

The Frontiers of Theory

Volleys of Humanity

Essays 1972-2009

Hélène Cixous

Edited by Eric Prenowitz



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Volleys of Humanity

Essays 1972–2009

Hélène Cixous

Edited by Eric Prenowitz

Edinburgh University Press

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9. How Not to Speak of Algeria

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Series Editor's Preface

Since its inception Theory has been concerned with its own limits, ends and after-life. It would be an illusion to imagine that the academy is no longer resistant to Theory but a significant consensus has been established and it can be said that Theory has now entered the mainstream of the humanities. Reaction against Theory is now a minority view and new generations of scholars have grown up with Theory. This leaves so-called Theory in an interesting position which its own procedures of auto-critique need to consider: what is the nature of this mainstream Theory and what is the relation of Theory to philosophy and the other disciplines which inform it? What is the history of its construction and what processes of amnesia and the repression of difference have taken place to establish this thing called Theory? Is Theory still the site of a more-than-critical affirmation of a negotiation with thought, which thinks thought's own limits?

'Theory' is a name that traps by an aberrant nominal effect the transformative critique which seeks to reinscribe the conditions of thought in an inaugural founding gesture that is without ground or precedent: as a 'name', a word and a concept, Theory arrests or misprisons such thinking. To imagine the frontiers of Theory is not to dismiss or to abandon Theory (on the contrary one must always insist on the it-is-necessary of Theory even if one has given up belief in theories of all kinds). Rather, this series is concerned with the presentation of work which challenges complacency and continues the transformative work of critical thinking. It seeks to offer the very best of contemporary theoretical practice in the humanities, work which continues to push ever further the frontiers of what is accepted, including the name of Theory. In particular, it is interested in that work which involves the necessary endeavour of crossing disciplinary frontiers without dissolving the specificity of disciplines. Published by Edinburgh University Press, in the city of Enlightenment, this series promotes a certain closeness to that spirit: the continued

exercise of critical thought as an attitude of inquiry which counters modes of closed or conservative opinion. In this respect the series aims to make thinking think at the frontiers of theory.

Martin McQuillan

Introduction: Cixousian Gambols

Eric Prenowitz

I

Towards the end of *H. C. For Life*, the first of his two books on Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida interrupts his reading with a reflection on her reception. He even assumes the role of a ‘prophet’, as he puts it, in order to ‘foresee’ or ‘predict’ what he calls ‘the place of this-life-this-work in History, with a capital H’.¹ Derrida notes that the person and the work of Hélène Cixous ‘already have an incontestable legitimacy: a French, European and global renown’.² But, he says, her authority in ‘the world of literature, of theatre, of politics, of so-called feminist theory, in the academic world, the old world and the new world and the third world’³ should not be allowed to dissimulate ‘what remains to my eyes a ferocious misunderstanding and an implacable resistance to reading’.⁴

Derrida proposes an extended analysis of these phenomena which, he insists, are multiple (he refers to them at one point as ‘resistances-misunderstandings’⁵), and all the more intractable in that they affect not only political, philosophical, literary opponents of Cixous’ work (notably in the form of what Derrida calls ‘the armed force of misogyny and phallogocentrism’⁶), but also, most insidiously, those on the ‘inside’. One can resist something even as one supports it, Derrida notes.

In fact, Derrida diagnoses in his own reading relationship to Cixous a certain tireless resistance – dating back at least to the mid-1960s, when she gave him the manuscript of what would be her first book of fiction, published in 1967. This is certainly a significant avowal for Derrida: one imagines he would make short work of most resistances. And he does not claim to have vanquished this resistance; the relatively late date at which he started publishing on Cixous’ work testifies, perhaps, to this. He goes even further: ‘My own reading, through the years, has been nothing but a long experience of more or less overcome resistances, and it will be this way for life.’⁷ But as he points out, and demonstrates, the

resistance in his case does not preclude reading. Indeed he is close here to extrapolating a general hypothesis from this experience: all reading worthy of the name may well be a grappling with resistances.

In his very first published text on Cixous' work ('Fourmis', a lecture presented in 1990), Derrida affirms: 'I have read her as if in a dream for 25 years, forgetting and keeping everything as if it should not be, in truth should never have been, able to leave me.'⁸ Eight years later, in *H. C. for Life*, he returns to this theme – or this confession: 'As long as I have known her, I read her and I forget that she writes, I forget what she writes.' But he adds: 'This forgetting is not like any other: it is elemental, my life probably depends on it [*il est probable que j'en vis*].'⁹ Derrida even affirms that Cixous herself is not 'innocent', that 'she herself resists herself'.¹⁰ Surreptitiously citing one of her neologisms, *oublire* ('to forgetread'),¹¹ without explicitly referencing her text – and thereby performatively reading and forgetting, inscribing in his text a reading of hers that is simultaneously effaced or forgotten – Derrida says that 'She must resist herself [. . .], avoid herself, forget or forgetread herself, misunderstand herself in order to continue.'¹²

I am reading selectively, of course, and these comments on resistant reading may not be representative of Derrida's engagement with H el ene Cixous' work. Yet it is none the less a striking, recurrent trope; I see no reason not to take this very readerly resistance to H el ene Cixous as a way, for Derrida, of never finishing his reading of her, of keeping her work still to-be-read, of continuing to read her while fending off any *definitive* reading, leaving it, while reading it, none the less, in or to the future.

II

Derrida's warning about inside resistance is universally applicable, no doubt, but it should be taken particularly seriously here, I would argue, at the threshold of a volume of essays by H el ene Cixous: how to read H el ene Cixous, today? How to resist resisting her? How to turn resistances into readings? And if all readings are inhabited or constituted by resistances to what they read; if, therefore, readings can never be purified of resistances; if resistances are therefore not simply opposed or opposable to reading, how to evaluate different readings, different mixtures of reading and resistance? I do think that these questions must remain open, particularly regarding H el ene Cixous, and I have no intention of offering interpretative prescriptions or proscriptions here. Yet this openness does not mean that there are no distinctions – and preferences – to

be made between readings. Quite to the contrary: this is precisely where the difficult and interesting work begins.

For instance, Derrida vigorously denounces one particular form of internal or laudatory resistance: the ‘reductive manipulation that consists in classifying the work and the name of Hélène Cixous in the series of “great-French-women-theoreticians-of-the-feminine-thing (feminine-writing, feminine-sexuality, etc.)”’. Derrida doesn’t exactly name any names, but he adds: ‘You know too well the taxonomic column of this blacklisting under the cover of eulogistic reference: the list of French women theoreticians, I, J, K, X, Y, Z or X, Y, Z, A, B, C.’¹³

This ‘taxonomic’ gesture – the cutting up of an ensemble and the labelling of the resultant fragments – is particularly reductive in the case of Cixous’ oeuvre for at least two reasons. In the first place, the diversity or heterogeneity of her work is such that to single one aspect out for exclusive attention is to occlude all the others. But even more importantly than the taxonomic dismembering of such a varied corpus, what really gets Derrida’s goat, one senses, is the damage this operation does at a different level: it effectively negates a trait that paradoxically runs through all of ‘this-life-this-work’: a radical – and performative – challenge to any appropriation or recuperation. Thus even the texts upon which Cixous’ reputation as a French feminist theorist is primarily based, notably ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ and ‘Sorties’, are much more than ‘theoretical’ essays. They are edgy, creative, cunning, in-your-face literary performances as well as meticulous, rational analyses, theoretical argumentations, political critiques or manifestos. The troubling irony of this very partial lionisation or election of Hélène Cixous, the ‘eulogistic reference’ Derrida condemns, is that one of the main *theoretical* thrusts of those texts consists precisely in an implacable problematisation of the very category of ‘theory’.

III

But I am getting ahead of myself. To heed Jacques Derrida’s warning about the ambivalence of any critical appreciation is to set oneself, it would seem, on a slippery slope: if looking to Hélène Cixous’ work for insight into French feminist theory, for example, can in fact be a way of resisting and reducing it, how might one proceed otherwise? Derrida offers no miracle solutions – although he is interested, as we will see, in certain more or less magical formulas. The only path he proposes, for those hoping to analyse and begin to outmanoeuvre these resistances, denegations, repressions, which, again, are not necessarily contradicted

by a certain international renown, is that of a kind reading: reading Hélène Cixous, I would call it, if I could still use these words naively, in an honest, serious, engaged way. No pitched battles or trench warfare, not even a talking cure: only reading.

So while Derrida forcefully suggests, as we have seen, that reading and resistance to reading can never be completely disentangled in practice or simply opposed in theory, he *also* affirms, *at the same time*, that the resistances, the ‘avoidances or denials’, regarding Cixous’ work boil down to a certain ‘im-potence of reading’.¹⁴ Derrida does not stress or directly address the apparent paradox of these two readings of reading. Yet I don’t think he would renounce it either. The fact that reading can never be sure it is clear of resistance puts all the more pressure on it to continually reinvent and re-empower itself. And Derrida has a lot to say, and in great detail, on reading Hélène Cixous, and above all *in* reading Hélène Cixous, on the way to read(ing) Hélène Cixous.

I will take just one example. In a long, performative, sentence that seems to be addressing us from within Cixous’ text, Derrida attributes this resistant impotence to a certain lack of courage – but courage in what he calls a ‘new sense of the word’:

the *courage*, the heart, the *courage* to give oneself over, crossing through the resistance, to what happens here in language, to the *enchant* of what happens to language and by language, to words, to names, to verbs and finally to the element of the letter, of the homonym ‘*lettre*’ as it is put to work here, to what signs an experience of bodily engagement with the untranslatability of the idiom and which, through the chain of replacements, of homophonies, of metonymical substitutions, of changes in speed, of infractions of all the great codes, conspires to produce unique events, unique in the way they put into question once and for all the best protected securities: genre, gender, filiation, proper name, identity, cultural heritage, the distinction between faith and knowledge, between theory and practice, between philosophy, psychoanalysis and literature, between historical memory and political urgency, etc.¹⁵

Derrida’s recommendation here can be glossed crudely as follows: in order to resist the pervasive and insidious resistance to Hélène Cixous’ work, one must, in reading, be attentive to something extraordinary that happens there in and to language, producing unique events that radically challenge conventional, pre-established limits and distinctions.

But, before returning to this reading lesson, programme or prophecy, a word about two words in this passage. The first is ‘courage’ in its ‘new’, derridian sense. The ‘new sense’ of this word is never explicitly spelled out, but it very likely comes from its old meaning, i.e. its etymology, which is alluded to: *courage* comes from the ‘heart’ (*cœur*). And the heart, for Derrida, particularly in the expression ‘to learn by heart’

(*apprendre par cœur*), already says something about poetry, untranslatable idiomatic singularity and the work of the signifier that can never be reduced to a semantic content.¹⁶ To read Cixous, Derrida says in effect, you need *this* kind of courage: the hardy heart to give yourself over to the crawling inchoate energy of the textuality of Hélène Cixous' texts.

That is, and this is the second word, to the *enchant* of her writing. This is a word coined by Cixous, presumably from the noun *chant*, 'song' and the verb *enchanter*, meaning 'to enchant', and originally 'to chant magic words'. Derrida takes this neologism from a book by Cixous he is in the process of reading, *OR, The Letters of My Father* (1997), and applies it in turn to her work. In *OR*, it is defined as a very particular kind of language ('that unlimited language without sentences all in willpower comparable to the unknown language of God'¹⁷) that is shared by people and animals, and constitutes the 'proof' that all 'creatures of creation' belong to 'a single superior intelligence'.¹⁸ This *enchant* seems to name the song, the singing, the song-like enchantment of writing in the broadest sense: before language becomes the mundane human system of workaday correspondences between signifiers and signifieds. This takes place in Freud's head, by the way, as he sings 'the song of enchantment'¹⁹ to one of his dogs. It is undoubtedly not fortuitous, furthermore, that there is a 'cat' (*chat*) hidden in *enchant*. Turned back by Derrida towards Hélène Cixous' work, the *enchant* refers to the way her writing provokes and taps into the musical workings of the signifier, the untranslatable letter, idiom or air of language.

So Derrida has something very particular in mind when he counsels reading, indeed when he calls to readerly arms as the only hope of overcoming the various resistances to Cixous' work. He does not promote just any reading. He calls for a 'countersigning reading',²⁰ which must have two characteristics. In the first place, it must be extremely attentive and open to the power of the *enchant*: to 'an experience of bodily engagement with the untranslatability of the idiom', to the musicality of the text irreducible to a simple meaning content, etc. In the second place, and at the same time, such a reading must 'sign something else',²¹ it must use – it must invent – an 'other language'.²²

IV

While initialling, in turn, Jacques Derrida's appeal for a certain approach to reading Hélène Cixous, I would stress that it is not enough for the 'other language', the new language or discourse that must

result from the kind of reading Derrida promotes, to be fundamentally different from the cixousian ‘language’ it reads – assuming such an identifiable thing as a ‘cixousian language’ can be said to exist.²³ It is not enough for the ‘other language’ of the reading to bear a signature different from that of Hélène Cixous’ inimitable writing. It must *also* be the fruit of a very patient, meticulous, open-minded and open-ended attention to the textuality of the cixousian text. To read Cixous, Derrida says in effect, you must invent your own textual world, but this invention must *also* be in some sense dictated, down to the very letter, by the text that is being read. It’s a paradox, to be sure, confounding prospective readers with intractably contradictory imperatives (Be creative! Be attentive!).

The double bind of this double imperative call to reading may seem disabling, but it shouldn’t. One of the most important reading lessons Derrida takes from Cixous’ texts is precisely that only an attentive creativity is truly creative and vice versa: there is no purely receptive, objective, neutral reading, no matter how attentive or meticulous it may be. In the name of its meticulous attention, a reading must also add something of its own. In other words, when it comes to reading, the active and the passive modes are inseparable: the inventive, egoistical impulses and the self-effacing, studious, submissive or receptive ones. An immediate consequence is that the distinction between ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ can no longer be established with any confidence. But if a reading writes, in this sense, does a writing necessarily read? Does every writing necessarily countersign another writing? Certainly Hélène Cixous’ work exemplifies this double relationship, where the most inventive creation takes inspiration from the most dedicated, receptive analysis; in her essays this reading-writing interdependence is perhaps most explicitly legible.

Once reading is understood in this double way (there is no reading worthy of this name that does not countersign what it reads), it is difficult to revert to a simpler alternative between descriptive science and free invention. In fact, one begins to notice instances of such hybrid reading events at every turn. For example, Derrida’s use here of this cixousian word *enchant* is already a ‘countersigning reading’: Derrida takes this neologism from a book by Cixous he is in the process of reading, and by dint of extracting it from the passage in which it occurs and applying it to the general structure of the cixousian textuality he is exploring, he transforms it into a sort of philosophical semi-concept. Derrida’s use here of this word *enchant* is at once very cixousian and very derridian. Call it derrixousian.

V

In talking publicly about Hélène Cixous and her work after many years of ‘forgetreading’ her in private, Jacques Derrida adopts a prophetic mode. However, it is not easy to pin down exactly what he prophesises. Yet this, I would argue, is part of Derrida’s point: he is predicting that Hélène Cixous’ work has a future, even in some sense that it is of the future. That it is yet to be read, that it *will be read*, in the future, and that what it means or is, now, depends to some extent on that reading to come. This indeterminacy is a general structure of prophecy: if a prophet were to say what the future holds, then that future would no longer be future, since it would already be known, fixed, effectively archived. So a prophet, as prophet, can only really say ‘the future is coming!’ or ‘I know that in the future you will know what the future holds – or will have held, as long as it was still in the future’. So, without saying what this reading will discover, Derrida predicts that Cixous will be read (‘she will at last be read’²⁴), that one day the day will come when she is read in the strong sense of the word ‘read’ that he promotes and prescribes. Of course, Derrida knows that she has already been read, that she is already being read (not least in Derrida’s own text), but just like the praise that also resists, he is looking ahead to a time when the resistance will be, if not necessarily vanquished, decisively addressed, analysed, accounted for, which, according to him, is not currently the case.

So Derrida’s prophecy looks, as it should, to the future, but it is also performative: it also aims to intervene into the thing it attempts to describe (the future reading of HC). ‘I participate, at the very least, in the provocation of what I feign to predict,’²⁵ he says. However, this performative provocation nonetheless leaves its object entirely to the future, as it must. Thus Derrida incites us to read Hélène Cixous in this way: ‘Take the challenge, if you can and if you have the courage, but be forewarned: you will see what you see, you will read what you read.’²⁶

All the same, Derrida does go one step further in his prophecy. He says that Hélène Cixous’ work will one day be read, in the strong sense, and that when this happens, the work itself will serve as an ‘analyser’, a kind of ‘quasi-scientific’²⁷ analytic tool, for whoever might try to ‘identify these resistances and account for them’.²⁸ There is a circular logic to this prophecy: in order to read Hélène Cixous you need to overcome the resistances that inhabit and inhibit any reading of her work, and yet in order to overcome these resistances you need to have read her work (which will then be the analyser you need to analyse the resistances). This is a kind of hermeneutic circle: you can’t understand it until you’ve read it, but you can’t read it until you’ve understood it. If such circles

don't make reading easy or guarantee its success in advance, they certainly don't preclude it. Indeed they probably represent the only path reading can take. The fact that the path is not simply open (or simply closed) is the best indication that it's worth the gambol.

VI

Perhaps this collection will contribute to the reading-to-come of Derrida's prophecy. Yet even here we must beware of internal resistances. By separating off Cixous' 'essays' from the rest of her work, and by publishing them together in translation, a book like this one may partake of or participate in precisely the kind of 'reductive manipulation'²⁹ Derrida decries. The tracing out of demarcations between various genres of Cixous' work and the riding roughshod in translation, no matter how attentive the translator, over the untranslatable idiomatic singularities of the original may be the first steps in a resistant appropriation, however contradictory this may seem, that undermines what it makes available. The body of Cixous' oeuvre cut up, 'edited', packaged, framed, introduced, desiccated, ironed out, universalised, pre-digested. Neutered, declawed. If we take Derrida at his word, one cannot begin to read Cixous, according to the strong sense of reading he promotes, without questioning, among other things, the limits of 'genre', for example between *fiction* and *essay*, and without 'an experience of bodily engagement with the untranslatability of the idiom'.

However, it would be a mistake to think that according to the logic of this warning, since translations of Cixous' texts, or distinctions between them in terms of traditional genre categories, invariably do irreparable violence to the texts' *enchant*, such operations must simply be avoided at all cost. The deconstruction of borders (between theory and practice, for instance, between essays and fiction as between philosophy and literature or signifier and signified . . .) does not open onto a toothless relativistic indifference. Distinctions can and must be established even if they are never natural, but inevitably cultural, that is political, biased, contingent, conditional – and this applies to the nature/culture distinction as well. It makes a difference, however, if they are traced out in full view of the pitfalls or shortcomings they can never completely neutralise. With this in mind, I will offer a few remarks on the rationale for publishing this volume of Hélène Cixous' 'essays', and thereby reinforcing the problematic genre demarcations, as well as on the more or less wilful decisions that determined the particular selection it contains.

VII

Hélène Cixous' writing is typically divided, for bibliographic reasons, between 'fiction', 'theatre', 'essays' and 'interviews'. To this list the category of 'seminars' (for the moment unpublished) must be added, as well, perhaps, as that of 'notebooks' or 'manuscripts'. Without forgetting what she calls 'the book I don't write', in a category of its own. But there is much crossover and it would be impossible to establish an absolutely consistent, rigid taxonomy. There is no absolute line between Hélène Cixous' essays and her fiction, to take just these two 'genres': in both, the theoretical cohabits with the creative, the philosophical with the poetic, the analytical with the oneiric. As an example of the more general unclassifiability of Cixous' work mentioned earlier, this particular subversion of genres is one of the unmistakable strengths and signatures of her writing: the creative, poetic invention is in no way contradicted by the hyper-conscious, super-critical analysis. Admittedly, this is the very principle of performativity, whereby a critical consideration of something simultaneously *does* something. Yet in Cixous' work this non-contradiction is not an exception or a special case, but rather the very element of the writing.

Furthermore, the 'essays' often cite or refer to the book-length 'fictions' and vice versa. A spectacular example is precisely what happened in and to 'The Book I Don't Write', one of the texts included here. This 'essay' was written to be presented at a conference on Cixous' work that took place at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (the French national library, or BnF) in 2003, on the occasion of Hélène Cixous' gift of the quasi-totality of her manuscripts to the BnF. The essay enacts a subversive resistance to this event: while the library's interest in her manuscripts represents a certain public, institutional, national recognition of her work, the transfer is experienced also as a sort of entombment. The essay's title is a warning or a caveat, problematising the apparent appropriation of the entire body of her oeuvre, indeed of her *writing*, of her manuscripts as the living trace of her writing, into the 'Necropolitan Library'. The essay explains that even as she wrote one book after another, the manuscripts of which are now archived in the BnF, there was another book, 'the book I don't write', perhaps the most important book by Hélène Cixous, but one that has always remained unwritten. And since it is unwritten – but no less present for it, on the contrary – it has left no manuscript of its own to be absorbed into the Library. That book, at least, will not be taken.

'The Book I Don't Write' refers to a number of actually written books by Hélène Cixous, recounting their making-of, or not-making-of. In

particular, it discusses the genesis of *Manhattan* (2001), which is itself the belated account of an event that took place in Hélène Cixous' life in the early 1960s, before she was a published author, and at the same time an account of her failed attempts to write this account during the intervening years. So 'The Book I Don't Write' constitutes in some sense a supplement to *Manhattan* – not only a 'theoretical' or 'critical' reflection on the book, but, since the book itself consists largely of a reflection on its conditions of (im)possibility, its continuation or extension. In a similar way, this very essay, 'The Book I Don't Write', and the event at which it was pronounced by its author, is itself taken up, recounted, revisited, reinterpreted, fictionalised, transposed, reincorporated in a later book of 'fiction', *Tours promises* (2004).³⁰

However, the absence of any pre-given line of demarcation or taxonomic principle does not mean that there is or should be no distinction between the books of fiction and the essays. For one thing, the extraordinary transgressive dramas that occur in the *Manhattan*-'The Book I Don't Write'-*Tours promises* sequence depend in large part on the apparent stability of the fiction/essay borders. Their transgression serves there as one of the central figures of a generalised challenge to the traditional demarcations between fiction and reality, life and work, poetry and criticism.

Furthermore, the essay genre itself might be taken as a particularly cixousian form: a kind of genre-problematising genre. The word 'essay' comes from the French *essai*, meaning an attempt or trial. It generally designates a relatively short piece of expository prose writing that treats a given subject while making no pretence of exhaustiveness or objective scientific analysis. It is neither art nor science, or rather, it renounces neither art nor science. As Adorno puts it, 'The essay [. . .] does not let its domain be prescribed for it.'³¹ The unabashed circularity of this logic (it determines its own domain from within its domain . . .) recalls the hermeneutic circle of reading discussed earlier and, in a similar way, implies a performative constitutional leap: the essay only discovers its travel plans en route, and there can be no return to the positivist dream of a pure exteriority of subject to object.

It is no coincidence that Montaigne, who was the first to use the word in this sense, figures prominently in Hélène Cixous' elective literary family. Montaigne's *Essais* were first published in 1580: arranged pell-mell, with no apparent organising principle, they propose freewheeling explorations of more or less timeless, more or less universal topics such as 'Sadness', 'Liars', the possibility that 'Our happiness can only be determined after our death', 'Cannibals', 'The uncertainty of our judgement', 'Thumbs', whether 'Cowardice is the mother of cruelty',

etc. The looseness of the essay form – this ‘form’ with no pre-ordained form – certainly offered Montaigne virtually limitless licence to address an extraordinarily broad range of subjects. And yet the turning out of Montaigne’s inquisitive mind to examine the world in all its diversity is inseparable, in the *Essays*, from a deep reflection on himself. As Montaigne says famously in his preface, ‘I am myself the matter of my book’.

Each of these factors – the formal or quasi-formal traits of the essay genre, the literary-genealogical hotline to Montaigne, the subversion of subject/object relations or of those between inside and outside, microcosm and macrocosm, between self-examination and political or critical engagement with the world – make the essay genre, with its particular history and character, however contingent or paradoxical these may be, a meaningful one for Hélène Cixous and her work.

In addition, there are a number of very clear contextual or biographical reasons for making this distinction between the ‘fiction’ and the ‘essays’. For instance, Hélène Cixous’ essays, almost without exception, are written ‘on demand’, generally for oral delivery at conferences or colloquia, whereas the books of ‘fiction’ have always been written in some important way ‘for themselves’. As Cixous has often pointed out, she has always written her fictions during the summer holidays far from the city. For instance, in ‘The Unforeseeable’, included in this volume, she writes: ‘Every summer I go off to write the book I have no notion of.’ On the other hand, the essays are generally written during the ‘school year’, from September to June. To fully appreciate this distinction, one would have to take into account the particular significance of this yearly cycle in French society and popular consciousness: the long summer months, with their traditional exodus from Paris, are decisively cut off from the rest of the year. One might therefore expect the essays to be more ‘scholarly’, and the fictions to be freer, less aimed at an academic audience, somehow more summery.

VIII

The concept of *selection* implies both a separating off and a collecting together. While any process of selection serves to constitute a new body – for example, a volume of ‘selected’ essays by Hélène Cixous – it comes at the price of a violent disruption of another: in this case, the corpus of all Cixous’ works, published, unpublished, yet-to-be written, etc. There is a further ambivalence inherent in this concept: is selection a mechanical, rule-obeying process, with or without a teleological goal; a process

that happens automatically, requiring neither art nor intelligence nor courage nor invention, like Hegel's inexorable dialectic or Darwin's 'natural selection'? Or, on the contrary, does it consist fundamentally in what Derrida calls the 'decision': the paradigmatic gesture of a living subject, a discerning intervention beyond any possible calculation, that cannot be reduced to the application of a law or an algorithm?

The constitution of this 'collection', or perhaps we should say this 'disruption', of H el ene Cixous' work to which we have given the name 'essays', has been neither simply natural nor entirely conscious, calculated or premeditated. I cannot say with certainty who or what made the selections of which this book is the result. Yet I can, retrospectively, point out some of the constraints and aspirations that clearly played a role therein.

I have attempted to include a representative range of H el ene Cixous' essays, both in terms of the topics addressed and the occasions for which they were written, and as a result they cover a range of styles, voices, textures, sensibilities, approaches, aims, levels of discourse, modes of organisation, objects of enquiry. Five of the translations have not previously been published in English, and three appear here in significantly altered versions. The earliest essay included here was first published (in French) in 1972, although Cixous began publishing in journals and newspapers in 1964. Since the end of the 1970s, however, much of Cixous' essay writing has consisted in the preparation of texts to be presented orally in the first instance. Many of these later essays have been presented in English, some only in English.

I have also tried to include a range of translators in this collection. Many worthy translators have been left out, but this collection can be read as a collective case study in the difficulties – and joys – of translating H el ene Cixous, and the quite different ways of rising to the task. I have not attempted to standardise the translations, although I have revised two of them substantially and made some minor modifications elsewhere in the name of consistency. I have also checked a number of things with H el ene Cixous herself, who has suggested a few small changes. While this is not the full critical edition that Cixous' work deserves, I have tracked down innumerable references, most of which were missing from the original publications, and provided a series of additional notes to highlight some of the most obvious allusions. H el ene Cixous' original notes end with [HC], the translators' notes with [tr.], and the others are my responsibility. I have included complete bibliographic information about the essays at the beginning of the volume: I hope that more than a few readers will make the effort to look up the original texts for comparison.

I have not included here any of the considerable subcategory of Cixous' essays that are centrally concerned with Jacques Derrida. These will be collected in a separate volume. While this decision does limit the representativity of the present collection in a very significant way, it is none the less true that even in these essays, Derrida is one of the most important references, characters, interlocutors. I have also included none of Cixous' numerous essays on art, since these too will appear in a separate volume in English. I have chosen not to include any of the essays that are already available in English-language collections. In particular, I decided not to include the two most popular of her essays: 'The Laugh of the Medusa' and 'Sorties'. These are widely accessible, and it seemed important to leave room here for less-well-known essays by H el ene Cixous.

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *H. C. pour la vie, c'est   dire . . .* (Paris: Galil e, 2002), p. 116. It wouldn't be too outlandish to take this '*H majuscule*' as already fulfilling the prophecy in a sense, at least to the extent that this letter 'in History' doesn't belong to history alone.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
8. Jacques Derrida, 'Fourmis', in *Lectures de la Diff rence Sexuelle* (Paris: Des femmes, 1994), p. 97.
9. Derrida, *H. C. pour la vie*, p. 131.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 120: 'elle r siste d'elle-m me   elle-m me'.
11. This word appears in Cixous' *OR, les lettres de mon p re* (Paris: Galil e, 1998).
12. Derrida, *H. C. pour la vie*, p. 120.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 121. Behind this 'column', we can detect two manoeuvres on Derrida's part. On the one hand, he is clearly separating H el ene Cixous off from the now canonical series of 'great-French-women-theoreticians-of-the-feminine-thing', where her name is commonly adjoined to those of (Luce) Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. These other *th oriciennes* get at best an initial or two in Derrida's book (though we should remember that the book itself is called *H. C. for Life*, and that Derrida can make a letter speak volumes). Indeed, in Derrida's second book on Cixous, *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres, and Genius*, he pointedly conjugates 'genius' in the feminine in Cixous' name, and insists on the singularity of her thought and writing. On the other hand, Derrida is simultaneously denouncing the phallogocentric misogyny that consists in aligning these three (+ n) 'theorists', authors of such radically different bodies of work, in one column under one

heading. Hélène Cixous' writing is unique, but so is the writing of the other 'French' 'feminist' 'theorists', Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, for example: each merits careful attention, and those who lump them together like lead soldiers in a single, lockstep column, even to salute them, do them a very dubious service.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

16. See, for example, 'Che cos'è la poesia?', where 'poem' is pseudo-defined as, among other things, 'a story of "heart" poetically enveloped in the idiom "*apprendre par cœur*" [. . .] I call a poem that very thing that teaches the heart, invents the heart, *that which*, finally, the word *heart* seems to mean [*vouloir dire*] and which, in my language, I cannot easily discern from the word itself [*du mot cœur*]' (trans. Peggy Kamuf, in Elisabeth Weber (ed.), *Points* . . . (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 291 and 295.

17. Cixous, *OR*, p. 18, cited in Derrida, *H. C.*, p. 93.

18. Cixous, *OR*, p. 18.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

20. Derrida, *H. C.*, p. 120.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

23. This question leads to an inevitable paradox: if an author's 'language' can be rigorously defined, then it immediately becomes repeatable, imitable and already an imitation of itself. Therefore not at all the author's language. So here too, an author must resist herself, resist her 'own' language if she wants to have any hope of speaking or writing for or as herself.

24. Derrida, *H. C.*, p. 117.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

30. Another example of the overlapping relationships between books of fiction and essays is Cixous' text called 'Vues sur ma terre', published in 2000, which constitutes in some ways an addendum or a prolongation of her 1999 'fiction' *Osnabrück*.

31. Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form' [*Der Essay als Form*], *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 3.

Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The 'Uncanny')

Let us propose here a bifurcated reading, between literature and psychoanalysis, with double attention paid to what is produced and what escapes in the unfolding of the text, sometimes led by Freud and at other times bypassing him in this trajectory that strikes us to be less a discourse than a strange theoretical novel.¹ There is something 'savage' in the *Unheimliche*, a breath or a provocative air which at times catches the author himself off guard, overtaking him and restraining him. Freud and the object of his desire (i.e. the truth about the *Unheimliche*) are fired by reciprocal inspiration. This long essay by Freud is a text of uncertainty: a tightly woven net that strangely inscribes a system of anxieties [*inquiétudes*] in order to track down the concept *das Unheimliche*, the disquieting strangeness, the uncanny.² Nothing turns out less reassuring for the reader than this niggling, cautious, yet wily and interminable pursuit (of 'something' – be it a domain, an emotional movement, a concept, impossible to determine and variable in its form, intensity, quality, and content). Nor does anything prove to be more fleeting than this search whose movement constitutes the labyrinth which instigates it; the sense of strangeness imposes its secret necessity everywhere. The movement's progress is all-enveloping and its contradictory operation is accomplished by the author's double: Hesitation. We are faced with a text and its hesitating shadow, and their double escapade. Knotting [*Nouements*]: but what is brought together here is quickly undone, what is asserted becomes suspect; each thread leads to its sectioning or to some kind of disentanglement. In the labyrinthian space, many characters are called to witness, interrogated, illuminated and quickly relegated to the corner of some street or paragraph. What unfolds without fail before the reader's eyes is a kind of marionette theatre in which real dolls and mock puppets, real life and false life, are manipulated by a sovereign but capricious machine operator. The net is tightly stretched, bowed and tangled; the scenes are centred and dispersed; narratives

are begun and left in suspension. Just as the reader thinks he is following some demonstration, he senses that the surface is cracking: the text slides a few roots under the ground while it allows others to be lofted in the air. What in one instance appears a figure of science seems later to resemble some type of fiction. This text proceeds as its own metaphor, as Mallarmé recalls Hamlet, reading in the book of himself while noticing that memory, in retrospect, serves to prophecy. *Oh, my prophetic soul!*

A text dealing with the nature of incertitude is approached by the reader with a sense of distrust and fascination, for in the exchange which takes place between the text itself and its reading, in this play of seduction where the text always emerges a step ahead, the doubtful elements of the text necessarily engender doubt in its reader. This phenomenon may account for the reader's sense of pleasure and boldness.

We shall examine the strange pleasure incurred in the reading of the Freudian text and what parallels it inseparably: an uneasiness which conforms to Freud's own, describes it, and which can hardly be distinguished from it.

Freud leads his investigation of the frightening thing which constitutes the nucleus of the *Unheimliche* in two different ways. We shall allow ourselves to be guided along two reading paths, by and against Freud's design, by what is certain and by what is hypothetical, between science and fiction, or between the 'symbolised' and the 'symboliser'. We shall be guided by ambivalence and in conformity with the undecidable nature of all that touches the *Unheimliche*: life and fiction, life-as-fiction, the Oedipus myth, the castration complex and literary creation. Undecided, the analyst, the psychologist, the reader, the writer, the multitude of named and anonymous subjects which are brought up and which disappear into the fabric of the text (starting with Freud, himself thwarted by himself) go along at least two routes which lead us back to our dissatisfaction. First of all, in allowing ourselves to be led, we are submissive to Freud's entreaty, and thus we share in his disillusionment: because the complexity of the analysis and its suffocation go hand-in-hand with the uncertainty of the analyst. Is not the analysis which brings up the whole question of folded repressions imprinted here and there by the effects that its production brings out in the one who leads the analysis? Everything takes place as if the *Unheimliche* turned back on Freud himself in a vicious interchange between pursued and pursuer; as if one of Freud's repressions acted as the motor re-presenting at each moment the analysis of the repression which Freud is leading; the *Unheimliche* is at the root of the analysis Freud does of it. It secretes the *Unheimliche* of the analysis that is done of it. Our role as readers caught in the *Unheimliche* is a curious double of the role of the other reader,

with whom at times we are spectrally identified, that of *The Sandman*.³ According to Freud, the dangerous eyeglasses which pass from the narrator to the unfortunate protagonist leap out at the reader's eyes, throwing him into the horrible peculiarity of the world of doubles.⁴ There can be no doubt concerning the doubtful identity of the menacing characters. However, what is perceived by the complementary eyes has no place either in reality or in verisimilitude, but only in the *Unheimliche*, in the unknown or the unrecognisable. If it is true that the story of the eye always refers to castration, it is not a simple Oedipus story. Through the unending series of substitutions, the eye becomes multiplied, and the familiar work of the eye, in turn, becomes the enigmatic production of the scattered doubles, sparks of fire, stars, lorgnettes, eyeglasses, vision from too far or too close, the theatrical secret which the Freudian text brushes up against, mimics and still flees.

On three different occasions, Freud proceeds to a confrontation with the *Unheimliche* and attempts to describe it, from the starting point of doubt. The whole enterprise, from its inception, may be designated as an act of theoretical boldness and as the answer to a solicitation issued from a domain yet to be explored. This is a subtle invitation to transgression on the part of the *Unheimliche*, and an answer or perhaps an anticipation on the part of Freud. Desire is no stranger to this adventure: desire ensures its coming and going. It articulates its detours and its interludes.

As prologue (in the first four paragraphs) Freud seeks to justify himself to the point of exoneration: how and why he takes possession of an area which does not appear to fall under the jurisdiction of analysis, the domain 'next door'. Psychoanalysis takes over an aesthetic domain neglected by aesthetics; but this does not constitute the first time this type of incursion has been made. For a long time, the work of art has been 'beckoning' to Freud and he has been casting a sidelong glance on its seductive effects: his excuse here is based on the question of emotion, on the necessity of someday studying its frustrating economy. Emotional movement does not, as such, comprise the objective of the psychoanalytical study; it only forms the network of effects submitted to aesthetics. Psychoanalysis is interested in 'psychic life', in the 'profound' domain. There arises here the mystery of literary creation; the secret of this enviable power possessed by its creator who manages to seduce us: this is what fascinates Freud. 'The freedom of the author, the privilege accorded fiction in order to evoke and inhibit' the emotions or the phantasms of the reader, the power to lift or impose censorship.⁵ Therein resides the motivation behind these many attempts at initiating a theory of this power, under the term of the *bonus of seduction* or of *preliminary pleasure*: a theory of pleasure which frequently comes

as a bonus to some adjacent development. Thus, in *Der Dichter und das Phantasieren* (1907),⁶ the theoretical proposition emerges only as an afterthought in a text which deals primarily with the phantasms of its creator. One feels this mixture of distrust and attraction with which Freud approaches this pleasure (which goes all the way to the *pleasure principle* and beyond⁷) made of two types of *jouissance*: from the bonus of seduction (*Verlockungsprämie*) produced by formal success, which, in turn, permits ‘veritable’ pleasure, the convergence of several sources of pleasure. First of all, Freud calls upon the creator’s technique by which he may overcome the repulsion which causes the phantasm of the other as other. The *ars poetica* would favour such a process of identification; it works ‘upon *limits* existing between each ego and the other *egos*.’⁸ Formal pleasure – which is linked to *representation* – would hide and permit the liberation of another pleasure with more profound sources. It is perhaps possible that we, then, return to our own phantasms after having taken the detour by the other, for the ‘assuagement’ of our ‘soul’. Yet if, as Derrida shows, the theory of the bonus of seduction appears to rest primarily on a hedonist ‘thematism’,⁹ it does not capture – thus the need for a displacement of theory – what no theme or signified can cover, and that is precisely the *Unheimliche*.

Freud considers the *Unheimliche* as, at the same time, a ‘domain’ and a ‘concept’, an elastic designation. The fact of the matter is that the ‘domain’ remains indefinite; the concept is without any nucleus: the *Unheimliche* presents itself, first of all, only on the fringe of something else. Freud relates it to other concepts which resemble it (fright, fear, anguish): it is the one in the ‘family’ that is not really a member of the family. Freud declares that it is certain that the use of the *Unheimliche* is uncertain. The indefiniteness is part and parcel of the ‘concept’. The statement and its enunciation become rejoined or reunited. The statement cannot be encircled: yet Freud, arguing for the existence of the *Unheimliche*, wishes to keep to the meaning, the real, the reality of the meaning of things. He thus seeks out ‘the *basic* meaning’. Thus the analysis is anchored, at once, in denotation. But all the denotation of this concept is connotation.

In the third paragraph, Freud rigorously refocuses on the question of the utility of aesthetics and the medico-psychological disciplines. He underscores the limits of aesthetics which are on the order of repressions and ideological determinations. Aesthetics deals with *positive* feelings and casts aside contrary sentiments (ugliness as a positive value has scarcely a place in this tradition). Then, there appears the neuro-psychiatric study of E. Jentsch.¹⁰ Freud considers it both interesting and disappointing; as an insufficient yet respected precursor, Jentsch

will represent, henceforth, the ‘layman’s’ attitude, which is ‘intellectual’ and in fact anti-analytical because of its phenomenological approach to strangeness. Freud offers, straightaway, a subjective explanation for Jentsch’s failure: he has not sufficiently delved into literature; he concerns himself only with everyday experience. Thus he loses ‘all claim to priority’. Literature is what psychoanalysis wants to interrogate. A hierarchy is created through the system of priorities.

Freud calls upon the not-yet-theorised, notably upon ‘sensibility’, and, more precisely, his own, because it is exemplary and yet different from the average sensibility, being ‘singularly insensitive’ to the *Unheimliche*. Assuming the personality of ‘the author of this essay’, Freud brings Jentsch into relief here and enters the scene in a double role: actor and ‘mechanician’, analyst and subject of analysis. ‘It is long since he had experienced or heard of anything which had given him an uncanny impression.’¹¹ Put into question by the author’s undertaking, the subject that he is becomes a place of astonishment since what was familiar to him is now strange. Things no longer *know* how to reach him . . . He must, thus, go to them; it is in this way that the scholar, in order to experiment upon himself with the states he is studying, pushes himself forward and comes to life again so that the *representation* which will stand in for experience may emerge. This provokes a first return of what was lost: the procession of ghosts is furtively inaugurated. Then, as if in reaction to a desired *nostos* yet which rejects melancholia, Freud reverts from the particular to the universal, or nearly so; he appeals to ‘the majority of men’, to a nearly impossible consensus, as if the *Unheimliche* were recognised in the same way by everyone. A rather paradoxical hope, one might think, since it is in the nature of the *Unheimliche* to remain foreign. But the hope should not be repelled. The pathetic dimension of the risk taken in supporting the scientific with the non-scientific recalls the constitutive disjunction in the *Unheimliche* – between the familiar and the strange – which Freud posits as the cornerstone for his research. Just as the still undetermined *Unheimliche* benefits from the status of concept, so too is the non-scientific clothed with the dignity of the scientific.

In this equivocal area, in which the author admits that he is the hesitant subject of his enquiry, the text bifurcates toward the choices in method, thus making indecision the occasion of some progress. Bifurcation: ‘Two courses are open to us at the outset.’¹² Each produces in a different manner the same result, which starts the process over again; one (linguistic experience) or the other (everyday experience) or the two. From ambivalence to ambivalence, or else language as a general phenomenon, or else the world as a series of particular cases;

nevertheless, these two paths are only proposed to us once the choice has been made by Freud and the path already followed. Freud assigns us an *inverted* order in relation to the one he has followed. After the event, the history of the enquiry presents itself by the other path, as if he had wanted to begin with the undecidable of the *Unheimliche*, which is lodged in language.

The opposite path

A history of *Un*: Freud proposes a lexical study, beginning with the point where Jentsch leaves off. Does anything new exist beyond the unfamiliar domain? The psychological viewpoint presented by Jentsch (the *Unheimliche* as an intellectual uncertainty), the part concerning seeing, knowing, occupies the first stage of the enquiry: the *Unheimliche* appears as coming from the world toward the subject. Once Jentsch's position has been displaced and set down, what does its language say?

The lexical continuation, a voyage of reference through foreign languages, constitutes a polylinguistic dictionary article. Through such a display of definitions, the world returns, a sampling of everyday experience, of home economics, of domestic problems. And yet . . . this hotchpotch, far from winning us over, this chain of quotations which *Heimliche* or *Unheimliche* threads together, appears to us an overlong, delirious discourse in which the world is seen as a deceptive reduction, not without the polymorphic perversity of a 'child-dictionary' [*dictionnaire-enfant*]. The body of articles exhales a dreamlike fog, for all lexical inventories necessarily play on the limit between the literal and figurative meanings. And it is Freud himself who extricates from the confusion the *added* thing; it is *in extremis* that the dictionary provides us with the sign: "*Unheimliche*" is the name for everything that ought to have remained [. . .] hidden and secret and has become visible."¹³ Thus, on the one hand, the lexicological undertaking is undermined by the article which also functions as the metaphor of its own scene. On the other hand, Schelling at the end suddenly draws a curtain: 'everything that *ought to have* remained [. . .] hidden'. Schelling links the *Unheimliche* to a lack of modesty. It is only at the end that the sexual threat emerges. But it had always been there, in the coupling itself and in the proliferation of the *Heimliche* and of the *Unheimliche*: when the one makes contact with the other, the dictionary ends and closes the history of meaning upon itself, delineating through this gesture the figure of the androgyne. The word joins itself again, and *Heimliche* and *Unheimliche* join together, pair up.

At the end of this strange crossing of languages, the *Unheimliche* can consider itself a part of this myth: from *Heimliche* to *Unheimliche*, the meaning reproduces itself as it goes. Where it becomes extinguished, it is rekindled. The opposition has been blunted; the divergence opened just enough space for it to be reclosed. The phoenix reproduces itself. Already Freud's commentary attempts to mitigate the disquieting character of the junction by contriving a sort of dislocation of contraries: a remarkable repugnance to acknowledge the absolute reclosing that takes place. The coincidence of contraries emanates, he claims, from the fact that the *Heimliche* belongs to two groups of representation which 'are . . . very different'. This indirectly brings up the question of hierarchy in the dual relationship of two terms: is there an inversion of the *Heimliche* into the *Unheimliche*, or else, starting from *Heimliche*, is there the emergence, through the *Unheimliche*, of a *new* concept? Therein, exactly, rests the stake of the pursuit; what, in effect, holds Freud's attention is precisely this *something absolutely new* spelled out by Schelling with respect to the content of the concept, which, nevertheless, cannot be 'found' there, but which slips in by way of the baroque forest of the dictionary, this disturbing domain of the very close, threat of non-distinction.

We recall that, for the reader, Freud employs an approach diametrically opposed to his own: what has *finally* emerged is sex, as what was ignored at the beginning, since Freud began with sublimation. Two threads have been tied together: a first thread for the ambivalence of meaning, which goes as far as meeting with its opposite; a second thread, which links Schelling's remark: the acknowledgement of lexical ambivalence is thus sexually charged. Freud places his finger on the nodal point. He pulls on the threads and tightens them.

The choice of a happy example

We find ourselves back at the crossroads, and we take the one that goes through the world. Once again, we allude to Jentsch's opinion in order to outstrip it immediately. Instead of a dictionary, we now have the double scene of animated 'objects' – Freud's summary of Jentsch's position itself being a lively little scene. The 'author' introduces here the preoccupation with the theatre, with everything which the theatre represents as a simulacrum of the living and with the theatricality that can be hidden in life as a tableau. On the stage of the stage [*scène de la scène*], the relationship between Freud's discovery in the domain of scientific truth and the mechanism of fiction may be brought out. Freud's own text, here, functions *in the manner of* a fiction: the extended consideration of the

ego instincts, the dramatic redistribution upon such and such a path, the suspense and surprises and impasses; all of that resembles the work specific to fiction, as the ‘author’ takes advantage of the narrator’s privileges to which the analyst cannot consent. ‘Better than anyone else’, says Freud, it is the writer who conspires to give birth to the *Unheimliche*.¹⁴ The writer is also what Freud wants to be. Freud sees in the writer the one whom the analyst must interrogate, in literature what psychoanalysis must interrogate in order to know itself. He is, in his relationship to the writer, as the *Unheimliche* in its relationship with the *Heimliche*: at the limit: his foreignness with respect to creation wants and feels itself to be ‘a case’ of creation. The enigma of the *Unheimliche* has a literary answer, claims Freud after Jentsch, and this answer is the most reliable.

Scarcely does he appropriate Jentsch’s example (in the manner of children: this doll belonged to me) than he declares himself the true master, his predecessor not having made proper use of it! The way in which he misappropriates betrays a stinging boldness and the ploy of a fox! On the one hand, Freud quotes the citation used by Jentsch, who reads *The Sandman* beginning with the character of the automaton, the doll Olympia. At the same time, he discards Jentsch’s interpretation. The latter links the *Unheimliche* to the ‘psychological manipulation’ of Hoffmann, which consists in producing and preserving uncertainty with respect to the true nature of Olympia. Is she animate or inanimate? Does Freud reject the psychological argument? Yes. He takes advantage of this to displace the *Unheimliche* (Jentsch had already shown it to be *decentred* with regard to the reader’s attention, and maintained by the subterfuge of this decentring) from the doll to the Sandman. Thus, under the cover of the analytical critique of uncertainty, the doll which had been relegated to the background is already, in effect, down the trap. Its repression will be accomplished, moreover, with the approval or the complicity of the reader: because Freud, henceforth, puts himself in our care. His real and persistent concern with the reader’s point of view, his attention to and his demand for communicability, which proceed from his well-known need to share, to guide, to teach and to justify himself – this pedagogical procedure that we find throughout his discourse – on occasion use the strategy of denial. ‘I hope that most readers will agree with me’, says the orator who takes no risk whatsoever without making an alliance or returning to it.¹⁵ The dialogue entered upon with the reader is also a theatrical artifice in which the answer precedes and envelops the question. There is hardly a step to be made from this to categorising without delay the the episode involving Olympia in the genre of satire, thus eclipsing it in the discourse on the *Unheimliche*. We get sand thrown in our eyes, with no further debate.

Next comes Freud's narration of *The Sandman*, and the account is faithful (or so it would seem); it is not a paraphrase. Freud delights in the structuring necessity to rewrite the tale, beginning with the centre designated as such a priori. The whole story is recounted then through the Sandman and the tearing-out of eyes. Given the fact that Freud's approach is the inverted repetition of his first work, one sees how he demonstratively rewrites the tale starting from the end: a reading that is reclosed as the *Unheimliche* closes onto the *Heimliche*. The reader thus gets the impression that this tale (Freud's tale) is not all that *Unheimliche*: is the something-new, which should have remained hidden, no doubt too exposed here? Or did Freud render the foreign too familiar? Was the letter stolen? The two versions of *The Sandman* have to be read in order to notice the slippage from one version to the other. As a *condensed* narrative, Freud's story is singularly *displaced* towards Nathaniel's linear, logical story, which is strongly articulated as a kind of 'case history', going from childhood remembrances to the delirium and the ultimate tragic end. All through the story, Freud intrudes in various ways: on the one hand to bring the fantastic back to the rational (the *Unheimliche* to the *Heimliche*); on the other hand to explicitly establish liaisons which are not conveyed as such in the text. These interventions, in effect, constitute a redistribution of the story while they tend to attenuate, to the point of effacement, the characters who represent the *Heimliche*, like Clara and her brother, to defuse the uncertainty revolving around Olympia, thus pushing Olympia toward the group of the *Heimliche*, to diminish the texture of the story by trimming, in particular, the discontinuity of the exposition, the sequence, the succession of narrators and points of view. These interventions thus organise a confrontation between the Sandman and Nathaniel which is much more sustained and obsessive but also less surprising than in the original version. If the reader's eye is applied to the satanic eyeglass of the optician (by Hoffmann, suggests Freud – who attributes many intentions to the 'author'), the function of the eyeglass as it is replayed by Freud constitutes a disturbing complexity: it seems to eradicate the doubt concerning the author's intention. Does it, indeed, lead us toward real life or toward the fantastic? No more doubt (there is repetition and insistence on Freud's part concerning the rejection of doubt): by a series of abrupt thrusts, Freud jumps from one effect to the other (giving the appearance of going from cause to effect) until reaching 'the point of certitude', of *reality*, which he wishes to establish as the cornerstone upon which he may found his analytical argument. We are obliged to accept this 'conclusion' with its retroactive effects, or to get out of this venture without loss. Let us play: at believing that there is a real

sequence and not only a semblance of sequence in such a peremptory declaration.¹⁶ And let's rely on the logic of 'consequently': we will not doubt, as Freud does, that Coppola is Coppelius, thus the Sandman in *reality*; and we will believe Nathaniel not to be delirious but clairvoyant. Let us be taken by these effects (and also this fictional unity of the reader and the analyst), by this 'art of interpretation'. But not without keeping the secret desire to *unmask* what should not have remained hidden in such a selective reading.

Freud pruned the story of its bushy narrative structure, of the heterogeneity of its points of view, of all 'superfluous' detail (the 'operatic' aspect of the story with its choruses of students and villagers and the retinue of mediations which are more or less useful to the plot), pruned it of all the signifiers that did not seem to contribute to the thematic economy. But should not this cutting in the Hoffmannesque wood (Freud, moreover, complains of excessive thickness) be remarked in its very gesture? For it is indeed a question of *cutting* [*une taille*] rather than one of summarising, as if the insistence on the elimination of eyes contaminated the very gaze that 'operates' the read text. The role of pantomime, so striking in Hoffmann's story,¹⁷ is precisely the element that accounts for the charm of this creative work, this sudden emergence of the stage, this springing from the *Erinnerung* through the epistolary relation up to the carnival scene, from the interiority of subjects to their externment, this reduplication of an ordinary reality by an extraordinary one (which *prohibits* reading the story exclusively in one or the other worlds, which obliges the reader to move from one to the other side and *in fact* has no use for the real-imaginary axis), this superb *excretion* is frankly expelled by Freud. Which accounts for the debatable indictment of intellectual uncertainty which leads him to dance between psychology and psychoanalysis. The rambling demonstrativity turns back attentively to what is at stake, and reflects Freud's discomfort. Who decrees, for example, that the uncertainty regarding such and such a point is not as uncertain as all that: Coppola = Coppelius. But this is done by paronomasia. Rhetoric does not create the real. To perceive identities is reassuring. But what about perceiving 'incomplete' identities? In his reduction of 'intellectual' 'uncertainty' to a rhetorical uncertainty, Freud is playing on lexical velvet: because Jentsch's *vocabulary* comes from psychology, Freud allows himself the possibility of completely excluding this uncertainty insofar as it would be 'intellectual'. When the *Unheimliche* represses the Jentschian motif, is there not, in fact, a *repression of the repression*? Does not Jentsch say more than what Freud wishes to read?

Eyes in one's pockets

It is up to us to read *in its ambiguity* Freud's phrase and what it censures: 'This rapidly related story leaves no doubt.'¹⁸ Do we understand this to refer to Hoffmann's story or the rapidly-related-story? But it is precisely the related-story in its rapidness that displaces and assigns doubt. We must think of the 'story thought' as a deformation of the text's thought [*pensée du texte*], just as one speaks of the dream thoughts: Freud 'relates', in fact, just as he *translates* the rebus of the dream by reducing the *visible* dimension. His elaboration begins, in reality, from a conclusion which returns the analysis to an always intra-analytical circle. This is a conclusion that cuts two ways: (1) the expulsion of 'intellectual uncertainty', which allows him to impose an analytical interpretation, and to eclipse Olympia and focus on Nathaniel. (2) Freud takes from the Sandman the fear of becoming blind and what this substitutes for, so that the Sandman is in turn eclipsed by the reductive equation: Sandman = loss of eyes (yet it is not so simple as this). Thus, in one stroke, the two great and extraordinary figures are ousted, and with them, Hoffmann's theatre: one half of the textual body is eliminated. Only the eyes remain: Freud's terrain is now less mobile; we are on territory which is very much reinforced by observations and theoretical knowledge ('to learn', 'learned'): on the one hand, the fear of the loss of sight is a fact of daily experience which clichés underscore; it is a *familiar* terror. Moreover, examination of three formations of the unconscious (dreams, phantasms, myths) shows that this fear hides another, that of castration. Oedipus, who is summoned briefly here, gives testimony that enucleation is an attenuation of castration. And castration – enucleation – Oedipus assert themselves here within the same theoretical boundaries, without our being sure of their relative position in the whole they constitute. *If* there is an articulation, the accent is placed on castration more than on Oedipus; analysis of the *Unheimliche* can thus pass for an analysis of the nuclear Oedipus-castration question. Freud, moreover, has not elaborated anything directly concerning the complex Oedipus-castration articulation. It is the castration complex that leads the boy to liquidate his Oedipus: the castration complex functions as an interdiction; it 'intervenes' directly in the Oedipean nucleus, but is it *intervention* or *articulation*? Freud starts from the fear the boy experiences of seeing his penis removed: we should thus examine this principle, and the fact that Freud never abandoned (or wanted to abandon) the sexual character of castration; we should likewise examine here the return to the father which the castration myth implies. In point of fact, the entire analysis of the *Unheimliche* must be (madly un-read [*dé-lire*]) perceived

(we shall see this more and more clearly) as marked by Freud's *resistance* to castration, its effectuation and its beyond.

For Freud, castration must make of its own enigma a law: 'enucleation is nothing but an attenuation of castration':¹⁹ how can we reinforce this affirmation which Freud soon recognises as contestable 'from a rational point of view'? Indeed, one might reverse the terms (castration as an attenuation . . .) or make them equivalent: enucleation or castration. Freud, then, leaves one non-proof for another, by affirming that the secret of castration does not refer to another secret more profound than that which is articulated by the anxiety: the fear of castration refers back to castration and, at the very least or most, to its process of substitution (the relationship of substitution, *Ersatzbeziehung*, of the penis for the eye and of other organs²⁰). *Kein tieferes Geheimnis*: 'no secret anymore profound', says Freud: the 'very obscure sentiment' of resistance to the threat of castration is the same for all of the presentations of the loss of an organ. Freud's theoretical work is concerned with the quality of the *fear*. Attention is thus focused on this strong and obscure sentiment which is the *strangeness* of the anxiety [*l'étrange de l'inquiétude*]: the lure of the enigmatic.

What lies on the other side of castration? 'No meaning' other than the fear of (resistance to) castration. It is this *no-other-meaning* (*Keine andere Bedeutung*) which presents itself anew (despite our wish to outplay it) in the infinite game of substitutions, through which what constitutes the elusive moment of fear returns and eclipses itself again. This dodging from fear to fear, this 'mask' that masks nothing, this merry-go-round of fear that leads to fear 'is' the unthinkable secret since it does not open onto any *other* meaning: its 'agitation' (Hoffmann would say '*Unruhe*') is its affirmation. Even here, isn't everything a repercussion, a discontinuous spreading of the echo, but of the echo as a displacement, and not in any way referring to some transcendent signified? It is from the having-a-place as a place that the strangeness-effect resonates (rather than emerges), the *relational* signifier that is the *Unheimliche*. A relational signifier: the *Unheimliche* is in fact a composite that infiltrates the interstices and affirms the gaps where we would like to join things up. This is what Freud underscores with a kind of relentlessness in the guise of urgent questions which are in fact tantamount to emphatic propositions: yet the 'question' *why* (a mask for because) obligates the theory to account for the 'arbitrary' characteristics of the story. What then appears as a shadow of the Freudian argument is the 'arbitrary' requirement concerning meaning: a relation of reciprocal guarantee sets up, here, its mirroring effect. The hypothesis aimed at filling the gaps (these 'become filled with meaning') derives from a refusal to admit the

insignificance of certain characteristics. Without this hypothesis, the narrative would be castrated. The fear of castration comes to the rescue of the fear of castration.

As a result of the statement of propositions (the link with the death of the father; the link with the trammels of love; the assertion of the arbitrary nature of propositions opposed to his own), by way of the *adjectivation of infantile* that qualifies the castration complex, the doll and its double are reintroduced. Olympia, adult 'doll', the object of Nathaniel's desire, and the doll, the little girls' toy, serve as a guarantee for the adjective *infantile*. Freud initiates a development here concerning childhood: any symptom, slip, dream has a forked branch which encounters a childhood experience or event. The subject, 'one', cites the case of an eight-year-old girl (patient) who thought that her 'concentrated' gaze would be able to bring dolls to life. In this example, the three effects of desire intersect: the hysterico-magical attitude (the gaze can produce an effect of direct action); the 'concentrated' eye, the eye-penis; and the doll that is secretly alive.²¹ This example brings up again the Doll motif as well as the debate on the Jentsch-Freud split. Freud underscores the displacement of fear onto the child's desire or belief that the doll is alive. (But Nathaniel is not 'afraid' of Olympia.) That is something that appears contradictory. Upon which, the chapter's research ends with a theoretical and novelistic suspension (we shall understand it 'later on'). From the time the doll makes its appearance, the story moves in an oblique fashion and runs away. The doll is not, however, relegated to some more profound place than that of a *note* [footnote], a typographical metaphor of repression, always too near but nevertheless negligible.

Note to Olympia; or the other story of the Sandman

In the form of a note, Freud effectively gives us a second narrative which is only 'reconstituted', a primitive, originary narrative, closer to the interpretation of a case than to the displacement imposed by the creator's imagination on these elements.²² It is no longer a question here of *The Sandman*, but rather of its analytical version. Coppelius is designated here as the dreaded father. Freud brings out the structure of a myth, whose functioning is analogous to that at work in the neuroses. This Sand-Man is also a surreptitious rereading of the Wolf-Man (with a few elements borrowed from the Rat-Man): the function of Nathaniel's maid, and of the Wolf-Man's Nanya; the father decomposed into old father and new father, a God-pig and tender father; a re-edition of the father by the Latin professor, Mr Wolf (son of son-filius-daughter)

and by Spalanzani. To be sure, the analogy has no scientific value, but it is certainly the citations of this story which colour the rest of this analysis (though Freud does not refer back to *Kleiner Schriften zur Neurosenlehre*²³). The filigreed presence of these cases allows Freud to accelerate his argument and justify the apparent ‘imprudence’. It follows that if in the ordering of this new text, a dismembered, tightened-up and reassembled Olympia takes on a new importance, she is, at once, recuperated by the interpretation: ‘she can be nothing else than a personification of Nathaniel’s feminine attitude toward his father in his infancy’, says Freud. To be sure! Homosexuality returns in reality under this charming figure. But Olympia is more than just a complex detached from Nathaniel that presents itself to him in the form of a person. If she is no more than that, why are not the dance, the song, the mechanisms and the artificer brought back into the game on this occasion or theorised by Freud? What are we expected to do with these marionettes which have haunted the stages of German romanticism?²⁴

Again, the beautiful Olympia is effaced by what she represents, for Freud has no eyes for her. This woman appears obscene because she emerges there where ‘one’ did not expect her to appear, and she thus causes Freud to take a detour. And what if the doll became a woman? What if she *were* alive? What if, in looking at her, we animated her?

Put away, removed from the scene, the doll exits . . . between two acts.

Re-birth and story of the double

Make way for another adventure: Freud tells us now a ‘surprising story’, that of the birth and evolution of the Double, the product and mask of castration. This fantastic story takes place on several stages simultaneously, in a spatio-temporal emancipation worthy of fiction. ‘The author who enjoys much freedom also possesses the freedom to select at will the theatre of his fictional action’, says Freud with respect to the envied creator.²⁵ At this moment, Freud has these freedoms at his disposal: he keeps his text in these indistinct and libidinous regions where the light of the law does not yet impose its logic and where description, the plural Hypothesis and all the pre-theoretical mental games are given free reign. This story of the Double resembles the novel of ‘the unequalled master’ of the *Unheimliche* which presents ‘a mass of themes to which one is tempted to ascribe the uncanny effect . . .’ The whole (novel, story) is ‘too intricate’ and confused for us to attempt to take out an excerpt.²⁶ What does the disconcerted reader do? He ‘selects’ the most salient themes in order to seek out what he hopes to find. And what about the

rest? One pulls a thread. The tapestry remains. Freud, then, satisfies his desire always governed by an economy of 'confusion', of abundance: the *Unheimliche* displays its branches, its enigmas and apparitions there against a historical-mythical backdrop. First cluster: the network of the manifestations of the double; 'telepathy', identification of the one with the other, replacement of the foreign ego by the proper ego, cleavage, substitution, redoubling of the self and, finally, the recurrent return of what is similar (this last trait is underscored as an *end* by Freud), repetition of the same traits, characteristics and destinies, etc. Second cluster: researchers of the double: Otto Rank, Hoffmann, Freud, the psychoanalyst, the 'vulgar' psychologist, the literary inventor, the poet Heine, a series of questions and enquiries which may be traced back to prehistorical times to a foundation of gods and demons. A mythic anthropology is outlined. Third cluster: a series of anecdotal examples which are literary, biographical, tales or remembrances and mini-stories within the story. These three clusters, which are made up of unusual and scattered elements, are recombined in a great disorder of meanings through points of intersection and attraction which appear frequently to be ordered by chance. Nevertheless, they are crystallised through contact with the fourth cluster, which lends intrigue to the entire story. The fourth cluster: each theme is the double (or the other side) of another theme; the primitive soul refers back to the figuration of dream language, to Egyptian art, to the child's soul by a system of metaphors or representations which psychoanalysis articulates: the 'algebraic sign', the *Unheimliche* is that which masks 'the unlimited egotism' and primary narcissism. But as a *changing* sign, it passes from the affirmation of survival to the announcement of death. As an 'anticipatory sign' the uncanny alludes to the death drive (as this entire text is a forerunner of *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*) within which the reinforcement of life by the Double is replaced by the pulsation of cancellation, of the discharge. So too the text is reinforced, redoubled, discharged; it pivots and becomes a forerunner of itself.

Implicit in this analysis of the silent language of death, the theme of childhood, diversified in a primary narcissism, initiates the historical development of the ego: the history of the ego is inscribed in the history of the theme as if it were facing it. The text pierces through the undergrowth: as involved and intertwined as it is, it constantly points to other paths and brings up other questions. A cortege of differed problems accompanies it, such as the allusion to pathological delirium, the reference to Egypt, etc. The historicity of the ego, which tempts Freud, corresponds to its differentiation in two instances; historically the double *feeds* on the offspring cast off from the ego by the critical instance;

an *incorporation* whose phantasm gives rise, in its turn, to the metaphor of a disquieting consummation: the Double thus also absorbs the unrealised eventualities of our destiny which the imagination refuses to let go [*démordre*]. While this ego, envisaged from a theoretical point of view and staged by the descriptive point of view, leads back to the Lacanian imaginary by all that is lodged there, it produces above all, in the reading, the ghostly figure of nonfulfilment and repression: not the double, look-alike or reflection, but rather the doll that is neither alive nor dead, and impossible. Expelled, but why?

Admission of failure: there is nothing in all that Freud says which explains the effort to defend the ego and the Double's exile. A hypothesis leads us back to phylogenetic positions, as Freud studies psychoanalytical 'themes' through the *collective* historical trajectory, at the level of race. There is a winding around the Double which seems to be 'decorated' with a new kind of provocation: this time, it is the *extraordinary degree* of the *Unheimliche* which escapes us, an overbid [*surenchérie*] *Unheimliche*. Still another zigzag, another disorder of the ego, and once again it is Hoffmann who is linked, this time, to the ensemble of anxieties. Fiction resists and returns, Hoffmann more and more distinctly becomes Freud's double (through cleavage, through substitution?). Everything occurs, then, as if Hoffmann, in coming back, incited Freud to produce a kind of fiction: two or three short tales punctuate the long development on the *repetition of the same*, the crowning case of the *Unheimliche*. Repetition is regulated by what 'should not have been' repeated. In the first biographical tale, Freud shows himself in a typical movement of denial: offering himself to view, he covers himself with language, with a modesty, which uncovers him comically: the psychoanalyst psychoanalysed in the psychoanalysis he develops.

The first story

Freud begins: 'Once . . . on a hot summer afternoon . . .'²⁷ in a style that oscillates between realistic narration and analytic deviation; uncertainty quarrels with certainty. 'I could not long remain in doubt' regarding the kind of neighborhood, says Freud. But for the reader, doubt alights here and there, touches the made-up women (dolls?) and Freud's wanderings – in obsessive returns. One more return and instead of the distress which Freud claims to have experienced, it is the irresistible comedy of Mark Twain that breaks out. Question: how many repetitions are necessary before distress turns into comedy? The 'degree' of repetition supposes a whole reflection that Freud scrupulously refrains from undertaking: he

wants to remain sexually on this side of ridicule . . . It's a missed castration opportunity!

The second story

The return of number 62. 'You' is the wretched hero of this story of series. This banal evocation of the little mysteries of everyday experience shows how an inanimate number can become an evil spirit. The number 62, in its returns, functions as an evil master of time. 'You' will be tempted to ascribe some meaning to it: here, the function of strangeness becomes complicated by this mediation of the number. The world repeats (and not the ego as in the preceding story). Freud adheres to chance inasmuch as chance would be a kind of analytical concretisation. What meaning would *you* attribute to 62? If you are not 'steered' against superstition, you will understand the *temptation* of meaning: 'you'. Especially if you have been born in 1856 and if you are writing in 1919 a text which the death drive haunts, then you will be the reprieved author, who flees the announcement of his end, masked by a you where the I identifies with the reader. Freud is palming off his own death on us, and the reader has become the substitute; and isn't the one who has lived a year beyond the age foreseen for his own disappearance in some way a ghost [*revenant*]?

After which, you, Freud, you slip back once again under the analyst Freud, and while the threat of 62 moves away again, the primary process which it had replaced on the stage reappears.

An exchange of subterranean journeys. The pleasure principle and its beyond enforce their disquieting reigns: a sudden projection to front stage of the dominant, blind and deaf repetition compulsion, the most intimate of psychological impulses (that is to say, the most archaic and secret doll). The devil, the playing child and the neurotic, sufficiently insufficiently conscious, touch one another, as good transmitters of the *Unheimliche*. The text becomes knotty, and stops. It is cut. A desire for the *indisputable*: you need something certain, says Freud. And he cites, again, either out of remorse or compulsion, another even more doubtful, mythological and veiled story: 'The Ring of Polycrates' or 'He who is too happy should fear the envy of the gods'.

This is a beautiful example of the silent 'dialogue' with death which claims its due; that is to say, always the exchange with life itself, with the most alive.

At this moment Freud puts up the greatest resistance to his own discovery: he defers, backs up, regresses or stalls for time in the research;

takes another detour (recalls the history of the Rat-Man). Thus through intersections derived from mythological and clinical studies running from the most commonplace to the most theoretical, and through a bizarre range of examples, the strange nether empire spreads out.

Let us return to the eye by way of the Evil Eye in a reading caught between superstition and ophthalmology. Once again, the threads become knotted: the thread of superstition, the clinical thread and the thread of analytical explication. I project onto the other my desire to do harm and his eye returns it to me; it is thus that the ‘evil eye’ of the text looks at us furtively from the deepest recesses of our story as we defend our omnipotence, our unlimitedness against the threat of reality. In the time when men were gods, in the time of ‘animism’.

The unconscious psychic activity appears to be derived from primitive animism. Associated with narcissism, animism reintroduces the Double. Freud does not come out of the system of the *Unheimliche* because no one comes out of it: one sees with a strange eye the journey completed by a return-repetition to the lexicon in an exact representation of the first lexical circuit. The foreigner is the neighbour, the *Heimliche* passes imperceptibly²⁸ to the *Unheimliche*, which is the intimate of intimacy, the ‘true’ intimacy. We take up the sequence, again checking on the strength of the knots: resemblance does not inspire fright if it does not proceed from itself in spite of itself. Thus the double becomes exteriorised not only as anguish but as a *return* of anguish. Narcissus is decked out in anguish. The *Unheimliche* transforms itself into *Unheimliche*. The repressed *Unheimliche* shows up again in the form of the *Unheimliche*.

Is this repetition? Yes, but displaced by Freud in the same circle grown tighter and tighter toward a decentred and receding target. Insistent: in the same way, it is the *insistence* of the *Heimliche* which provokes the *Unheimliche*. Insistence of the familiar with time gives rise to the strange. *Unheimliche*: the *intensity* of a vibration which passes over to (rather than causes) the return of the same. What made this *Unheimliche* ‘other’, which is not to say new or foreign, is simply the process of repression. The vibration that changes the burden of the signs, the intensification of the real that produces fiction.

Are all men mortal?

‘[. . .] the primitive fear of the dead is still so strong within us and always ready to come to the surface on any provocation.’²⁹ The direct figure of the uncanny is the Ghost [*Revenant*]. The Ghost is the fiction of our relationship to death, concretised by the spectre and in literature. The *rela-*

relationship to death produces *the highest degree* of the *Unheimliche*. There is nothing more notorious and foreign to our thought than mortality. There is a dazzling chapter on disputed death, on the failure of death to serve as an instrument of moral order and public authority; death veiled by an ideological belief in the hereafter.

Why would death have this power? Because of its alliance with scientific uncertainty and primitive thought. 'Death' does not have any form in life. Our unconscious makes no place 'for the representation of our mortality'. As an impossible *representation*, death is that which mimes, by this very impossibility, a reality of death. It goes even further. Signifier without signified. Absolute secret, absolutely new, which should remain hidden, because if it shows itself to me, it means that I am dead: only the dead know the secret of death. Death will know us, but we shall not know it.

At this juncture, the text only continues in starts; who is the one who could weave the texture of death? The theory, which is violently thrust aside by the irreducible character of the *Unheimliche*, turns as it hesitates and gives way in the face of the inexplicable body of the *Unheimliche*. Nothing is new, everything always returns, except death. Why are we still very much afraid of the dead? Freud asks. It is because, he says, 'the dead man becomes the enemy of his survivor'.³⁰ If he returns, it is to carry you away (you, the credulous reader or the subtle thinker at the end of your life) to his 'new existence', into his abode (this *Heimliche*, this mortal country where no metaphor, meaning or image enters). In order to *carry you away*: it is always a question of displacement, the insidious movement, through which opposites communicate. It is the *between* that is tainted with strangeness. Everything remains to be said on the subject of the *Revenant* and the ambiguity of the Return, for what renders it intolerable is not so much that it is an announcement of death, nor even the proof that death exists, since this Ghost announces and proves nothing more than its return. What is intolerable is that the Ghost erases the limit which exists between two states: neither alive nor dead, passing through, the dead one returns in the manner of the repressed. It is this coming back which makes the *revenant* what it is, just as it is the return of the repressed that (re)inscribes the repression. In the end, death is never anything more than the blurring [*trouble*] of the limit. To die is the impossible. To be dead: absolute uncertainty. If all which has been lost returns, as Freud showed it in the *Traumdeutung*, nothing is ever lost; if everything is replaceable, nothing has ever disappeared; nothing is ever sufficiently dead; the relationship of presence to absence is in itself an immense system of 'death', a fabric riddled by the real and a phantomisation of the present. Since a very small quantity

of presence can substitute itself for or be the equivalent of an existence, life in concrete reality can recede up to the void.³¹ Olympia is not inanimate. The strange power of death moves in the realm of life as the *Unheimliche* in the *Heimliche*, as the void fills up the lack.

Before death's invasion (which the analyst, 'the man of science at the end of his own life', cannot master by theory but which he frustrates by a complex strategy with dodges and thrusts), Freud invokes a screen of traditional defence: men's 'responses' to death are all tainted with the order of the Establishment, of ideological institutions (religion, politics). This is the evolution from primitive animism to the moral order.

Still another knot of examples: will the weaving of references never end? Freud proceeds with excuses and additions: one more; this is the last; another instant; that is not enough. A direct anguish emanates from these incessant additions. The text does not want to give up; the argument becomes anxious, reaffirms itself, is doubled up with additional layers. Thus, quickly, another knot: the one who casts the evil eye, plus epilepsy, plus madness, plus the Middle Ages and demonology, plus the diabolicalism of the person (Mephistopheles) and the difficult patient; and I am skipping some; 'dismembered limbs, a severed head . . . feet which dance by themselves'.³² Still another example, and at the same time the metaphor of this great gathering in which members form a unity which is always disjointed since each preserves an independent activity. A heap. But in the end *the figure* of a *body* of *examples* emerges, but without 'revealing' itself, a figure of figures, a body which returns to its *dislocation*. It is this 'body' which Freud 'crowns' (by the crown, there is reference to a head that is not there) with the supremely disquieting idea: the phantasm of the person buried alive: his (absent) textual head, shoved back into the maternal body, a horrible voluptuousness. Thus the *Unheimliche* that enters head first into the *Heimliche*, an inverse birth.

Liebe ist Heimweh

Love is a yearning for a lost country [*mal du pays*], according to popular wisdom. *Heimweh*: a yearning for a lost country, is a formulation which is always interrupted [*coupée*] by the interpretation which reads 'regret' or 'desire' for *mal*. But this *mal* is also the evil that the country did to you. Which country? The one from which we come, 'the place where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning'. The country from which we come is always the one to which we are returning. You are on the return road which passes through the country of children, the

maternal body. You have already passed through here: you recognise the landscape. You have always been on the return road. Why is it that the maternal landscape, the *heimisch*, the familiar becomes so disquieting? The answer is less buried than we might suspect. The obliteration of any separation, the realisation of the desire which in itself obliterates a limit; all that which, in effecting the movement of life in reality, allows us to come closer to a goal, above all at the end of your life, everything that overcomes, abridges, economises and promotes satisfaction, appears to affirm the life forces: all of this has another face turned toward death which *is* the *detour* of life. The abbreviating effect which affirms life affirms death.

The fantasy of the person buried alive represents the confusion of death and life: death within life, life in death, non-life in non-death. And what about castration? It is the notch and also the other of the buried-alive person: a bit too much death in life; a bit too much life in death, at the merging intersection. There is no recourse to an inside/outside. You are still there. There is *no reversal*, of one term into another. Hence the horror: you could be dead while living, you can be in a dubious state.

What is proper to the blurring [*trouble*] of the limit is this threatening mobility, the arbitrariness of the displacement against which repression reacts. 'The prefix *Un* is the token of repression', says Freud.³³ Let us add this: any analysis of the *Unheimliche* is in itself an *Un*, a mark of repression and the dangerous vibration of the *Heimliche*. *Unheimliche* is only the other side of the repetition of *Heimliche* and this repetition is two-faced: that which emerges and/is that which is repelled. The same is true for the text which pushes forth and repels itself until it reaches an arbitrary end [*terme*]. (The *Unheimliche* has no end, but the text must necessarily stop somewhere.) And this 'conclusion' starts up again and offers itself as a recurrence and as a reserve.

Will there be an end to theoretical hesitation?

If the analysis has oscillated, because of its appeal to examples, between 'life' and 'books', it is because of the difference which exists between the *Unheimliche* we encounter and the one we *imagine*. Because a doubling is represented at all times, an 'important distinction' which is only clearly perceived in the articulation of literature and life: the doubling of the *repressed* and of the *overcome*. The *Unheimliche* of the *Repressed* would be linked to the resurgence of infantile urges brought on by threats and danger. These are *representations* which are repressed, that is to say a *psychic* reality. Material reality has no hold on representations (the fantasies of the maternal body and the castration complex).

The other type of *Unheimliche*, the *Overcome*, has the same primitive root as the *Repressed*, and then bifurcates: it would seem that in ancient

times we had an animistic thought which vanished when confronted by *material* reality. To overcome does not mean to expel: new convictions are sometimes overwhelmed by a return of the old beliefs which a real fact – such and such extraordinary coincidence – seems to confirm. But when it ‘returns’, we see it reappear without the anguish which the returning urge produces, and the test of reality always defuses it once again.

This distinction redoubles another distinction which manifests it, but while *cutting* across it: that between life and fiction, not separated, but interchanged.

The *Overcome* can become frightening in fiction. In return, fiction can cancel out the *Repression* of the psychic content. The strangeness of the repressed and the strangeness of the overcome exchange their operations and their effects in the exchange which takes place between life and fiction (to such a point that Freud calls to our attention the impossibility of distinguishing them ‘clearly’ in real life). Their limits intermingle. The distinction that is made is itself a product of fiction.

This last development would nevertheless be clear enough, if Freud had not retroactively brought doubt back up again, recalling it to the very points from which he seemed to have dislodged it. The entire body of examples is shaken by it. Doubt, too, is doubtful; we have never sufficiently chased it off. It is never sufficiently certain. If the *Unheimliche* can’t hold it’s own, in reality, under the influence of facts, it may reap some disquieting virtue, but it keeps more to itself. In fiction, the *Unheimliche*, free from the test of reality, has supplementary resources.

Toward a theory of fiction

Fiction is connected to life’s economy by a link as undeniable and ambiguous as that which passes from the *Unheimliche* to the *Heimliche*: it is not unreal; it is the ‘fictional reality’, the vibration of reality. The *Unheimliche* in fiction overflows and comprises the *Unheimliche* of real life. But if fiction is *another* form of reality, it is understood that the secret of the *Unheimliche* does not refer to a secret more profound than that of the *Unheimliche* which envelops the *Unheimliche*, just as death overflows life.

What is fiction in reality? This is a question which haunts the outskirts of the Freudian text, but without entering it. Freud writes: ‘What is uncanny about fiction, imagination, poetry, deserves a separate examination.’ Further on: ‘Fiction presents more opportunities for creating uncanny sensations than are possible in real life.’³⁴ The analysis returns

to another object, the one which it has come up against unceasingly without ever exhausting it: *fiction*. It is not merely a question here of examining the enigma of the *Unheimliche* but also of the enigma of fiction as such, and of fiction in its privileged relationship to the *Unheimliche*. Fiction (re)presents itself, first of all, as a *reserve* or *suspension* of the *Unheimliche*; for example, in the world of fairy tales the unbelievable is never disquieting because it has been cancelled out by the convention of the genre. Fictional reality, then, is interrupted. The effect can be multiplied by the interruption in the contract between author and reader, a ‘revolting’ procedure on the author’s part, which leaves us to wander until the end, without any defence against the *Unheimliche*. This is only possible provided the Overcome is never completely overcome. The impossible could then represent itself as the possible (let us distinguish here between absence in reality through impossibility and absence through death). The impossible is not death, and death is not impossible. For Freud, the variations of the Overcome only stem, in fact, from mystification. A false death. The *true* secret of fiction rests somewhere else.

Fiction, through the invention of *new* forms of *Unheimliche*, is the *very strange*: if one considers the *Unheimliche* as a fork of which one branch points in the direction of the strange and the other in the direction of frightening, one sees, at the extreme end of the strange, fiction pointing toward the unknown: the newest new, through which it is in league with death.

As a Reserve of the Repressed, fiction is finally that which resists analysis and, thus, attracts it the most. Only the writer (‘knows how’) has the ‘*freedom*’ to evoke or inhibit the *Unheimliche*, in other words to give rise to or repress Repression. But this ‘freedom’ remains unanalysable; it is another (unique?) form of the *Unheimliche* where what should have ‘remained [. . .] hidden’ does not escape the law of representation, mysterious to all but itself.

From our point of view, as unflaggingly disquieted readers, we cannot help but think that Freud has hardly anything to envy in Hoffmann for his ‘art or craftiness’ in provoking the *Unheimliche* effect. This is of course not always the case. If we experience uneasiness in reading Freud’s essay, it is because the author is his double in a game that cannot be dissociated from the edge of his own text: he is there, he gets away, at every turn of phrase. It is also and especially because the *Unheimliche* refers [*renvoie*] to no more profound secret than itself: every pursuit produces its own cancellation, every text dealing with death is a dead text which returns. The repression of death or of castration writes death (or castration) everywhere. To speak death is to die. To speak castration is either to overcome it (thus to cancel it, to castrate it) or to effect it.

‘Basically’ Freud’s adventure in this text is dedicated to the very paradox of the writing which stretches its signs in order to ‘manifest’ the secret that it ‘contains’ [*contenu-détenu*], and that always overflows it(self) mortally. As for ‘solitude, silence, and darkness’, which have always been there since childhood, ‘we can say nothing’, says Freud, except their permanence. Similarly, of the *Unheimliche*, and of its double, fiction, we can say nothing. Only this: that it never completely disappears . . . that it ‘re-presents’ that which in solitude, silence and darkness will (never) be presented to us. Neither real nor fictitious, ‘fiction’ is a secretion of death, an anticipation of non-representation, a hybrid body composed of language and silence that, in the movement which turns it and which it turns, as a doll, invents doubles, and death.³⁵

Translated by Robert Denomme (revised by Eric Prenowitz)

Notes

1. Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’ [1919], *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 219–56; ‘Das Unheimliche’, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 12 (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1999), pp. 229–68.
2. The standard French translation of *das Unheimliche* is *l’inquiétante étrangeté*, which itself might be translated into English as ‘disquieting strangeness’. The standard English translation of *das Unheimliche* is ‘the uncanny’.
3. E. T. A. Hoffmann, *The Sandman* [*Der Sandmann*].
4. Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, p. 230.
5. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 251.
6. Sigmund Freud, ‘Der Dichter und das Phantasieren’ [1908 (1907)], *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7 (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1999), pp. 213–23; ‘Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming’, *S.E.*, vol. IX (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 141–53.
7. ‘Das Unheimliche’ first appeared in *Imago*, 5 (1919). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* appeared in May 1920, but was written, according to Freud, in 1919. Note the relationship of composition-publication of these two texts. Together, they form a chiasma: they refer to each other. See Sigmund Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ [1920], *S.E.*, vol. XVIII (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 1–64. [HC]
8. Sigmund Freud, ‘Der Dichter und das Phantasieren’, p. 223.
9. Cf. Jacques Derrida, ‘La Double Séance’, *La Dissemination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 249; and ‘Hors livre’, *ibid.*, p. 66. [HC]
10. Cited by Freud in ‘The Uncanny’, p. 219; the study appeared in 1906. Freud’s singular relation to his fascinating predecessor: it would seem, despite appearances, that the *Unheimliche* has something to do with intellectualness. [HC]
11. Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, p. 220.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 224. Freud is here citing Schelling [ed.]. Freud's text is riddled with linguistic patterns, which are sometimes obvious and sometimes hidden. Cf. note 35, pp. 39–40, 'Translating the *Unheimliche*' [in this volume] [HC]
14. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 227.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
16. Cf. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 230: 'For the conclusion of the story makes it quite clear that Coppola the optician really *is* the lawyer Coppelius and also, therefore, the Sandman. – There is no question therefore, of any intellectual uncertainty here . . .' [HC]
17. And in all of Hoffmann's stories, always constructed around a double scene (see *The Princess Brambilla, An Evening with Don Juan, Kreisleriana*, etc.). [HC]
18. Cf. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 230.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 231: there is a 'substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ'.
20. Cf. Sandor Ferenczi, *Sex in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1950), Chapter 10: 'Symbolism'. [HC]
21. Cf. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 233. [HC]
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 232–3. [HC]
23. Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers*, 5 vols (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1950).
24. A heritage transmitted by Goethe (*Faust* I and II) from the medieval Puppenspiel, and replayed, up to the very obliteration of the notion of the imaginary, by Kleist, by Hoffmann, between philosophy and delirium to the point of a meeting of several languages: that of the eyes, that of memory, that of body, that of enigma, that of silence (*en voir* the echo engraved by Hans Bellmer). [HC]
25. Cf. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 249.
26. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 233–4.
27. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 237.
28. It is this imperceptible passage, too slow and too rapid, that Poe inscribes everywhere, and whose impossible history he attempts to note down. [HC]
29. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 242.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
31. This is the problem of sublimation and substitution: is there such a thing as the unsubstitutable? This question arises in many ways in the following pages. [HC]
32. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 244.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
34. Cf. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 249.
35. In the French edition, the following note is appended to the essay:

Translating the *Unheimliche*

Concerning this semantic analysis, a remark must be made about the *impossibility* of 'translating' the word *Unheimliche* into French. An impossibility that is not, in my opinion, the simple and customary

obstacle to all translation, which always divides a displaced text into translated + non-translated. To translate is to bring over as best one can from one code to another a certain ideality of meaning; to transfer an intact kernel into another signifying web. But in this case I wonder if the transplantation has worked: in the place of the *Unheimlichkeit*, we have a '*inquiétante étrangeté*' ['frightening strangeness', 'disturbing foreignness' . . .], which does not fail to disturb me. The French therefore operates the *Unheimlichkeit* through syntax [in French the adjective generally follows the noun]. This articulation is – in fact – already a kind of defence: we are not 'receptive' (neither is Freud, he reminds us) to this type of dread. It is not familiar to us. In other words, we repress it, because it is more foreign than familiar, too foreign, too threatening, perhaps. What I am saying can only be supported by a vast analysis, which would be out of place here, but which would make us reflect on the relations between *French* thought and the *cogito*, and the truth, etc., of the history of the *cogito* and of its influence in France. The fact that the critique of truth – by philosophy and psychoanalysis – was first produced elsewhere than in France is not surprising for whoever perceives the repressive power of logocentrism on our soil. This power is much more significant [*prégnante*] and durable than for our German or Anglo-Saxon neighbours. It is no coincidence that there is no fantastic literature in France (the traces one can find are infiltrations of the German fantastic). Very generally, we do not like worry, fright, confusion, decentring: this is also why it is so difficult to imagine a 'French humour'. Ours is the 'old irony' that monarchises and does not make things slip. The Germans have wandering, failure, *doubt* that we have subjugated, with Descartes, to the majesty of our thought. For French thought, there is nothing exterior to reason that reason cannot reappropriate. This is why – famously – the French reader is resistant to the works of the German Romantics, who were only appreciated by their kin, Nerval or Artaud. A sociological analysis of reading and intellectual production (in France and elsewhere) would lead us very far. In particular, the whole history of psychoanalysis would be curiously illuminated.

Note that, with the survey of translations he undertakes in diverse languages, Freud stresses that 'in many languages a word designating this particular nuance of the frightful is lacking'. He cites examples from Latin, Greek, English, French and Spanish. And he adds that Italian and Portuguese seem to be content with words that we would call periphrases. In Arabic and Hebrew, *unheimliche* is confused with the demonic, the horrible. 'Let us return, therefore, to the German language'. 'Therefore'? It is a bizarre effect of scientific scrupulousness that makes interest fall back on the German language. Which makes us question: (1) Freud's decision to circumscribe the analysis to the German field, and nothing more; (2) the relation to be established between the manifestation of the *Unheimlichkeit* and language.

How can we avoid suspecting Freud of undertaking little strategic operations where Jentsch, and the dictionaries, bother him a bit. The *Unheimlichkeit* having to do – after all – with symbolicity. [HC]

The Character of 'Character'

I. Introduction

What exactly is 'character'? How is it possible at present to think of the 'concept' of 'character' – if it is a concept? Assuming that this concept has a history, how far are we along now in this history or in the examination of this history? What does 'character' name? These questions are, on the one hand, involved in a whole system of critical presuppositions and crop up from traditional discussions about literature, within a conception of literary creation that is today outmoded. But, on the other hand, these same questions, having cropped up out of a disintegrating system, allow, through displacement, for the emergence of new, prying questions opening out onto the unknown of a text rather than its recognisable development; onto life, the incessant agitation of literary practice rather than its theses and its stability; onto its indescribable, unidentifiable aspects rather than its rules and means of being classified. To be more precise, it is with the removal of the question of 'character' that the question of the nature of fiction comes to the fore,¹ as well as the examination of subjectivity – through fiction, in fiction, and *as fiction*: where the term 'fiction' should not be taken simply (in the sense of *borne in mind*) as part of a pair of opposites, which would make it the contrary of 'reality'. Here, rather, it would appear that subjectivity as reality is continuously worked over by fiction, because of several factors: the surplus reality produced by the indomitable desire in the text; that which, beginning with the subject, tears itself away, through desire, from what already exists [*le déjà-là*], from the given [*donnée*], to project itself out into what does not yet exist [*le non-encore-là*], into the unheard-of; and the *imaginary*, secreted by a subjectivity that has always been disturbed, changeable, literally populated with a mass of 'Egos'.

I take the imaginary here in the Lacanian sense, coupled with the symbolic (i.e. with the concatenation of the signifier, or the order of

discourse). The imaginary is the material of the symbolic, which it enters into and supports. It is subordinate to the symbolic. The imaginary is the category of identifications. Any relation between one thing and another is part of the imaginary. (In this sense, the notion of ‘character’ necessarily goes back to a theory of the imaginary.) The ‘Ego’ is the location of the Subject’s identifications, primary and secondary. As an ‘imaginary nature’, the ‘Ego’ is a function of unawareness that makes knowledge and ideology possible. It is on the basis of the imaginary and by means of its restriction that ‘characterisation’ is produced; and ‘characterisation’ conducts the game of ideology. In fact, the ‘socialisation’ of the subject, its insertion in the social machine, can be accomplished only at the price of controlling the production of the imaginary, by repressing the production of the unconscious that poses a threat to established order, with the Ego relegated to its ‘civil’ place in the social system. A ‘character’ is always in store for the subject along the chain where everything is coded in advance. ‘Character’ and ID card go together in this restricting process of which literary interpretation (by means of the encoding – the laying of the wires for a current – that it effects) becomes the reinforcement and reflection. Now, if ‘I’ – true subject, subject of the unconscious – am what I can be, ‘I’ am always on the run.

It is precisely this open, unpredictable, piercing part of the subject, this *infinite* potential to rise up, that the ‘concept’ of ‘character’ excludes in advance. Under the reign of this ‘concept’, the mass of Egos would be reduced to the absolute monarch that ‘character’ *wants* to be . . . that is, if the unconscious could be cancelled out. Actually, if ‘character’ is the product of a repression of subjectivity, and if the handling of literary scenes is done under the aegis of masterdom, of the conscious, which conventionalises, evaluates and codes so as to conform to set types, according to cultural demand, then the *imperishable* text can be recognised by its ability to evade the prevailing attempts at reappropriating meaning – and at establishing mastery, with which the myth (for it is a myth) of ‘character’ collaborates insofar as it is a sign, a cog in the literary machinery.

If ‘character’ has a sense, then it is as a Figure that can be used in semiotics: the *personnage* functions as a social sign, in relation to other signs, within a text which, if it admits of the existence of ‘character’, necessarily goes back to pure representationalism. Such a text is governed by a coding process that assures its communicability; through ‘character’ is established the identification circuit with the reader: the more ‘character’ fulfils the norms, the better the reader recognises it and recognises himself. The commerce established between book and reader is thus facilitated. A community consigns its comforts and its goods to

this mirror relation. Literature thereby assumes value as a marketable form. The marketable form of literature, we might say, is closely related to that familiar, decipherable human sign that 'character' claims to be: in the 'concept' of 'character' the allurements are all asserted, forming mutual leagues and legacies in order to make up a certain literary scene: this 'concept' organises 'recognition'; it is offered to the perception of the reader who can take account of it; it is given as explicable; it patronises meaning [*vouloir-dire*]. Mouthpiece [*Porte-parole*] of meaning [*sens*], it is bound up with the authority of the author and expresses his messages. It leads one, finally, to assume a 'depth', a truth that is hidden but discoverable. In fact, 'character' is the servant of a certain order that parades itself across the theatre of writing.

By definition, a 'character', preconceived or created by an author, is to be figured out, understood, read: he is presented, offered up to interpretation, with the prospect of a traditional reading that seeks its satisfaction at the level of a potential identification with such and such a '*personnage*', the reader entering into commerce with the book on condition that he be assured of getting paid back, that is, recompensed by another who is sufficiently similar to or different from him – such that the reader is upheld, by comparison or in combination with a character, in the representation that he wishes to have of himself.

In this system, the 'character' represents a set of externals. He has referents (real causes that are anterior and exterior to the text: he could be the portrait of a real person) to which he alludes, while he fixes his essential traits so as to preserve them in the book. He is therefore the guarantor of the transmission of meaning and of the 'true', at once *porte-parole*, emissary and idol, indubitably human, at least partially universalisable, and homogeneous.

The ideology underlying this fetishisation of 'character' is that of an 'I' who is a whole subject (that of the 'character' as well as that of the author), conscious, knowable; and the enunciatory 'I' expresses himself in the text, just as the world is represented complementarily in the text in a form equivalent to pictorial representation, as a simulacrum.

This is all accomplished in the name of some reality principle ('life', 'truth', 'biography', 'sense') to which the text is subordinated. It is a subjugation enunciated from the outset by the semantic history of the word *character*: coming from the Greek *kharattein*, to engrave, it is first the mark, the drawn, written, preserved sign; then the *title*, natural or legal, which confers a rank, a right . . . A mark, then, by which the 'character' is assured to be that which has been characterised and refers back to the stamp, to the origin. It includes in its lexical evolution – that part connected with expression ('he's a person of "character"'), with description

– the art of the portrait; with the distinguishing mark, it is that which morally differentiates one person from another. Figuratively, it is designed more and more to function as an active element in the process of social coding – to the point of becoming an ‘account’, a certificate of conformity, the very mark of the intervention of the censor (‘detailed report of a person’s quality, good repute’). Finally, it goes off to appear on the dramatic stage, which is none other than the representation of a ‘real’ that is itself a stage: the character is thus, in the final analysis, the role of roles.

Punctuation mark, graphic character, print type, the trait that dominates the nature of character is precisely that of being the ‘specific nature’ of a thing; it is the instrument and the essence of what pertains, what belongs. ‘That’s him all right! That’s me all right!’ people say, as they perform a specular operation that consists of the Ego’s (re)appropriation of itself.

And what can be said of its French equivalent, ‘*le personnage*’? A sketch of its lexical history proves still more illuminating: ‘person’ is first a mask used by the Etruscan actor. From here we pass metonymically to the role played in the theatre or in life. The earliest usage adopted by the French language is that of ‘ecclesiastic person’ (cf. the English *parson*). The *personnage* is not simply a person: he is a *notable*; a *fictitious* person, man or woman, he personifies. He serves the function of . . . being. It is this representational function by which the true subject can be but dragged down or banned by the civil powers that be. As soon as we say ‘character’, or *personnage*, we are in the theatre, but a theatre that offers no exit, that takes in everything, that substitutes itself for a non-representational reality.

‘Character’ occupies a privileged position in the novel or the play: without ‘character’, passive or active, no text. He is the major agent of the work, at the centre of a stage that is commanded by his presence, his story, his interest. Upon his ‘life’ depends the life of the text – so they say. This is why he should not be too mortal. It is therefore disturbing to many that, at the present time, he has disappeared. Haven’t they announced once again ‘the death of the hero’ (another death of God, in short) – a death generally experienced by the reader as a murder, a loss, on which follows the reader’s quick withdrawal of his investment, since he sees nothing more to be done with a text that has no one in it? No one to talk to, to recognise, to identify with. The reader is loath to venture into a place where there is no mirror, to go forth, so to speak, onto ground that is still virgin and perhaps even non-human,² even if this ground is in fact the system of roots that constitutes language rather than the visible, delimited, framed, comforting stage. Is the ‘hero’ or

'character' the captor of the imaginary, dead? No, he is just brought out of his blinding ignorance; he is unmasked: which does not mean revealed! But rather denounced, returned to his reality as simulacrum, brought back to the mask as mask. He is given up then to the complexity of his subjectivity, to his multiplicity, to his off-centre position, to his permanent escape: like the author, he disappears only to be multiplied, attains the self only to be, in the same instant, differentiated into a trans-subjective effervescence.

So long as the questions of subject, of its subjectification, remain unasked, we will be trapped.

So long as we do not put aside 'character' and everything it implies in terms of illusion and complicity with classical reasoning and the appropriating economy that such reasoning supports, we will remain locked up in the treadmill of reproduction. We will find ourselves, automatically, in the syndrome of role-playing. So long as we take to be the representation of a true subject that which is only a mask, so long as we ignore the fact that the 'subject' is an effect of the unconscious and that it never stops producing the unconscious – which is unanalysable, uncharacterisable – we will remain prisoners of the monotonous machination that turns every 'character' into a marionette.

'I' must become a 'fabulous opera' and not the arena of the known. Understand it the way it is: always more than one, diverse, capable of being all those it will at one time be, a group acting together, a collection of singular beings that produce the enunciation. Being several and insubordinable, the subject can resist subjugation. In texts that evade the standard codes, the '*personnage*' is, in fact, Nobody [*Personne*]³ – he is that which escapes and leads somewhere else. How could he carry me away otherwise? If he repeated me, how could he surprise me, ravish me? Fortunately, even when Nobody is dubbed with names of 'characters', when Nobody is alive, there is still a part of his subjectivity that remains unassigned, on which the code has no hold, which disorganises the discourse and which produces itself (it is not produced or reproduced or reproductive, but inventive and formative). In saying this, I am not referring by priority or exclusivity to any particular modernist literature that has had the benefit of psychoanalytic insights.

The problem of the subject and its relation to fiction, and in general the whole problematic complex of subjects of a text ('person', group, subject, reader, scriptor, writing), all the instances of production, all this is new only in its systematic and continually developing formulation since the advent of psychoanalysis by a certain anti-psychoanalysis and a certain philosophy of fiction.⁴ But here the immediate question is that of subjectivity insofar as it continually gives rise to modifications and

re-examinations of any structure that agitates a certain number of ‘pre-Freudian’ texts, never submitted to traditional criticism, uncodifiable by means of ‘character’. These texts baffle every attempt at summarisation of meaning and limiting, repressive interpretation. The subject flounders here in the exploded multiplicity of its states, shattering the homogeneity of the ego of unawareness, spreading out in every possible direction, into every possible contradiction, transegoistically. From this off-centre, eccentric subjectivity flow all the questions – beginning with ‘What will I have to do with it?’ and ‘Who is speaking?’ – that interest us: ‘Who am I when I am you, you, or him, and pretty far away from myself?’ and also ‘If I can be all my others, who couldn’t I be?’ And if, like Nietzsche, I can say: ‘I am all the names in history’, then how can I not question the value of the proper Name, the value of History, and that of the subject’s history in its periplum through its personal individualities? By means of which critical discourse will I be able to grasp that which ‘character’ can neither cover nor contain nor designate? And yet, who bears a first name and who becomes?

How would it be possible to study ‘character’ in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* when the vacillation of subjectivity between ‘nobody’ and all the possible individualities discomposes the text by provoking it? What is a ‘character’ in a Joycean text? Or in a text by Henry James? Or by Shakespeare? How is one to describe, circumscribe this subject-plus-one that explodes structures and ruins social and affective economy? No designation can connect Nobody. This subject is any other – and also all those that precede it and those it anticipates. It is no accident that Nobody was at a crucial moment the name of Ulysses⁵ and that from Ulysses flows Joyce’s *Ulysses* with his thousands of individualities. And the point here is not to use, by contagion, new critical concepts that happen to be ‘alamode’.

Literature has been at work for a long time on this subversion that has now become its pride. In pre-Marxist and pre-Freudian times, before the joint efforts of psychoanalysis and linguistics, of anti-idealism, began to radicalise the dismantling process that is now taking place actively and massively, what was happening in literature? The same struggle went on, in different forms, through different channels: it took place perhaps more violently because it was more hopeless, with text laid bare, less subversive and more offensive.

There were the same bastions to destroy for the German Romantics, for example, as for us: logocentrism, idealism, theologism, all the props of society, the scaffolding of political and subjective economy, the pillars of property. The machine of repression has always had the same accomplices; homogenising, reductive, unifying reason has always allied itself

to the Master, to the single, stable, socialisable subject, represented by its types or characters: and it is there, at the base, that literature has already struck – where the theses and concepts of Order were imposed – by denouncing them at the level of the signified.

Long ago Georges Bataille and James Joyce, Hoffmann and Kleist virulently took to task the idealism of Hegel and the confining 'dialectic' of Recognition. Poets of Subversion, deponents of conservative narcissism, breakers of yokes and of shackles, they tear away the subject from subjugation, rip up personal possession [*le propre*],⁶ dismember the mari-onette, cut the strings, distort the mirrors. Early on Hoffmann set free the complicated intoxication of knowing that 'I' is more than one. As an artist of subjectivity, he set out, as I wish to show by way of example, not to make the subject disappear, but to bring it back to its divisibility. To attack the home [*le chez-soi*] and conscious existence [*le pour-soi*], to show the fragility of the centre and the partitions of the ego, is to hinder the complicity of the Ego as a masterful and masterable 'character' by exercising authority, by reducing the human being to role-playing and by advocating property in all its forms.

When Hoffmann dismantles the Great Proprietor [*le Grand Propre*], the one called Someone, he is calling on the infinite Nobody to speak.

II. Portrait of the artist as artists

There exists a series of admirable texts, a sort of fantastical musical notebook, that gathers together (under the title here of *Kreiseriana*, but it might as well be entitled *Hoffmannia*, or whatever you wish) diverse thoughts, dispersed portraits, disconnected people, thought-persons, that are similar in that they all proceed from a marvelous life-source, which is indicated at times by the name of Kreisler, at times by the name of Hoffmann or of Wallborn – and of many others, and whose infinite variations are carried along by a flux of reflections on (musical and human) composition. This life-source is itself a source of writing and of musical notation, and the musical source is the source of life. A fabulous continuity enlivens this opera of fluids, in such a way that space, time, body, relations among all things and all beings, are reintegrated; substances, individuals, sensations, localisations are liberated, and in this vast movement of unfettered centres and peripheries there is a continuous materialisation and dissolution of passionate encounters, recognitions, personifications – concerts of singularities that give rise to the modulated melody of a name, of crystallised moments, of events, which concert to make a 'story' woven together of snapshots; and these

bottomless, limitless spaces, these beginningless times, these leaps and bounds, are permeated by a few beings of unclear gender, human or musical or amorous, who recognise one another and deliver resounding messages in an ecstatic exchange of correspondences, identities, othernesses and enchanting supersubjectivities. No preperson is ever held back in his precipitation into the other who speaks to him in his name or who makes him reverberate with the convulsive airs of his libido. The material is personal, multiple, exultant, not masculine or feminine or neuter, but amorous, of lively, musical sex and uncharacterisable.

To attribute this material to anyone would be impossible, as it is taken down only when it occurs to one of the loyal friends, who are similar or identical to one another. Yet it is not absolutely unlimited; it doesn't get lost for lack of designation. On the contrary, it takes on – so as to be well liked – a few authors' names, a few instants of signature and a few restrictions on breaking loose; thus – we are told by one of the singularities filling the role of author – all that is gathered together in this notebook of follies is some '*very* disconnected' reflections. But the editor of the author-persona – who is himself an invention of the author – has been entreated by various Kreisler personae to burn ruthlessly the '*very very* disconnected' reflections, which he is supposed to do out of love for each and every one of the individual potentialities of choirmaster Kreisler. The very very disconnected potentialities of the master, as to person, writing or resonance, have not disappeared without leaving enough of a trace for us to feel at every moment their possible presence in the text or in some recollection emanating from a multivocal memory.

A self-same sensibility, unstandardised, designates by name these perfect friends separable by nothing but chance and distance. But it is the same sensibility that, passing through the dear form of Baron Wallborn, cuts like lightning across the bizarre little body of another Lordship who might, on a night of gluttony, be named Dr Schulz of Rathenow, yes, exactly the same, who, rebounding from this witty Lordship, will galvanise another fraternal, witty Lordship, nourished just as much on song, harmony, violins, flutes, and capable of divine exaltation, which, in the person of Johannes Kreisler, intercepts the waves and harmonics of all these Excellencies evoked in such a crazily musical way. For Johannes Kreisler, who once carried music shut up within him, burst open; the music sprang forth violently, and now he's the one who's shut up inside music. His Excellency is the Baron Wallborn whom Kreisler carried in his heart, who no doubt sprang out of it at the same time as music, and who now encompasses it. This baron, however, issued from the heart and returns there, just as Johannes' breath blown through an instrument comes back to his ears as chords. And because he is an

excellent musician, Kreisler cannot help but recognise the key in which his Excellency is played. The way Wallborn, by a turn of the treble clef, became momentarily Dr Schulz, the way Kreisler, in the guise of Schulz in ecstasy, was forgiven his madness, and the way Schulz could then become him, the way he was so racked with pain that the heavenly image that inflames his innermost fibres is set loose from his innermost self, and the way he becomes, as the result of melodies, the good, the gentle, the amiable Wallborn, in such a manner that his melody is the speech of his interlocutor and the melody flares up in him the moment that the one he wishes to be breaks into speech; all these transformations of the mad-musician par excellence make of the *Kreisleriana* a tumultuous, nearly unreadable notebook in several-part harmony whose author varies according to the key in which he is played. Kreisler, whose key predominates, himself no more than a melody desirous of dissolving into heavenly spaces, has an admirer who is an excellent being in every way but who is sometimes defined as 'the enemy of music'; and actually, were he not, as described, incapable of taking pleasure in the art, he would be indistinguishable from the famous choirmaster. Thus, through a series of encounters in which he is by himself his own groupuscule or club, complementing himself, listening to himself, opening himself to multiple possibilities, in a storm of affects, shaken by intensities in E-major or F-major, Kreisler, disconcerting, hears himself, depersonalises himself in the other who singularises him, and precedes himself to the point of losing his hearing.

But this dance of singulars by Kreisler and others, these prancing intensities, are no insignificant flourishes; in the guise of caprice – from a disorganised chapter-sequence and plain pretentiousness to incoherence or insanity – arduous, painstaking research is going on which the stylistic extravagances at once veil and reflect. The object of this research is the mystery of musical genius, of the origin of music. And this research violently divides the researcher: he is himself a mysterious source, a composer, a 'master' (but master of what discipline?) – and also the disciple devoured by curiosity, the student in search of knowledge. Someone in him 'knows' what someone else does not. The furious 'we' frequently written in the name of Kreisler is precisely this artist interrogating his art and taking his soul apart to pluck out the secrets of its creation, as if he were more than one and as if he weren't the master of his own mastery. Hence his apostrophic, conversational, passionate, elliptical style: the emitter and receiver of the discourse is he himself divided by the pangs of a thought process that must follow the incompatible rules of two systems of logic: conscious logic, that which harasses the living in order to subjugate it, and unconscious logic, of which the conscious would like

to be master and analyst. But in the receiver there is always a thief of the message, the knowledge, the object that he is supposed to send back to the sender. And it is hopeless from the outset for the subject to speak to the Other within him in the hope that, by ‘knocking at the door of the great smithy’,⁷ something will open up.

The comedy of the notebook-man simply records the humiliation of the Ego discovering that he is not the master of his house, but who, at the same time, rushes to meet the guests he doesn’t know and – if possible – in order to become familiar with them or to win them over, even speaks their language; then his surprise to discover that many more things are happening continually in his house than he can reveal to his conscious. At least the subject doesn’t slam the door of his house: he is just at times rather unhappy, for, in this pre-Freudian era, he cannot give up without difficulty his reign over the circle of loyal friends. In a sense, all these fine masters and companions, barons, enthusiastic young people, former apes, are Kreisler at one time or another during his stormy existence. Why should they hold it against him if, once in a while, he wants to mix his ‘scrawl’ in with their ‘clean, clear hieroglyphics’?⁸ For he expects his instruction to come in the form of calligraphy. Indeed, as we shall see, the members of the ‘poetico-musical club’ that meets in Kreisler’s ‘house’ have a common project that allows them on occasion to sign for one another. It is a philosophical reflection on *musical notation*.

The point is not to reduce everything to a sort of synthetic Kreisler, a melting-pot of homogeneous phantoms. Kreisler’s ‘you-as-me’ figures, in fact, substitute themselves for one another on the basis of differences asserted all the more readily as, finally, they ensure the *Kreisleriana* of its movement and rhythm – that is, its style of life, and at the same time a whole series of individual leaks that guarantee this set, so often shaken by explosions, against complete annihilation. There always remains someone on the surface when all the others have vanished, a correspondent to whom the last letter is addressed and who takes charge of forwarding it, a ‘loyal friend’ who takes on the duty of editing the ever so disconnected reflections. A new edition of the collection is always in progress. For the Kreisler ‘set’ is composed of two simultaneous series, admirably conceived so that all the excesses of the person he wants to be, including all the others, are possible without drawing out the work to a point of no return, where any identification process would become impossible. The fear of absolute externality, of the unrecognisable, is the flip side of a reckless narcissism. What are these two series and how do they relate to each other?

The *Kreisleriana* is from the outset divided into two series. The first series constitutes a sort of rambling journal kept by choirmaster

Kreisler, which sets out in bits and pieces a long discourse at once critical and theoretical on music and the following related subjects: that music, which is a divine art, should be reserved for the initiated and not prostitute itself in society; that the secret of music is beyond mankind: and yet doesn't music reside in the very heart of man?

Doesn't it reside in the very heart of man? Doesn't it fill his soul with lovely images, so that the spirit yields itself entirely to music, and so that here on earth a new, transfigured life is ready to tear the spirit away from the constraint, from the overpowering torments of earthly existence? Yes, a divine force comes over man and, giving way with childlike piety to that which the spirit arouses within him, he begins to speak the language of this mysterious kingdom. Like the apprentice reading aloud from his master's magic book, he evokes unwittingly, from his very depths, a thousand marvelous apparitions that scud across life, flying in radiant circles, and fill whomever sees them with infinite nostalgia.⁹

that what springs from the depths of a being must be understood in the depths of that being and performed with supernatural intuitiveness; that music is a voice of the heights or of the depths, but never of the base and vulgar: music is the most romantic of all arts – it is not useful, it makes no 'sense', it is gratuitous, its object is the infinite; it is

the mysterious Sanskrit of nature, which is expressed through sounds, which fills man's heart with infinite yearning; they add that man can understand only through music the sublime singing of trees, flowers, animals, stones, and streams! The useless trifles of counterpoint, which are of no cheer whatsoever to the listener and, as a result, depart from the actual aims of music, are called mysterious and disturbing combinations and might be compared to mosses, grasses, or flowers all marvelously intertwined.¹⁰

The interweaving of musical structures does not stifle the sound:

Everything is interwoven, arranged among the parts of various instruments, and put together with the most beautiful sense of unity. Such is its general structure; but within this artfully constructed edifice, there is a succession, in constant flight, of marvelous images, the appearance and interpenetration of joy and suffering, sadness and happiness. Strange apparitions take up a joyous dance, at first blending into one spot of light, then scattering into sparks, then into flashes, pursuing one another, chasing one another in groups of all forms.¹¹

Pure music (that which is purely musical) cannot be subordinated to a poetic discourse or to dramatic ends. It ravishes. It cannot be repossessed; it belongs to no one, be he artist (performer) or listener. Its mathematical proportions, the mysterious rules of counterpoint, are but

a grammar of an enchanted language. ‘The infinite variety of musical phrases, from the outset, forbids hazarding here any rule whatsoever; by relying, however, on a vivid imagination corrected by experience, some indications can be given, and I would call them, as a whole, a “mystique of instruments”.’¹²

From one page to another the famous ‘master’ celebrates this language (spoken by few: he cites Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Bach) and its unique power, which is a fire, a source, an energy, the irresistible record of a mysterious libido: the only truly sovereign production. And he opposes it, in every possible manner, ironically yet fervently, to subjugated arts, to the very ones that attempt to subordinate it (as in the operatic text) and defends it against all process of reduction: it is not an entertainment, it is not an amusement, it is not a background, it is never minor, secondary, familial or domestic.

The first series is a musical composition, a sort of hymn by Kreisler, moving, hostile with respect to the uninitiated and painful. The pain becomes comprehensible when, by the end of an entirely different second series, we have been through this heaven turned upside down, this inferno of delights that makes up the Kreisler set – a set that includes – or is included by – Kreisler’s editor (whom we could call Hoffmann). The second series is this strange set of I-as-you figures, composed of a certain non-finite number of men defined positively or negatively by their relation to music, victims or idolisers of the art, but all of them, in any case, subject to its power. This series of Excellencies is put together as a signifying chain in relation to the series of reflections which then takes on the dimension of the Signified: the same problematic relation connects the two spaces, but if we follow the meanderings and jumps of the signifying series, we find ourselves buried in repetitions, abysses of tormented passion, dissonances, very striking changes in tone. Zones of depression succeed zones of exaltation, depending on whether one is near or far from the realm of the infinite, on whether one remains at the edge peering down at its depths or is overcome with dizziness. It becomes clear that one question haunts these texts throughout. The first series describes in general the effect of music. This supernatural effect is undefinable except in terms of a mystico-pictorial analogy: the cause of this effect, the secret of its power, that which is the desirable, is the inaccessible. ‘True’ music appears as the signified in perpetual flight, constantly evoked, represented, written down, noted, but no sooner noted than snatched away, always some other. (In a certain way, it is the other arts, particularly pictorial art, that serve the function of signifiers constantly referring back, constantly deceptive.) In the second series, the problem is attacked head on, in its most dramatic form: music is just

as much a mystery to the composer as to the listener. It is given, but it is a disturbing gift, which takes everything, which possesses and draws along, beyond every limit, the subject who has nonetheless produced it. The master can multiply himself as much as he likes in an attempt to make off with the secret: not only will he never be able to, but what is more, in his efforts toward an inconceivable truth, he actually adds to the density of the mystery: the more he is numerous and the more he spreads out to encompass the object of his desire, the more the mystery goes beyond him and plays at his expense: the Kreisler set is the instrument of this music. Music, like life, *ravishes* the subject that produces it. While in the first series the choirmaster appears to be the master-sage, he is shifted to master-fool in the second. What happens, then, from one series to the other? In the first series, Kreisler sets forth the contemptuous discrepancies that exist between the dignity of the art and its dishonorable exploitation by commoners. In the other part, there arises another discrepancy – the 'true' one, the one that at first was repressed in vain. This true discrepancy is the one that breaks the relation (that makes a broken relation) between music at its source, mental music, the work as it is heard – or even seen – in the soul of the artist, and its actualisation in the form of a written copy, a notation that, by 'repeating' it, consigns it to repetition: here is where the idea is confirmed – so cruelly – that the scoring (*partition*) of music is thereafter a real partition.¹³ This music, this air that seems to bring about universal communication among human beings, between human beings and all forms of nature, and among the natural realms themselves – this mistress of correspondences, in reality, communicates nothing of its most profound truth; it is not communicable. What we hear, these audible readings of scored parts, are nothing but the remains of a division that has cut music into two unequal halves, into two 'languages'; the 'individualised language' and the 'universal language', one that accompanies and the other that accompanies nothing, but that creates, that is not unlike the 'sacred', the Supreme Being Himself.

In a very beautiful chapter on 'Effect in Music', someone who rises above Kreisler's suffering and remains anonymous, outside the you-as-I relationship, points out the difference in practice between the true effect and the artificial effect in music. The one springs irresistibly and spontaneously out of the depths of the spirit and passes from the genius' soul to the listener's soul by way of the soul. The other is 'fabricated', from the outside, out of technical exercises and formal imitations, taking its cue from the impresarios or from simple-minded composers: this effect remains external, never entering the soul, and falls flat. The imitation of form never creates spirit: 'It is spirit alone that, governing at will the

methods employed, reigns in these masterpieces as absolute sovereign.¹⁴ But at the same time, it is this necessity that blends with the essence of musicality, which in reality results so often (perhaps always) in tearing apart, in cleavage, in a sense of loss: for that which is at once infinite and complete, faultless, in the soul of the creator, is this way only insofar as the marvellous sounds of his interior music go on: but this realm cannot be part of this world; it has no direct tie with the natural scene, as does painting, for example; musical sound belongs to a ‘superior language’: it is speech heard only deep inside man. The musician is someone who grasps everything (colours, smells, light) musically.

For the musician, sight is an internal hearing, that is, an intimate feeling for music which, vibrating in unison with his spirit, produces sounds in everything his eyes perceive. Thus, these sudden inspirations of the musician, the springing forth in him of melodies, could be considered the perception – the unconscious, or rather linguistically inexpressible conception – of the secret music of nature, taken to be the principle of life or of every vital activity.¹⁵

The musician *hears* everything; he is all ears. As composer, he will fix and enclose within written signs these nameless affects. Having a privileged relation to the unconscious, a singing unconscious, he can learn the art of ‘representing’ emotions by notes. But what a diminishing enterprise! Musical notation is nothing more than an ‘ingenious alignment of hieroglyphs’, the engraving of ‘characters’, which ‘preserves only the indication of what we have perceived’.¹⁶ The divergence between signifier and signified is huge and unparalleled. Verbal language, on the other hand, does not face this fracture: ‘There exists such a close alliance between the sound and the word that no thought springs up in us without its hieroglyphics.’¹⁷ Music, however, speaks to us, it tells us everything, enflames us, envelops us; we can understand it, but we cannot speak it: because it is life itself, no notation can account for it. What is locked up in the score is nothing more than a transformation of music into common language, the attenuating record, practically the ‘execution’, demanded by our simply human need for mastery, the refusal to be alone to hear. ‘And what if the spirit of music, roused by the initiate, were expressed in mysterious chords intelligible to him alone?’ enquires Johannes Kreisler.¹⁸ The unbearable option is there: either transcribe into intelligible statements the chords perceived by the interior ear, give them up to interpretation and lose what lies beyond: lose life so as to preserve its trace in the form of notes, or of characters; or, in solitude, listen to the song of life, but in a solitude such that it is scarcely different from non-existence. Never to hear anything but a simulacrum, or to be but a phantom. Johannes Kreisler, since he cannot give one answer, nor

choose one of the paths, moves continuously from one side to the other, trying to fit them together. On the side of communication, he identifies with the geniuses (Mozart, Beethoven, Glück) in such a way that he removes the risk of their solitude: he is the ideal listener. He goes so far as to encounter them at the obscure site of enunciation: it is in this way that he can tell us about the inception of the overture to *Don Juan*, whose secret is held by him alone – and Mozart, his other self. On the side of silence, he divides himself into several representatives of the Ego, with whom he is in correspondence as the hypnotist with his medium, the musician with nature-music, colours with sounds: he works in concert with them, 'his strong determination being the one question that nature (or the other) never leaves unanswered'.¹⁹ He invents accomplices who can understand him at the very level of enunciation:

We are made such that as soon as one of us speaks, the other cannot hold his tongue . . . You know very well what I mean [. . .] but look here, my dear student: when I used the word 'we' in the preceding phrases, I felt as though I was resorting to the plural simply as an elegant form of modesty, and, when using the singular, as though I was speaking of myself alone; it seems to me that, in the last analysis, you and I are but one.²⁰

He who is designated as Kreisler, situated at this point in the sequence of variations on the Ego, amid rapid transformations, is so volatile that wherever he appears he is at once in a second place and in a second state; what is more, his body jumps around and visibly changes shape; he is, finally, more and more inaccessible himself – nearly post-Kreislerian. It is certainly his ardour, his suffering, his desire that make these pages resonate where he moves about – where he has just passed by. Sometimes on the side of the inaudible, other times on the side of enunciation, he is comparable to the musical 'mirror'; in a certain way, he approaches the art he idolises by fading away: his desire – and what he achieves – is to be no longer the expression of music, but a puff of air: while I-as-you, in the filiation of his signifying confreres, persists in listening to, conveying, pursuing, counselling, hiding the absence, I-as-I runs out of breath and vanishes into unspeakably thin air . . .

III. A representation of representation: How to outcharacterise character

There exists a letter to the Stagehands that Hoffmann wrote at the time he was Johannes Kreisler and directing the orchestra of the Opera in ***. It is a letter of the utmost importance in that it could be composed

only after a period of intellectual fasting prompted by a long series of errors. It is our author's *The Gay Science*, the sign of his recovery.

First of all, I am indebted to my stay in *** for being cured of the many dangerous errors I had previously fallen prey to; there it was, too, that I gave up my puerile admiration of people I had once regarded as great men, geniuses. Besides an imposed yet very salutary intellectual fasting, the cause of my recovery was the regular use they recommended of that clear, extraordinarily pure water, which, in ***, and especially at the theatre *** gushes? . . . no! but which flows gently and silently from numerous sources.

For example, I can still remember with a genuine sense of shame the respect – what am I saying? – the puerile veneration – I used to feel for the stage-designer and stage-setter at the theatre of ***.²¹

One of the symptoms of Kreisler's sickness was a puerile veneration for the stagehands of the theatre of *** and an absurd adherence to their principles, according to which the sets and stage machinery were to blend into the text: thus, the staging that existed then was in the service of 'the theatrical superstition of the text and the dictatorship of the writer' (Artaud).²² One should be careful not to materialise or to actualise the theatre, thus conferring upon it the value of a spectacle; otherwise the spectator would be transported far away from the theatre and, without realising it, end up in the imaginary land of poetry.

These are the precepts of this doctrine of subservience that Kreisler never stopped attacking from then on:

- Resort in every case to sets, machinery, staging to perfection, so as to ensure the most complete illusion.
- Comply down to the meanest detail with the poet's intention.
- Preserve the effect of unity under the author's direction.
- Eliminate every detail that might suggest a connection – by comparison, by direct reference or by reflection – with reality.
- Get rid of all trace of labour: paints, canvases, planks, etc.; therefore, distrust all slipshod artisans who, 'instead of conceiving their work in line with lofty poetry, have dragged the theatre down to the rank of a wretched magic lantern.'²³

Of the three domains covered by the stagehand's job, the imaginary, the real and the theatrical, the first is out of bounds; the second is so far subordinated to him as to be his repressed matter; as for the last, he is flatly excluded from it. The motto of the 'perfect' stagehand: 'No theatre at the opera'.

In his letter to the Stagehands, our friend Kreisler exposes the diabolical scheme of the poets for whom the stagehands act, unconsciously

or not, as accomplices: it is nothing short of an abuse of confidence, a hypnotisation of the spectator who responds on demand, like an automaton. The poet behaves with regard to his audience like the leader (as described by Freud) with regard to a primary horde: he deprives it of the real world and plunges it into a place of violence, where he moves it, tortures it, impassions it – in short, makes it dance to the tune of his pipe. This great paranoid encounters virtually no resistance since he is assisted by the servant-stagehands. No more theatre, no more real. What is left is the imaginary and its magical, wicked, ephemeral aspects, the paltry offerings of the fantastic, insofar as it is alienating: for the 'spectacle' doesn't give the poor, swindled spectator his own phantasms to enjoy. They are the phantasms of the great poet, with whom the clever conspiracy has forced the spectator to identify.

Thus exclaims our furious choirmaster, taking apart the machinery, the paradox by which, in the long run, all the pleasures that the theatre could give are confiscated or retrieved beforehand. Let there be two terms of a representation that operates in such a way that the two terms dissolve for the benefit of a third term which arrives on the scene like a thief: this is the paradox of representation stretched to the point of absurdity. How can the art of the spectacle be refined so far that the stage itself vanishes? By using the Chinese box technique. Not by placing the spectator inside the magic lantern, but by appropriating his senses, his sensibility, his consciousness, his mental and emotional apparatus, through 'lofty poetry', by means of various manipulations; the spectator is to be carried away, locked up and placed under surveillance in the phantasmal box erected by the text around its captives. What does Kreisler find so revolting? On the one hand, it is the reduction of the spectators to a role of marionette with the text pulling the strings; and on the other, the general deterioration of places, of rapture and of life: in the poetic process, the theatre, stretched to the limit, teeters and then disappears. It gets lost in its own perfection, in the excessiveness of its decor. And the real? The real, it is agreed, should be left outside. Normally, however, in 'theatres', the real is not cancelled: it is the repudiated term in relation to which the theatre defines itself. Without the element of the real, no theatrical effect. The joint effort of the stagehand and the poet consists in pulling down over the theatre a fictitious real that masks the theatre's 'truth' – that is, the machinery, the stage – and breaks down the relationship into a commonplace externality. With one stroke, both the real and the theatrical are annulled. The theatre loses its essential theatricality and opens up onto a sham exterior, which is itself the true fiction – fiction that would insinuate itself as the true reality. And the spectator, no longer aware of his seat in the theatre, is carried

away on invisible wings to an immaterial land to which he contributes, for the sake of reality, his true tears, his real blood, his genuine laughter and his all-too-real fears: he is the real within a fiction which he gives life to and which he cannot perceive to be a mere box of words. So what's the use of the theatre? Since it no longer exists . . . do we need theatre? We certainly do – we always need the seat, the screen, the couch, as means of passage: the theatre serves precisely the function of demolishing that other cumbersome stage, that of the real. It's the means of transportation. We must reach the imaginary through the metaphor's self-destruction.

IV. The theatre at the theatre

Kreisler then proclaims a manifesto – against magic. Unite against the poet and the musician! Thwart their plans! 'Insofar as these individuals will resort to anything to make the spectator forget he is at the theatre, you should, on the contrary, by cleverly arranging sets and machinery, continually remind him of it.'²⁴ The theatre must be presented as a spectacle: so it can bring out its truth and destroy the bogus truth of the setting. Let the impeccability of the labour be manifested as such. The theatre must be theatricalised, the phony mystery put to an end, the spectator urged to expose and to control the stage tricks: the spectator must be given the *double* pleasure of representationalism, that which arises from this appendage at two places at once, which maintains the game value and thus, all at the same time, ousts seriousness, appropriation, alienation, bans all form of possession, but also opens up, between the real and the theatrical, an intermediate and particularly delightful scene in which the transition is accomplished from one term to the other and where all sorts of events cannot help taking place: in this exchange zone, the action and the representation take turns at causing accidents, hybrid, provisional forms, and a whole 'story' that crystallises the difference between these two types of reality in the form of a dust cloud of supplementary effects – a sort of co-reality or perispectacle – that are pure profit for the spectator. Thus, something more is given to enjoy: the actor is at once the personage (with whom he must try to identify himself), the artist, who does an admirable job of identification, and the actual person, who is threatened by on-the-job accidents and who receives a triple ration of sympathy when a piece of machinery carefully hung improperly by the stagehand gives way, at the risk of killing three birds with one stone.

At the risk, too, of having Kreisler, or some other, capriciously unroll

this surface spread out between auditorium and stage along the real, which continues to the point of becoming a backstage to itself. The stagehand, then, discovers the rationale for his art: not to trick, but to set himself up as the technician of the passage – according to, for example, the model of ravishing glissade proposed by Hoffmann in his texts, as in the *Kreisleriana*, where he does a demonstration of stylistic figure skating in the letter to the perfect stagehand. In this case it is a question of 'sowing' seriousness – not of destroying it or of overthrowing it, but of taking it off its hook and leaving it behind. For this deed, the technique of 'curiouser and curiouser' must be used: an emphasis on the real through augmentation, a sort of comparative of internal superiority to the thing described. It would not be, therefore, a measurable, quantitative increase, but an intensification of being, a sort of acceleration in place. Kreisler's manifesto, which begins at a measurable distance from seriousness – a seriousness with which humour never breaks, takes off with a leap and elaborates a dynamic of suggestion, which carries off humour along a curve, plotted in the manner of a Moebius strip, to the point where the intensity of its reverberation seems to topple it onto its other side – parody. An excessive speed and – where are we reading? We are quite incapable of saying, 'This is where seriousness stops'; this is parody. We are let go of in a space that leaves us free to interpret. 'Seriousness' encounters at some point the *possibility* of being overthrown, its limit, the point at which its effects of meaning elude all affirmation: that can mean anything one wishes. It is impossible to attribute to the author any definite position. There is a moment at which it reverberates so strongly that, as in the adventures of Alice, effects precede their causes: first the piece of cake is eaten, then it is cut. And in the theatre, first the stagehand is heard yelling, 'What an uproar! what a racket!' And then he sets his storm going. In this way, signifier precedes signified: the thunder makes us jump, then it thunders. And the text refers us back to its effects of multiplying incertitude. There will always be extra meaning, space enough for everyone, for each more-than-one, and for each one of me.

Translated by Keith Cohen

Notes

1. As I began to suggest in my essay on 'La Fiction et ses fantômes' [included in this volume as 'Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The 'Uncanny')' [ed.]] and elaborate in *Les Prenoms de personne*. The present remarks go along with the basic ideas of the latter work. [HC]

2. Non-human: because a non-repressed subject can produce forms of unexpected, unheard-of subjectivity, which then throws off the identification process; what if I were to become an animal (Kafka), several others (*Ulysses*), a scrap (Beckett), a set of animal, mythic, fantasised productions (*Neutre* by H  l  ne Cixous)? [HC]
3. ‘*Personne*’ is translated throughout this essay as ‘nobody’, though this should be understood in its ambiguity of ‘a person’/‘no person’ [tr.].
4. I am thinking in particular here of the beautiful ‘anti-analyses’ by Gilles Deleuze reading Lewis Carroll, or Klossowski, or Artaud, in terms of the movement of their intensities (see *Logique du Sens* [Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (London: Athlone, 2001)] and *L’Anti-Oedipe* [Gilles Deleuze and F  lix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984)]). [HC]
5. In the scene of Ulysses’ escape from the blinded cyclops Polyphemus in Homer’s *Odyssey*. [HC]
6. I translate *propre* as ‘personal possession’ in this context, though the word has a great many other connotations in French, such as ‘one’s own (self)’, ‘characteristic feature’ and an etymological trajectory that goes from the ‘close’ or ‘intimate’ to ‘that which is appropriated or taken away’ by way of the notion of property (*propri  t  *) and family (not given) name (*nom propre*) [tr.].
7. David Charlton (ed.), *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, The Poet and the Composer*, trans. Martyn Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 165 [translation modified].
8. *Ibid.*, p. 165 [translation modified].
9. *Ibid.*, p. 88 [translation modified].
10. *Ibid.*, p. 94 [translation modified].
11. *Ibid.*, p. 102 [translation modified].
12. *Ibid.*, p. 113 [translation modified].
13. For Lacan, it is from his partition that the subject proceeds to his parturition. [HC]
14. Charlton (ed.), *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, p. 156 [translation modified].
15. *Ibid.*, p. 164 [translation modified].
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 164–5 [translation modified].
17. *Ibid.*, p. 164 [translation modified].
18. *Ibid.*, p. 98 [translation modified].
19. *Ibid.*, p. 164 [translation modified].
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 159–60 [translation modified].
21. *Ibid.*, p. 115 [translation modified].
22. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 124.
23. Charlton (ed.), *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, p. 116 [translation modified].
24. *Ibid.*, p. 117 [translation modified].

Missexuality: Where Come I Play?¹

Then, (while the machine of all trades – of history, (hi)stories, machines and the typewriter of all the lost texts of all peoples – carries on with its analyses, helixtrolyses and other operations in poetic physiochemistry; and the structural synthesis of the whole of culture in general linguistic equivocality; without forgetting to programme the etceteras; in a parenthesis).

(and while Jones Shaun, as a professor, asks himself answers)

(and while, as young women and researchers, *Finnegans Wake* scatters itself on all the free benches of a public lecture theatre registered what's more in Vincennes)

it is a question – (while, as much male as father, the war between the huns and the hothers, the men and the shems [*les hommes et les hombres*], unfolds its new perversion) on the ring where Burrus and Caseous occupy for the time being – for a few pages, if not the first place, at least a remarkable place; it is a question perhaps, then, of History or rather of one of those (hi)stories which History strings together into one of the bad dreams which insist to the point of producing its (non-)sense, that is its nonsense.

No more, however, after all, than of Dairy – of electronic churn – of machinery capable of dissociating language into its atoms, milk into its by-products – or of sublimation.

Nor less than of a geometry, of an orchitecture [cf. *FW* 165.9], of a plioscene geology [cf. *FW* 165.26] with sedimentation and obscene implication, of a putting into text [*mise en texte*] not of a machination

a double, analyticosynthetic programme of the spiritual products of the world of culture, of natural products –

(While writing crosses all the cultural systems with the help of several languages, in the hope of striving to gather to its thread [*fil*] and group together within its alphabet all the energies which circulate through all the spaces of production.)

whereas someone from Shaun holds forth *ad usum delphini*, himself his own mentor, liar [*menteur*] and tutor – protracting a ‘unified talk, concealing the difficulties, filling the lacunae, casting a veil over the doubts – and all this in order to make you believe in all conscience that you have learnt something new’ (as Freud would say)

(for the use of which *delphinus* [*dauphin*]?) – finding it corps-rect and decent to call things by all possible names.

Then, – (pure perversity or overexcitation of the text as a lecherer’s [*con férencier*] audience?) a lack makes itself felt in the writing which was hitherto pure male full of grace, something like a cut – on the side of homozeroticism – which cannot be kept away any longer, a slice of language, which wants to be told, which grows between the M – ales, a feeling of unpleasant pleasure which threatens to engross [*engrosser*] the combatants, whereupon it is in their interest to have a letter made to them in the text by itself [*à se laisser faire une lettre dans le texte par elle-même*]. A necessity, M begets itself and presents itself among them. It grows fast: no sooner M than Margareen already.

No (hi)story without M. Without it, without Marge, no room for the men’s scene/stage [*scène*]. No room, no place, no *père*-text at all for history, neither as future nor as narrative. No Middle, then, and no Mis(s)tory.

Since she must, so let her be. And she springs up. From the cup and from the – edge. From the croup and from the bottom. Bang in the Middle [*Milieux*] places – the ‘undistributed middle between males’ [FW 164.6] – between males and meals, of a corporeal space, below the belt of the text which can do nothing about it, and makes a bit out of a tit and out of the male tit another titbit [*et fait d’une scène un sein et du sein mâle une autre cène*]. Equidistantly from both ends of the alphallbit [*alphallebête*]. Ah! Merge! In relation with the in-between two senses . . . ; with pulsion; with the sediments, the burials in the ground [*enfouissements*], repressions and origins; with the regions, the good and bad regions of repression; with di(s)-simulation; with bisexuality; with the conjunction-disjunction of virile combinations with 2 or 3 elements; with magnetisation and binding.

– because it is his hour: ‘the babbling point of platinism’ [cf. FW 164.11]. The boiling point of the text, of platinum (the point of absolute motionlessness), the ‘absolute zero’ [FW 164.1], the prehistoric hour, before any counting – the hour of babel/babble [*babelle*]

– Thus has the state of the text – the text-state – decided. If the necessity of its (hi)story did not come, everything would remain at a standstill.

Who? M. ‘A pale face surrounded by heavy odorous furs . . .’ [*Giacomo Joyce*]² Giacomarge. A face, a letter, a pressure at the level of

the page's abdomen. M . . . i, M . . . e, an M . . . waiting for a series of letters with which a living being can be composed, perhaps a tendency which has just made a hasty entrance into the textual salon under the sweet-and-sour gaze [*regard miss-figue mi raison*] of the 'custodian' himself, delegated by Father-Conscience to the control of these little repressed ones who come back suddenly and rush preconsciously without perviously asking for permission – And for good reason! Young *missives* from the unconscious of *Finnegans Wake*, they are in the habit and mania of sexpediting themselves to their (re)senders.

Miss M's emission, at repeated intervals throughout *Finnegans Wake*, is related to the process of the text's own circulation by itself on the mode of projection (secretion, excretion, operation of reappearances) of a saMe wrenching itself from the matrix like the first missive saved from shit by the original hen (*FW*, III), the still motherborn [*mère-née*] hen, made to lay and hatch letter-eggs, and propagate – the space always already space where language inscribes itself for reading.

M . . . arge, not the primordial mother, not this matrix which tends 'to expense herself as sphere as possible' [cf. *FW* 298.28–29] as 'paradismic perimutter' [*FW* 298.29], not the chaotic soundbag with the infinitely plastic perimeter, but a young wild provocative M who as a message is never there, and as soon as she arrives is no longer there. The letter of *Ersatz* par sexcellence.

'and looking wantingly around our undistributed middle between males we feel we must waistfully woent a female to focus and on this stage there pleasantly appears the cowrymaid M. whom we shall often meet below who introduces herself upon us at some precise hour which we shall again agree to call absolute zero or the babbling pumpt of platinism.' [*FW* 164.5–11]

Letter and cowrie, a sign of exchanges to start with, initial shell/misprint [*coquille*], the wager of a still hidden vocable, and a little later 'cleopatrician in her own right' [*FW* 166.34–35], at once intruder, anonymous and the queen, the stranger without whom the proper would have no middle in which it could exteriorise itself in order to come back to itself, the M which allows the half-kings/mirrors [*mi-rois*] to admire themselves while reflecting themselves, and which, being median, tells the letterbeads [*articule le chapelettre*]. An advent, therefore, which causes more or less greasious, phonic and graphic precipitations, and affects the turn of events in the minidramas in which the *Wake*'s men ceaselessly fall back.

M's immediate effect on these milking condensates which the masculine representatives then named Burrus and Caseous are, is excremally stimulating: it makes the substance come. They cream with love for her

[cf. *FW* 164.19]. For her are their screams, their matters, their po-M's, Butter, dream, pooh, writing, scream, secreteure [*sécréture*], unconscious: they are pressed, compelled to pay homage to her. Their presents for her – or rather thanks to her, thanks to the M . . . without which they run dry. Source and strength of which they discover, because it is suddenly present, that it is never far from the textual or corporeal space which they strive to occupy, share and appropriate. Their better thirds [*moitiers*].

The M which perverts their good ears as it subordinates space, that is to sing the aria, to the time factor, which introduces the area of the Aria, (ave m,aria or p,aria(h)? or, in the labyrinth of their ears, the Ariad,ne?) while injecting masculine fantasies into the circuit, the sketch of a scene of refellation cut off in expremis(s). As incantatrix she exercises a charm over mouths and over holes in general, over (s)exits, the suddenly solicited glottises of verginal troubadours. The attemptatrix [cf. *FW* 79.18].

‘O! to cluse her eyes and aiopen her oath and see what spice I may send her. How? Cease thee, cantatrickee! I fain would be solo. Arouse thee, my valour! And save for e'er my true Bdur!’ (*FW* 165).

one more line and he would have spissed [*épicait*]!

She arouses desires of introjection, while inviting to the production of artistic objects, accelerating the process of transformation, displacement and sublimation.

Her arrival triggers off crystallisations of relationships, of chain-linkings of systems of figures: figures of transformation, figures of culture, of fabulation, a whole work in which political economy, libidinal economy and biological economy meet and interrogate one another, and trade places. A question of regulations [*régimes*], therefore.

Desired, feared, unavoidable; this added M, in excess and marginal, is not allowed to get away with it like that. Which cannot be done without, Love M [*qu'on M*], after all.

Hence the attempt at reappropriation of the young girl through *Erinnerung*, Representation, Pictorial Reclusion.

Into which frame(work)s can the one who entered by herself be set? A triggering off of paradoxes: how can one make ‘within’ the within? [*faire ‘entrer’ l’entre*], the margin? – Jones’s answers: by entering within. By demarginalising. By making her ‘portrait’, ‘touring’ her, exploring her parts.

To analyse M., to reduce and incorporate her, such is the professor’s *démarge*; which is necessary too, on the model of the relation of doctor Jones to the ‘subject’ of his biographical venture: none else than Freud.

To make the portrait of the Pa(t)ter(n) [*Patron*], to master the master, the M, the letter that leads: a project common to all the Jones, in and

out of the Wake, Joyce never plying far off the Freudian waters, always ready to grasp what, from this other scene in which Freud himself is placed at the centre of the seducing machine, inducing transference in fallout, echoes and marginal news, could not fail to interest him.

It is as a spatialist of calculus in space that Jones – Shaun’s lieu-tenant that day – undertakes to ‘comprehend’ the incomprehensible, and first of all to ‘summon’ [*traduire*] it within geometrical language (as one summons before a court of law [*comme on traduit en justice*] – and reduces to an equation) with a method *à la* Margelle Duchamp. This is more or less what happens:

In order to make her portrait, cut up Marge into small pieces – of rhombs and trapezes,

toss her up in butter and cheese, add to the choice virgin morsels mental spices of the same wild species: frozen conger eel, etc. originating from the ‘black continent’ and, simultaneously in another frame, dress her with piled hatboxes, on which B and C will be able to test their capacity for virile erections and congestions. Frame and title: *Portrait as Any Body of a Woman Without Lack*

(*‘The Very Picture of a Needlesswoman’* [FW 165.15–16])

To assasign her – To penetrate delicately into the quick of the mat(t)er. Hymen!

One would then get the secret of her ‘*boîte à surprises*’ [FW 165.29–30].

A lecture [*Exposé*] in which it is (not) taught that all operations of mastery, however ‘gratuitous’ and distant they may appear to be painting as representation – capture – retaliation – of the model of literary criticism as dissexion – are in a way the punitive expositions, the acts of devouring and of destruction in which the amorous approximations of *espicietomophilia*, or the love of word peppering [*épicietomophilie*], are accomplished.

And that any subject of curiosity finds itself doomed to be at the place of the Subject of Curiosity through the play of substitutions, not to wit [*à ne pas savoir*]: the young virgin girl.

One can understand that Professor Jones is able to affirm that, after such an intervention, he has doubtless examined the subject from the inside. He has sized her up [*Ses mesures, il les a prises*]: he is therefore in a better position than anybuddy [*quicon*] to flunk Marge’s presentation in three paragraphs (FW 166–7).

Which he does not fail to pull off with trio:

A magisterial description at first, which then becomes increasingly hesitant, uncertain and less and less masterful, to the point of the object

of discourse getting the upper hand and taking power, taking over motion [*le pouvoir, le mouvoir*], and even the text, once again to the end, to the top, on the edge of the abyss, which imposes its law: to the Tarpeian rock [cf. *FW* 167.18] which promises to any king at once his erection and his fall.

Where it is proved in the *père*formative Professor Jones seeks to – define M – to *economise on her*.

That she is herself what arouses the desire of economisation –

Or more exactly the proof of *masculine econhomy* [*econhommie*].

Of all the economies. As Margin. As what completes, allows, forbids, extends beyond what happens between B and C plus the Other [*l'Autre*] in the structure.

– First paragraph (*FW* 166). No question of asking the question: *Where is (the) Marge* when she is only a ‘demilitary young female’ [*FW* 166.4–5], when she is reduced to occupying the maid’s place.

A question which maliciously opens an uncanny scene, as if it came straight out of the minitheatre of Freud’s social milieu and was regrafted there, with its restless nannies, seeds of prime hysteria, (phantasmatic satisfaction of young au-pair girls, romance of public park benches, those repressed by the family machine . . .) where M. is at the place of the one who gets the master with his back to the wall, and makes his head spin with her little game [*manège*]. Petty anxieties and petty pleasures of the master who is always made a little too pereplex by his hysterics. If the accompasped professor, endowed with his accurate eye [*armé de son compas dans l’œil*], claims to attain the perimastery of his subject of exasperation, exintrinsicly, he is conversely, through a portraitured reflexion, himself caught up within the chain of identifications in which M walks her forenames. And while he boasts doing her, Marge does him in.

The well-ordered Jones behaves econhommically with his ‘discovery’, like one of those exnurslings especialising in anal eroticism, who derive a supplementary gain from defecation. Part of his pulsions is ‘sublimated’, part of his excitation is put between brackets, another one is sent on a cul-tural mission into M’s erogenous regions.

The attempt at M’s detention-‘comprehension’ takes place within the codes classically devised in order to tell the famous mystery of femininity, as much as to lock up the missteric, within stereotypes which annihilate her: codes-of-seduction, modesty, fashion organise the eternal *space-of-the-veil* in which she is kept secretly confined. As a secret . . .

But M, unruly already, hystericises her analysis everywhere at once: a merrily Joycean inscription of analysteria. A digest of cultural clichés, of mini-studies on hysteria, together with the text which is supposed to pass through Jones’s mouth, but crosses Joyce knows how many other

erogenous zones of the same (m)ilk, hystericises itself . . . and in its/his burgeoning of bisexual infantasies, the analyst cannot but be his own missterisk.

Where is Marge
When she is not
on all the free benches
of a public garden
or at the movies?
Neverywhere [*Nullepartoute*]
all at once.

moving from the park –
reserve
and representation of the feminine
sex –
space with ‘free’ elements –
to the film theatre,
still in search of Him, of
Id, her eyes
fixed upon the Other.

Defined, coded, identifiable according to three ‘modes’ or practices of the feminine signifier (fashion, seduction, modesty).

I have got the size of that
demilitary young female
whose types may be met
with in any public garden . . .

Marge, in several copies, is always
in several places at once and even
in all of them, in a pudic park, a
demilitteral young female a bit on
the military side.

ostentatiously ovidently
ovidously
 avide/ovide
hemming apologetically over
the shirtness of some sweet
garment a very ‘dressy’ affair . . .

Showing – stealthily disrobing
[*dérobant*], ostensible under classical
signs subverted while sexcu-
sing – a hem always shows – to
reveal between her little more or
less of chemiss, at a pinch [*à la
limite*] – her pinch of chic [*sa
limite chic*], – her little luxury
hymen, her thing trimmed with
a natural fur. Her ruses: to read
in order to look sideways. One
gesture hiding another.

at the movies swallowing sobs
and blowing bixed miscuits
over ‘childe’ chaplain’s
‘latest’ [cf. *FW* 166.3–14]

At the flicks to eat, swallow, nibble,
feed on her own affects, see a
Chaplin movie in order to weep, so
that she can ingest what she emits.

In tears, cherishing her sorrows at the latest Chaplin.
But above all she is not weaponless, and has the one weapon which
he would like to make the instrument of his little economy: she holds

a *hostage*: ‘or on the verge of the gutter with’, on the edge of the pavement, as on the verge of prostitution, on the feminine masculine *verge*

‘some bobbedhair brieffroked babyma’s toddler, held’

nobody less than – held far near – HIM!

‘hostage at armslength, teaching His Infant Majesty’

his majesty mummy’s little boy, a male child whom she teaches – as the master’s mistress –

‘how to make waters worse’ [FW 166.15–16, 18–19]

waters worse [*le pipire*]; as a sexual seducatrix, what she inculcates in him passes through piss. How to make his sexcretions a wee worse [*empipirer*]? By exchanging liquids and solids, matter – maternal matter with male jets. How to worsen the flow? Learning the benefits of substitution. Piss me your little things – thus goes the world.

Marge holds the strange power of being from the edge: she holds Him above the chasm with which he is in a dangerous relation. Mastering the techniques and places of *jouissance*: who knows whether she is not endowed a little more than others (in knowledge, in *jouissance*, in the thing [*du chose*])? (To find out the answer, apply to Tiresias. Of the ten parts of *jouissance*, she has nine . . . at least).

Whereas Professor Jones does not take his eyes off her, for he is a specialised researcher: does he not have regions to look beneath, seeing as she uses ‘Master Pules’ [FW 166.2; *Master Piauleur*] to conceal her muscular personality? Piling up maskles, and parading and flourishing her umbrawly [*parapiauleur*], flat out [*toutes voiles dehors*], but inside . . .? Disquieting all-woman, ‘totamulier’ [FW 166.26], who introduces into his structure additional elements, and from elsewhere! She plays at joining and disjoining.

As a result, Jones, as HIM, sees himself in a position of rivalry – surveillance – in relation to ‘her “little man”’ [FW 166.21], who?

Himself the child, her little-man – hers, her clitoris.

Quivering of sexual difference, bisexuality at its tits’ end [*qui ne sait plus à quels seins se vouer*], at the end of its muscles and masks the better to dissimusculate itself. And under the analyst’s troubled, ‘suspecting’ eyes

– because he himself has reagions [*raigions*] to look/for looking beneath, from bottom to top and under cover of education, one detexts the ambiguous use of the tiny tot as presex [*poupon prête-sexe*]. The work of the undies.

And conversely she exhibits a flood of female signifier swissshing over some male signifier, as if to diffeminate the fact that her internal

layout would have in store less feminine surprises than one would father [*papierait*].

A slip-parade of underwear: any slip refers to another slip, naturally: a slip of the tongue, a slip of a girl.³

To be her little one, the (s)only requisite at bottom is to be topless-turvy [*il faut et il suffils d'être sans dessous-dessus*]. March on the bisexual revolution!

(Just as one will get the message once more, specifically in *FW*, p. 239, history and all its stories would cease going under the same old phallocratic crotches the day 'when the new Clitorines have taken their own powers and have amanticipated'.⁴)

But things go a bit too fast [*tout tourne un peu trop vite*] when, in the exchange of good lessons, Jones happens to allude to his 'solotions' [*FW* 166.27], which must be suspended . . . from the moment he tackles this awkward chick the right way [cf. *FW* 166.28–29].

My 'solotions': What are the solotions of the pettyholder [*petitulaire*] of the chair 'for the proper parturience of matres' [*FW* 166.26] (– mater, matter – *materia*)⁵

Mater [*Mère*] – matter [*merde*] – partition: the mother 'makes' the child.

Miction-mite-(child) [cf. *FW* 166.28]: the child 'makes' water. His solotions are kept. His masculine solotions do not enter the circuit of disjunction. 'Totamulier'

– '*Verumvirum*' [*FW* 166.26] – *seducente infanta*: intervention of the Latin (let-in?) language, a dead Romance language, which injects a set of supplementary notations into this fundamental question: revival [*relance*] of History (Brutus-Cassius), of good linguistic-neurotic use, the language of law, of the Church, which also have a few words to say [*leurs mots à dire*] in the text when matter – *materia*, the very flesh of all language – is allowed to (be) work(ed on) [*quand il s'agit de (laisser) travailler la matière*].

An example of this infinite combination of levels, domains and regions which join and interpenetrate one another, work on one another [*se travaillent*] within this kind of 'fundamental language', as Freud would say, which ceaselessly emits new versions of needs, interests and affects deposited and inscribed in its matricial body – symptom traces, cultural refashionings – produced in it by each individual story together with all the stories and History, reworked, distorted and revived [*relancés*] by it, in a transunconscious network. Language: matter *and* form(s) *the* matter – which – is made to be worked – at work.

If 'the matter of which a thing is made is like its maternal contribution', to separate from one's matter is to give birth to the maternal in

oneself. The education of the young would have to be rethought from another angle.

Jones's suspense – as the master of matter(s).

And Marge comes back to us on a completely different stage, no longer from the depths of an unconscious, but from Asia, from where she propels herself at last, as a supplement to B and C. After being looked at – sideways – in her 'typical' passivity, she appears no longer as the one who waits for Him, waits for love and feeds on dreams, but as the active one who is waited for, *the one who arrives* and transforms everything, the one who loves, touches, seduces – and frustrates: by *giving* them her *riddle*. Enter the Cleopatrician.

As Marge she strangely constrains the apex-sick [*en mal de tête*] triangular figure made up by B and C into completing and closing itself. She thus triangulates them with some other, but this other [*autre*], – A, is not her: it is below A, with A in complicity with Antonius, that she secures the binding and enables the sublation of the 'talis qualis older' [cf. *FW* 167.5]. It takes no fewer than three pieces of men [*trois bouts d'homme*], as we saw already, for a bit of man to manage to rise.

She *binds* men together – it takes three sons to make a father. Or two plus A. She complicates /B/C/A/, implicates, mutates with A, her same self in marginality. And it is she, as *Cleopatra*, who has the *key-of-the-pater* [*clé-du-père*]. When M is Margareena, she thus leads all the operations which she renders simultaneous.

It is complicated! The text endlessly says it itself about itself – let us talk about it:

the way in which the text works is an original mixture of compilation, programming and emulsion. Just as one feeds one's computer, it eats and gives you back [*rend*] its matter.

Margarine: at once a synthetic and vegetable product, she is more 'matter' than Butter and Cheese, the products of lactation which situates them on the side of animality and humanity. She *unites*. On the contrary, they constitute themselves by losing part of their original substance. This is how masculine economy is managed. From milk to buttermilk [*basbleurre*].

'Margareena she's very fond of Burrus' [*FW* 166.3]. Margareena is the very base [*fond*] of melting [*fondant*] Butter. Again a masculine solid Butter – liquid tea opposition. *a*/lick *a*/lack [cf. *FW* 166.3], she licks, she lax [*lâche*], 'she velly fond of chee' – Influence of the 'eastasian import' [*FW* 166.31, 32]. She touches on the tongue as the organ of taste and by causing phonic mutations upon it, as well as dissociations and transfor-

mations. The cheese breaks up and part of it becomes tea: 'chee' – the Chinese way; or else spirit (chi).

Anti-Butter, supplement, other kind of food. Comparative, equivalent emul(a)sions, complicated signifiers in whose substance the influences and metaphors which organise History cross and substitute one another.

(Who eats them? In whose mouth do they melt? Do they not melt?) Absorption-Digestion. Excretion. History itself is the inscription of a digestion, its narrative and its excrement: *Res Digestae*.

What is the relation between the animal and the plant, B and C, and M? As we have known since the first pages of *FW*, the father falls the mother carries on [*poursuit*]. Father time and mother space [cf. *FW* 600.2–3]. Motherly products, B and C are brought back to the farther [*plus père*] than ever when they try to make Margerine's mystery speak. Their will-to-know works through pseudo-fat and substitute emulsion. The mother 'makes', the marge displaces and brings back somewhere else. *Femininity: what exceeds history*.

She complicates it with Antonius and introduces, in between the signifiers of a same masculinert paradigm, the additional signifier of uncanny desire. – Marge (not the mother) or femininity as History's margin, which makes *His-story* vacillate and oscillate between its poles, vivifies and neutralises through the same plural play the opposition between sexual opposition and difference; plays hide and smash [*cache-casse*] with the myths with which the unconscious plays during History's long sleep.

She exceeds and carries [*déborde et déporte*] History as events and History's narratives off course: after all, interpretations depend on it. If one lets oneself be carried away by M, one ends up on the side of the unconscious of History's agents. Nothing new here. History repeats nothing but the sup(p)er-session [*remise-en-cène*] of a *femm*-ilial quarrel. Which takes place on the table or below, according to the gender [*genre*] of appetites.

But she does not explain – how she disjoins and conjoins the elements from several (hi)stories, how, as margarine, herself a synthesis of oils, she recomposes.

Thus it is for Burrus and Caseus, who we learn contend for mastery – of her 'mystery' [cf. *FW* 166.36]: what is her mystery made up of? The secret of imperial power is in the margin between *Miss* and *to miss*.

The *young girl's* missexuality is also the *failure* [*échec*], the very name of the limit which sends the emissaire back to himself. She is the masters' mis(s)tress.

'A cleopatrician in her own right she at once' [*FW* 166.34–35]

Her imperial feminine power mastering seduction ‘complicates the position while [BC] are contending for her *miss*tery by implicating herself with an elusive Antonius’ [FW 166.35–167.1] miss

mastery
mystery
master-
risk

‘a wop who would appear to hug’ (a mediterranean immigrant landing in the USA in 1916) ‘a personal interest in refined chees of all chades’ [FW 167.1–2]

she’s shades
teas trades

Our cleopatrician suddenly complicates the situation while B and C fight over her *miss*tery by implicating herself with an elusive Antonius, a ‘wop’, a bit of a polygamist, as boorish as a Boer [cf. FW 167.3], who ‘wags an antomine art’ [FW 167.3]. A and M are ambivalent simulators, half-bred, half-baked texts [*mêtèque, mêtectes*], with several natures, origins and behaviours. Thus, through her, the cleopatrician, enters Antonius, a composite being, coming like her from somewhere other – ‘the somewhere other’ of Westerners – and also having an artistic ‘nature’. He takes after her. A mixture of contraries, a mine of identifications, a set [*ensemble*] of appearances, other-in-itself, he mimes to complete the econhomy of nonmen [*l’économie des nonhommes*]. He is himself the masculine semblance of being [*pareêtre*]. An addition to the addition that *she is*. A part of her ‘*miss*tery’.

Check miss [*Échec et miss*]? But, like any mistress, she is also the maid: that is her *miss*tery – her masculinity, her mysteria – – which incites letters [*lettres*] to write, and beings [*les êtres*] to produce for ever symbolic substitutions, who ceaselessly recharges with a new energy. Masculine, ‘hyperchemical [*hypèrechimique*] economantarchy’ [FW 167.6] (a blend of noone, noman, manteia, or: how (no)one has the power). Because of her, fats to her [*graisse à elle*], in order to flee from her, to capture her, to take the one which is part of each and everyone, which crosses and exceeds every pseudoall and infinitises it, any subject of her law, even the most simple [*simplet*] one, the one who cannot read, nor tell a b from a p – bliss from piss [*un benis d’un penis*] or ‘a bomb from a painapple’ [*pomme*; FW 167.15], desperately tries to see what is being written above his head – milky way – in the margin of grace –

In order to try and want to see light in this matter, they all agree. In order to be exceeded [*débordés*] by her mystery.

How can one stop Marge's march?

Answer: Misstery –

She *has* and is her Misstery, is the only one capable of being what she is, self-sufficient, needless.⁶ Keeping herself.

Always already farther, she provokes the milky males to the transferences which *are* History; she is the riddle of their *will-to-see*: all visual signs, *not in words*. Jones speaks; she seems. She does not symbolise, she is herself the contradictory structure of sexual clothings and leanings [*vêtements et versements sexuels*].

M leads us to put Marge's status in relation with the text's operation in general: between margin and the fact that it is not possible to stop polysemy in 'mystery' (the fact that the spilling-out of mystery, of marge into m, of m in general, cannot be mastered), there is an affinity: what M and her remainders [*restes*], sequels and excesses say is also the text – not a specular or mimetological withdrawal, not a mere abyssal miming [*mise en abyme, en amime*]. But it is the text, like M, as what one cannot make the economy of. And that is femininity. The text's femininity in *FW*, the riddle text as femininity. The impregnable. Over which every Jones hides his skull [*se cache la tête*] in his attempt to describe and circumscribe it.

Margarine, or any signifier capable of misstifying [*mystifiller*] the master, is another name for the general mystery of *FW*, of the text which asks – to whom? – Where come I play [*Où jouis-je?*]? Let us not privilege marge, mystery, but rather let us see the text's incessant work spilling over in cuttings, replanting itself and doing its mimost to reflower [*refleurissant à qui mimieux*].

A writing which in addition says its very same self [*elle même, elle m'm*], as what undoes economy.

What Joyce wants to 'show', if there is a demonstration, is that, between all these (hi)stories – Family (hi)stories and histories of the family, of culture, of symbolic systems, including psychoanalysis – and this spilling-out, there is an *essential relation*:

If a text like this text could not be written *like that*, these (hi)stories . . . could not be written: that is because things like that take place *in language* that these (hi)stories happen.

Missemiation does not represent family (hi)stories: it is the same thing. The saMe [*La Mème*].

First the same language is used to communicate ideasires [*idésirs*] and to convoke sexual partners; it sensues [*sensuite*] simultaneously that it bears the same interest with a difference on cultural work which is the equivalent of, and substitute for, sexual activity. Sounds, m's, words get detached from a signification in order to attach themselves to another

missignification, to detach and come back with a vengeance [*et revenir en remettre*] . . . in a shuttle which one cannot make head or tail of.

As if it was being written so that textual emulsion could set [*prenne*] but also so it could . . . go sour. Not to be set upon/caught [*Ne pas être pris*]: to be never more here than there, farther. Far from here, here is the ‘end’ [cf. *FW* 628.13], the goal of the Joycean movement. It must set without one (Joyce) ever being caught (at) [*pris*] being anybody else than . . .

Translated by Laurent Milesi

Notes

1. All annotations given in square brackets have been added by the translator. Quotations from *Finnegans Wake* (*FW*), giving page and line reference to the standard Faber edition (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), have been silently emended to match the original wherever necessary; cf. indicates more specifically a textual allusion or near-quotation. In the case of intricate wordplay in Cixous’ original essays, we have occasionally resorted to providing alternatives followed by the French original italicised in square brackets, in bold type if already italicised in the French [tr.].
When this text was republished in Cixous’ 1986 collection of essays *Entre l’écriture*, where it is followed by her ‘The Pleasure Reinciple’, as it is in the present volume, it was preceded by a page presenting the two as an ensemble on Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* in these terms: ‘La mise à n’œuf des genres dans le *Finnegans Wake* de James Joyce ou comment Joyce nous fait (t)ordre de lire. Suivent Deux Lectures Pour S’amuser Nonsans Quelque Serreyeux’ [Re egg-gendering in James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, or How Joyce makes us (s) cream with laughter. What Follows are Two Readings For a Lark in Ear-Nest] (Hélène Cixous, *Entre l’écriture* (Paris: Des femmes, 1986), p. 71).
2. *Giacomo Joyce*, With an Introduction and Notes by Richard Ellmann (London: Faber, 1968), p. 1 [tr.].
3. Both in English in the original, with French translations [tr.].
4. The original is a French rendering loosely based on *FW* 239.20–21: ‘when all us romance catholeens shall have ones for all amanseprated’ [tr.].
5. Followed by a gloss/translation, not reproduced here [tr.].
6. In English in the text [tr.].

The Pleasure Reinciple or Paradox Lost

If, among the billions of motifs that ‘adomically’ [cf. *FW* 615.6] constitute *Finnegans Wake*, I simply could not help [*m’empêcher*] picking out [*pêcher*] the ‘Phoenix’, it is because this motif appears at the beginning of the *Portrait of the Artist*, where it is surreptitiously associated with the theme of Sin [*Péché*].

The *Portrait of the Artist* recounts the genesis of the artist Stephen Dedalus. It begins somewhat like this: ‘Once upon a time there was a strange little birdie . . .’ This strange bird, a tuckoo (a cuckoo badly pronounced, that is), will grow into Dedalus, the flying artist, a strange bird indeed. All this begins thus like a strange *f*airy tale [*conte de féel nix*]. This tale lays its first egg – a little scene, two pages long. These two pages contain, in embryonic form, the totality of James Joyce’s work, including *Finnegans Wake*. The *Portrait* opens with a primitive scene, a fateful [*destinale*] scene in which the one who will become the artist is put to the test of the Law. The origin of this primitive scene is always the same, namely the first, Eve’s primitive scene/sin [*(s)cène*] in the very first book which deals with the question of whether or not to be in the know [*faire ou pas la connaissance de la connaissance*]. There is the Apple; there is the secret of the Apple. And, straightaway, there is the Law. What the first woman will discover, by not submitting to the injunction of the Law, is the secret of the Apple, which is (the) *inside* (of) the apple: its flavour, its kindness – a *jouissance* and a knowledge experienced through the mouth. What is *inside* the apple? Not death, but flavour.

What about the artist? What he, as a descendant of Eve, will discover by infringing the Law is the secret of the Pome.¹ It is also something which is hidden inside. Inside a fruit-word [*mot-fruit*]. It is the pleasant, forbidden secret of which he will become master during the first scene of apprenticeship, which will give birth to all the other scenes of the *Portrait of the Artist* containing initiation rites, and which, in the end,

will give birth to the whole series of trial [*épreuves-procès*] scenes that weave *Finnegans Wake* together.

The first scene resembles one of these examination scenes we experience when we dream, or, like Parzival, are invited at the Fisher-King's, in the Quest for the Holy Grail. Disquieting scenes they are, because the trial takes place without us knowing what is happening and what exactly they are about: they always take place in conjunction with cenes [*cènes*] where one is enjoying oneself [*entraîn de jouir*]; and all of a sudden one is harshly punished for something one has done that one should not have done, or for something one has not done that one should have done, but what is it exactly? Basically, nobody is supposed either to know or to ignore the Law. We are supposed to obey the letter of the Law, absolutely, blindly. That is what Law means – the kind of Law whose amazing, invisible Portrait was drawn by Kafka.² If you do not obey the invisible Law, you will be struck with blindness. If you do not turn a blind eye, you will be blinded – that is what little Stephen was told.

In the beginning, then, there is the Law, the incomprehensible Word. These obscure and threatening words: 'You-shan't-or-else'. Where does this encounter between the child and the words lead? To a game. The game of the Law. The little Word game that will eventually generate the gigantic Wordplay which is *Finnegans Wake*.

Here is the original mystery as it is being told to us on page two of the Joycean Genesis, in little Stephen's language, in free indirect speech:

The Vances lived in number seven. They had a different father and mother. They were Eileen's father and mother. When they were grown up he was going to marry Eileen. He hid under the table. His mother said:
 – O, Stephen will apologise.
 Dante said:
 – O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes.³

*Pull out his eyes,
 Apologise,
 Apologise,
 Pull out his eyes.*

*Apologise,
 Pull out his eyes,
 Pull out his eyes,
 Apologise.⁴*

All the elements of *Finnegans Wake* are already there:

First of all, there is the family unit, the Vances, incestuously structured by the grace of grammar, where parents are their own children as well as their own parents. Just as in *Finnegans Wake* where the Earwicker family, double-father son-daughter-mother, constantly intermarry, fight against one another and beget one another.

Then, there is the pure, precious model-Sin [*Pêché-modèle*]: the one committed in pure innocence – the cause of artistic creation. What is it? We do not know any better than the child. Was it to hide under the table? Out of playfulness? Out of guilt, or fear? Of what? *First* he is under the table, then there is the Law. With its threat of enucleation. And still no offence.

And yet, it is quite unexpectedly from the Law itself, by a strange understanding of it [*drôlement entendue*], that the work will derive.

Finally, there is the exemplary blossoming of art. The birth of the feeble-eyed but keen-eared artist. What interests the artist is not what the words mean but what they contain phonically. Who cares about the Law as long as it sounds nice. It grumbles: apologise!?! What luck! From this bizarre word the child derives a funny little poem. What's in a word? A little treasure of sounds. That is already the question in *Ulysses*.⁵ And it also already contains the whole answer of *Finnegans Wake*.

And what is an artist? He is the lucky one 'capable' of playing with language, that is the lucky, culpable [*coupable*] one. (In Joycean parlance [*En joycien*] capable and culpable are synonymous.) He is the stealer of signifiers, the cunning connoisseur of the Law out of love for *the noise of the Law*. The moral of this tale, for Joyce, is that one needs the Law to derive music from it. The artist needs the Law but only the better to cheat it. Our outlaw [*hors-la-loi*] remains an inlaw [*frôle-la-loi*].

From which we will have learnt that the artist has to be descended [*se faire descendre*] in order to immediately rise again from his cinders [*des cendres*]: the Tuckoo will give birth to Icarus, the feathered boy, the bird *manqué* who falls only to rise again, Dedalus who, in turn, will give birth to Shem the penman [*l'homme à penne*], the painman [*l'homme à Peine*] in *Finnegans Wake*, who, painfully [*à peine*] hatched, is already accused, and ready to start again and commit his works in the same Other Phoe-nest [*Fait-nid*].

Paradox lust in *Finnegans Wake*⁶

Finnegans Wake, the phoenix of literature, is the Paradise of those lusting for [*jouisseurs*] Paradox, where loss is gain, or where that which

does not exist, does, because everything that is not, be-comes [*tout ce qui n'est naït*]. It is the nideal [*nidéal*] nest of 'parody's bird' (FW 11), this mocking bird that populates the text – sometimes also called Phoenixcan [cf. FW 608.32], the Phoenix can, the place where phoenixes can soar from the graphico-phoenic level any time.

I have chosen to pursue this innumerable motif through three of its epiphoenic modes of appearance: the History of Ireland, Myth and Language.

This choice has been made for the sake of convenience because, as is well known, there is in *Finnegans Wake*, with its constant shifting of grammatical boundaries and proliferating linguistic codes, no place that does not constitute a mixture of different levels of meaning and often paradoxical interferences. Selecting would be ruinous, the nest would become a grave [*le nid (est) tombe*], and the grave is a home – – – and even the father, in the end, turns into *mer* . . .⁷

The primal park⁸

It is in Phoenix Park, Dublin, that the father, H. C. Earwicker, with his eternal erection problems, experiences the first downfall in his penix-phallic career. He is caught at we-don't-know-what.

Phoenix Park is the famous Dublin park where, in May 1882,⁹ an attempt was made to assassinate the Vice-Roy of England, through which two men lost their lives. The affair had tragic political repercussions, in particular for the fate of Parnell, the 'uncrowned king' who was first adulated and later held in contempt by the Irish. In 1887, *The Times* published a letter believed to have been signed by Parnell, which condoned these killings. The letter was a fraud, the work of someone called Pigott, who was unmasked two years later thanks to a surprising detail: the forger made very idiosyncratic spelling mistakes. He spelt the word 'hesitancy' with double t.¹⁰ What a fortunate mistake!¹¹ What a *signature*! This mistake which then saved Parnell's honour, later also brought happiness to Joyce. It sparks a good many pages in *Finnegans Wake* back to life. By the stroke of letters and of a letter, the whole Irish Revolution passes through Phoenix Park: a nest of letters, the place of Parnell's fall and his redemption, the Park later becomes the place where H. C. Earwicker, Joyce's fabricated parody of a successor, falls in turn and rises again – but with some literal difference: it is, in fact, in 'Phornix Park' [FW 80.6] that our grandfather [*parterrefamilias*] will have vice-royally [*vicieuroyalement*] phornicated with two girls – unless nothing took place but illusions to all the feminine [*femmeux*] Parks where

our ancient motherly tattle [*antiques commémérages*] comes from. Are we not in 'Edenberry, Dubblenn, WC' (FW 66), first city and first cesspit?

Phoenix Park is indeed at once a dump and a garden of Eden where our innumerable H. C. Earwicker, who is also Ardamant and his opposite, falls through happiness and pleasure, following the paradoxical logic that organises the Joycean 'chaosmos' [FW 118.21]: for had he not fallen, he would have failed to reserect [*rechuscité*], which would have made him highly culpable indeed.

We recognise the Augustinian theme of the *felix culpa*, the happy fault, or the necessary original sin: Adam must fall in order to give rise to the Redeemer. A good succession from Sin to Son,¹² the text implies, because in some languages it may even be enough to change one letter to either commit or efface the fault. Do not falter on the fault? [*Il faut la faute?*] Never mind, even the fault can lapse from the heights of sin to the common state of a slip of the tongue or pen [*lapsus*].

Seen from Phoenix Park, the Fault is thus rerouted and above all infinitely multiplied by crossbreeding with the Phoenix. At a stroke from the magic feather, the motif of the *felix culpa* becomes 'foenix culprit' (FW, 23),¹³ and turns out to be of the inextinguishable species of the Phoenix: from the first single necessary fault stem the thousands of faults with which this phoenixian Letter that is *Finnegans Wake* is written, this *culpa* [*coulpe*], this cup [*coupe*] filled with ashes fertile in signi-fairies [*signes fées*].

'O *fortunous casualitas!*', the text sighs on p. 175. Fortunate catastrophe indeed from which the artist always falls happily [*tombe toujours bien*]. O innocent culprit who does and does not do at the same time, does and denies [*fait et nie*], is foe and *nix* and never phoenixes doing it, in the Park, the faun who is sometimes a mad 'faunayman' (p. 25) – [*faune-nieur*], sometimes 'Faunagon' (p. 337).

Foenix culprit is, depending on the language (English, French or German), culpable of reading it, the culpable foe of humankind and the culpable one who did not do anything, *fait nix*, *fait Nichts*, nothing at all.

Maybe one only ever leaves the bewitched Park to find oneself in it again, in the *unheimlich* translation of the Freud-Joycean Jungfraud's Messongebok (p. 460).¹⁴

Phoenix Park is a theatre where the same scene/sin [(s)cène] is constantly being replayed in a hundred simuldamneous translations: Adam and Eve's Garden Party, or Jesus' 'goddinpotty' (p. 59) in the manger, or the divine Pot [*Potée*] in the Chalice, or the Eureka-rist. And this theatre is called the 'featre of the Innocident' [FW 59.9], in Feeneganswakean

or in French: the Theatre is its Devil.¹⁵ But do we not find at the bottom of the word ‘goddinpotty’ our phoenix already stewing in its nest?

The echnomical bird

– *The Phoenix Family*: One could not dream of a more suitable myth to illustrate the structures of the Earwicker family, the main population of Joyce’s Book, than that of the Phoenix and its self-begetting.

It is known that this bird, at once unique and yet not unique because it ceaselessly descends from its cinders [*descendre de ses cendres*], is its own father and son and even more. At the end of a five-hundred or fifteen-thousand-year cycle it is burned by a ray of sun, turns into ashes and is reborn into another cycle. And what about the mother? She seems repressed, unless she herself is the ashes? Or the hearth/home [*foyer*]?

In that case, the phoenix who is also its own nest, is also its own mother, the egg and the hen, the egg turned hen in order to re-lay [*se ré-pondre*] (to) itself, the egg that makes its own nest [*l’œuf qui fait son nid, l’œuf fait nid*], the eggphoenest [*l’euphénid*], etc., is its own family to itself.

The same goes for the incestuous Earwicker family, whose five members break through the shell, quarrel, clasp, split up, fleece one another, fall in love, gasp, kill and succeed one another in an incessant scrambling [*brouillage*] of themes, making countless omelettes as they (re)unite. The sons become the father as so(o)n as they are [*qu’en tant que ‘sons’ ils ‘sont’ déjà*]. The father is more often cooked than cock [*fait le plus souvent la coque que le coq*] and the mother cockobbles [*reco-colle*] the pieces together.

For even inside an egg there are genders and roles. All these mutual forgeries produce all sorts of amusing pranks [*farce amusement*] in the house. Especially every time the funferal [*funéraiteries*; cf. *FW passim*] of the master takes place, since, according to the mortvellous [*mortveil-leux*] logic of the self-engendering [*autogéniteur*] bird, one never ceases to be until the day before one’s birth [*on ne cesse d’être qu’à la veille de naître*]. All of them eggain [*à œufs tous*] rebuild the phoenix: ‘Grampupus is fallen down but grinny sprids the boord’ [*FW 7.8–9*] – it will be high life once more [*ça va être encore la fête*]. When it finishes it means that it already begins to be Phinished [*Phinix*].

This hearth/home [*foyer*] is always a proper madhouse [*foire uni-verselle*]. The more the eggier [*Plus on est d’œufsfous, plus on rit*]. That is what is called ‘funforall’ in *Finnegans Wake* (p. 458), a mixture of pomes and circumstance [*Pommes funèbres et royales*], where one no

longer knows whether one is drinking beer [*Bière*] or is being put on (in) a bier [*mis en boîte dans une Bière*].

This is how the family lives it up and creates the World: if the father with his accidents constitutes Time, the mother is Species, that is Space and Species [cf. *FW* 600.2–3].

– As for the Book,¹⁶ the phetish bird is its perfect Teetotem [*Touthème*]: the book is its own nauthor, its reading, its own family, its cycle of production-consumption [cf. *FW* 497.1–2] with all its inner critics [*critiques intestins*]. A phoenix, the book finishes only to start all over again. In fact, it never really ‘starts’ because in the first line it *continues*. *Finnegans Wake* is a sequel. Which announces its own structure of inclusion with the famous sentence which runs under our eyes when we open the book:

‘riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.’ [*FW* 3.1–3]

If that is a sentence. But it is rather the river language that started before the book and circulates unchannelled between the paper covers, goes undertext [*rentre sous texte*], overflows and resurfaces in tears on the last page . . .

A book that flows [*coule*], a book that rolls [*roule*] – this rotund book is eager to quote its formal, if not philosophical vicinities, including the cyclical theory of History elaborated by G. B. Vico in the eighteenth century. Pedalling on this vicycle [*vicyclette*] one goes through the divine age, the heroic age, then the human age – and finally through an obscure, confusing *Ricorso*, the twilight of a new day.

Vico is not the only godfather of the big Egg. One should not be surprised to encounter throughout the text the burning ashes of Giordano Bruno, the heretic so dear to Joyce. Bruno was burnt at the stake in Rome in 1600. By his destiny as much as his philosophy (the reconciliation of contraries) he is also doubly of a species that always begins anew [*il est doublement de l’espèce toujours recommençante*].

A nest of S’ignifiers [*S’ignifiants*]: From Spark to Sphoenish

Because of the end without end of its destiny, and the fire that smoulders under the embers [*couve sous la cendre*], the phoenix is the luminous metaphor of the work that proceeds inside the Wakean signifier. The Writing pokes [*tisonne*]. Words fly into sparks, flare up and seem to set

one another ablaze [*semblent, dans un flamboiement, s’embraser les uns les autres*], to disappear and in their incandescence pick up innumerable meanings [*reprendre en incandes/sens*]. This ‘Words’ – always several – projects sparks of secondary signifiers the moment it is pronounced, which then light other little fires [*allument . . . d’autres petits foyers*] everywhere. The signifier Phoenix itself is scattered about into a thousand signifiers. Broken, disseminated [*répandu*], it comes back all intermingled with others and becomes phoenish, phoenis, phaynix, finixed, phenician, fornix, fortnichts, depending on whether it mixes with end, penis, night, Phenicia, Finnish, etc.

But since I would never finish raising [*relever*] the phoenix unless I put the whole of *Finnegans Wake* on paper, I will choose one of its most beautiful reappearances: the alliance between the phoenix and the sphinx. The marriage of these signifiers takes place in Erebia (an alliance between Erebus and Arabia) on page 473 at the end of Vico’s heroic age, in an auroral climate [*dans un climat d’aube*] in which our phoenix is a trifle cock [*coq*], a trifle Lucifer, bringer of light. And under the Sphinx’ influence it prepares to burst out of the darkness of its pyre towards the sun.

‘so too will our own sphoenix spark spirit his pyre and sunward stride the rampante flambe.’ [FW 473.18–19]

From the pyre which is at the same time its opposite, namely spire, our eternal spark will soar out of this Park and its niddle [*énidgme*] and, mounted on a ray [*montée sur un rayon*], it will re/gain [*re/gagner*] the sun.

*Finnegans Wake, the book that never ceases (not) to be
(born) [qui ne cesse de re/n’être]*

Finnegans Wake is the Book of a Long Night. It is the Sombre letter which Joyce sends to himself; his always purloined letter, always found lost, reposted, returned to its sender, who is himself the ultimate and first addressee and unique ideal reader. Written in the language of a hundred languages, the *Finnegans Wake* letter constantly translates itself – before the Law [*en justice*] – to excuse [*s’excuser*] and to phenicitate itself on madness [*se phéniciter de folie*], the use of (bed) forgeries [*usage de faux lit*] and breach of nest [*abus de nid*]. It warns its author against the danger of lingering ‘in the wake of the blackshape’ [FW 608.28–29], following the tracks of the black sheep that it is:

'You'll have loss of fame from Wimmegame's fake.' [FW 375.16–17]

You will gain a lot of loss at this fool's game [*à ce feu de dupe*], the letter promises him.

Once *Finnegans Wake* finished,¹⁷ Joyce dies. *Finnegans Wake* smoulders/hatches on [*couve encore*]. Some say the author would have written a book of the day, if he had survived it. But after seventeen years of *Work in Progress*,¹⁸ has not Joyce become the last phoenix? Sometimes one really dies from writing certain books. Then one returns ashen [*on revient cendres*].

Translated by Laurent Milesi

Notes

1. Pome, as Joyce says. Pome, or the poem-fruit [*fruit-poème*], as the little Joycean collection of verse suggests: *Pomes Penyeach*. [HC]
2. In his fable *Vor dem Gesetz* (Before the Law). [HC]
3. This last line is repeated in English in the original [tr.].
4. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Granada, 1977), pp. 7–8. [HC]
5. 'What's in a name?' Stephen asks, while playing with the meaningful echoes of proper names like William Shakespeare, Ann Hathaway, but also Stephen Dedalus (see the 'Scylla and Charybdis' chapter in *Ulysses*). [HC]
6. The phrase 'Paradox Lust' is an allusive play on Milton's verse epic *Paradise Lost* and lust (*jouissance*). Through this slippage Paradise Lust thus mixes the pleasure of the Paradox, and the pleasure found in the lost paradise, the paradox that insinuates itself into the exchange between loss and pleasure [*jouir*]. [HC]
7. A pun related to *matter – mater – material* (see 'Missexuality' above) [tr.].
8. Cf. FW 263.20.
9. Not in 1883, as the original states [tr.].
10. Cixous' account is inaccurate here. The mistake, in fact, was to spell hesitancy with an 'e' ('hesitency') [tr.].
11. This is part of an extended play on the Wakean motif of the *felix culpa* [tr.].
12. And even: 'And that was how framm Sin fromm Son, acity arose . . .', *Finnegans Wake* confesses on p. 94. [this note, in the original, is followed by two attempts at translation]. [HC]
13. *Foenix culprit* is a play on Phoenix, Felix and *Fait-Nichts, Nichts* [or *nix*] (German: nothing). The *Fait/nix*, the Culprit, is a good-for-nothing [*fait rien*]. Is there any more paradoxical (lucky) Felix than a culpable one [*coupable*] who did not do anything [*Fait-Rien*]? [HC]
14. 'Jungfraud's Messongebook' is a pun on Jung and Freud, Freud and fraud. The *messongebook* is the book of messonges, lies [*mensonges*] and masses [*messes*] . . . [HC]
15. This is a punning allusion to Antonin Artaud's *Theatre and Its Double* [tr.].

16. 'Quant au Livre', the title of one of Mallarmé's essays [tr.].
17. In English in the original [tr.].
18. The working title for *FW* during its gestation [tr.].

Reaching the Point of Wheat, or A Portrait of the Artist as a Maturing Woman

You have probably recognised that the title of my essay is an imitation of the title of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. I have chosen to pursue a kind of meditation on creation and perhaps also on the different attitudes that men and women show with regard to becoming an artist. The moment I say that, I reproach myself for using the words *men* and *women*. We have difficulties nowadays with those words. At first I want simply to give a kind of warning. We always get confused because of those words, but we have to deal with them, we have to struggle with them. We must be very careful not to be too fascinated and deceived by them. When I use the word *man* or *woman*, I should open a parenthesis and explain what I mean by it. The first thing I want to say is simply this: when an author signs with a woman's name, it does not mean that the book can be said to be 'feminine'. This is banal, this is obvious, but I want to say it because I myself am a victim of what I am saying. Because I thought they were the best possible examples, I had to choose Joyce and Clarice Lispector – Joyce in order to illustrate what I feel about the artist as a young man, and Clarice Lispector because of what she has to say about women. And it happens that he is a man and she is a woman. It could happen a little differently; maybe a man would have had something to say about female or 'feminine' writing, or vice versa. And so every time I say 'masculine' or 'feminine', or 'man' or 'woman', please use as many quotation marks as you need to avoid taking these terms too literally.

I'll tell you a series of stories regarding the first story in the world, which is Genesis. I'll tell you something about how an artist is formed, about what actually makes an artist. The genesis of an artist is not unrelated to genesis generally speaking. There is a whole genre of literature which is concerned with that, the *Bildungsroman*, and this is what I am going to speak about – about *Bildung*, about the education, the formation of the artist. But what I am interested in is the libidinal education of

the artist, that is, what in his/her libidinal structure, in his/her affective, in his/her psychic structure is going to be determined particularly by sexual difference.

Urszene or 'Cènes Primitives'

I'll start with the opening of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. All the pieces I refer to deal with one scene which one could call a Primitive Scene, and when I use the expression 'primitive scene', I use it in every possible way: that is, you'll think in Freudian terms of the primitive scene, and in some ways, the scene *is* a primitive scene, having to do with discovering a forbidden secret. But I'd like you also to consider the primitive scene in the way we would write the word *cène* in French without an 's'; without an 's', it means 'the meal'. 'The primitive scene' is also 'the primitive meal'. The first scene, or the initiating scene of the artist, or of the artistic human being, is composed of the usual characters: the parents, father and mother, and so on. Of course, such a scene immediately brings into question the enigma of origins. The main character in this scene is somehow impersonal: it is the Law and its representative the Word – Words. Another very important character is the apple, the fruit, whichever you like, the meal. And then, usually, one finds the rest of creation – birds, hens, whatever.

During the first s-cène, there will emerge the questions that will be the essential questions of the life of the artist, particularly the question of knowing, of the desire for knowledge, of the means of knowing and of the symbolic value of knowing. There are two types of knowledge: there is the knowledge we learn here in universities, which is the knowledge of knowing, which has to do with mastering; and there is another type of knowledge, which does not derive from higher education, but from the highest education, and that is knowing through pleasure – it is pleasure itself. In the first s-cène, there is a kind of struggle between the two types of knowing, the pleasurable and the symbolic. Which is going to win? That is the question.

The taste of knowledge

Now, I'll simply recall briefly the familiar story of Eve. She goes through the test of the apple. She is told by He who is called God that she must not eat the apple. She is told that she mustn't, because otherwise she is going to die. And this is a completely opaque message. It does not

mean anything for her, since death does not exist in Paradise. This will give birth to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and even to all philosophy. So the message is: 'Don't'. That's all: 'Don't'. And there is the other message, that of the apple, which says: 'Try me, I am beautiful'. There is no reason why she should not try, because the death message is meaningless. So she tries, because she is a woman. That is what the Bible says, and it is probably true.

I think it is true that her decision must have been determined by something 'feminine' in her structure, particularly her desire and her non-fear of *knowing what is inside*. So knowledge started for all of us with knowing with the mouth, by tasting. Taste is the first act of knowledge, for women and for all men who are women. And the price of it has been exile, death, but also work, art, creation.

It is very interesting to see when reading *Bildungsromane* that this primitive scene comes up immediately, of course with some variations. There is a very old primitive scene which is extremely interesting in a story I like, the story of *Percival the Welshman*, a medieval quest story. Percival is a kind of mixed being. Although he is supposed to be a man, he is a woman's son. His father has completely disappeared, and he has been brought up in a wild way. He is always called 'wild' in the story. Percival has been living in a very happy way, in a forest, which of course is the mother figure, but since he is after all a boy and a man, he is going to become a real, proper man by going through a series of tests which make up the quest.

The first thing that happens to him is that he goes out of the forest and meets with real knights in full armour, with swords and helmets. And they are so brilliant and invisible in a way that he thinks they are angels, and he falls in love with them. Then starts his real, manly education. In the second episode he finds himself in a castle which belongs to a man called 'The King Fisherman', and this man is paralysed, that is, he is a figure of castration. Percival is invited to a huge meal, which is fantastic, and he enjoys it considerably and keeps eating. During the meal, he sees somebody crossing the hall, bearing all kinds of dishes to another room. This happens several times and every time with great ceremony. Now and then he also sees a long lance going through the room with blood dripping from it, and he keeps wondering: What is that? What does that mean? Where is it going? But he had been told, just before entering the castle, by a wise man who acts like a kind of teacher, that good men mustn't ask questions, that it is impolite and that one mustn't do it. So he refrains from asking questions, although he really would like to know.

At this point the narrative starts threatening Percival. The narrative

starts saying: You know, Percival, you are doing wrong. You *should* ask questions. Something horrible is going to happen if you *don't* ask questions. Ask questions! But the narrative speaks mutely in the book at the enunciation level. Percival does not understand, does not hear. And when the meal comes to an end, suddenly there is a huge explosion, and the narrative shouts: You see what you have done! You haven't asked questions, and so you'll be punished. Now you are a horrible sinner, and because of you the world has been lost a second time. The King Fisherman, who would have been saved by Percival if he had asked questions, will remain paralysed for eternity.

When we read that, we are completely appalled. If we are innocent, as we are supposed to be, we do not understand what happened because Percival did what he was told to do. And then something in the narrative said that he should have done just the contrary, which is completely incomprehensible, illogical and mysterious. But that is it. And the moral of the story is – this is exactly the mechanism of the law – that we *are* guilty. We have got to learn about guilt, and the best way to do that is to be completely innocent. The first stage in education is to come to know the law as it is, that is, as pure law, pure interdiction, pure 'you mustn't', which makes for its power. The law is completely negative, it is absolute, and it gives no signs, except that kind of strange order. In fact, in the beginning, there was a 'Not' or a 'No'. Whereas, in the beginning of the women's bible, there is the 'Yes' of Molly Bloom.¹

An illustration of the power of the law is a very famous little text by Kafka, called *Before the Law* (*Vor dem Gesetz*). It starts this way: 'Before the law, there stands the doorkeeper.'² A man from the country asks for admittance to the law. The doorkeeper says: You can't come in. And the man says: When can I go into the law? And the doorkeeper says: I don't know, maybe later. The doorkeeper is a big man with a big beard, and he looks very fierce. So the little countryman just stands in front of the law and waits. And he waits all his life. By and by he changes, because time passes, and he becomes very, very small, bit-size, as small as a pea. In the meantime, the doorkeeper has grown very tall and the countryman looks up at the beard of the doorkeeper. He is about to die and suddenly he has an idea. He had been thinking all the time in front of the law, and he suddenly realises that during all these years he has never seen anyone coming to the law and asking for entrance, as he has. So he asks the doorkeeper, How is it that no one has come and done as I did? And the doorkeeper shouts very loudly because the man is actually already dead, 'Because this was your own door', and he shuts the door.

So the little countryman will never have known anything about the law? He will never have known whether the law had an inside. He didn't

step in, he didn't go over the threshold, he stayed there all the time. So he did not know anything about the law, that is, he knew everything about the law. All his life he stayed in front of the law, just as the law wanted. So he was in the law without knowing it. And, of course, it was his own door, his own law; he made law to himself (which is called autonomy). We behave as country people when we read Kafka's fable. Because we read 'Before the law stands the doorkeeper', and we go on reading and staying in the front of the door of the text, and go on and die. And suddenly we can ask, we can wonder, But what is the law? The text-as-law functions the moment the sentence starts; we are in front of the sentence exactly as in front of a door, and we don't move. We don't even think about it.

In front of the pome: The sound of the law

Now to take the little text by Joyce, which is exemplary of what an artist, not a countryman, is going to do with the law when he is in front of the law. These pages tell us everything about the artist. They start like a kind of fairy tale, and we have everything that makes a human being: a 'moocow' as a mother, of course, and a 'baby tuckoo.'³ The first adult character who comes to the page is the father: 'His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face.'⁴ Who is 'he'? We don't know. There is a confusion of personal subjects in all the text. 'He was baby tuckoo.' We don't know whether it is the father or the baby who is 'he'. But the father is hairy, exactly as the doorkeeper; that is, he is a real 'man'. Now, the little boy is going to get educated in two pages. On the first page, there are three very short poems. The first is:

*O, the wild rose blossoms
On the little green place.*

And the second:

*Tralala lala
Tralala tralaladdy
Tralala lala
Tralala lala.⁵*

In these two pages, Stephen Dedalus becomes a boy, a son, and an artist, and this is the way it goes. First he has to face the father, who tells him the story. The father is his own storyteller. The mother, who is the

classical anal mother – that is, she makes him clean, body and soul – has a very special role because she makes him dance on the piano. For Joyce, the mother is also a substitute for the church: she makes him move like a puppet, but she is second to the father. Then comes a series of little events, and the final and most important event comes on the next page: ‘The Vances lived in number seven.’⁶ Exactly as in a nursery rhyme: They lived in a shoe.

They had a different father and mother. They were Eileen’s father and mother. When they were grown up he was going to marry Eileen. He hid under the table. His mother said:

– O, Stephen will apologise.

Dante said:

– O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes.⁷

And the chapter finishes this way:

*Pull out his eyes,
Apologise,
Apologise,
Pull out his eyes.*

*Apologise,
Pull out his eyes,
Pull out his eyes,
Apologise.*⁸

This is the first work of art of Stephen the artist. How did it happen? It is exactly the story of Percival or of Eve. He has been threatened with a horrible chastisement, and doesn’t know why, of course. Is it because he hid under the table? Or did he hide under the table because he was already threatened? We don’t know anything about it and he doesn’t either. The whole thing comes down to his mother saying that he is going to apologise – so he is guilty; then he can commit his sin. And his aunt says: ‘O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes.’ And he becomes Prometheus, Oedipus and Stephen. And what does he do? He makes a poem out of it, a little poem with rhymes. He has picked up the word ‘apologise’ and subverted it into a little poetry, which is his way of playing with the law. What he does – and this is already a big difference and all art goes through this difference – is that he accepts the law in order to transgress it. And he transgresses by being attentive to what is *inside* the words. He enjoys it, so what he will take care of is the sound of the law, not the message of the law. This is how he becomes an artist.

I want to compare Joyce’s text, noting a large difference, with a text

by Clarice Lispector. Clarice Lispector is a Brazilian writer, and for me she is the greatest writer in the twentieth century.⁹ I rank her with Kafka. Her first book, which she wrote when she was only seventeen, was called *Near to the Wild Heart*. Now, 'near to the wild heart' is part of a sentence from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It is a quotation. But Clarice Lispector didn't know anything about Joyce when she wrote that text. A friend of hers told her: 'This makes me think of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*', and he suggested the title. *Near to the Wild Heart* is the story of the making of a young woman who will become an artist. In a small chapter called 'The Bath', we see her in an episode which is extremely telling. The girl is about twelve when this happens.

At the moment when the aunt went to pay for the purchase, Joana took the book and put it carefully with the others, under her arm. The aunt turned pale.

In the street the woman searched carefully for the words:

– Joana . . . Joana, I saw . . .

Joana gave her a rapid look. She remained silent.

– Well haven't you anything to say? – couldn't contain herself the aunt, her snivelling voice.

– My God, whatever is to become of you?

– Don't be frightened, Aunt.

– But still only a little girl . . . Do you know what you did?

– I know . . .

– You know . . . know the word? . . .

– I stole the book, is that it?

– But, God protect me! I don't even know what to do anymore, since she admits it besides!

– You made me admit it.

– You think one can . . . one can steal?

– Well . . . maybe not.

– Why then? . . .

– I can.

– You?! – cried the aunt.

– Yes, I stole because I wanted to. I will only steal when I want to. It doesn't do any harm.

– God help me, when does it do harm Joana?

– When one steals and one is afraid. I'm neither happy nor sad.¹⁰

In this way she is innocent. She is very, very far from the law, actually outside the reach of the law. There is an echo of this in Joyce, but not at all in the same way, when Stephen proclaims: 'non serviam' (I will not serve).¹¹ She doesn't say even that. She says: the sin is to be afraid. If I am not at war with myself, then I am innocent. It is a very strong position. She stole a book. The book is her apple.

The mother father of the artist

Let's look at the passage called 'The Father', the passage that opens the book. The first lesson is a lesson of the law of life, not the law of law and interdiction, but the law of life, the law of the living. The girl's world is introduced by 'Papa's machine'. Again, a Papa is there, he is writing, and he has the machine. He is a real father, and has everything a father should have. The little girl is immediately alerted by all the sounds around her. She has an ear, which is very important for the artist, as it is for Joyce, and she is extremely bored. So the first observation she makes is in the second paragraph:

Leaning her forehead against the cold, bright window-pane, she looked at the neighbouring courtyard, the big world of the hens-who-didn't-know-they-were-going-to-die. And she could feel as if it were quite close to her nose the warm, tightly-packed earth, so fragrant and dry, where she knew very well, knew very well one earthworm or another was stretching itself before being eaten by the hen that the people were going to eat.¹²

She does know about life and death, through the experience of hens: this is her first remark on the world, and it is not that of Stephen Dedalus. Then we attend the first moment of creation.

This comes very soon, as in Joyce, and she is going to create a poem under the same kind of conditions: she doesn't know what to do with herself, so she tries to attract the father's attention. This is going to be a recurrent theme.

She dismissed the difficult thought distracting herself with a movement of her bare foot on the dusty wooden floor. She rubbed her foot, looking askance at the father, waiting for his impatient, nervous look. Yet nothing came. Nothing. Difficult to aspirate people like the vacuum-cleaner.

- Papa, I've invented a poem.
- What is it called?
- Me and the sun.¹³

Translate: Me and the father.

Without waiting long she recited: – 'The hens that are in the courtyard have already eaten two earthworms but I didn't see.'

- Yes? What do you and the sun have to do with the poem?

She looked at him for a second. He hadn't understood . . .

– The sun is above the earthworms, Papa, and I made up the poem and didn't see the earthworms . . .

– Pause. – I can invent another one right now: 'O sun, come and play with me.' Another bigger one:

‘I saw a little cloud
 poor earthworm
 I think that he didn’t see.’
 – Very pretty, little one, very pretty. How does one make up such beautiful poetry?
 – It isn’t difficult, you have just to go along saying.¹⁴

Now you know everything about how to make a poem, but you have got to have the father’s attention, and it is going to be a certain type of poetry and writing, if you keep in mind the hens that are going to die and the earthworms that are going to be eaten.

What about the father? He presides over all creation. All those biographies or autobiographies or *Bildungsromane* give the father a very special place. We know about Kafka’s father. Joyce’s father was very important. For Clarice Lispector, whose work will become a model of ‘feminine’ writings, the father was there too. How? She is the father’s daughter, and he is really the one to whom she refers before she does anything. She either acts against him or for him, but she is always under his eyes. He legitimises the artist. The chapter about the mother starts . . . with the father(!):

One day the father’s friend came from far away and they embraced each other. At dinner-time, stupefied and contrite, Joana saw a naked yellow hen on the table. The father and the man were drinking wine and from time to time the man said:
 – I really can’t believe that you managed to have a daughter . . .¹⁵

Which is indeed surprising, for there is no mother in the mother chapter, only the naked yellow hen on the table – and the men are going to eat the hen.

Laughing the father turned toward Joana and said:
 – I bought her down at the corner . . .
 The father was gay and grew serious too, making little balls with the bread.¹⁶

The father has bought himself a daughter, and this is the way it always goes; but this is positive in a way. He wanted a daughter, and he did what he had to do for that. Actually she is so much the daughter of the father, that this is what is said as regards her future or her fate:

– What are you going to do when you grow up and when you’re a young woman and everything? [says the friend]
 – As for everything she hasn’t the slightest idea, my dear fellow – declared the father – but if she doesn’t get angry I’ll tell you about her plans. She told me that when she grows up she’s going to be a hero . . .¹⁷

Of course everybody laughs except the little girl. It is true that she starts by being the father's hero, the father's tiny hero. This is completely phallic, and we have to admit that. But does it mean that this is the end? No. What Clarice points out all the time is that the mother is all important, even if she is dead, even if she is absent, even if she is only a naked hen on the table. In the next chapters, the theme of the mother will emerge again and again as remembrance until actually she, in a way, is resurrected within the daughter.

Something extremely beautiful is that, at the second moment when Clarice, the tiny little girl, has consulted the father regarding what she should do, she starts working on words, a little like Joyce, but what she works on is *the sex of words*:

- Papa, what shall I do?
- I already told you: go and play and leave me alone.
- But I've already played, I swear to you.¹⁸

This goes on and on. The father finally gets bored and says:

- Hit your head against the wall!
- She moves away making a little braid in her smooth hair. Never never never yes yes, she sings very softly. She has learned how to braid lately.¹⁹

Now, if we are 'good' Freudians, we'll see that this means that she has in effect learned to *write*. Freud has indeed formulated this hypothesis, that writing came from braiding, and particularly braiding the hair of the sex.²⁰ So this is what she does. She braids her hair; that is, she already knows how to write. The first words that come out are: 'Never never never yes yes . . .' And what does she think about the words?

Mistress of the house husband children, green is man, white is woman, fleshcolour can be son or daughter. Is 'never' man or woman? Why is 'never' neither son nor daughter? And 'yes'? Oh, there were many entirely impossible things. One could spend entire afternoons thinking [. . .]

Never never yes yes. Everything was like the noise of the tramway before falling asleep, until one feels a little fear and one sleeps.²¹

This chapter ends with the little girl going to sleep on the words 'never', 'yes', and the strangely Joycean 'yes yes', and in the arms of the father.

It was the embrace of the father. The father meditates for a moment. But no one can do anything for the others, one helps. The child goes along, so free, so slight and precocious . . . He breathes hurriedly, shakes his head. A little egg, that's it, a live little egg. What will become of Joana?²²

The father is a kind of hen too.

This is also an important feature, and we'll see it recur in a fantastic little Lispector text called *Sunday, Before Going to Sleep* (*Domingo, antes de dormir*). This story says everything about the relation between the artist-daughter and the family. In Brazilian, the signifiers play on the masculine and feminine all the time: the main signifier, the word *Sunday*, is 'Domingo', which means the day of the Master, and it is masculine. The whole story is inserted within Domingo, within Sunday, or within the father; it starts with the masculine, but it finishes with the feminine.

In the final sentence the masculine Domingo turns out to be the feminine night. This is how the Brazilian text plays with genders, both exchanging them and en-gendering them!

*Domingo foi sempre aquela noite imensa que gerou todos os outros domingos e gerou navios cargueiros e gerou ágau oleosa e gerou leite com espuma e gerou a lua e gerou a sombra gigantesca de uma árvore pequena.*²³

The great Domingo(d) has eventually given a textual birth to 'urna arvora pequena', a little she-tree. The wee tree, both feminine and phallic, stands small and erect at the end of the Domingo(ne) world.

The ends of the text are then phallic though feminine.

As for the middle of the text, it has a centre, a *visible* acme, constituted of words which are underlined in the original. Twice underlined: typographically and linguistically, since those attractive signifiers are imported from foreign languages. This is how this Brazilian receptacle of foreign immigrants looks:

*Foi quando conheceu ovomaltine de bar, nunca antes tal grosso luxo em copo alto, mais alteado pela espuma, o banco alto e incerto, the top of the world. Todos esperando.*²⁴

'Ovomaltine' and 'the top of the world' are two strange expressions, which are there in order to indicate that there is 'the top of the world', there is a superior world which is the world of art and of words. And now we are going to see how the little Eve reaches the world. Instead of the apple, we have 'ovomaltine'. (Ovomaltine is a kind of chocolate drink that is made in Switzerland.²⁵) This is the story about the discovery of the mystery of ovomaltine. It starts with the father taking the family to the city. He takes the daughters out on Sunday, so there is going to be a feast. He has a privileged relation with the youngest daughter, which is the way it always happens: it is the King Lear's way. Everything is a little magical because it is Sunday, because it is Domingo, because it is the father. They go to a bar. And what happens in the bar? First of all,

they sit on stools and the stools are swivelling, and they go higher and higher; everything becomes elevated under the father's influence. 'The youngest daughter wanted to sit on one of the stools, the father found it amusing. And this was gay.'²⁶ And the father was satisfied, and God thought it was good. 'She then acted more charming and already this was not so gay.'²⁷ What happened then? She wanted to please the father, and she immediately lost grace, exactly as one loses grace when one becomes over-narcissistic. She wanted to be higher and higher and nicer in the eyes of the father, even too much so.

Then there came the test of the meal, but this meal was not going to be an apple: 'To drink, she chose something that wasn't dear'.²⁸ That's to please the father, because they have different economies; he is for not spending, and she is for spending:

[. . .] although the swivelling stool made everything dearer. The family stood, waiting. Timid and voracious curiosity with regard to joy. That was when she knew bar *ovomaltine*, never before such a great luxury in a tall glass, heightened more by the foam, the high and uncertain stool, *the top of the world*. Everyone waiting. She fought from the first against the nausea but went on to the end, the perplexing responsibility of the unhappy choice, forcing herself to like what must be liked, from then on mixing, with the minimal excellence of her character, a rabbit's indecision. Also the astonished distrust that *ovomaltine* would be good, the one who isn't worth anything is me.²⁹

What she has to decide is this: If what I think is good is bad, then I am the bad one. And that's the way women usually act.

She lied that it was the best because standing there they were witnessing the experience of dear felicity: did it depend on her that they believed or not in a better world? [It did depend on her. – HC] But all of that was surrounded by the father, and she was well within this small world in which walking hand in hand was the family.³⁰

And just before falling asleep, she has a vision of the world:

Out of the window, on the white wall: the gigantic and fluctuating shadow of the boughs, as if of an enormous tree, which in truth did not exist in the patio, there only existed a meager bush; or the shadow of the moon. Sunday [that is, the father – HC] was always that immense night that engendered all the other Sundays and engendered cargo ships and engendered oily waters and engendered milk with foam and engendered the moon and engendered the giant shadow of a little tree.³¹

So the father is all-engendering, but he is the mother. Father was always that immense mother that engendered everything. And the father's side

of creation is that it is all made of shadows and appearances. What the little girl has learned there is that the creation of the father, the world of the father, is a world of appearances that are bigger than reality. And she is, when she is a girl, contained within the father although she knows about reality and about truth; but Domingo, the father, must remain this huge night otherwise he would vanish, of course, as a shadow. She is conscious of that. She realises that there are two worlds: one is the world of pleasure and truth, the other the world of wanting to please the father and of having to lie in order not to hurt him. She also discovers the world of language: ‘*ovomaltine*’ has a bad taste but it has a nice sound, particularly when it is ‘*de bar*’. This is a kind of deconstruction of the superficiality of the law. The *foam* is the truth of the law. When she says that the one who is not worth anything is herself, this is really a description of sublimation. She is willing to pay for the father. But as a writer she will choose the other world because she is the one who has tasted of the other side.

Clarice, in all her works – and this is her courage – will always say that she knows about the part of the father, she knows how to deconstruct it, but she does not abolish it, she shows it, and then she goes beyond it. What she is going to do later is to state the truth about ovomaltine, that it has a bad taste and that she wants to throw it up. But she will go even further until the time when she can even try to swallow it in order to know everything about life, even what is bad, what is disgusting, until she reaches the point where she can say that everything is as good as anything. She is going to look for a kind of equivalence, not because she abolishes taste, but because she wants to respect everything exactly as it is, because she wants not to lie.

Clarice is going to lead us on a quest for the truth of existence – the truth of life, which is something very difficult. In a way, she will become a kind of mother. Of course, this is idealistic, since not all mothers are good. But what she becomes is a kind of mother of creation, a mother of life, and this will consist in what she calls *taking care of things* very carefully. She will finally elaborate a kind of philosophy, or even a kind of set of morals.

I have given names to the types of attitudes she reaches, the first one is *the art of having*. What she points out in many books is that many human beings have lots of difficulties in having what they have. We don’t know how to have what we have – the moment we have, we lose.

The art of having what we have

‘Clandestine Felicity’ is the story of a young girl – of course, she is Clarice Lispector herself – who desires madly to be lent a beautiful book, and this book is in the hands of another little girl who is a horrible little girl, a nasty little pest, and this little girl has a very special position because her father is a bookshop keeper – so she is the happy one. The little girl tells Clarice: I’ll give it to you, you come to my house, and you’ll have it. The idea of getting the book immediately transforms Clarice into what she calls the hope of joy. She herself becomes an incarnation of the hope of joy, she is pure joy, pure hope, and she does not live anymore, she swims in a kind of suave sea. Now she runs, or she flies, or she swims through the city, and she comes to the house of the other little girl who opens the door and says: Oh, I forgot, you know, I gave it to somebody else, but why don’t you come tomorrow? So Clarice goes away and thinks: tomorrow, and tomorrow becomes hope, and she says tomorrow will come, and tomorrow is already today, and she is again full of joy. So tomorrow, which is today, she comes back, flying, swimming, and so on through the city and she comes to the door, and the little pest opens it and says nastily: Oh, I completely forgot. I gave it to somebody else, so please come tomorrow; and this goes on and on.

The bookshop keeper’s daughter keeps Clarice on tenterhooks all the time. She is sadistic, and she thinks that she is torturing Clarice, but Clarice is in Paradise because she is hoping and hoping and hoping, and she is full of tomorrows. Finally, because it is a real story, one day the mother of the little pest appears and she wonders why that little girl is coming every day and what she is doing there, and she discovers the whole game.

And it happens that she is a good mother, so she is disgusted with her own daughter and immediately puts a stop to the thing. She brings the book to Clarice and says: You can keep it for the time you want. And immediately Clarice is the wealthiest person on earth because she has everything she wanted, for all the time she wanted. An ordinary girl would lose everything immediately, she would read the book and it would be finished. But Clarice has a kind of instinct, and now that she has the book she manages to keep her having of the book, and for this she invents an art of having which is fantastic. She runs home with the book but doesn’t begin to read it. First of all she goes to the kitchen, she makes herself a sandwich, and she eats the sandwich as she would eat the book. Then she creates all kinds of sham difficulties: she puts the book somewhere and forgets where she has put it so she can hope and have it tomorrow. She looks for it everywhere, she finds it again, and all this

finally is the creation of ‘clandestine felicity’. She has invented *having forever*, and she says: ‘How I delayed! [. . .] I was a delicate queen.’³² But to become a ‘delicate queen’ is very difficult, if you try. Clarice has this relation to the object of desire: it is a book that she desires, but she treats it exactly as if it were a lover or an apple.

The art of keeping alive

‘The Foreign Legion’ teaches something a little different. It is a kind of tragic story which tells about the impossibility of people keeping what they love and how to learn not to lose what is loved. It has to do with *the art of giving* and *the art of keeping*. This is not the same as the art of having, as we will see. In this story Clarice is an adult woman. She has a kind of forced little girl friend, called Ofelia, who has imposed herself on her. Ofelia comes every day, and is the master of the situation. She keeps giving advice to Clarice, saying that everything she does is wrong, that she doesn’t know how to bring up her boys, and that she has bought too many things in the supermarket, and so on. She acts exactly as if she were the law, this tiny little girl, and Clarice is fed up with her; but she respects her.

One day something very important happens. Clarice has bought a little chick for her own children, and suddenly the little girl Ofelia hears the cheeping of the chick, which is in the kitchen, and the little girl herself changes. She, in a way, dies and is born again, and this is how it happens: she is suddenly torn by the pain of desire. She has never desired anything in her life, and this simple cheeping of the chick has gone through her and torn her apart. And now she is exposed to what Clarice calls *the best in the world*, that is a chick. One can understand that it stands for a child. This little girl, then, goes through a crucial test, because for her, to accept desire is to acknowledge that she wants something and that she lacks something, and she is much too proud to admit that. So she suffers terribly, she struggles against desire and finally, thank God, desire wins. That is, she gradually and painfully allows herself to desire what she desires.

Clarice sees the little girl as being at the same time her own mother, as giving birth to herself by a kind of partition. A Lacanian would describe this as the somewhat comparable experience of division – but the little girl is divided by herself, by her own desire, and in an agony of pain she finally gives birth to herself as a desiring being and admits to herself that she desires the chick. During that time, Clarice is working very hard in order to give the child the chick. And how can she succeed in giving the

child the chick? In not giving her the chick. Because the girl is so proud and so hard that if Clarice gives her the chick, she will reject it. So she must proceed obliquely and help the girl gain access to the object by effacing herself. She says that she becomes the silence for the girl, that is, she accompanies the girl during all that metamorphosis by keeping silent, by looking at her, by witnessing her transformation and not touching her, not suggesting anything to her. She helps her to be free and goes as far as to help her finally to express her desire with words. In the end, when the girl had admitted there is a chick and asks: Can I go to the kitchen? Clarice says: Go to the kitchen if you want to, do what you want. And she obliges the little girl only by these words to want what she wants, not to deny that she wants what she wants. But the message suggested is solemn and mythical: 'Go to the mountain' she insists. For it is in the going to the (kitchen) mountain that the little girl will once find the strength to feel that the mountain can walk to her.

The little girl finally reaches the kitchen. It has been a very long way, and there is love between the girl and the chick. Then there is a silence. Clarice goes on working, and suddenly she becomes aware of something very ominous in the silence. The little girl comes back and says in a very polite and unusual way: I think I'm going to go back to my place. Clarice runs to the kitchen and, of course, she discovers that the little girl has killed the chick. Why? It was too much for the little girl, she was not ready. She went a long way in order to desire, and in the end, she just couldn't keep what she had desired. She had had as much as she could have, neither more nor less, and as little as she could have then. She is at the stage when she can possess only in losing. And this is tragic. Clarice runs up to her and shouts, but the little girl is too far away in history to hear her; she shouts: You mustn't be afraid, don't be afraid because we don't know how to love well, we've got to learn how to love well. Sometimes one kills out of love, after that one forgets and one learns how to love well without killing. This lesson deals with living beings, but then Clarice will extend the respect of life to everything that exists, including the inanimate.

The art of blessing

'The Partaking of the Bread' is an illustration of what one can call *the art of blessing* or the benediction of things as they exist. It is different from the stories I have already discussed because it is much more symbolic; it is a general metaphor of respect. It is the story of an invitation which is addressed to no one. People come into a place, they are in a

bad mood, and suddenly they discover that a table has been set with all kinds of wonderful things to eat and drink and that it has been set for no one, for he who comes, for strangers. But since it has been set gratuitously, without any intention, without being dedicated to anyone in particular, it is really for mankind. And this is a shock for those who come in – the first instance of awareness in this text. And then, not only are those who have not been invited but who are welcome, treated magnificently, but also everything on the table is perfect and beautiful. All things shine as ‘epiphanies’ of themselves (Joyce would say) because everything is so beautifully arranged. Everything stands by itself, and as Clarice says, ‘everything is clean of twisted human desire’.³³ There has not come between all the things and all the human beings anything that could spoil the pure beauty by an addition. There is no ‘foam’, there is no ‘swivelling stool’, there is no added desire, there is nothing that disfigures the things or the persons: ‘Everything is as it is, not as we had wanted.’³⁴ There has not been any projection of desire. We project desires on people we want. We want them to be as we want them to be. Here the tomatoes are just exactly round, beautiful, red tomatoes, and they are ‘for no one’.³⁵ They are just pure tomatoes, absolute tomatoes. And everything is this way. Everything is ‘existing and whole’:

Just as a field exists. Just as the mountains. Just as men and women, and not us the avid ones. Just as a Saturday. Just as barely exists. Exists. In the name of nothing, it was time to eat. In the name of no one, it was good. Without any dream.³⁶

And she proceeds by describing the cleanliness of it – without any dream, without any excessive desire. She goes very far, she even says ‘without tenderness’: ‘I ate without the passion of piety. And without offering myself to hope.’³⁷ That is, without the future coming over and crushing the present; and ‘without nostalgia’, that is, without the past brushing the present away. This is a lesson in respecting things as they exist, by not making them subservient to any type of human interference. In the name of *no one*, it is good; that is really the ultimate lesson.

What I want to emphasise is the ‘no one’. One can reach that point of equanimity, which is also felicity, only if one has been able to achieve a very difficult attitude toward oneself. This is what Clarice calls ‘depersonalisation’, getting rid of the ego, coming to the point where one is so free of egocentrism that one can be open completely to the other. And this is how she describes it in one of her best books, *The Passion According to G. H.* The idea is very precise: she does not deny desire, she keeps desire, but as long as desire is not disfiguring.

I have avidity for the world, I have strong and definite desires, tonight I'll go down and eat, I won't wear the blue dress but the black one. But at the same time I don't need anything. I don't even need a tree to exist. [I don't impose my need on things, they exist without my asking them, demanding them, to be there. – HC] I know now of a mode that dispenses with everything – and also with love, with nature, with objects. A mode that dispenses with me. Even though as for my desires, my passions, my contact with a tree – they continue being for me like a mouth eating.³⁸

This is paradoxical. One mustn't think – and she insists on this, she is very clear about it – that she is against love. She is for good love, she is for the love that respects, for the love that doesn't try to appropriate, but that lets things remain as they are, and lets other human beings be as they are. She is on the way to defining how to be a woman. This is how she defines it:

Everything that characterises me is scarcely a mode by which I am more easily visible to others and by which I end up being superficially recognisable to myself. As there was a moment in which I saw that the cockroach is the cockroach of all cockroaches, so I want for myself to find in me the woman of all women. Depersonalisation as the great objectification of oneself. The greatest exteriorisation one reaches. [. . .] The first step in relation to the other is to find in oneself the man of all men, the woman of all women.³⁹

Every woman is the woman of all women, on condition that 'depersonalisation' has taken place. When one reaches that, when one is courageous enough to drop the heavy self and open to the other, then everything can happen, then one becomes really 'the woman of all women'. This is what she calls the secret mission of life: 'The gradual de-heroisation of oneself is the true work that labours (with itself) under the apparent work, life is a secret mission.'⁴⁰ She expresses this by a kind of metaphor: the getting rid of the name.

The deheroisation of myself is undermining subterraneously my building, accomplishing itself, unbeknownst to me, like an ignored vocation. Until it be finally revealed to me that *the life in me doesn't have my name*.

And I too have no name, and this is my name. And because I depersonalise myself to the point of not having my name, I answer each time that someone says: I.⁴¹

This is difficult to achieve, but one at least has to try. When one achieves what Clarice achieved, then one reaches what she calls, in a beautiful way, the '*point of wheat*'.

The art of receiving: The point of wheat

What is the '*point of wheat*'? It is the relation one can have with the other and with the world when one has 'deheroised' oneself by not forgetting the other; even if it is a cockroach, or even if it is the rain, then one has the type of love that the rain and the earth have one for the other. And that could be defined as a kind of economy of attention. This is completely explained in the little text called 'So Much Mansuetude'. (I have kept the word 'mansuetude,' which is a Brazilian word that also exists in French but is no longer used in English.) 'Mansuetude' means kindness, serenity, but the etymology of the word suggests the taming of the hands; and it has to do with knowing how to use one's hand in a good way. In 'So Much Mansuetude', Lispector opposes two types of economies: one is that of consolation. Formerly she used to be organised to console herself from anguish and pain. So she was always exchanging pain and joy: 'But now I have to handle this simple and tranquil joy'.⁴² And it is extremely difficult; she is not used to joy and has to learn about it. And this joy is like a hand of grace. Nothing is happening, she is at the window:

I go then to the window, it is raining a lot. Out of habit I am searching in the rain what in another moment would serve me as a consolation. But I don't have any pain to console.⁴³

So she is using the rain, she is looking for something in the rain, and she has no pain, and nothing happens. But then suddenly she realises that she has everything. She is herself in front of the window and the rain is raining and she says:

Ah, I know. I'm now searching in the rain for a joy so great that it becomes sharp, and it puts me in contact with a sharpness that resembles the sharpness of pain. But the search is useless. I am at the window and only this happens: I *see* with beneficent eyes the rain, and the rain *sees* me in agreement with me. We're *both* busy flowing.⁴⁴

Nothing happens except that she and the rain are both busy flowing. She has no need, she has no lack, and again, as in 'The Partaking of the Bread', she insists on having without having to thank, that is, avoiding completely the system of debt – this is pure receiving. And she says: 'What simplicity. I never thought the world and I would arrive at this *point of wheat*'.⁴⁵

This is the point of wheat: one grows and that is all, without even thanking God or Nature, exactly as the rain. And this is the way she

becomes a woman. ‘I am not a thing that says thanks for having transformed itself into another. Am a woman.’⁴⁶ And there she has suppressed the personal pronoun. She is pure ‘am’ – ‘am a woman, am a person.’

(Am) a woman develops. Being a woman is indeed being more than a woman, is being a woman in translation, being a woman continuing, extending, being a selfless woman, a woman *and*. But not a woman *and* anything else regardless of any quality. No: woman develops into equivalents or ‘semblables’. ‘Am a woman, am a person, am an attention, am a body looking through a window. Just as the rain is not grateful for not being a stone.’⁴⁷ She (the rain, *a chuva* is feminine) is a rain. ‘Perhaps this is what we call being alive. No more than this, but this: alive. And simply alive from a serene [*mansa*] joy.’⁴⁸

No paying, except attention. Being alive without asking for thanks, just looking with beneficent eyes. One really has to make a big effort, and particularly one has to overrule the ego and the pretense of mastering things and knowing things. Then we reach the point when we can say as she says: it is only because I don’t know anything in an appropriating way, ‘because I don’t know anything and because I remember nothing’, because I am not a prisoner of the past and I am not a captive of the future, ‘and because it is night, then I stretch out my hand and I save the child.’⁴⁹ The serene, joyful writing hand of the artist saves the child, any child, and signs: Am Alive . . .

Translated by Ann Liddle and Sarah Cornell

Notes

1. James Joyce, *Ulysses* [1922] (London: Bodley Head, 1960), notably p. 933.
2. Franz Kafka, ‘Before the Law’, in Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.), *Franz Kafka: The Complete Short Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (London: Vintage, 1999), pp. 3–4.
3. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* [1916] (New York: Viking, 1964), p. 7.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
9. All citations of Clarice Lispector are translated by Ann Liddle and Sarah Cornell [tr.].
10. Clarice Lispector, *Perto do coração selvagem* [1944] (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 14th edn, 1990), pp. 59–60.
11. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 682. See also: James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 117. [HC]

12. Clarice Lispector, *Perto do coração selvagem*, p. 19.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–1.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
20. See Sigmund Freud, ‘Lecture XXXIII: Femininity’ [1932], *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XXII (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 112–35 (p. 132).
21. Clarice Lispector, *Perto do coração selvagem*, pp. 23–4.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
23. Clarice Lispector, ‘Domingo, antes de dormir’, in *Para não esquecer* (São Paulo: Ática, 1978), p. 53.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
25. This drink is called ‘Ovaltine’ in English.
26. Clarice Lispector, ‘Domingo, antes de dormir’, p. 52.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 52–3.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
32. Clarice Lispector, ‘Felicidade clandestina’, in *Felicidade clandestine* [1971] (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 7th edn, 1991), p. 18.
33. Clarice Lispector, ‘A repartição dos pães’, in *Felicidade clandestine* [1971] (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 7th edn, 1991), p. 99.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
38. Clarice Lispector, *A Paixão Segundo G. H.* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 6th edn, 1979), pp. 169–70.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 170–1.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 171. [Italics: HC].
42. Clarice Lispector, ‘Tanta mansidão’, in *Onde estivestes de noite* [1974] (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 7th edn, 1994), p. 110.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 110–11.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 111. [Italics: HC].
45. *Ibid.*, p. 111. [Italics: HC].
46. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
49. Clarice Lispector, ‘A legião estrangeira’, in *Felicidade clandestine* [1971] (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 7th edn, 1991), p. 74.

Letter to Zohra Drif

I have not written this letter. It is still there. Speechless, present, shy, it is my letter to Zohra Drif. It stays with me, unwritten, patient. I have a blank letter that does not leave. It is addressed to Zohra Drif. But it is held back. This letter has its reasons. For not writing itself. For not vanishing. It has been addressing Zohra Drif in Algeria on my behalf for decades. What halts it just before the paper and suspends it between my shores, my countries, is a long story. The loss of words I never had.

It all began in January 1957. When I wanted to write my letter to Zohra Drif. Such an impulse broke out in me. I was reading in the Paris newspapers what was happening in Algeria. The birth war raged. The war I had despaired of, and which had bloomed at last on the day of my despair, in November 1954, the great quake of time, the shackled country had finally broken its fetters, and it shook the pillars of the metropolitan temple at last! The day before, I had left, I had fled this earth in pain that I could neither caress nor help nor call my mother without offending it. I arrive in France, a foreign distinguished elegant country. I arrive in France, I thought. There I am not. I can't get my footing. This country is not my country. I am savage, a bit furious, alarmed, overwhelmed to the point of being crushed by its constructions and its customs, I can't manage to arrive. I go nuts, I goat and ram. [*Je deviens chèvre et bélier.*] I stumble on the carpets of the bourgeois buildings I who went barefoot yesterday. But no nostalgia. I had not been at home behind the fences of my native cradle.

From Algeria my love my terror I am liberated by the Algeria that is being born. She frees herself. It is this combat – which I had despaired of – that liberates me at last: I can go my way without the dread, the shame, the powerless anger following me, and without remorse. My childhood grief at having been fated to a thankless birth in spite of myself stops persecuting me. Africa gives me my first departure. Algeria freeing itself

frees me of the sins I did not commit and which had been deposited as a poisoned gift in my cradle.

I who had been born under the guise of French citizenship, a frail semblance dating nonetheless, on the side of my father, an Algerian Jew with Spanish ancestors, to 1867, and which was broken overnight by the anti-Jewish laws of Vichy. In *Monolinguisme de l'autre*, J. Derrida has described this manoeuvre, unique in history, of the French State subjugated to Hitler, which made us, we who were 'French' but Jewish, in October 1940 and for two years, we who were born 'French', into passport-less, law-less, shelter-less, identity-less, school-less, profession-less people.¹

The sea alone, our good seamother, protected us from the deportation that took those like us captured in France. We fell outside inside. The outside became my inside. I have never left it since. My German Jewish grandmother with all our German-speaking family had just lived through the same annulment. How could I have been able to believe that we were 'French', or want to be when we were recitizenised after 1943, puppets of the whims of a State that established its authority on a colonial Empire the jewel of which was North Africa. I was three years old when I was driven out of the true garden into which I had just been admitted as the daughter of an officer doctor of the French army, and which had never been open to the 'natives'. In October 1939 my father Doctor Cixous was lieutenant doctor in the French army, on the Tunisian front. In October 1940 the little girl that I was saw him unscrew his doctor's plaque from the door of our house: he was no longer French or doctor. Jew.

Gates as high as the sky, invisible and mobile ones, used to encircle my childhoods. I was always separated from my true kin as from myself. Undecidable but decided and condemned by an iniquitous State to be one or another of the things I wasn't. I survived between the bars.

Algeria had given me the departure. But France could not give me the arrival. In 1955–6 I lived in the French language, in books, in paper. That war, in my native cities, was a harsh springtime.

That is when I learned from the newspapers that in the Algiers Casbah a leader of the FLN [National Liberation Front] and his young woman companion were holding out against the assaults of the French army. I read the instantaneous legend. In the Casbah, the oldest of Algiers's cities, the most folded up, the convoluted one, the cascade of alleyways with the odours of urine and spices, the secret of Algiers, and, if I had been able to name it then by its hidden name, I would have called it the savage genitals, the antique femininity. Yes the Casbah with its folds and its powerful and poor people, its hunger, its desires, its vaginality,

for me it was always the clandestine and venerated genitals of the City of Algiers.

And it resisted rape.

From the bottom of my voluntary internment in France, as a spectator without earth, without roof, without nationality of the soul, I watched the play that was showing in the sacred places of my antiquity. Shakespeare in Algeria. The Act of the Casbah. Enter: Zohra Drif. This is fate and its halts. I might have been born Zohra and I was born Héléne but a bit of Zohra in me had never stopped chafing at the bit.

Enter Zohra. I know the footpaths and the roof terraces well. It is in the Casbah that my mother the Kabla delivers babies. The Casbah, place of nativities.

I cried out with joy. So there was a woman who was freeing the Casbah. She has blond frizzy hair, a calm body – I must stop – I shall return

This whole story had begun in the preceding act in 1947. The set: Lycée Fromentin, the antithesis of the Casbah. It is the most beautiful school in the world. A mythical place. Imagine an old Moorish palace, in terraced gardens where amongst the enormous trees stood the flower birds with orangy beaks of the Strelitzias. The path that led to the classroom buildings is flanked with bushy slopes. The fine house on a small hill, nested on the heights of Algiers. But on these primitive beauties a warlike masquerade is spread: during the World War which is moving further and further from its walls this school was the headquarters of high French political and military authorities. So the house was adorned with a camouflage that remains and monumentalises it. The walls are painted with frescos of fake khaki and brown trees. *Trompe l'œil*. Everything is *trompe l'œil*. My father, coming from ebullient Oran to live in a poor neighbourhood of Algiers, enrolls me there, at Lycée Fromentin in the autumn of 1947. What he does not know: this school is governed right to the depths of its soul by the spirit of the *numerus clausus*. The spirit of Vichy. What is the 'Numerus Clausus'? *The closed number*. These Latin words ennoble a mental leper: Closed number means exclusion: Even yesterday the beautiful school had closed its doors to Jews, as had all public places, but not totally: the law made it an obligation to exclude the Jews while including 1 or 2% of alibi and hostage Jews. Once the war was over all these legal racist measures had been consigned to oblivion. But at Fromentin, the pleasure of exclusion had not been forgotten. A tradition had simply been perpetuated secretly. This is how I was a student in a school where the Jews could be counted on the fingers of

one hand. I was almost always the only Jew in my class. My father died at the dawn of 1948 without having had the time to take the measure of the sickness. Yet even in 1947 he had been obliged to intervene twice against an illegal insidious Catholicisation of the teaching.

Lycée Fromentin could not be detested. It was a femininity, modern, sumptuous, luminous gymnastic fields, there were eucalyptuses, secret corridors, underground passages, one day there was snow, during play-time in the edenic courtyard we fought around the old Maria Carabosse a little shrunken fairy in the form of a broken stick of barley sugar who sold barley sugar sticks. But I could not love it freely. It smelled of Vichy in the fine corridors and offices.

I lived on edge, irritated, and each year more strongly nourished with vigilance, with revolt. I detected the lingering odours of racism and colonialism in the teachers. A cult to France reigned and was not questioned. We learned France. It was only the French teachers come from France who brought, o paradox, the fresh air of a foreigner. Most of the others, 'Algerian French', lived comfortably seated on the divans of a volcano, as blind ladies used to live before the Revolution.

Note that there was no explicit discourse. It would have facilitated my life and my private mission. But everything was sign and symptom. So I did my political reading alone, and with no one in whom to confide my suspicions, young, not yet trained, but having always been on alert. The students my companions all French and Christian were less insidious and perilous than the teachers. Occupied with childhood in the enchanted gardens of Fromentin. Inside there was only Algeria without Algerians. It was natural that one of them should say to another who would not give up her eraser: 'don't be a Jew'. The day I heard that sentence I was 11 years old, I asked for an explanation. The other, older, gave it to me: it means: don't be stingy. I undertook a protest that was not understood. For the other girl that expression was a normal part of French culture. My father had just died.

There were only invisible signs: absence of Jews, absence of Muslims. Brilliant absences that dazzled me and took my breath away. How can one make people see the invisible? Colonial Algeria, champion of making-invisible: they didn't even need apartheid: they could walk through the Algerian crowds without seeing them. They said 'the Arabs' (and not Algerians: Algerian is a revolutionary word) and it was a magic word: they no longer saw the crowds or the feverish looks of offended men, or the timid women, or a destitution that I never saw anywhere else before finding it again in India, or the anger of the humiliated, or the hate of the oppressed, or the ulcers, or the rags. The 'Whites' called 'Europeans' climaxed with all their forces. I have never seen such an appetite. Even

today I feel suspicion and repulsion with regard to the enormous jubilation of the French from Algeria. I saw it as a symptom: the dance before the storm.

At Lycée Fromentin the camouflage was unfurled on all of reality.

I saw the invisible. I heard the furtive shifts of meaning in the words of the French and History-Geography teachers. I perceived the cover-ups. And no one to complain to.

My brother, a student at Lycée Bugeaud, in town, had the good fortune of being in a theatre where everything was said. Insults flew. There were Jews and Muslims amongst the colonialist majority. So they could fight it out, a great relief in the thirst for justice.

But at Lycée Fromentin, a veil muffled all the senses. Reduced to powerlessness, I thrashed about like an animal: the words were missing. The poison circulated on the sly. I dreamed of battles. I took my end-of-term tests like the champion of a cause that did not exist — and was not recognised.

At thirteen I went to spend the summer in England my first country abroad, and I swore I would leave my prison at the first possible moment.²

That was when three Muslim girls appeared at the school, in my class. They immediately entered, with an absolute privilege, into my memory forever. In one season they became unforgettable for me. And I knew nothing. Except that for me they were the incarnations of the truth. But which truth?

Samia Lakhdari, Leila Khaled, Zohra Drif. One brunette, one redhead, one blond. One smiling, one laughing, one serious. It is very difficult to tell a story that had no events. This story happened to me. What was happening to me, this I knew, was Algeria. The arrival of three young girls had a prophetic dimension for me, this is how I experienced it. Alone. There were no names for it. It was Biblical. I had the message. Not that they themselves gave it to me. But I had received it. I was attached to their presence.

All of this was not said. My life had changed horizons, directions. I did not say it. I had a feeling of community. With them. But to say so was hopeless and senseless. It would have been in anticipation, a declaration of love for the future still well hidden behind the foliage of Fromentin. It was *my* life that was transported onto another planet. I was the one who needed them, their future freedom so that mine would be able to blossom. I also needed in an indefinable way a discovery, a reunion, an alliance, because with them I made sense to myself. I called to them in silence and without hope. I was behind the bars of a mad destiny, cooped up with the French my non-fellow creatures, my adver-

saries, my hands held out toward my kind, on the other side, invisible hands held out to my own tribe who could not see me. For them, surely I was what I was not: a French girl. My ancient desire for them, my desire for innocence, for purification, inaudible. There was no *us*.

My solitude doubled. But I was more cheerful. I laughed a lot with my three friends, whom I loved for the remote years and who did not know to what point of necessity I loved them. In the narrow neighbourhood of the school they were always my distant ones, my young girls in bloom, them living in me, me not living in them. I could tell a thousand details about this chaste and audacious relationship. But the letter to Zohra awaits me.

I left Algeria in 1955. Without grief. With no idea of returning. I removed my bandages. Enough silenced. Enough swallowed. I removed my gag. I began. At last I stopped being the one I wasn't. And I was the foreigner that I was. Unknown. Alleviated of my double the anger that had accompanied me until then. I no longer had to carry the sins of France I who as a child had been chased out and execrated by France. At last there was war, the just war.

According to the tradition of my father, my brother a medical student in Algiers was committed in favour of the Algerian's struggle for independence, as I was naturally in France. We were no longer those tied up scorned and misunderstood hostages of the tragic comedy of nationalities. There was at last future, cause, promise: Algeria for the Algerians. Not for me of course. At last I could enjoy being delivered from the usurpation of the theft, of the expropriation, of the slavery, of the French crimes.

Then I read the newspaper: Zohra Drif armed in the Casbah. Alongside Yacef Saadi. It was the message. The summary of the books written above us. We are characters in a great narrative. We go line by line on the page without ever seeing the volume in which we figure. But it happens that the Author lifts us one day out of the chapter and, holding us above the plot of our existences, briefly reveals to us the architecture of the whole, the coordination of details, the concordance of metaphors and, for an instant, we see exterior to ourselves the face of our story.

I had my vision. I was taken with exultation. The incandescence murmured: write a letter to Zohra. Yes, yes, a letter to Zohra Drif. Something a hello, a joy.

I did not write it. Not with words. It lay in my desire, in patience. It searched for its words, its form, its tone, its address. I searched. Where should I address it? False question. Once written it would have found a way to Zohra in the Casbah. That was not it. I did not write it. It

fluttered near my shoulder. I smiled sideways to it. I would write it soon. I would write: Zohra, it's Hélène. No that's not it.

It would say: Zohra, Algeria, at last, you, I had sensed it coming, I had not hoped for it, there was something behind your eyes that did not show itself, a guard, at last you. It would say: 'we have suffered so much separately, ground our teeth, chewed bitter mistrust.' No. I was nineteen, I was experiencing the impossible letter. It was the first time. In the impossible letter we want to explain everything to God, we commune, we are neither humble nor proud, we recognise and we are recognised, between us incomprehension reigns respectfully, we speak superhuman without shame and without modesty, we spend nights seeing ourselves write it, from hour to hour we rise, we approach, at dawn we renounce we are still too far from the good height. We are so little and so confused, we will write it tomorrow.

What I did not want to write was a letter from Lycée Fromentin. I wanted the impossible one, the only one that would be worthy of the immensity of the event.

How could I write with justice to Zohra, Algeria? The letter to Zohra did not leave me. There are letters we do not write, that does not mean they don't exist. Changed into prayer and thought, they stay near us, for decades, ready to be, unforgotten, sublime. Waiting for us to have attained the region where they will be able at last to land in sentences. In this letter I said: Zohra, then the words went off and all the history of Algeria unfolded from the Atlas up to the Tell, the paper did not contain the contours I loved without having ever seen them.

It was a letter in the image of my fatality of Algeria: mute, ardent, faithful, enthusiastic. Forbidden. I can talk about it because it is still there. It did not go by. I did not throw it into forgetfulness. It knows this. I did not deny it. It is the portrait of my own inexistence, phantom that I was as a child and young girl, surreptitious and unknown at school. I keep it, unfinished. It is the only photograph of my soul that I accept as a witness of my extreme Algerian impotence.

Are there other reasons for this non-happening? The fear of love the fear of hate. Many others, no doubt, but I do not know them.

When I met Hamida in 1993, my first Algerian to come close to me, in reality, sitting beside me sitting beside her at a table as if absolutely nothing separated us, no mountains, no colonial infamy, neither religion nor wall nor secular silence, when I found myself and she Hamida speaking trembling to me about the severed heads, the slit throats, the Assassination that has taken over this country, and nothing shut me in I was not driven out, within the first hour that united us, I asked Hamida

for news from Zohra Drif. As if my silent letter had waited forty years for Zohra to answer.

Hélène Cixous
18 February 1998

N.B. A few names and dates:

1997: Forty years later:

- Zohra Drif, my mother says, was a great resistance fighter.
- She's a very important woman, says my friend Nourredine, a young Algerian born in 1964, all of Algeria knows her. She's not someone who has been forgotten. The terrorist group of Yacef Saadi. Djamal Hamani, a poet, who was in his group, talks about her all the time. You see Zohra Drif a lot on TV. She talks of Democracy. When you say: Yacef Saadi and Zohra Drif, you say: 'the Battle of Algiers'.

'The Battle of Algiers', January 1957, fateful month in the history of the war. Point of non-return.

November 1954: The Algerian War breaks out. It is commanded by seven 'historical leaders' of the FLN.

(1955 I arrive in France I am the first person in my family to imagine staying there.)

September 1956: Bombs explode in the cafés popular amongst the 'French' of Algiers, in the centre of the city. These are the famous attacks of the *Milk Bar*, of the *Cafétéria*. The pest of fear spreads in the arteries of the City. The French army is everywhere. There will be 450,000 men enlisted in the war.

End of 1956: Several of the principal leaders of the FLN hide in the Casbah. The Casbah: the oldest neighbourhood of Algiers, entirely Muslim.

January 1957: Larbi Ben M'hidi, one of the great leaders of the FLN suggests the idea of an insurrectional strike. It will take place on 28 January. It will catch the imagination of the world and attract the attention of the UN. The strike is preceded on 26 January by a spectacular series of bomb attacks.

Yacef Saadi is charged with executing the most sensational of the episodes in this tragic play. Time bombs fabricated in the Casbah are placed in the most familiar famous cafés in the centre of Algiers, by the hands of the young girls of the group. (Zohra Drif, Samia Lakhdari, Djamila Bouhired, Djamila Bouazza.)

La Cafétéria, the *Coq Hardi*, the *Otomatic*, are blown up with many

victims. Algiers no longer sleeps. The old Casbah makes the gilded young French Algiers tremble.

In vain, two thousand paratroopers comb the Casbah. Yacef Saadi and his companions, in the Casbah, stay no longer than two days in the same hideout. He is hidden 14 rue du Nil. With Zohra Drif and Larbi Ben M'hidi.

He is hidden at 5 rue Caton.

He is at 7 Impasse de la Grenade. The French Army searches without stopping.

It is time to leave the Casbah, they think.

Larbi Ben M'hidi goes to hide with friends in the European neighbourhood. On 23 February he is arrested. On 4 March he is 'interrogated' to death by a Special Section of Paratroopers. Continually supported by Zohra Drif, Yacef Saadi avoids all the traps. He goes disguised as a woman, covered with a Haik, his face veiled. They escape all the dangers.

1962: Algeria is Independent.

Rue d'Isly, one of the two main streets of Algiers is henceforth called rue Ben M'hidi Larbi. In 1947 my father had opened his Radiology clinic there. That is where my midwife mother remained until 1971. A hundred metres from the *Milk Bar*.

– Today Yacef Saadi has retired from politics.

– Zohra Drif married one of the seven historical leaders, Rabah Bitat, who was the president of the National Assembly and several times minister. He is the only one still living. In Algeria he is called 'the Authentic'.

1981: Large women's marches were organised in Algiers to protest against the 'Code of the Family', which the Algerian feminists call the 'code of infamy'. At the head of the procession, I am told, the elders marched, the famous resistance fighters Djamila Bouhired and Zohra Drif.

1984: The code of infamy, close to Charia, is voted. It annuls the Constitution of 1976 that guaranteed civil rights for women.

Translated by Eric Prenowitz

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 1–18; *Monolinguisme de l'autre* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2006), pp. 31–7.
2. The 'prison' in question is clearly the author's situation in Algeria; the three girls of the next sentence arrive in her class in Algeria, not in England.

The Names of Oran

There are so many, and each one calls to the other, I could never note them all. I shall let them come here in the order without apparent order in which they come when I pronounce their key-name that is the colour of the chrome with which I buttered language with my brush in order to relish painting,

I say Oran, and the words come running down the boulevards and the alleyways, up the hills, along the cliffs the colour of raw meat overhanging the coast, here they are clacking high in my new child's ears dazzled with sonorous sparkles: le Villaginègre, Ya Ouled, Mémé Eckmühl, Ptivichy, Saha, La Calentica, El Khobz, Djib Batata, Ima Ima, Mleh, Fissa fissa, Khlass, El Bab, Mers El Kébir, toflah, sbakh al Kheir, Baba, archraâl, Tlatin douro, l'ahmar, Dolorès, old Mrs Flörsheim, Promenade de l'Étang, Boulevard Galliéni, Ya Benti, Lycée Lamoricière, Lycée Stéphane Gsell, Oran-Républicain, la Marine, Ain Temouchent, Canastel, Alberplage, Clairefontaine, Cap Falcon with its dunes, la Kemia, Aïd-el-Kebir, Imaâ, and on Sunday the family took the word *les Planteurs* and we went up the slopes of the Moorish cemetery climbing to the Belvedere, then across the rocky scrub, in the direction of the word *Santacruz* and when my father took us we made a stop at the word *Marabout*.

And all of this – these explorations, these communions, these ascensions – was Arabic, the Arabic we spoke at *rue Philippe*, on the corner of the *Placedarmes* in Oran.

All the beach-words, the theatre-words, the street-words were both strange and strangers, and 'common' or 'proper', they fluttered in the form of magic, incantatory verbal spirits, without ever making sentences but making 'things', 'places', 'goods', dwellings, scintillate and appear, themselves, the words, being musical houses where sorceries kept watch. These word-names with powerful charms were accompanied in Oran by odours, aromatics whose red ochre gold powders clogged the thick

jute sacks of the spice shops. The names of Oran smelled. They had the perfumes of the Orient that are called *species*. Because language knows that the aromatic is the species itself and that the *spice* is the substance of the word. The word-words were spices of spices. They came to me by air. I sniffed them. Spices of species. Nutmegs cumins chili peppers trails paths led me from one being to another by the tip of my nose and the tip of my tongue. Oran has an odour. The Oran-odour. Privilege and wealth of fragrant countries. India also begins with odour. But the odour India is a mix of perfumes and dejecta: rose and excrement unite. The name of Oran smells of the Bible and incense.

Standing before the lions, real lions of eternal cast iron or else it was bronze, between the palm trees, with the Municipaltheatre to my right and to my left the Emergencypharmacy flanked by the two grottos where liquors and metamorphoses ferment, I always had that peculiar sensation of having-just-arrived. I was the passing voyager girl in a city-house-theatre; no sojournment no repetition, no duration, ever softened the acuity of my aboarding. I was always standing before between on the doorstep of a foreign country of mine, because of all these name-words, this fauna, that I could not put down on paper and which enveloped me in transparent sonorous forests. Oran was always the book before writing, everything took word, and the word was a name and the names were the precious pieces of a mobile mosaic that I collected and constantly arranged in new combinations, just as at the beach I gathered mother-of-pearl that I worshipped with a numerous and precise cult.

The spellbinding charm of this jewelry came from the fact that I knew nothing about transcription. The language one does not know how to write has a magic authority. It is she who spoke to me, and at her words I travelled. I lived in a living illustrated dictionary where the word '*cycloramieur*' came to alight beside the word '*araucaria*' and the word '*créponné*' to form groups of intensely erotic elements through incongruous and compatible contiguities. And just as the *Dolorès* group – laundry blue – the royal blue colour of the round detergent tablets – the song of the boiling in the wash boiler – the clean smell of the dish towels – the gallery – the washboard – the *savondeMarseille* – which the words *Bésamé-Bésamémucho* lifted with melancholy, was inseparable from and prophetic of passions I knew nothing about, in the same way the *Mohamed* group – the tin dish of chickpeas in broth – the coat of rag strips – the darkness of the staircase that sheltered his abode – the solitude of the silent man in the cage – the mystery of his definitive move, as planned by our gods, to live at the back of the entranceway in the four-storey house, was part of the most intimate aspect of my existence

and I was attached to those slightly mute living existences as to very sensitive parts of my body. Thus I lived in the bosom of Oran, bathing in a dissemination of signifiers that lulled and moved my heart, I was in this language intangible in its totality, elusive compact, and that I loved I could never hold in my mouth.

It was not French.

What is a language?

I shall never know if it was Arabic that gave me German or German that gave my ear the taste for Arabic and not just any German but precisely the one that was my first food, the German language of Omi my grandmother who arrived from Germany just in time at the end of 1938 to initiate my palate to the mix of words and cabbage with potatoes, or else if it was my father's voice, with its accentuated and persuasive inflections. I did not like to eat. Luckily the grown-ups bewitched me. I am sitting at the table facing my adversary the plate. The attacks of the plate. Everything displayed there was examined by my hostility. Ah, if only I could have lived without vegetables, but not without words or sound!

By luck and patience, my fostering parents translated the mouthfuls into delicious words for me. First Omi transformed the cabbage purée, that pallid paste, into a field plowed with regular furrows. And it was Austerlitz. Already it was no longer exactly cabbage. Then came the story. I only swallow the cabbage with the sentence. For the carrots, it takes all of my father. I only gave in to carrots smothered in jokes.

What is a 'tongue'?

Later in Algiers Omi would rather buy a veal tongue. But in Oran it was ox tongue. According to me it began well, with the compact well-shaped muscular end and it finished horrible burgeoning fatty exhibiting the torn strips from being wrenched from the mouth of a flayed animal which left me inconsolable. At the market among the entrails impaled by metal hooks frequented by flies and dripping with blood, they were the blood-stained primitive incarnation of the spirit of the Greek and Biblical tragedies. I saw Absalom Oedipus the gouged-out ones the decapitated ones there was no species barrier to my eyes between a raw meat stripped of its organic modesties, exposed, crucified and another meat. Omi took the thing in her eminent cook's hands hefted it, and began to transfigure it partially. First it is scalded and the thick skin that sheathes it is removed without difficulty, liberating the delicate tenderness of the flesh. According to my father the organ is fixed by the posterior end (the end I abhorred) to the floor of the mouth and

owes its admirable mobility to the 17 striated muscles innervated by the upper hypoglossal. According to Omi there was no relation between *diese schöne Zunge* and *die deutsche Sprache*.¹ That is why she peeled the *Zunge* with detached expertise. Whereas for me there was only one tongue, which was that of the sacrifice and the butcher, meat itself whose soul dispersed in the hot and odorous air in millions of sounds could never be made into stew.

The one we spoke in Oran my native city was entirely foreign to me and thus desirable. I love my mother tongue – but which one – to begin with it *heaves*, it *haspirates*, it *rasps*, it calls me enticing me, it *chatches* me, it *hails* me, it *hélène's* me, it holds me back and drags me with this imperative H, the breath of YaHaweh himself, it cannot be disobeyed, it gives me the impetus and the summons from out of this H that inaugurate me and does not exist in French, but in Arabic-German it aspirates the turmoil [*émois*] along its path.

H, the name of the note *ti* in German.

I bear the German name of my great-grandmother Helene Meyer.

My first name is German, the French language swipes it from me, extinguishes its *ti*, decapitates me. My second name the bizarre one has always medusa-dumbfounded the French. And why? I know not what sound hidden in its phonemes provokes the surprise and the minor repulsion that is caused by a spider crab. People don't really know where to grasp it by which leg to stop it. It is a name that won't be tamed. Is it the X that puzzles the star with four points, is it the effect of the CIX that drives them back? No matter how much my name and I spell ourselves, we are not received. We finish the ordeal with a scratch, our C is suppressed, we are disfigured, we are impossible. So: there exists a name that the tongue in which I perform writing recognises instantaneously to be unpronounceable, indomitable, inaudible, escaping the ear, the voice and the orthographic corset. Cixous an apotropaic name. My proper hedgehog.

But in Algerian it is at home and as familiar as can be, as unsavage, as crumbly as can be and not spicy at all. As *Kouskous* I am spread semolina in a large dish rolled, rubbed, kneaded by the solid palms of mémécouscous, moistened, steamed and accompanied with vegetables meats juices and sauces. No one in Algeria can do without my name I am the daily bread. I am the wheat that does not wound. I am the good repetition, the relief on the tongue, the most common of common names. The most consumed of dishes. All of North Africa lives by it.

What is there in this name, that in the north is poison and in the south is gift? There is a secret.

But I did not know it, neither in Oran, nor in Algiers, nor later in

Paris when I said I was Cixous with a C at the beginning, when I tried at lycée Fromentin to slip the word by in French and it repelled it, I didn't know that I was hard wheat flour. The family had a secret, but it was a completely unknown secret. No one has ever heard of it.

One day – it was during a ‘Salon du Livre’² – I was there – but who was I, who are you when you're sitting in the place called Salon du Livre – and these questions are a part of the event that happened then and which I am going to recount – I was there, sitting at a little table, next to myself, I next to myself sitting under my name, under the name of the author Hélène Cixous – a somewhat crazy situation but which luckily only lasts for an objectively limited duration – because the place called ‘Salon du Livre’ is indeed the only one where I am swapped and appear in good health though crazy as my own fiction. And on this stage not only do I look like the person I know the least, but in addition I respond in her place unavowably. I am not the only one, in this situation, to be crazy. The people who move around this Fair are all crazy in different ways, each one mistaking each other for someone else hundreds of strangers recognise each other they think and all is quid pro quo. It is frightening. Dangerous. But salutary. One is rapidly covered with phantoms and false photos. There is no more reality. But in its place, no Dream. I was sitting surrounded with books I had neither read nor written but what matter, and above me on the wall the portraits of our favourite actresses kept watch. I was sitting under Liv Ullman. An enthusiastic man assured me he had seen all my films. Did I look blond? Such is the magic of the Salon.

A young woman came to alight before me. Smiling, she folded her wings and struck me with her brilliant beauty. She seemed to me the opposite of Liv Ullman. Brunette, tall, keen, narrow eyebrows, well-defined lips, very white cheeks.

– You are a Berber. She says to me. She was a Berber, I could see.

– No, I say.

Her brilliant green eyes came and went on my face, along my eyebrows, around my ears.

– You have my aunt's eyes, says the stranger.

– False! I cry.

– My mother's lips exactly. She smiles firmly at me. You are from our village. I have already seen you.

– Sorry, I say, I am not a Berber. And I pushed back her smile.

– The spitting image of my sister.

– You are mistaken.

– You deny? So be it.

I defended myself with a violent frown. Upon which she vanished from before me. And the portals closed.

I felt a sad sensation of victory and immediately afterwards regret and thereupon grief.

I have defended the truth, I said to myself, but do I know it? Who did I defend? Who haunts me? Yet I am very sure. But of what. I disowned an unknown person who is dear to me, I thought sadly, I myself have chased off the Secret. I didn't even ask her name. A letter arrived for me and I sent it back. And yet she resembled my father like a daughter, but I refused her and I don't even know why. I will never know who had written to me at my address.

Could I be a Berber? Could I have been invented centuries ago in the Atlas Mountains? It is a non-impossibility.

In my father's family memory begins in 1867. But before 1867 stretches a vast unexplored uninhabited forgetting, no one in the family remembers ever having forgotten anything. And before the immense depopulated forgetting stretched a craggy landscape with hills climbed by goats and planted with pines. The events that happened among the sizzling rocks are comparable to the beds of oueds that remember having known white-water rapids. The insistent drought is the witness of these disappearances.

A story has been entirely lost I know not where or when. A cloth was cut and ripped, a bridge collapsed, a sin was buried, a love was punished, a promise was not kept. I would so like to know the names of the woman and the man who were buried beneath time and whose tongues still move in my mouth.

My father speaks French Spanish English Arabic and since Omi entered the home, he also speaks German Charabia, which is to say Algharbiya, which is to say Berber crossed with Westphalian. It is a language that makes use of everything it encounters, incomprehensible beyond the apartment, a language of signs and *Witz*, a tongue of apes and cats. If the cat asks: who took my dictionary? my father raises his left arm, points the index finger of his right hand to the left armpit, and says: *soulbra*. Sometimes he only says 'soulbra' without the mime. 'Soulbra' means 'I do not know' in Westphaloberber Charabia. The etymology of *soulbra* is as follows: Soulbra, from: what is there 'under the arm' ('*sous-le-bras*')? from *sueur*, French for 'sweat'. In German: *Schweiß*; in *Schweiß gebadet*, drenched in sweat; *Schweißstuch*: shroud; *Schweißblatt*: underarm dress shield; *ichSchweißnicht*: I-do-not-know.

IchSchweißnicht is what Omi the German immigrant says dozens of times a day, because she can hardly speak in French.³ So we go Charabiawise from one tongue to another juggling from syllable to syllable. Our tongue is preferably terse, accentuated, tonic, laryngeal. Language is a hoax. Omi cooks the ox tongue in *Sauerbraten* and always saves me the end. Doctor Adida, the dentist, raises *dindon* [turkeys] on the balcony across the street. Whereas we have only a hen. ‘Can you hear Adida’s-chubby-turky?’ cries my father, or rather: *le dindon-dodudadida*, and he promptly recuperates a bonus of pleasure from the dentist across the street. Meanwhile my mother puts K’s everywhere (at our house we eat Karrots, at grandma’s they are still carrots). But what I prefer are the *Kha*, the *ach!* their severe sweetness, their sweet severity, the rasping of their muffled exclamation which to my great regret does not exist in French, and which I only encounter, with their flower of bitterness mixed with the voice of anguish, in the double consonant, my X, my Ks, my Chi, the single unknown that counts for ten.

Arabic, for me, was always the sweet harshness of the German language which grates the fur of its young, the mixture of the firm hand and the combing, the rubbing of the silky muscle of the sexual organ between the teeth, the crossing of dryness and breath, at the edge of expiration.

When I listen to myself write I hear the Arabic of *rue Philippe* shaking the roots of its wings in my ears. I like the word *arbre* [tree]. It is a survivor. There are not many RBR in French. Nor many SKS. Or KFK. I like the name Franz Kafka its rustling of wings in the branches.

And to think that I do not speak Arabic, yet Arabic speaks (to) me.

When I was ten, happiness sadness, my father gave me the last gift: he gave me two teachers one of Arabic the other of Hebrew then he died. Without having known that he was the author of a condemned tale. I don’t know if it was a letter; it was a will that I did not read. It was surely a message but brutally posthumous. I struggled for a while. The two men resembled each other the two alphabets imitated replaced approached repelled each other. What did you say? I cried to my father who was becoming more distant, what did you want to tell me?

But a porch was closed. What have I done? Was this a legacy? An inheritance? Should I speak Hebrew arabically? Should I join prefer separate should I betray love contaminate ride two horses fly two wings one white the other black flow a river from one bank to the other. Or exhausting myself in the competition flee the division the vertigos of the verb *doubler* stop harnessing myself to two carts?

In the end I took up French as a foreign language.

– Is that what you wanted? I cried. Perhaps?

In the distance behind the eternal windowpane my father raised his left arm and gestured to me: ‘*Soulbra.*’

Upon returning, on my first Algerian visit, I was struck with the exhilaration of the miracle: I had never imagined this event. Rediscovering the native country. It seemed so unlikely, too far off to arrive in time. Stowed away in the memory of my losses. In my surprise, I wanted to bring everything out, to recall the images, to open the tombs. And I wanted to free my tongue from its long silence. I would hoist its golden sail, I would unfold its tablecloths and its ornaments. I open, I take out the precious linens and fabrics. It was torn, moth-eaten, rusty, like mémé’s wedding sheets. I set about collecting my possessions. I went back over the premises, I haunted myself.

To think of the treasure I acquired over the course of a few months in Algiers. I see myself clearly sitting at the desk of my father who died in 1948, it took place in his clinic and not in our wild house. The Arabic teacher, soft peachsmooth calm patient slightly absent, his colour a thick transparent brown. How many? Twenty words per lesson? I enriched myself quickly without thinking about it, I was *ohne Verstand* as Omi said, it wasn’t worth much I was at the school of the Law and I swallowed so as to be done with it and not so as to begin. I must have possessed five hundred at least. I knew how to read write count make sentences. I had surprises. I discovered that certain syllables which were as familiar to my ears as the banana or medlar trees were to my eyes my hands my tongue and which I had taken to be voiced fruits had a meaning hidden under the noise. Thus el Bab pivoted opened and closed as a door. This pleased me and displeased me. I lost the opacity of old mysteries. The names which were rock and god were humanised. Everything signified. It was exalting and sad. I lost music and grace. It was as if the sentence of my delight had been flayed and quartered, my forever favourite: ‘Open Sesame!’ it was as if Open-Sesame the beautiful the enigmatic had been blanched and peeled. It was as if a teacher had told me *sesame* means: open up in Arabic. Whereas all the power of the sentence is in this or its [*ce ou cette ou son ou sa*] Sesame, the word one must absolutely not forget and which cannot be grasped rationally by logiferating memory, this word Sesame handsome as a young girl can be handsome promising, promised, he or she, and which opened onto all the riches of the East on the condition that it be pronounced with naiveté belief obedience and the submissiveness of a donkey. Because the untranslatable is what I love. This is why Sesame is so powerful.

But the teachers taught me the equivalents and the synonyms and in

an obscure way I feared losing my cavern of treasures kept pure and unusable. Beautiful.

I possessed, I acquired and I was dispossessed, this manifested itself in my ignorant soul as a timid uprising of my disobediences. I accumulated but there was no future in it. Luckily the Arabic took cover to some extent in the German.

Then I decided to head for ruin. No doubt they were doomed – all this took place behind my thinking – Arabic and Hebrew, Arabic as Hebrew and Hebrew as nothing other than Hebrew – a language that was still without streets and without markets – condemned to descend below the earth with their deceased father mother. After the death of the father who had elected and loved them they fell from the lips like dead skins.

The two languages suffered the same fate as Fips our dog,⁴ they also underwent the disinterest of the family, and the three animals formerly adopted by my father wasted away and were abandoned to dereliction. I did not struggle to save them from oblivion and loaded as they were with my sins I let them wander in the desert like three emaciated goats charged with our misfortunes.

Later on I was always haunted by the three phantom dogs.

Already, in my mouth, on my lips, the two tongues were fading, particularly Hebrew, but I do not know why. Perhaps by chance, but is there chance? – what is it that we call *hasard* in French with the name of a dice-playing Prince in Arabic? – is chance, *hasard*, Arab or Arabic? is the Arabic *hasard* more seductive and chancy than *alea*? – perhaps the Arabic teacher was more rounded glistening musical elegant nearly mute and a trifle absent his polished surface offering less hold for the blows of effacement because he was himself handsomely effaced? I do not know.

And immediately afterwards I went off to conquer German and English the two sisters my cousin mother-aunts, one because it was the language of the country of my mothers whom I cherished, the other to rekindle my mother's quest, my mother who at nineteen left Dresden and Osnabrück to discover England. I bit into the two tongues with relish.

The words that remain

When Ali Baba in person came home to me in Paris, I quickly began to collect my possessions. In loss I am rich! I have not finished doing the accounts. I lost the word milk. It's one I miss. And it was so close so familiar so sweet and morning-fresh. My brother and I went to fetch it. In Oran and then in Algiers. Everything is kept fresh. In Oran on the other side of the *Placedarmes* during the war with a ticket and we

carried the milk can carefully. In Algiers in the Clos Salembier the same can and we went early to the store run by Madame Bals a pig-turned-grocer to stand in line the two little Jews with the little Algerians, our forehead lowered before the thundering ladle of Mme Bals who scolded us and poured the foaming liquid drawn from her casks with cylindrical measures. We bought half a litre or a litre, the poor held out the money for a quarter litre. In the downpour of excremental insults spewed out at us we contemplated: *Le Lait*. Each precious drop like a maternal kiss. We loved it so much.

I have lost the word. But it is enough for me to take Boulevard Laurent-Pichat in the Clos Salembier and in a few steps, on the asphalt across from the barbed-wired lot, among the heavy perfumes of pink oleanders, the words inseparable from the Algerian air and street burst out, they cross above my head the little girls in tears crying Ima Ima Mama! Mama. Then stop short. And the little boys lower their torn shorts, open their fly and point their pistol while proclaiming *le Zeb le Zeb!* Le Zeb king of street-words. My myopia hid the object from me when it appeared more than two metres from me. But I've seen a collection of Zeb up close, and even in my hand and it is an unforgettable word. I still hear this mix of Zeb and bay leaves, the war-cry has remained.

I am waiting for the word milk to return murmuring in Arabic. I'm waiting for it. It shall return. May it return.

Translated by Eric Prenowitz

Notes

1. Between 'this beautiful tongue' and 'the German language'.
2. A book fair where authors sign their books, etc.
3. On this 'translation' of *ichSchweißnicht*, cf. 'Promised Cities', p. 259, in this volume.
4. Cf. Hélène Cixous, 'Stigmata, or Job the Dog', in Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 1998/2005), pp. 204–31 and *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*.

The Book as One of Its Own Characters

Books are characters in books. Between authors and books, not everything can be taken for granted. At the point where the author ('I') thinks s/he can close the door on a chapter, the book puts its foot in the door. If I want to explain myself, the book cuts me off and takes the floor in my stead.

The story I have to tell is the story of writing's violence. I want to write what I cannot write. The book helps me. The book leads me astray, carries me away. *It* wants to write. It wants me to write *it*; I want to write the book I am pursuing with my dreams. Will I ever get it written?

A book is not only writing: it is a weapon; it is a misdeed; it is a race for the secret(s). It is a struggle against memory, for memories. One is in pieces; one patches oneself back together. That is why I love *The Life of Henry Brulard*¹ – a life that is a book in the process of skinning itself, churning its own blood, getting cold feet, arguing energetically about death and destiny in the kitchen. There is food and drink and enough laughter to bring tears, in books where the book makes a commotion. And there is 'no alibi', as my friend Derrida would say.²

I. *Die Ursache* – The Thing

At the beginning of my autobiibliography, I didn't write books, I didn't write, things happened, at night. Others would have said 'books' perhaps. But I called them *things*, these residues of nocturnal earthquakes and convulsions. Living speaking frightening things. Untitled lava flow, spread by cracks in the soul. While the author sleeps, the *auctor*, s/he who increases, who founds, the *auctor* who has the right, the power, to command, to sign, to recognise, sleeps, the Earth rolls onto its side and opens up lips of wounds. In the morning one found

things, as repulsive as poor Gregor Samsa.³ These were still, at that time, the daynights when I wasn't there. Except that already the *Where* was there, an infernal garden, locked away inside the City. The Garden of Things.

The daynights when I would not for anything in the world have put my name to those animated things that had dropped from the mental entrails of the being that was in my place or in whose place I was myself, these were endless hours, uplifted, haunted, invaded by armies that ended up in the morning with a battleground where I scarcely dared walk, columns of insects occupied the walls, there were footprints or pawprints on the paper on my table, and everywhere there were remnants, droppings, fragments, tales, dream-gasps, memories of events flayed bare. Someone was hurriedly jotting down visions, accidents, primitive scenes, in my handwriting, obeying the order to write, an order issued by no one, issued by (the) Order itself, by the City or the Emperor, some orderer with no identity and no face, but who was sending letters to me, already a book, which it was unthinkable that I could evade. I gave in. I gave up in spite of myself and separately from myself. I am still giving in, separation is always part of me still, as it was in the beginning. What has changed is the terror.

I have finally gotten into the habit of this ordering (or order-giving).

The Things were by no means inert, they moved, it was awful. They were still there. They wouldn't go away until note had been taken of their shapes and their statements. It was windy, the wind raged, one walked in darkness on half-buried squirrels that one didn't dare touch.

'The author', that is, the slave of these nocturnal events who would later stop running away from the scandal and admit defeat, in my name, was like Goya's half-buried dog.⁴ I had never seen that Dog before, that half-Dog, it remained halfway between life and death between earth and heaven in an ochre storm spilled out by Goya in the opening onto a void, in Madrid, as soon as I saw it, the day I saw it, it was I, that day, without hesitation, I saw the portrait of my soul, it too *unearthed*, myself as my yellow-nose dog half alive despite the embrace of death. It was as if I had found the proof and the origin.

I recognised my lava and my larva.

At the beginning of the beginnings, there was a bombardment. Volcanic eruptions. According to me it wasn't communicable. You don't publish *lava*. These weren't letters: lava. As they settle, though, under the pen that notes, they grow by one letter. *Larva*. Now they are *larvae*. They don't know how well they put it. Larvae bring up in us a slight unjust feeling of repulsion, unjust like every slightly justified

repulsion: at issue is the deficiency in our soul, our acquired taste for the definite, the situated. A larva – an insect larva: it's not this, not that, it's an embryonic form peculiar to insects that are also not this and not that, like the timeless cockroach on which the whole life of G. H. runs aground and cracks its keel.⁵

These *things*, roaches, larvae, they terrify and fascinate us. But before the French language designated as 'larva' an intermediate state in insectuous genetics, rather late, in the eighteenth century, before landing on the body of those half-buried, half-immersed thing-beings, the word *larva* had lurked in homes. At that time larvae were the spirits of the dead, who pursue the living, spirits in Latin. The origin of larva is *lar*. If I were Edgar Allan Poe, I would call it *art* [*l'art*]. The *lares* were called gods, charged with protecting the hearths of Roman life, they looked after the living whom as spirits of the dead they had earlier pursued. Lares, larvae, ancient infernal spirits, turned back into their opposites in the ambivalent turn described by Freud. But the threat is never forgotten. People ask the very spirits they fear to protect their delicate inner hearths. They ask death to guard life, yes. Everything larval is as bad as it is good, living as much as it is dying, attractive because it is repulsive, terrifying because it is inexplicably seductive. In this larval time I was not yet acquainted with the Freudian concept of *unheimlich* but I experienced it quite often. For larvae, in spite of myself, in spite of my repulsion, I had a weakness, a *Faible* as the Germans say. Let us note that a 'Faible' is always a haunting, a foreign spirit-body that one fails to reject in one's inner hearth, one accuses it and accepts it. Thus I had in spite of myself and because of my dead ones in myself – my father and the nameless succession in his wake – a 'Faible' (pronounced 'fay-buhl' in German) for larvae, of the same breed as lava, those thing-beings whose state shifts between two states. Because larvae are not embryos within the maternal body, they lead a life, free, neither herenorthere, outside the egg, that's what worries me, they are not yet but already.

There had been the bombings of Oran, the bombardments of war, with bombs, descent into the shelters, warning sirens, space becomes extremely vertical, life is a cord stretched between two non-extremities, between above and below ground, between horror and jubilation.

Later I saw cities that had become bombed out: the inside on display, the privacy of domestic life exposed. Anatomy Lesson. The Guttred City. Lethargic. Seeing what is hidden causes a shudder. One can't prevent oneself from looking at what one shouldn't see. London strafed, split open, ribs cracked in 1950 still. Manhattan already ruined, crumbling in 1964.

There was (had been) the bombing of Salzburg, yet another. Yet another. A series of bombardments. Some shatter the chest of the natal City. Others crush the images of destiny, daydreams, childhood hopes.

We are born to be bombed and to see suddenly familiar places and ordinary things become naked and spectacular. Then the outside reaches the inside and the inside displays itself brazenly, and there is nothing we can do about it. It is like that mathematical phenomenon called Klein's Bottles, an inconceivable thing, yet one that exists, a volume whose outside is inside.

I shall be able to give the name of my bombardments.

The Destruction of the world does not happen only once.

There are Mines of evil.

When my father left, leaving an earthsized crater in the place of the Universe, I thought that everything 'had happened'. I thought it was *The End* and *The First Cause*.

But another Apocalypse follows another Apocalypse. As we have known since the Apocalypse, the vision of the Apocalypse takes one's breath away. One remains without a voice for a very long time.

As soon as one can recount, there is something like an appeasement of the household gods. But for forty years there is an impossibility of any narrative. Forty years: always *forty years* of desert or muteness. The fainting spell lasts forty years. Then memory starts up again. During the fainting, a world remains, a population untold, well hidden, crouching in the corners, in the stairwell, larvae of young ones condemned to death, who return as soon as they are dead who besiege us and whom we besiege.

The End is not the end. No more than *the* beginning begins.

Once my first son died, I was begun again. There is not *an Ursache*. There is no *Once and for all*. There was not just one country lost. Nor just one son dead.

What the advent (event) of the inexact child caused me (before his return to me forty years after our common end, after we both ended):⁶

a slippage, disarray, dislocation, dissolution of borders, a discrediting of the world

a mockery of destiny with respect to calculations: the intrusion into real existence of tragic irony, a device I thought reserved for heroes of the Theatre.

The inexact child was the irruption of the unforeseen, the incalculable, into the presumption of calculations. I was twenty-two years old,

unknowing and totally calm. I was at anchor. I remained in the silence of its inexactness for exactly thirty-nine years.

Slippage, metonymy, replacement, substitution are the spirits that came in beneath the unreadable countenance of the child born to me unknown. The letter of intrusion into my consciousness, not yet formed, of philosophic irony, was delivered by a neitherthisnorthat child, a backwards dream [*un rêve à l'envers*].

In shock there is a mental calling off: what one believed one had under control escapes. The expected child arrives without arriving. The child-thing does not come into its place. In its place disquiessence oscillates.⁷

What is a child? What is a human being? The words like normal, law, own, all the inherited terms, the terms of inheritance, sink away. Questions come to us violently, take us by surprise, without asking or waiting for a response, no, the questions come *in place of* responses, they respond by mocking our irresponsibility, a global interrogation makes us slip and fall in the street, shakes our cliché-beliefs.

And what is this odd thing, a book?

* * *

Two Scenes:

1: *The doll's hand*

2: *Madison's parrot*⁸

The Bombardment bombards space and also time. Suddenly time breaks. At the very moment of bombardment, time pulls back from under my feet. Time's path collapses in front of me. The future disappears behind a horizon of clouds. The present has slid underground. One looks at the very moment of bombardment from the viewpoint of a cooled-down future. A time has been killed. One no longer knows what side one is on. The human beings who were persons and people an hour ago probably lie under a sentence that flees itself in erratic leaps, as if it could not make up its mind to 'let go', to deliver the message of death. The sentence throws itself into a segmented trajectory, it takes off with a wobbly gallop like a horse that keeps on running with a broken hoof, it is only by stumbling over and over that it approaches what it was hiding and in the end collapses, before the immense heap of smoking ruins under which the fragments of time and their former inhabitants are most likely piled up, as if *changed all at once into dead ones by death*, as Thomas Bernhard writes.

Careful. Because by continuing under the bombardments we are going to reach the place-moment where writing has its source. Is born of a crevasse between the annihilated world and the next one, from which a night wells up overpopulated with somewhat foreign beings.

It is (will be) recognised by the fact that one does (not) recognise this thing that springs forth, unspeakable, through a crack. Unspeakable: captivating. Like beauty. There is scarcely any distance between the thing of horror and the thing of beauty. There is war, the cause of the instantaneous and totally unforeseeable mutation of species.

At the edge of the abyss one needs to rush into keeping a diary of the inconceivable, so as not to *fall into* madness. One writes madness in order to keep it there at one's side and not fall into it. To dwell in impotence and not drown. In a stabilised disqualification, gradually accommodated.

There had just been a bombing. The inhabitants had suddenly changed species. Some were now dead people, others had undergone a different mutation: they had become 'Seekers'. Scavengers, that's what they were.

'At that moment', says Thomas Bernhard in *Die Ursache*, 'I saw all the powerlessness of those who had entered into the war without transition.'⁹

As if one had passed *without transition* from one country to another, this is how it is to enter without an entrance, to leap over time. Yesterday has become dizzyingly remote. Yesterday has dropped to the bottom of the pluperfect.

Then Thomas Bernhard takes the road that leads to Gstättengasse. In front of the Bürgerspital church, he *had walked* (that was yesterday, but a yesterday carried off in the story of the depths of the pluperfect), he had stepped on a 'soft object'.

I believed, when I glimpsed this soft object (*weichen Gegenstand*) [while I was glancing at the *Gegenstand*], that it was a doll's hand (*eine Puppenhand*), my classmates too had thought it was a doll's hand, but it was a child's hand, torn from a child. It was only when I saw the child's hand that this first American bombing of my hometown ceased being a *sensational event* exciting the boy I had been and became a *horrible intervention of violence* and a catastrophe.¹⁰

The turning point is there: everything is turned in a foreign sense. It is only *at that moment* that what had been able to pass for *eine Sensation* can become something else entirely: a thing belonging to the realm of theatre and of excess. Everything changes. Everything leaps onto a land mine, including tenses. From one second to another, one stops being a little boy and moves on to the pluperfect of fatality. Time and tense leap around that unprecedented *thing* that has to be read in German for its full import to sink in. It is the story of a doll's hand, a *Puppenhand*. It is a story of *Puppenhand*. The story is in German, a language that

makes compound words readily and in large numbers. Where we say, in English, a doll's hand, 'the hand of a doll', German says a *Puppenhand*, a *dollhand*. A hand-held-reported-defined-undetachable. We decompose, we articulate; in German, it is the opposite, the word makes a single whole of bits and pieces, a single word that shakes its own hand.

Another striking word here: *ein Gegenstand*, the object, a word that now commonly has a philosophical value. There in the street someone steps on an 'object' that belongs to the philosophical sphere. Other words express the object in German, from the word *objekt* to the thing, *das Ding*. But little by little *Gegenstand* takes up space in the German language, it is made up of *stand*, the being there, an upright being, and *gegen*, which expresses 'against' in all senses of the word 'against', what is very close, what is right up against, but also what may be the against of antagonism. *Gegen* is also what is toward, around, about. Around this time, the word *gegen* is used. The 'object' is what holds together in a region that is defined by directions, orientations, proximities or distancings that are *gegen*.

Then Gstätten Street in front of the church, he steps on a *Gegenstand* that expresses the indefinite, the against, the thing that is not-me (an irreplaceable word, it has to be translated in English by 'object', which is not wrong, since *ob*, the Latin *ob*, ob/ject, functions a little like *gegen/stand*, but *Gegenstand* is more abstract, more cerebral than the word object).

*Auf dem Weg in die Gstättingasse war ich auf dem Gehsteig, vor der Bürgerspitalskirche, auf einen weichen Gegenstand getreten, und ich glaubte, es handle sich [. . .]*¹¹

I emphasise this *handle* through which, surreptitious, the hand arrives; *handle* in English really means 'manipulate', the hand is at work. In German, *handeln* has the sense of 'to be in question'. But this completely trivial word puts the hand, *Hand*, in circulation. As if *before* the exact nature of the *Gegenstand* comes to clear consciousness, a phantom hand were already saying its name, by premonition.

*[. . .] es handle sich, wie ich auf den Gegenstand schaute, um eine Puppenhand, auch meine Mitschüler hatten geglaubt, es handelte sich um eine Puppenhand [. . .]*¹²

*[. . .] I thought it 'was a question', while I was looking at the *Gegenstand*, of a doll's-hand, and my classmates too had thought that it *was a question of a dolls-hand* [. . .]*¹³

But all at once the hand is not what it is thought to be, that false hand is nothing other than a hand that had been – before *looking like* a simulacrum of a hand – a hand of another species, a hand articulated with a child, a hand of a third kind: neither a doll’s nor a child’s, but more exactly: a child’s-hand-torn-from-a-child

[. . .] *aber es war* eine von einem Kind abgerissene Kinderhand gewesen.¹⁴

[. . .] but it was a-from-a-child-torn-child’s-hand.¹⁵

See the gap in the observation of the difficulty of the adjustment: *Kinderhand/Puppenhand*. We are not told: but it was a child’s hand. Nor are we told: it was a hand torn from a child. We are told that it was a *Kinderhand* torn from a child. In a wholly subtle way, he tells us that what has been torn from a child is not its hand, not a hand, it is a *Kinderhand*. In fact there is no clear separation between *Kinderhand* and *Puppenhand*. If someone tears off one of your legs, you will not say that it is a man’s leg torn from a man. What the sentence says in an *unheimlich* way, an uncanny way, is that what has been torn from a child is a child’s-hand. Species arise, like the species of *seekers*, scavengers-in-ruins. Here is another still unknown species: it ‘is a question’ of a child’s-hand, which is comparable, substitutable and which is confused with a doll’s-hand. And in that moment when one is stepping on the deceptive thing one is slipping into the world in which only writing can render these slippages, these humanisations-dehumanisations. (I shall add too that one can allow oneself to think about the *von*, if one does not remain in a sort of realist respect for the scene, because that *von* could function like a child’s hand, but it can also mean by a child. We are not going to think that it is by a child, but there is a multivalent ambiguity in the *von* that can make us think about this.)

This *Kinderhand* is struck, contaminated by thingification: if it has been stepped on because it was thought to be a doll’s hand, this is because it is a sort of doll’s hand. A child’s-hand-torn-from-a-child becomes a *Puppenhand*, becomes a *Gegenstand*, a sort of object, it is a piece, a scrap, a scrap but one that is a whole, and it is a sort of terrifying thing. Someone has torn a-child’s-hand from a child, as if that *Kinderhand* were a *foreign* supplement *proper* to the child’s body. Through that hand-that-was-a child’s, that hand disconnected from the human and reconnected to the human by its very detachment, through that lost, mutated hand, writing comes. I place my foot on a hand that puts its hand on my soul. A very slight hostility shoves my thought along.

We have just arrived at the genetic moment of all writing, all litera-

ture. I thought it was a doll's hand, but the doll was not a doll, and the child was no longer a child. The doll and the child rub shoulders. You remember the riddle of the cemetery in *Hamlet*. Hamlet interrogates the gravedigger: 'What man dost thou dig it for?' 'For no man, sir.' 'What woman, then?' 'For none, neither.'¹⁶ It is for a thing, I am digging for some thing that was man or woman, that is no longer man or woman, and that is one of those indefinable appearances that are alongside us, man, woman child, human being, like and totally unlike, and that bring into our experience the feeling of alteration, of otherness, of another species which we are. That happens to us *Gegen*. With *Gegen* writing begins to be born, in the murky region of connections, recognitions, identifications, margins, and for that, for this foreign *Gegend* to take place, this disturbance of separations, of distinctions, there has to have been bombardment.

Suddenly, one writes. One writes *things*, which are foreign things come forth from our night. One writes *with* a foreign body, a child's-hand-torn from our childhood. One recognises nothing.

Later, much later, I get used to calling my former larvae books.

I Want the Free [libre]. The Free Book, the Book Unbound, Unbooked.

Saved from funereal publishers' fairs, false politeness. Books are not what they want us to think, not the chastened made-to-order compelled to mould and flow into the flowmould of the printed volume, and muzzled in the bargain: when one becomes a book one must not sing, shout, whisper, or – especially – be silent.

But the book when it arrives, in all its states it vibrates, growls, sings and often remains silent.

In my book there are chickens, dogs, insects. Reciting a lesson Rousseau sees a fly land on his hand. A fly lesson, that is what the book gives me in passing. A lesson of silence surrounding/source of the buzzing.¹⁷

There are pains as well. The pains do not speak in a linear, monotone fashion. They crack. They shout and go on shouting. Suddenly break off.

Everything that happens to the breath, to the soul, makes music that I make my book play back to me with no holds barred. Language can render everything about the soul, grammar has infinite resources, it acrobats, it sinuates and bends, it has the spine of a cat, it can pass the subject's head between its sentence-feet.

Into the published volume, in the middle of the story, I let in, let pass,

an irruption of forgettings: for example the mongoloid chorus.¹⁸ The percussion chorus of chickens.

It resembles a scene on stage animated solely by interruptions. Stops, fishbones, angles, tracing the agitation of the soul. It resembles the pauses in a Beethoven score.

I adore Stendhal in his personal writing: he gallops down a street in Grenoble, swoops into a ravine, holds back his sentence at the last possible moment. Pulls himself together. I am wandering he says. And takes off in the opposite direction. True false movements. I adore miswanderings. Versatility is life and vice-versa-tility.

Sentences

There is a bond of exchange-engendering between the fact that we – persons, beings, *Mensch* – produce, send forth, emit things from and of the soul that are Sentences, and the virtual presence of a book that awaits only the right moment to make itself manifest.

We are chattered chatterers. Exhalers-breathers of sentences (= precipitations, *elocutions* of soul states). Words, sentences (1) express (2) shape our state and our fate.

I am a registrar, a gatherer of sentences. Here there ought to be a long dreamy reflection on the semantic, syntactic mystery of a sentence. Sometimes nominal, a body without a verb, a movement without a motor. Sometimes without a subject, without a master, a direction without a driver.

A book lurks, waiting, alert, pulling itself together – a long gestation, years, decades.

A Body pulls itself together, articulates itself. Striker-spirits. Struck. A foreign body prepares itself to speak in the place of my more or less familiar body.

Sentences are the spirits of books.

Sentences are the genetic keys, the unwitting avowals, the minimal beacons, the steam engines, the tanks, the horses, the skein . . .

In every book a sentence lives in secret, a diamond hidden in the paper, under the story.

It is the book's co-signature, its seal. Its confession and its regret. For example this one: 'Was I happy? No, I tasted pleasure.'¹⁹ Or this one: 'I should have been happy: I was not.'²⁰ Or this one:

My imagination had been employed forestalling the harm my tyrants did me and cursing them; as soon as I was free, at H, in my mother's drawing-room, I

had the leisure to develop a taste for something. My passion was: medallions moulded in plaster from hollow mounds of sulphur. Before I had had a minor passion: a love of thorn-sticks, gnarled sticks cut from hawthorn hedges, I believe; game-shooting.

My father and Séraphie had curbed both of them. That for thorn-sticks vanished under the jibes of my uncle; that for shooting, based on the voluptuous reveries nurtured by M. Le Roy's landscape and the lively images my imagination had manufactured when reading Ariosto, became a frenzy, meant that I adored *La Maison rustique*, Buffon, that I wrote about animals, and expired finally only from a surfeit. At Brunswick, in 1808, I was one of the leaders on shoots on which we killed fifty or sixty hares with peasants as beaters. Killing a doe horrified me, that horror has grown. Today I can think of nothing more contemptible than turning a charming bird into four ounces of dead flesh.

If my father in his bourgeois fearfulness had allowed me to go out shooting, I would have been more agile, which would have helped me in the war. There I was agile only by dint of being *strong*.

I shall speak again about shooting, let us return to the medallions. [. . .]

After four or five years of the deepest and most banal unhappiness, I only breathed then when I found myself alone and locked up in the apartment of the Rue des Vieux-Jésuites, a place I had detested until then.²¹

I love long, segmented, maddening, auto-erotic, obsidional sentences, convoluted hypotaxes, distillations, stills, alchemy dreaming of the Whole and of Gold. I love parataxis. Stops. Decisions. Falls. I love nominals. I love. *J'aime*. Gems.

I read the intimate Stendhal out of passion for his rhythms. He streaks ahead like a horse like a hound at the hunt like a hunted hare like a falcon like a false consul I mean a false Nap., as he called Napoleon. I read the intimate Derrida out of passion for his Stendhalian sentences. 'I am the last of the Jews'²² he says 'I posthumate the way I breathe' he says.²³ Out of passion for the way he rides clichés, his way of spurring on everyday language.

A Book Happens

Where do books come from?

A surprising message, sent by a yesterday-foreigner who has today become a fateful necessary stranger.

For a book to come, one must go to a quite foreign country, be born into another memory. It is always a matter of a *found manuscript*. Describe Sweden, describe the raised stones of *Ales Stenar* at the southern tip of Sweden. There are, in that place where the earth thrusts the tip of its tongue into the sea, up high, where the sky comes down to earth, fifty-six raised stones left – in prayer? – once

upon a time by a Viking about whom we no longer know anything at all, a legacy of stone, with commentary by a countless chorus of totally invisible larks. On this timeless jetty there remains a book that is like a boat. Every book is a boat that remains on land after a crossing.

The boat: the stem is the plough, the sea is ploughed and seeded, the earth is ploughed and seeded and we do not know it.

Describe Rome ruined alive seen from a rock on Mount Janiculus a magnificent sun is shining, every time, it is here, one tells oneself, that the *Transfiguration* (Raphael's) was admired for two and a half centuries. The idea of Transfiguration transfigures us; for a book to come, there must be a City where all memories come flocking back; a city ancient and modern with tombs and gardens, archives and apparitions. And in the city, a solitude. A solitude sitting on my lap, and without which I would feel alone.

Add to that an enormous inner chaos, a commotion of the nooks and crannies, griefs rising nameless, mournings without objects, regrets without attributes . . . Fears that have taken flight. Fears.

Long muzzled months.

Immense events powerfully minimised (failed love, dead child, betrayal, salvaged love . . .)

The Soul seeks an image in which it can resemble itself.

* * *

A book arrives from a country that yesterday one does not know.

There is a giant called Finn – who clings to a pillar and merges with it in the crypt of the cathedral in Lund. Pillar and giant are inseparable like construction and ruin.

That is it: the figure of the book. When one has encountered it one has received it like an arrow in the shoulder, yet one has not recognised it. But it has fished us out.

Finn comes back, as James Joyce remembered. The end, comes back – to begin.

Hospitalities

How does the book reach me, from where? When? In the summer. The season of birthings. Subterranean origins, multiple. It gathers like a slow, subtle storm. Readies itself. I do not know it.

Until the moment it sends me *its first signs*. Glimmers, phrases, emotions that belong to the world of writing.

I recognise them with a delay. They are already in place, writing. I recognise them by joy. A sensation of greeting. I open the doors: Welcome! I say. I do not yet know to whom. A hospitality begins.

The book signals, makes 'its signs'.

It advances by annunciations, by representatives. As in the Bible, one does not recognise them but one receives them. Like it or not. The widow of Zarephath says to Elijah: 'I have nothing to eat.' Elijah, the book, says: 'Do not worry, I tell you that there is what you need in your home. Believe me.'

I open the doors. A little girl comes in half devoured.

A film about Eichmann.

A square in Paris, St.-Germain-des-Prés, May 1 with false dogs, false explorers.

A three-legged dog.

What is that? An inventory? The day I am not there?

What happens. Blows from the world. Fair or foul.

My instinct, my law: let the blows reach me. Write 'The Day I Was Not There.'²⁴

I obey, I listen.

I love *voices*. Docility in the face of storms.

The City is full of Voices. It seems to me that there is always (a) city in my book. I am in my book as in a city, foreign. The city of my own birth, foreign. Like my mother, foreign.

There is a foreign city in the city of my birth and vice versa: there is a birthplace city that keeps watch for me in every foreign city. I could have been born elsewhere. Was I born in Oran or in Osnabrück? I was born of Osnabrück in Oran, of Oran in Osnabrück. From Osnabrück to Montaigne. From Montaigne to New York. The City is the first book that I read that read me. With all my body, all my blood, all my tears. I was inside.

I live in a book, I travel a book. And the other way round.

Die Ursache is the name of a book by Thomas Bernhard. It begins with these words: '*Die Stadt ist,*' ('The City is,').²⁵ These words are followed after the comma by a sentence of incredible length, segmented, a jumble of clauses. But first there is the City as Being.

The origin of the origin, the beginning of Beginnings: there is a City, there was a City.

The City is always big, it is always a kingdom and a people. Even

‘small’, it is large. Even small like Troy and its three thousand inhabitants it is large like all memory, all literature. A City is – to take.

Even if we leave it behind it never leaves us in peace. It recalls itself. To what extent do Oran, Algiers, never stop recalling themselves while passing through and passing for Osnabrück or New Delhi?

The city space is crisscrossed with pleasures and hostilities. Especially hostilities. The first Cities in literature are cities under siege. We too, are cities under siege from inside and out. The most powerful enemy is within.

The city space puts the originary kernel into orbit, the originary polemic kernel, the *polémos*, the warrior kernel, there is where it always begins; it is the family table, that is where war, conflict, polemics begin, in a room, in a play, in the dining room. And then it dilates, expands, and we have the city, and the city is merely a play in which a war is taking place. Either it is war, the one Thomas Bernhard describes for us in *The Origin, die Ursache*, and it is a stroke of luck, it is not a metaphor, and it has a power of extraordinary degradation, deflagration. This does not mean that war is not metaphor, it can reach us only with its metaphors, as metaphor. So either it is that war, with bombs, planes, antiaircraft defence, or else it is a larval war with virtual bombs, and from there we shall nevertheless return to the situation of polemics that is *the spirit of the city*. Next one has all the places, all the pieces, all the scenes that are arranged on the great stage of the city, and every time they are miniatures of the city, or on the contrary enlargements of the family scene.

In Rousseau there are countless examples. In his peregrinations he goes from city to city, from dwelling to residence, where every time events take place that are in themselves stage plays, events of *polémos*, overt or covert confrontations, between representatives of classes, or between representatives of passion. The counterpoints points of flight, of evasion, of repose are always ephemeral, brief moments on islands or in woods. Retreats, refuges, shelters.

* * *

Shelters

The word *shelters* [*abris*], its charm in my childhood; its etymological charm: from the Latin *apricari*, to warm oneself in the sun. When the sirens sounded the alarm, at night, in Oran we went down as a family to ‘warm ourselves in the sun’ in a basement on the Rue des Jardins. Shelters are not on earth. They are underground, they are anti-aircraft

shelters, tunnels, lairs, caverns, caves. The mother of all caves is Plato's. Afterward it multiplies into apocalyptic dwellings, places where books are hatched.

Or else they are caves on high floors, offices, small rooms that protect the four delicious solitary occupations whose generic names Proust supplies – reading dreaming tears voluptuousness.²⁶ These four occupations are what put books into gear. But all these rooms are places of origin of primitive *visions*. They are camera, chambers (*Kamera, Kammer*), boxes for manufacturing images; and sometimes shoe boxes, like the one in which I lay Fips my martyred dog²⁷ or the one in which Jacques Derrida raised his silkworm.²⁸

The City is an enlargement of the shoebox inhabited by small animals. The Theatre is its synecdoche. There one is always playing life against death. Thomas Bernhard played with the idea of suicide on his violin in the little room full of shoes.

The book is a City in reduced form. There one plays at suicide. The book has the form of a fossil shoebox.

II. The Book Makes Its Entrance

Theatre of the Book

23-10-2000. Dreamed last night fully awake that I was writing the next book, I was beginning to write it in the middle of the night, in a highly awakened dream state, what I was writing rapidly with intensity power and a dense and rhythmic awareness, a symphonic cadence was telling the story of the beginnings of a book, it was gathering together all the events and circumstances of writing that were produced around the author's plan, her desire and her personal life, the book followed itself step by step, noted its own reflections, remembered the drafting of a text, *das Urteil*, which one night of feverish notation had sufficed to bring to light, it resembled, it thought, a member of the family of texts similar to a herd of human zebras or wild horses, animal things, nocturnal aboriginals, geniuses, creatures produced by authors in the grip of a deafening trance

I was writing in a thick, lucid bustle, rushed by the shortness of the time of the dream, I was gathering together the daytime causes of this upheaval, during the week I had read the story *das Urteil*,²⁹ at least I thought I had followed its unfolding seated in the first row of the pit, but now the story had transformed itself into a hallucination, had gone to my head, had passed into my blood, had spread through my brain, I

had smelled its odour, I was hearing its street noises, it was totally contagious, I caught it

I was in its danger

all at once the whole workroom some structure was vibrating I was a city, I was in a city, I was rooming, I was roaming past the pages of the beginning, the subject of my book was its own construction, it was its battlefield, its factory, its maternity clinic but at the same instant I was struck by the idea of the world, of howeverness: for during this lying-in the world around me was in labour, the book that was developing in darkness and promising to be strong and well-nourished was fated to encounter the violent world story that lay in wait for it outside like a twin born barely an hour before. At the window of the room in which, legs crossed under the table, head down, hands (the left hand) clutching the paper so it would hold still under the pen that was engraving its spine body bent, weighing, on the body I was fashioning with the hardness that creates, I was sacrificing all of life to the process, shots rang out in close succession, salvos shouts of rage as dense and tireless in their repetition as contractions and the sprays of words that the book was phrasing.

It came to my mind obsessed by the vital fomentation that the book did not know that it was the offspring of a war, did not yet know this, that it was being born in the night which forgets, in the grace of a night, but since night is short, but deep thick vast enough for a work to develop and ripen in it entirely occupied with its own mystery, it does not yet know, the work, happily immersed in the night water, bathed in oblivion and misreading, it believes while believing it holds all of itself in itself. Thus begins a book like a god delighting in the pleasure of his own gestures, totally absorbed in the play of a sentence, hypnotised by the linking of words, captivated to the bone, it does not hear the clamour, the bursting of shells, the screams of rage, it remains deaf for hours, as if dead, as if totally anaesthetised, as if a soul become paper,

as if unaware of the blood, the weather, the dismemberments

as if it could not be torn up

seated in the depth of a night legs crossed under the immortal table for hours,

as if drowned by the hours in a mad insolence

as if for want of drowning a traitor to the twin who is screaming in the street

as if a larval worm in the process of larval absorption

as if absorbed – absolved – and without sin

and without sin for six or seven hours, at least, not more.

In the beginning the book absorbs everything it is completely absorbed

in its birthing, on the watch for its fleeting images, leaning over its own edge, it is fishing, it is the fisherman the line the fished-out the dragged-up the sin. It hears nothing it sees nothing except the line held out from its hand toward the object of all its wishes. How beautiful it is that line whose far end is lost in the sparkling page of the water. In the beginning the book thinks only of the line, thinks of thinking the line all the way to its end, following it, remembering it suddenly forever, its brilliant long stroke, taking pleasure in each of its points, not moving away from it while enjoying the straightness of its thrust, seizing the spurt, the purity, the secret of its charm. It pours its whole self into fishing, into sinning, for this is all it likes to do.

What is sinning? Write the story from ten o'clock at night to six o'clock in the morning on the night of the 22nd/23rd. The terrible fatigue and the joy, the way the story unfolded before me while I made my way through water. Several times that night I bore my own weight on my back. How everything can be risked, how for all the strangest ideas there waits a great fire in which they are reduced to ashes and rise up again. The sight of the intact bed, as if it had just been transported into the room, Kafka wrote on the 23rd at seven o'clock in the morning. The certainty that I am in the shameful dregs of writing. Only thus can one write, only in this contemplative state, only with such a total opening of the body and the soul can one accomplish the sin of writing. An opening onto the shameless depths, far, far away from the world hurrying by in the street. The shots ringing out on the bridge go unheard.

Between ten o'clock and six o'clock in the morning.

Suddenly the door opens the maid crosses the hall, I wrote the last sentence. Or else it is the reverse: I wrote the last sentence when the door opened and the maid came in. This is the sin: in the story G. B. is writing a letter to the friend who is living abroad. It is a long letter. Once the letter is written G. B. thinks about it, about the letter he has just written. With the letter in his hand he remains seated at his desk his face turned toward the window. The pages pass, from ten o'clock to six o'clock in the morning. G. B. follows the thread of the letter that he is holding in his hand. A friend passes by in the street. The friend offers greetings in vain. The man who is sinning barely responds with an absent smile. He is under the shameful spell of the book.

At the end – of the time – of the absence – of the story – the door opens. All at once. The world enters. The maid. A burst of rifle fire breaks out.

Has the writerdreamer the dreamwriter plunged into the dregs of the soul far away from the world by writing? Or rather in order to write has he plunged in farther and farther away from the world? Has he fled

the world in writing? Has he written in order to flee? Or has he lost the world while pursuing a sentence for hours?

– All at once a burst of rifle fire erupts, the pen falls from his hands. Or the opposite. As long as he holds the pen he does not hear the bullets whistling.

How forgettable this world is, how one can move forward in the water of the other world carrying one's own weight on one's back for six hours, pursuing the unfolding of a sentence. Suddenly the door slams. The world is rolling along on paving stones. Two men are running across the bridge. They are tossing a young wounded fellow about. The boy is losing a lot of blood. The shirt is drinking it in. The clarity of this red strikes me with astonishment. Everything is so clear. The blood, the noise, the blue of the sky. Clarities like these are unforgettable. One cannot turn one's gaze away. They open violent windows in the book. Rifles are spitting out green flames.

III. The Letter

There is always a letter in the Book

The Book writes a letter

The book writes another letter, a letter other than the one it thought it wanted to write.

The book is always another letter, an other letter.

A letter is missing. The 600 letters from my father arrive all at once like 'a single man'

The last letter is missing, the book says.

All the letters are missing: they arrive: That means: they are not yet arriving, they are going to arrive. The Messiah is arriving! The future present.

The book is written in the place of the letter that one will never write. One thinks about it. One flees from it.

Kafka's *Judgment Letter* (Das Urteil)

Georg writes a letter. *To a faraway friend*. It is his letter. His letter to himself.

How to send it? To whom to send it?

He closes it slowly, fiddling with it, tapping it.

He looks out of the window. One can see the river. The other bank – The other book. He is on this book and he sees the other book. Between the two lips the tongue flows –

He slips the letter into his pocket. The letter is in his pocket. It begins to act on him.

Unknowingly he does what the letter dictates. It writes him. He does everything that he would never have done and that he should not do. Instead of going to mail the letter to his friend, and to that end leaving his house and crossing over to the mailbox he crosses the narrow hallway he goes to his father's bedroom in which he has not set foot for months and he goes in. There he is in the box

Letters are manifestations of the disorder of our times. We are temporally disordered, we are prey to Time that is to its essential discordance.

We are divided, buffeted, displaced in place, passed by in the very moment.

The nowlessness, the mindlessness of letters frightens me.

Their elusiveness, their craftiness, their transgressive power. They are always virtually posthumous. Between departure and arrival how much time, how many years, and even death.

In French, letter and being, *lettre* and *l'être*, are homophonous twins. As soon as I say one I am saying the other. Being is letter is being. Always stolen.

What am I saying! At the moment I write I have passed, I am past, you are future thus past, neither the one nor the other is ever present at the same instant.

Deconstruction of the illusion of communion.

'Regret?' No. Sad and marvellous pleasure of the mystery of the human spirit which is carved into time.

Letter: always missed appointment.

Love letters: we write them anyway, with despair. Letter always says: we missed each other we miss each other, I miss you, you are lacking to me, I am filled with your absence. K. to Milena: I loved you too late

*Sero te amavi*³⁰

They say we miss each other in reality but in eternity which does not know time it is written that we met, we passed through this place, 'in time'

Love letters are in truth traces in/for whoever will come later.

Sometimes I have the feeling that we're in one room with two opposite doors and each of us holds the handle of one door, one of us flicks an eyelash and the other is already behind his door, and now the first one has but to utter a word and immediately the second one has closed his door behind him and can no longer be seen. He's sure to open the door again for it's a room which perhaps one cannot leave. If only the first one were not precisely like the second, if he were calm, if he would only pretend not to look at the other,

if he would slowly set the room in order as though it were a room like any other; but instead he does exactly the same as the other at his door, sometimes even both are behind the doors and the beautiful room is empty.
[. . .]

You must also consider, Milena, the kind of person who comes to you, the 38-year journey lying behind me (and since I'm a Jew an even much longer one), and if at an apparently accidental turning of the road I see you, whom I've never expected to see and least of all so late, then, Milena, I cannot shout, nor does anything shout within me, nor do I say a thousand foolish things, they are not in me (I'm omitting the other foolishness of which I have more than enough), and the fact that I'm kneeling I discover perhaps only through seeing your feet quite close before my eyes, and by caressing them.

And don't demand any sincerity from me, Milena. No one can demand it from me more than I myself and yet many things elude me, I'm sure, perhaps everything eludes me. But encouragement on this hunt does not encourage me, on the contrary, I can then no longer take one step, suddenly everything becomes a lie and the hunted choke the hunter. I'm on such a dangerous road, Milena. You're standing firmly near a tree, young, beautiful, your eyes subduing with their radiance the suffering world. We're playing 'skatule skatule hejbejte se', I'm creeping in the shade from one tree to another, I'm on my way, you're calling to me, pointing out the dangers, trying to give me courage, are aghast at my faltering step, reminding me (me!) of the seriousness of the game – I can't do it, I fall down, am already lying on the ground. I can't listen simultaneously to the terrible voice from within and to you, but I can listen to the former and entrust it to you, to you as to no one else in the world.

Yours,
F³¹

There are (thus) also 'still'-born letters.

Letter to my son to whom I have never written a letter.

My love, to whom I have never spoken my love,

I am writing in the house that I had built because of you, in haste for you and against you while Eve our mother was keeping you, I was building I was no longer writing, instead of poems I was building I was responding to your arrival in stones for the time of times, I was welcoming you, I was warning you, I was hastily putting up a house where we would be protected and separated, I was making the house to which you never came. A house completed on September 1 196- the day of your own completion.

I never think about the origin of this house born of your birth. As soon as I knew your name from one day to the next I stopped writing.

I am writing in this house that I built so as never to write again.

I inherited this house in which I am writing you about your interminable passage.

I am calling you by name, I am making you come, I am drawing you out of the unknown nest.

Brief respite for that he, I take in my arms the phantom of the skinned lamb.

While I was writing I felt his rough cheek against my lips.³²

The Family Record Book: a book of *dated* events, which does not account for the other strata of Time in the family.

What is age? Order? Birth order?

Age on the page. In fantasy?

What is my age? What age I? I aged. I age.

Great outpourings of one time in another. *Resurfacings of 'present'-that-does-not-pass* marked by 'I see'. Memorial hallucinations:

That is what came to happen to me at the Sainte-Foy maternity clinic. I see the scene as if I were myself outside up against the windowpane nose pressed to the glass mouth rounded by curiosity. I see her. She, it is I who that day have just tipped outside of myself and there is no longer any question of going back into the house of myself that I have just fallen out of. Time pivots and falls. There is no more past. The future not yet. There remains a hesitation of the present badly attached badly detached suspended above the two beds the big one and the little one. Outside fish are swimming around the aquarium.

She does not get over it. She lingers in a peculiar hour, floating, between two hours. She has just given birth, on the one hand. On the other hand, what has just happened is that the one who has just been born has not yet entirely arrived someplace, he is not in his place, he is still stirring weakly in the wings, on the outside as if held back by some great uncertainty, as if he is shy. On her side she does not budge, she waits. The place. She does not think: what a surprise this child, this child who seems not to be coming back to her, who defers, who differs, who does not have air, this fish that is gasping as if it were missing the milieu of water, one expects a surprise but instead of the expected surprise there is an entirely different one, o mysterious power of the newly arrived who undoes millions of expectations thousands of years of images, o natural phenomenon eternally astonishing forever never seen. And this one is the champion. He escapes her absolutely, she does not remember him at all. She does not conceive him. She is stopped. Where? At a standstill.

I see the woman struggle in silence with the child, it is happening in one of those worlds in which from the first step a spell closes in on whoever strays or ventures there, where the laws of metamorphosis reign, where one never knows who is pursuing whom during tens of pen-years, where one cannot not hunt the way one breathes. I see the animal woman and child, seized alive in the burning gel of a face-to-face the way two cats caught in the last two meters of a kingdom stay still for hours guarding the last two meters with the patient tenacity of gods who are measuring out among themselves the last chance at immortality.³³

That day when he was not there cannot pass. Goes into the limits between memory and oblivion. *The Day when which I was not there?*

* * *

Letters have arrived from Algeria. I saw them twirling before me: they were the letters r, v, consonants seeking their vowels on my lips. I dreamed of her, of *elle*, of l, of wings, *ailles*, of Al, of laughter. Already *Les Rêveries de la Femme Sauvage*³⁴ was writing itself. I do not remember the Wild Woman's Ravine, I still live there with my brother. In the Clos-Salembier.

The letters link *ravine*, *reveries*, arrive, shore-*rive*, turn-*vire*, laugh-*rire*, and twirl

Ordered to write *I give in*, *I take myself there slowly*, as a body gives in, by taking itself to a place, turning itself over to someone, complying unconditionally with the order. *I turn myself over to what has been ordering me to Algeria* since these primitive scenes. Since these primitive scenes I have been ordered – and this order is the order to write, the order to write it. I have given myself over to that order as if to letters of Reveries, I have gone to arrive near Algeria as near the shore where everything arrives, I have given myself over to living the non-event of arrival

That order into which I have returned – the order of writing, *arrived from Algeria* of writing from Algeria and that takes me back to it at last, that order is also what makes me *inseparable* from Algeria and the Arabs and separates me from everything to which I belong, that is the Parisian scene, the university, Parisian culture. Separation is *part* of me. I am inseparable from Aïcha, Zohra, Hamida, Samia, Oran, Algiers, *or*, Al, El

THE BOOK THAT I DO NOT WANT TO WRITE is the book that I do not want to (have) read (to me):

– Always the question of the *secret* will have either led me on or dogged my heels.

It Must Not Be Said title of my 'last' book.³⁵ The book gets out of an interdiction by uncalculated false steps. It slips in and out between barbed wire between hedges, like the always furtive and gay text of Henry Brulard.

Who tells me 'it must not be said'? On the one hand it is Eve my mother. But she is the champion of paralipsis. First she tells, denounces, confesses, admits and her last sentence enjoins the eradication of everything she was unable not to say. An example of autotransgression.

But on the other hand, on the side of the Other my other, the It must not be said is divine and formidable, it does not gainsay itself, it makes me tremble with terror, it is pronounced threateningly, if you say it you will die, if you eat it – the divine morsel – you will be driven out of paradise.

Now all my life and all my sense and all my strength all my story and my destiny are under a divine interdiction, interdivine should I say? I will never tell the Things of paradise, I take pleasure in mourning the unsaid. It is not that I do not know what to say, it is that I do not know how to write what must not be said. I seek.

What is at stake of course is a sort of crime, but innocent of any guilt. Are my books crime-hiders? They are attempts to confess.

‘But I shall never confess.’ I tell myself.

And at once I add: careful not to affirm a certainty. Affirmation begins right away to shake it. The battle begins. Between I and the book. The book wants what I do not want. Insidious, the book. Most of the time I do not see it coming or else it is the opposite: seeing it come I push it away, I think I am pushing it away, and in pushing it I yield it the field.

The Book That I Did Not Want to Write is *OR: My Father’s Letters*.³⁶ When the letters – the six hundred letters, so voiceless – arrived, an immense event – I fled them for ten good reasons and the last of these reasons was that I had already written a book to the father, and then in many other books I had noted the return it seemed to me that writing *OR* would be a fall back into childhood a reiterating complacency, let us add that the privilege granted my father whereas I had not written a book to my mother would be further aggravated, no I will not write it I wrote and while I was sincerely struggling to convince myself, the book denied was nourishing itself with all those questions and all those denegations, the ten reasons one after the other ran out of breath and I gave in, I gave up. I love the books that write themselves in spite of me and that win out over my ten reasons, that break the tables of the law and disavow the author. But one can neither anticipate nor command them. They are storms. What they break as it crashes down opens the way to sudden appearances of which I had never dreamed.

The Book That I Especially Did Not Want to Write is *Osnabrück*.³⁷ In October 1991 I had set a date, I announced its non-arrival, its exclusion, its impossibility, and publicly, in a talk, in Canada. One cannot write about one’s living mother, I had declared, this is a promise. An oath. With these words the perjury had begun.

What ‘I’ bear witness to is first, *right now, my secret*, it remains reserved to me.

I have to be able to keep secret even that to which I bear witness Jacques Derrida tells himself³⁸

I seek to bear witness to what I keep secret.

Destiny is that we end by doing what we particularly do not want to do we cannot not let it be done.

The books that write themselves in spite of myself. ‘I am nice nice nice’ the book barks. The book is a three-legged dog. I add the phantom leg, the fourth.

Whereas if I have an order, and if I want to order: sterility, impatience.

I love the book that steps forward saying: I am a book. This is a book. But I fear it just as much. Combat: sometimes I am the one that does not want to write it, sometimes it is the book that does not want me to write it

Books that run away, let them run away! I bless them, I pursue them, I beg them

The first pages of the *Reveries*:³⁹ the book that I am *hunting*: The hunt for Happiness. The hunt for Algeria

IV. The Book Denied

The first pages of *The Day I Wasn't There* a book that presents itself as masked (like the Mongol mask, the mongolian mask)

– *I did not see it coming*. Only attacks and suffering, like messages, like threatening letters.

What is happening? Indices: symptoms. A text announces itself by signs that are often physical, uninterpreted. States of body-souls. I note them. They demand to be noted. Dreams. But especially states like dreamstates, adrift in full daylight. Then night countersigns. The book that I do not want to write. The book denied. The dumb book

The book is a three-legged dog. The book is Goya's half-buried dog:

What day I do not remember did I see him again once twice three times in Algiers and it was always the same the same smile he at seven months I at five months I at seven months hatching the substitute doubling him with the next child, I hatch him every time the way in which he does not become in which he remains as if sleeping there in the cradle is a pinch of eternity becoming more and more pronounced.

There has awoken in me an urgent curiosity another astonishment arouses me, what has become of him in the meantime, the life that he has led and in

which he has led me for such a long time and always with the elegance of someone who is giving off a secret radiance and does not take himself for anyone, a half-buried dog between the yellow eternities, a sublime minuscule dog with strawcolored fur yellow muzzle raised toward the saffron yellow worldwide sun, dog with a gentle profile half caught in the infinite sand, cradle dog slowly fought over by life and death, ineffaceable ochre puppy between the infinity of oblivion and the infinity of memory. He is coming back up now, it is the hour of his return, why now, I ask him and myself.⁴⁰

He 'lacks' one paw, half his body, he lacks neither soul nor ardour nor aspiration to the heights. The book is in the process of pulling itself up out of nothingness: where to make its way? Where to dig the tunnels?

A subterraneanness makes the earth shake, the surfaces.

The book takes in the abandoned dogs who have not been taken in by the subject.

The book confesses the limits of hospitality and the contemplative, taking-in state.

It must be said. We have to.

Confessing the limits, the faults, repairs nothing. But it is the ethical minimum.

The book inscribes the debt. Like the Egyptian Book of the Dead: a book of useless but necessary remorse. But without falling into humility which is one face of pride.

The book is at fault. As a human thing, as a speaking being.

As a cat it is the flesh that forgives

The animal makes no reproach. It *is* forgiveness.

The book is a cat whose carnal function is to calm the heart clenched by the abandonment of the three-legged dog

Sometimes the one sometimes the other, always in passing, from the one to the other. There is no greeting that saves, no salvation

Only a greeting – salvation? – that makes a sign of recognition

NB. I have already said that?

(But I have forgotten.) I have forgotten it. Forgetting is the guardian of the work. If I did not forget I would not write. Forgetting is at work in the work in the writing as in the reading. I have invented the word *oublire*, to-forget-to-read, to-read-to-forget, to describe the marvellous mystery of reading: every year I forget-to-read-to-forget.⁴¹ Dostoevski, Stendhal, Proust, Rousseau, I read, I read-to-forget-to-read. Every year I come back to their cities, their streets, their scenes, and it is a different work that is born under my other reading.

*Unforgetting**Mimosa Branches*

Part of my way of living is after a certain fashion a way of bookreading. Very often events, the-fact-of-living (rather than life), I pass through them, I pass by, I happen to myself, as in a book. And the others too, the others beside me whether foreign or familiar, are at the same time, in a subtle and very tenuous fashion, characters. I feel that there is in me someone who is the process of writing that book. Of writing it or reading it. Life is a book, but which is not yet written, which is the process of being written. I am in the process of writing it and living it at the same time. From time to time something has just happened that is so much more alive than the living that I want to write it down. I do not think 'I am going to make a book of it.' I think 'I do not want that to belong to the past. I want it to remain present.' I do not think that it is going to be registered for eternity, it is just an act of memory. Example: Eve comes by my house while I am locked in a tête-à-tête with the phantom of a book in my study. When she has gone I find a bouquet of mimosas on my sink. It is nothing. Someone in me reads that scene. The temperature is at the freezing point, we are in February 2001, Eve my mother who is ninety years old has come to put mimosas in my house. While I was not there. As if she were coming to put a mimosa branch on my February tomb and so produce a resurrection but not on purpose. In February as my father I am dying and I succumb, as my mother I am saved. What is beautiful is that she does not know what she is doing. She does it. As if she were coming to put some life on the sink. And also Algeria. And also the word *mimosa*. The word sink, *évier*, as well. Mimosa is ephemeral. It will be dead tomorrow. She knows that I adore mimosa. I think a thought that was as if I were reading it: 'My mother came to put mimosa branches on the sink this afternoon at my house.' Eve-my-mother, *l'évier vivier*, the sink a fishpond, a breeding ground. It is nothing. And I know that it is not nothing. It is a signature. There is neither a word nor a gesture that is not already of the order of the unforgettable. Life which is made up of forgetting is at the same time the bearer of countless unforgettables, which we forget.

What is an *unforgettable*? The secret depths of nothings, *riens*. What is a nothing, *un rien*? A word-with-a secret of the French language. The essence of thing. All that is ungraspably. The substitute for the same the dweller in hollows and caves, edges and almosts, the mimed light touch of the perfumed duvet the miming of all that is not.

The contractability of a luminous instant. The word, a prophetic remnant of a precarious thing that could take place, still. The word remains. The word 'remains'. Remnance, remainingness, mimosance,

indissouciance. To think that the mimosa was once a mimer, a 'mimeuse'. Almost no one remembers. Unforgetting remains fleeting.

The slight flash of mourning humid gleam, aura of the instant *noticed instantaneously as if from a little later on*: a unique instant that will not be repeated except in memory.

Remembering-time, remembering-dying, co-dying already illuminates the instant

An unforgettable is the instant-scene at once already 'remembered', already coming back (to haunt) already a dweller in the memory-cabinet.

Life passes a raspberry cane through the window of Rousseau's soul and suddenly he remembers everything.

The least recollection of that time pleases me for the very reason that it belongs to that time [. . .] I can see the maid or the valet busy about the room, a swallow swooping in through the window, a fly settling on my hand while I recited my lesson: I can see the arrangement of the room in which we were sitting [. . .] an engraving representing all the popes, a barometer, a large almanack; while branches from the raspberry bushes in the much higher garden into which the back of the house was built fell across the window, shading it and sometimes growing in through it.⁴²

Proust's life passes a branch of wild currant-bush through the partly-open window of the small room devoted to the four occupations that require inviolable solitude:

I ran up to the top of the house to cry by myself in a little room beside the schoolroom and beneath the roof, which smelt of orris-root, and was scented also by a wild currant-bush which had climbed up between the stones of the outer wall and thrust a flowering branch in through the half-opened window.⁴³

And here his text remembers a raspberry cane passing its arm through the window of a text, yesterday. If Proust has forgotten, his unconscious remembers. The 'unforgettables' come to us often in small closed rooms, kitchens or studies, in which we give ourselves over to autoerotic activities (*occupations*, Proust rightly calls them), 'reading, dreaming, tears, voluptuousness.'

A small room is required.

Destined for a more specialised and more vulgar use, this room, from which during the day one could see all the way to the keep of Roussainville-le-Pin, served for a long time as a refuge for the narrator of the *Recherche*, 'doubtless because it was the only room whose door I was allowed to lock,' he says.⁴⁴ The same small room, destined to store the hundreds of filthy shoes of the pupils of the Grünkranz school, was

used by little Thomas Bernhard to play the violin and to play with the idea of suicide, voluptuous occupations that demanded inviolable solitude.

From behind my back life passes a mimosa branch through the window of memory, every time I play with the idea of suicide, and I come back to life.

In a small room through which one can see all the way to the keep of Roussainville-le-Pin suffering and suicide melt in voluptuous tears, weeping smells of orris root, way up at the top of time the tragic events already allow themselves to be told in the future perfect, the unforgettable promise to be born again with a charm whose power will triumph over the sorrow of the day.

To be more human, one would have to write every time the book that we are in the process of living or reading. I have given an example that is beautiful. But very often it is the opposite. Something horrible. Blood shed, an act of cruelty, of wickedness, an absence of humanity. I note. The note will perhaps never go into a book, but I have made a gesture so that what happened will not be wiped out. A gesture of gymnastics that someone who writes has to practise. *Gymnos* expresses nudity, nakedness. I unclothe. I take away the forgetfulness that *palliates*. I do permanent mental and psychic gymnastics. And that active vigilance is lit like a nightlight in me all the time. It is a job: a ceaseless exercise of attention, of the soul that entertains the possibility of writing. Ministry and mystery. Once a week there is something unforgettable. It is at once already unforgettable: at the moment when that thing is produced I live it as unforgettable. I am going to forget it, naturally, but it is to be kept. The unforgettable is a manifestation of what human beings are either in their wickedness or in their goodness. It is an act, action. An action bearing a meaning. A meaning that goes beyond the moment when *it* is produced. I do not know what *it* means at the moment when it is produced but I know that it *signifies*: *it* is written down. It was already written *to be read*.

It is reality that writes, but this writing would not exist if I were not there to read it. An act of writing is required so that these stories can attain the present of the unforgettable. But this act of writing is two-faced: it does not invent reality, it notices reality's hidden writing. This is how writers have written: having in them the capacity to register in writing, even unconsciously, the passing event. It is a tongue that listens, a tongue that watches sees what is passing. Watches itself see passing.

This unforgettable is very forgettable. At the moment when it is produced, *I feel it*, the sensation is like the state that follows a dream: I have to note it live, or I do not note and it disappears. It is the same 'thing' in

waking life: if I do not make the active gesture of noting what I feel, the 'thing' does not exist. At that moment the mimosa goes into the trash. But I name it because I feel it. I feel the perfume of mimosa speaking. I feel life. I hear its footstep. If the writing did not come to conclude a pact with the living event that event would no longer exist. Very early, I obliged myself to follow a discipline: at the moment when the unforgettable is produced, something that is going to be forgotten at the very moment when it is produced, I command myself: 'Careful! Act!' This is Faust's motto: 'Slow down, moment, you are so lovely.' *Verweile doch.* Take your time, instant. Take your eternity in your mimosa arms. I take you taking your eternity in your arms.

The mystery is: why, how, does my mother who does not think about words, make herself become a minister messenger of such a necessary signifier.

All *that* passes knowing.

'Are they holding up, the mimosas?' asks the messenger.

'Of course not,' I say, but they are holding up differently.

You, Who I Am, I

'You think you are the author?'

I find this sentence in my head, in a chapter of my book. *Who* is questioning me? Who is saying you to me?

Is it an internal self-substitution? Am I saying you to myself?

Who, what subject is (am) saying you to me?

And if it were the book itself? Who else would come to *challenge* me like this from so close up? At the moment when I am writing and taking myself naively to be the author, here is a voice that makes fun of me? Calls me up in the middle of a page, right where I live. Destabilises me. Disequilibrates, *déséquilibre. Déséquilivre!*

In case I might have created some outdated illusions for myself, as people did before Freud and before Jacques Derrida, it is there, with its critical voice, the book in person, it arrives in time to remind me that I too am a character in the book, and that no one is here to settle on a meaning or a truth.

It tells me more than a few home truths. The book is pitiless. It uncrowns me, it uncovers discovers me, my weaknesses, it picks them out, puts a stop to them, puts them to work.

It is a stern guardian, clever, ironic. It has an imperious nature. Like an idea-of-my-father. It intimidates me.

Besides, I know that I am always on the page of the other, of the not-I. I am always seated across from myself, especially when I am in the

process of doing something foolish while thinking that I am alone in the world, I am completely absorbed immersed in my own company, in my body suddenly I raise my head, and, seated a step away from me what do I see? I see myself in my nebula, I see what I did wrong, what I forgot, I see my other side, I see the whole of which I am a distracted part—I am a half-turn, a quarter-circle away from myself.

I repeat the initial experience of the mirror stage hundreds of times. I come to a halt before this person from the other side, she is I, that one? It is you he she. This feeling of (surprise, disapproval, anxiety) ‘but what are you doing there?’

Besides, I have always looked at the world (and I have always looked at myself) including myself first of all from the point of view of my first meyou, my brother, my shemblance my freer my otherme, my side of which I was the other and the rib.

If there has been intimacy I mean intimateness I mean in-who-you-me-ness since I began to comment on the world, thus to read, it has been with my brother, right away I always had that he, that stone in my garden, that intimate altercation, that storm, that accomplice in crimes and joys, that autoadversary.

And all at once, yelling very loudly in German, and secondly I always still hear the voice of Omi my grandmother, O, m, i, Oh-me, my anagram and first taleteller, my German Homer, who sang of wars, exiles, voyages, of the tiny mouse people of Osnabrück – and turned my plate full of cabbage into an Achilles’ shield.

Besides, in adolescence I reached the point of being so many others that I sometimes feared I would drown. Jacques Derrida’s ‘who am I?’ [*qui je suis, moi?*] that anguish of self, I knew it once. I was in a state of overpopulation and dread that turned all events into anacoluthic constructions: an anacoluth is a break in construction bearing especially on the subject function in a sentence. The ‘rule’ holds that a single subject governs the clauses even in a complex sentence. Well, no! says the anacoluth. And right in the middle of a sentence in progress it introduces secondary subjects, intruders, gourmands.

I love anacoluths. I love the word and the thing. I love subterfuge, interlocution, misunderstanding, comedy, vanishing tricks, substitution, metonymic fluidity. I walk in the streets of Prague and I reach the square of the Arms of Oran. At any moment writing can produce these magical slippages (it has a hundred means of making things melt and link together) with which we are familiar in dreams or films. Willingly or not we are the subjects of lapsus.

What a text performs, if we let it, if we do not take it back, is setting the stage for the failure of the idea of the last word.

There is no last word that is not supplanted by another last word.

There is no end. There is no stopping place – for me, a bus, a train – neither at the end, nor at any place in the text. There are impressions or illusions of arriving.

I say a thing not only do my brother, my mother, my son say it differently, but the thing itself says something else, an other thing, while I am saying it.

So I write knowing-feeling-experiencing that everything I write can be held against *me*, nothing I write can be held against me, I write, knowing that the verb laugh, *rire*, is in cahoots with the verb write, *écrire*. And that laughing is the result of seeing oneself writing, so seriously, writing oneself to death.

The Feeling of Book

The feeling that there was ‘a book’, an enveloping and supplementary presence in the place where I was taking place, where I was giving myself up in spite of myself with my brother in spite of himself, happened on 12 February 1949 about 11:00 a.m. in the Saint-Eugène cemetery in Algiers.

Because of that impalpable but intense presence the place, that is, the cemetery, had become a scene of the scene, which we were not only in the process of living through, but also embodying as characters

on one side

because of the immense presence of a book that was taking us down as notes and hostages right here among the tombs

on the other side

because of the intense presence of the sort of powerful absence in which my father maintained himself in this cemetery where he had been lying since the previous year,

because of the presence of that indeterminate absence of my father as body which I still heard literally not breathing and my brother too,

because of that frightful human disorder at the boundaries between the kingdoms of Life and Death

the sensation that there is a book that is following me, or that I am a book, I am one, without enthusiasm but without the ability to resist, it drives me, I never know who is driving whom nor who is killing me/you nor who is causing whom or what, it leads me, jostles me, sends me, that sensation was born in the Algiers cemetery. It surprises me, it disconnects me, it apostrophises me it pushes me farther than myself.

(It who? you ask the question? Well so do I. You see? That is a stroke

of the book. I was speaking of the cemetery and all at once it is the book that speaks.)

I am Abraham's donkey. (I have always thought so.) I go where I have no wish to go, holding back with all my soul, but my feet obey. It orders me and encourages me. I give in.

12 February 1949. I was eleven years old and my brother ten. I was the donkey my brother the lamb. We didn't have the slightest idea of this. All at once there was a global obscenity. Rending. It was grandma. Our grandmother from Oran, my father's mother. Such a scene cannot take place without extraordinary consequences. She had a violence. We were driven away. We were there, before a tomb, but driven away, outside. And she like a she-bear, she was devouring the tomb and producing terrifying groans. She was truly crying out to heaven. She was no longer of her species, nor of this world. What she screamed I shall not say here. On the spot we became spectators. In truth this moment was unlivable and we did not live it. There was a witness. There was already a book. There was witnessing. My brother was the witness of me my brother without whose witnessing I would be dead and I was witness for him. We are elements under the wind. I know how God screams.

The thing – is in the process of telling itself: it was passing over us, around, between us, fascinated, dispersed condemned to my father's death.

Grandma trumpeted while trampling us. There was no use looking for a substitute lamb.

One only survives such events written down. Because the scene has already taken place had to take place had already to have taken place

There is an enormity of apocalypse of which no child could be the author; but on another hand without the immense smallness of a child there would never be any apocalypse. There was a ragged old Ecclesiast who played the role of a beggar among the tombs. There is a time for weeping. There is a time for laughing. We, mybrotherwithme, laughed ourselves to death, we died laughing, we could not help ourselves.

All that was written in the book that was already there except that that day we were read. Later I would write it. At that time I was with my brother a modified child. Without him I would not have been

We were besieged by words, by affects. We were unbelievable. Without my brother to believe me I would not have held up I would not have believed myself. We were suffering indeed precisely from the rawness of belief, from rawness. From a flaying of all that up to now had had a skin as its visible surface: there was no more surface. Every

thing, every being, animate, inanimate, thoughts, events, passions, reveries, everything has a skin. A tomb as well. We live under skin and we see under skin. Well, there was no more skin at all. There was no more nudity, either, not of the gentle sort. There was cruelty: the flesh of flayed things.

All that enveloped in the cover of a book into which we had entered dragged by Abraham grandma to the summit of the cemetery.

The steps, stages, ledges, tombs, trunks, everything was pointed and slicing engraving on my brotherandme the matricial runes of all my books.

There was a small book. My brother with a false kippah on his head had read – hadtoread, whatwasread – the Kaddish in Hebrew of which he does not know a single word, not one traitorous word, as French says. He read, we laughed, we screamed until we cried over that false reading. We were mad fools, false fools, lost in the folly of false-reading. We laughed so sadly. It was because we were not dead.

Books are always traversed by that shudder of survival. We shall be dead and they will go on shuddering.

Translated by Catherine Porter

Notes

1. Stendhal's autobiographical *Vie de Henry Brulard*, in V. del Litto (ed.), *Œuvres intimes*, tome II (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1982), pp. 523–1008.
2. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).
3. From Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.
4. Goya's *Half-submerged Dog*, at the Prado, Madrid.
5. Cf. Clarice Lispector's *Passion According to G. H.*
6. On the arrival and departure of this Down's syndrome child, see Hélène Cixous, *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2000); *The Day I Wasn't There*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006).
7. The French reads here: '*l'inqui-est-cence: qui est ce quoi?*', the latter part of which means 'who is this what?'
8. The story of this parrot is absent otherwise in the French version of this essay.
9. Thomas Bernhard, *Die Ursache* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 1975), p. 38; *Gathering Evidence*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Knopf, 1985), p. 90 [translation modified].
10. Thomas Bernhard, *Die Ursache*, p. 38; *Gathering Evidence*, pp. 90–1 [translation modified].
11. Thomas Bernhard, *Die Ursache*, p. 38.

12. Ibid., p. 38.
13. Thomas Bernhard, *Gathering Evidence*, p. 90 [translation modified, emphasis added].
14. Thomas Bernhard, *Die Ursache*, p. 38 [emphasis added].
15. Thomas Bernhard, *Gathering Evidence*, p. 90 [translation modified].
16. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, V, i, 98–101.
17. The French here is ‘autour/auteur du bourdonnement’.
18. ‘Mongolism’ was the most common name for Down’s syndrome until at least the mid-1960s.
19. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions, Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1958), p. 197.
20. Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann, À La Recherche du temps perdu I* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1987), p. 38.
21. Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, pp. 715–16.
22. Jacques Derrida, *Circumfession*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 154.
23. Ibid., p. 26.
24. Cf. *The Day I Wasn’t There*.
25. Thomas Bernhard, *Die Ursache*, p. 7.
26. Cf. Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, p. 12.
27. Cf. Hélène Cixous, ‘Stigmata, or Job the Dog’, in Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 1998/2005), pp. 243–61 (252), and *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 74.
28. Cf. Jacques Derrida, ‘A Silkworm of One’s Own’, in Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 17–92.
29. Franz Kafka, *Das Urteil: Erzählungen* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1985); ‘The Judgment’, in Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.), *Franz Kafka: The Complete Short Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (London: Vintage, 1999), pp. 77–88.
30. Cf. Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, cited in Jacques Derrida’s ‘A Silkworm of One’s Own’, p. 17, as well as Kafka’s *Letters to Milena*, trans. Tania and James Stern (London: Schocken, 1953).
31. Franz Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, pp. 46–7.
32. Hélène Cixous, *Le jour où je n’étais pas là*, pp. 70–1.
33. Ibid., pp. 51–2.
34. Hélène Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la Femme Sauvage* (Paris: Galilée, 2000); *Reveries of the Wild Woman: Primal Scenes*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006).
35. Hélène Cixous, *Benjamin à Montaigne, il ne faut pas le dire* (Paris: Galilée, 2001).
36. Hélène Cixous, *OR, les lettres de mon père* (Paris: Des femmes, 1997).
37. Hélène Cixous, *Osnabrück* (Paris: Des femmes, 1999).
38. Jacques Derrida, ‘Demeure: Fiction and Testimony’, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 32; ‘Demeure: Fiction et témoignage’, in *Passions de la littérature: avec Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996).

39. This book begins with an account of the search for some crucial misplaced first pages.
40. H  l  ne Cixous, *Le jour o   je n'  tais pas l  *, pp. 149–50.
41. See H  l  ne Cixous, *OR, les lettres de mon p  re*, pp. 16–17.
42. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, p. 21.
43. Marcel Proust, *Du c  t   de chez Swann*, p. 12.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

How Not to Speak of Algeria

I get along well with the mysteries of the word sexuality and even gender (I get along with these words and these concepts *in French*, because for me, they live, work and create in the French language); however, in the face of the word nation I feel ill at ease, I am intimidated, uncertain. I can only feel implicated without reserve if I retain the semantic value of the word's Latin root: *natio*, birth. With Nation I am caught in the tension of two opposites: non-belonging and belonging.

I sense that the word Nation, the Latin word erected, glorified, enlarged to the political community by the French Revolution, remembers having once signified the tribe, the ethnic group. When I was a student in Algeria's French public schools, I sensed that I belonged neither to the Gallic tribe nor to my Arab kith and kin who, for their part, were excluded, or nearly so, from school. I sensed this because the entire class made me feel it. One day I must recount at length the psychic distortion, the split, the *skhizein* (*schizo-*), the guilt, the stigmata engraved into the unconscious minds of each of those schoolchildren and non-schoolchildren who were changed into structural impostors by the ambivalent and contradictory powers of the Master of Thought and Imagination called the French Republic. But another day my friends of Algerian nationality will also recount at length the incredible adventures that happen to them through language, or rather through languages, which are taken hostage, taken to court, regimented, and erected or abased according to whether their gender – or their sex? – is masculine or feminine. I have neither the time nor the competence to describe here with sufficient subtlety the various tragic acts in which the Arabic language is the persecuted character in Algeria today. Allow me to refer you to a book called *Algeria in Others' Languages*.¹ You will read, for example in the article 'Symbolic Violence' by Omar Carlier, how the Algerian government is attempting to hyper-Arabicise its own nation in order to reduce its singularity and push it in a pan-Arabic direction

– less Algeria, more Arabia – by denying dialectal Algerian Arabic any national status and calling spoken Arabic the language of the entire people.

(How in this denied Arabic one says *l'Algérie*, which happens to be a feminine noun. And how in so-called standard Arabic, imported from the Middle East, and which is not spoken by the Algerian populace, Algeria is called *El-Djezaïr*, which is the masculine name of Algeria's capital city. As for the word *dialect*, it is called 'teeja' in Arabic: a word which means childish babble.)

This is how Algeria 2000 auto-colonises itself or post-auto-colonises itself, with the help of a deep misunderstanding of the vital stakes involved in the relations of genders and sexes in language. With a fatal denial of cultural multiplicity, the very treasure of a people. And in its place this terrible hegemonic unifying fantasy which is the progeny of the concept of the nationalist Nation-State.

I am natively [*natalement*] Algerian:² the flesh of my memory, the most ancient inscriptions on my skin can testify to this. I can say without hesitation that I am the result of an encounter of very complex, divided and diverse genealogies – my father's and my mother's genealogies – with the earth, the body, the shore [*la côte*], the sea, the physical geographical form called Algeria. I can add that I am the verbal child of the *word Algérie*; and immediately I must recall that I was verbally born *en Algérie*, that is, in the *French* designation of this country which, at the time, was not politically defined as an independent *nation*, but was fantastically detached from Africa by colonialist surgery and madly grafted as a sort of foot or pedestal under the feet of non-African France, cut moved pasted added on as an inferior step, at once foreign and whose foreignness was denied, to the Construction of the French European Nordic Catholic Castle. From the age of three on, I have always been conscious of this incongruity, of this monstrous and violent montage. I was a speaking political being already wounded by the extravagant brutalities that the politics of conquest, the practices of power forever spawning oppression, the authoritarian exercise of the theme of sovereignty, inflict on every individual, on every being whose soul has not been stamped into submission and into a comfortable and mortal ignorance. I have never believed in – nor have I ever been able to bear – the virtue or the possibility of *integration* as a reduction to the same, in any milieu whatsoever – whether it be integration-identification with the uncontested myth or theme of the nationalist-nation, the fusion with the wholeness of such a nationalist-nation; or whether it be the same homogenising fusion with a part that resists the whole, a fragment that is constituted as a small whole, a communal core, often self-defensive,

for example in Algeria when I was little, the enclaved excluded encircled attacked small-whole constituted as an enclosed space that was the Jewish community. An enclave that unfortunately existed for a reason at the time, since it was the object of several converging antisemitisms whose origins were opposed but whose virulence was the same.

EXPULSED

Dawn of 1940, my father (who was a Jew born in Algeria to a family of Spanish and perhaps partly Kabyle origin) was now a military doctor on the front, I was admitted into the first Paradise. What Jacques Derrida calls PaRDeS.

The PaRDeS, the second and the last paradise, after which there were no more paradises to lose, was the *Jardin d'essai*, a Garden in which both Derrida and I discovered all the essays that sprout in the ear and in the soul. A botanical garden, the *Jardin d'essai*, adored literally and to the letter, with its paths lined with palm, with yucca, with bamboo, with d and c, *des c, des c'est*, because we never followed those paths without feeling we were reading and read in the magic symmetry of the forest, going by palaces and palates of palms and of sounds, walking, hand in the father's hand amongst French homonymy. I went on enjoying verbal coincidences until the day when a thorny version of the Garden rose before me: not the *Jardin d'essai*, but *Décès*: of death. This garden in Algiers was the first essay of our literature. And what did we essay in this garden? We attempted to be. And to survive. And to safeguard. And to give birth. And to see, from behind the enclosure which had a view of the sea, the passing sails [*voiles*], at once promising and menacing.

The first Paradise is set in the Cercle Militaire in Oran. All the trees of the arid city are there, with the earth, the sand, the plants and viscous animals amongst which I am two and a half years old I crawl I know. The distant children in power at the swings remain unknown, unknowable. Above my earthworm's head they speak loudly what seems like another French, a French and catholic French, they say they covet postage stamps. So this is the ticket to enter the world of the children? We the Cixous' and the Kleins receive stamps every day from the whole world at 54 rue Philippe right next door, I boast the truth, from the universe of the exiled come stamped envelopes from Australia, Uruguay, South Africa, Argentina Chile Palestine or the concentration camp of Theresienstadt. To obtain my visa I promise that tomorrow I will bring all these little pieces of paper to the masters of the garden – Liar! you will not one of them spits in my face. She is a small big blond I am black. All Jews are liars.

Am I a Jew [*juif*]? Am I a liar? The world shows its teeth. Nailed to the sand I felt chased out of the hoard chased out of pure reason, paradise began to rot beneath my belly. In the street I rapidly weighed the choice between two dishonours, to bring or not to bring, two equally bad possibilities. The poisoned sword in my back bothers me. Now you know what exists above you. I chose. I chose one of the two, if that is what choosing is. Now you know that you are a lying child.

Soon thereafter my father, excluded from the state medical association by the anti-Jewish laws, unscrews his plaque from the face of our house, you are condemned to death by unscrewing of the face. The great gates of Paradise

are once again closed. The iron bars, *barreaux*, which mock the anagram of trees in French, *arbres*, climb towards the blue sky. Inside is separated from outside with a screwdriver. But if I had not been excluded from Paradise what hell it would have been! My father an undocter. On the same day in Algiers the principal of Lycée Ben Aknoun sends the little Jackie Derrida home to his parents. October 1st 1941 the weather was extremely beautiful. Dishonour devours the expelled [*renvoyé*] child's lungs.

We were chased off broken degraded dishonoured. It is an indelible sensation. But on the other hand, that was when I began to become inseparab.

When it happens there is only suffering without explanation. If only we were guilty, we would defend ourselves tooth and nail. But the child is innocent. He feels that much more guilty. Guilty of all the world's wrongs. Guilty and source of misfortunes and injustices. Guilty of innocence.

Later on, Jacques Derrida invents philosophy, from the other side. The philosophy of the other side. All his philosophy is suspension, postponement, referral, back-tracking, reversal, reseeing, revoyaging [*renvoi, renvois, renvoir, renvoyagement*], turning suffering into light, exclusion from school, yes from every School and vice versa.

And its moral is accusation, self-accusation, accusation of innocence, exercise of immunocence . . .

This scene had already taken place in Dublin for Joyce, in Prague for Kafka, in Moscow for Mandelstam, it began again each time a very young poet does not see and does not accept that he is totally inadmissible it begins again

The difference between the little Arab child and me thrown together in the street is prehistoric: he was never admitted into the Cercle Militaire. I was admitted in order to be expelled. No sooner in than out. I understood that inside gives onto outside.

The perverse logic of exclusion is a trap. One can quickly feel 'at home' in exclusion. To be internal, to be interned, to make one's nest in the outside, to make an inside out of the outside: this is not our penchant we do not turn exclusion into our thing or our proper belonging. Never leave this State of Vigil: to undo, to unlock, to detect the closures, to exceed exclusion. What is the Vigil? Night time work in full daylight as at midnight the work of the night, working night time, travelling through it, haunting it, impregnating it with dreams and acts to come, to let oneself be haunted impregnated by its hours of sombre light

The Vigil is always before a battle. Everything can still be saved. Everything can still be lost. Everything can be lost again.³

Verbally, poetically, I was born from the French word *Algérie*, a playful word, rich with phonetic secrets, and which associates through its anagrams pain and laughter. Politically, my outraged-being was set ablaze by the contact of the madness that destroyed not only liberties, rights, hopes of happiness, but above all the most precious attribute of the human being, the human essence of the human being, the natural dignity that is the person's supreme possession [*bien*].

As a child I lived with fury and anguish in a city I loved (Oran) where

I saw the forces of the two absolutely obscene Humiliations on *patrol*, led like repeated attacks against the two peoples to which my heart belonged: the Algerian people, an assailed, crushed, colonised, apartheid people, very numerous, reduced to serving the all-powerful but thinly present Empire, and the Jewish population, twenty times less numerous, stripped of its rights to live, and destined, in the connivance established between Vichyism and Nazism, for destruction.

In so far as I was natively, if not nationally, Algerian and culturally Jewish, I lived, I experienced the wounds that these denying violences inflict on the soul. And I know that psychic scars, unlike physical scars, are never resorbed. The terror, the anger smoulders forever. And unfortunately, though they are legitimate, they are also bad counsellors. In the tragedy, the worst evil inflicted on the victims is not death; it is the poisoned trace, the assassination of trust, the interminable replies [*répliques*] to and aftershocks of the murder after the execution, the hateful haunting decades and decades after the massacre.

In order to become as human as possible with other human beings we must never forget that we don't know how to forget well nor how to remember well either our own or other suffering.

For a long time I could not write about Algeria, or recount Algeria, or make it speak, or make myself speak about it. I even said to myself: I will never write about this country, what's more I have others to write about. This one is my native country lost from the start, it never belonged to me, I hatched there by chance, I was born in Algeria too late too early and without future. This is not my-home. Or rather I am at home there in hiding.

And at the same time I also said to myself: I will never write about my mother. I thought: at long last Algeria is free and independent; I am not going to appropriate it now in writing. 'My Algeriance' is how I named the electrified high-tension region caught in a web of contradictions where I found myself each time I would turn towards Algeria, standing at the door, neither inside nor outside, and this is what served me as a stage on which to preserve the treasures of my childhood.⁴

I owed, and I owe, everything to Algeria, my infernal paradise – everything save any return, save any hint of possession. Algeria was still trembling, 'post-colonial-Algeria', as they said, as they say, and I did not wish to swoop down postcolonially upon it. Post-colonial: yet another dangerous, perverse, word, yet another post of exploitation. I do not want to aim my pen, I thought, at Algeria in search of its new language – which language – at an Algeria between two languages, and at the start of a new

literature. And while I voluntarily abstained from writing on Algeria for ethical and political reasons, I also did not write on my living mother, voluntarily, I wrote without (too much) remorse on my dead father, but I refused to transform my mother, Eve Klein my German mother, into a textual character. I will not write about them, I swore to myself, until the day when all of a sudden I began to write nonetheless, about Algeria and about my German mother, the German fugitive from Nazism who, upon arriving in Algeria in 1936 had so loved the marvellous Arab country that not for an instant did she think of leaving it after Independence. My German mother the midwife in the Casbah and in the shanty towns of the Clos-Salebier, for whom Algeria was not a cause for torment but the immense miserable roof under which she was constantly delivering Algerian women, she the Jewish German exile, who was the first to salute the arrival of thousands of babies who were natively Algerian and Muslim. My German mother the Kabla. Everything was simple for her: she was at the beginning of life, before all the hatred. But as I have recounted since, to my great sorrow, after birth the door closed once again, the mistrust began again, my mother the German Jewish midwife was once again subjected to the mistaken reading dictated by the tragic circumstances. As a midwife: welcome. As a 'French woman', which she never was, although she appeared to be, she was not invited into the families.

And so one day, without having calculated or foreseen it, I began to write about them, Algeria and my mother, sometimes one of them sometimes the other, or both of them.⁵ At the same time. And yet for different reasons. The closed door of Algeria was opened for me by a number of Algerian women fleeing Algeria, suddenly thrown out of the self-defensive national and nationalist enclosure by the atrocious events that erupted, the self-mutilation, the auto-genocide that has become the ever-present terror of this country. It was these Algerian women who asked me to speak and thereby gave me the space to speak from out of my native country. To my surprise they called me 'sister', so I too said my sister, my daughter, and through them I suddenly entered into that people by whom I had never dreamt of being admitted. It is known that terrible misfortune often engenders an increase in love.

As for the book on my mother, it was not the massacre, but the threat of the end of time, which caused my turn around. Today my mother is almost 92 years old. When she was 85 I began to admit that I feared death, even if I believe each day that my mother is immortal . . .

However, there is certainly a hidden logic in the coincidence of my two opposing changes of direction. Some subterranean link between my relation to Algeria and my relation to my mother.

I have spoken up until now of the tragic Algeria, the martyred and martyring, alienated and alienating Algeria, the result of centuries of war, the devastated and devastating product of imperial politics. But there are more than one Algeria. And among all the Algerias, of every gender and sex, mine was always an extraordinarily erotic and desirable Algeria, a springtime, an orange tree in blossom and in a primitive and definitive fashion, *a woman*.

My brother and I are sitting in the little wicker armchairs on the balcony of the house with the infinite pine forest at our knees.

– Nothing here reminds me of Algeria my brother begins again. As soon as he arrives here, we take our places in the armchairs and mysteriously it begins to begin again. Everything reminds my brother that nothing here reminds him at all of Algeria. This is how we commune sitting in the armchairs that are not the armchairs of the Clos-Salembier, that are-not-the-armchairs which is to say they are the non-armchairs of the Clos-Salembier we cannot sit in them – the two of us my brother and I – without noting how much these little armchairs have nothing in common with *our* armchairs, the immense armchairs-of-war, our gigantic wooden armchairs painted flaking green, our armchairs of metamorphoses which served according to how we turned them over as boat, as destroyer, as tank, as inn, as

The sea is not the sea, the sky is nothing like the sky, the pine trees, when I look at the pine trees here I only see external pine trees, nothing but reproduced pine trees, in the definition of the pine trees from here you should tell the truth, they are idiotic pine trees, look at that pine tree it goes straight up look, twenty meters straight up look at that idiot I tell you and after twenty meters a tuft, looklook says my brother whereas the Algerian pine tree is a parasol pine tree, and not idiotic, gracious twisted and velvety parasol, you should tell the whole truth, looklook cries my brother, whereas all the pine trees in the garden stiffen at his looklook and take a step forward, look at that pine tree to the right how ridiculous it is, it's grotesque here the idiotic pine tree is grotesque and you don't say so, and I feel all this alone, thinks my brother crushing the tiny armchair with the weight of his big body-of-regrets, a fly compared to the giant armchairs of war, and I can't even tell you that I feel this alone because it's obvious, thinks my brother, that you feel nothing of what I feel, the proof is that you can *live here* he-re. The more I come here only to see you the more I am convinced that you did not know Algeria, the more I feel myself to be objectively in danger of mutilation, because you can entirely renounce what ultimately united us, he thinks

and sitting immobile and silent by his side, I listen with all my soul to the psalmody of his thinking, I always read him, my brother, by contact, listening to myself listen to him feeling myself feel his big anger from the Clos-Salembier blow on the straight French idiots without ever managing to twist them to his past taste, at this very moment I am (following) him, thinking I am alone, you jettisoned that country which later on jettisoned us your-mother and me, although even as I followed him I thought once again of that Algeria which is not mine and which makes me in the negative backwards

and entirely. The idea of missing Algeria never comes to me. It is a curiosity: we are sick with love for years we would commit follies in the hopes of taking a person in our arms, until the day when after years that person slips from my mind and falls into the past. And yet for eighteen years *I was really inseparable*. I clung on to the wire fencing, I watched the gate I waited for the message: a face, a door, a smile. At the time I myself was passion for that country.

– But what does it mean to know – I say – Algeria, next to my brother, following his silence exactly. What doesn't remind reminds, I say and to not-know Algeria is also to know it. On the one hand I heard about Algeria I say, and I still hear about it today by the thousand, there are millions of Algerias, there are also hundreds of thousands of the City of Oran, and hundreds of thousands of each City and hundreds of thousands of ways to hear about it. On the other hand I heard about Algeria, I say, but so little a trickle of water for my desert.

– Where? asks my brother.

– At the back of the garden especially in the person of Aïcha, because she is the only Algeria I was ever able to touch rub retouch feel palpate arch my back against her calf bury my mouth between her breasts crawl on her spicy slopes. I nestle up against Aïcha from the level of her knees I watch her teeth being whiteness in the red of her mouth. I was on her, I say. But I have never been to her home. I counted her, I have counted her teeth, her hennaed toes, her children who came out of her once a year I have recited the names that came out of her Allaoua Baya Zouina Leila Ali faster Allaouabayazouinaleilialiaïcha.

I have watched her. I watch her arrive veiled at the little kitchen door, carried slowly ample without stirring by the invisible water with the heavy lightness of the fishing boat that runs up on the sand sighing she moves without stirring her feet little majesty enveloped all the way to the little courtyard. I watch her remove the veil that rocks her and boats her among the white boats and underneath it is a woman who is-the-woman and there is no other woman than Aïcha, since neither my mother nor Omi are women, my mother a young girl on a young boy, Omi a lady from Osnabrück come from a distinguished family of photos, there are no women at our house which is why I await the ripening of fruit come every morning from the City of Algiers as my daily woman, in our family there is a discrete virility, apart from the little-developed chest, with a swift dry extremely rapid pace sober sharp of hands intact don't lose a second between two seconds, use the left and the right equally, the back verystraight straight-is-not-enough still straighter stomachheldin except for my brother, at our house, *chez nous*, pronounced *chénoús* with the tonic accent on the second syllable, woman one doesn't do instead of doing woman one does things quickly. But thereupon Aïcha comes to me slow creamy a bowl of milk about to boil which doesn't overflow stirs inside the desirable layers a gelatin intoxicating to contemplate for its extremely gentle quiver. Comes to me gliding on the bright water whose trajectory I unroll from the gate to the kitchen to watch her come unhurriedly end her journey the Aïcha that with a firm heart I haul in to the kitchen shore and from the window of my room pulling on the rope.

All that a woman can be and all that can be a woman is Aïcha sometimes pregnant sometimes unballasted of the litter and often coming her arms filled with the previous child in the form of a little neatly dirty deity, the blond

hair braided with cobwebs a few flies at the eyelids and pearls of snot at the nostrils, jewels of the city, shells at Algeria's neck.

What is left of 'Aïcha' who is long dead: volumes and volumes. Art. 'Algeria,' as a caressing name of the untouchable. The velvety name of fleeting. The beauty of flabbiness, rare and difficult beauty. The big soft breasts badly attached to the cord on purpose, which gives each one autonomy. The round irises moist shining entirely brown like brown moons outlined in kohl. The pastries of flesh, the feeling of a wedding cake which tempts me still, and it is the composition that overwhelms, the multitude of similar parts of the doll for which I would have sold my soul, the endless number of hers that composes her.

Without her – it makes no sense to imagine what is not. I shall not pretitise Aïcha. I am conjugated from her. All the time of the Clos-Salebier I dreamed of going one day to Aïcha's house in her house. At night the musics. They soar up from the distant terraces. From the roof of the house which is made of tiles or corrugated steel. And I never went there. In her house. Was there a house? No one knows. Aïcha, my brother pronounces. What a story, I say, what counted for my brother was Aïcha's daughters and for me it was the mother but according to me Aïcha was the bread the cake the fruits the wells the shadow the rest canaan the lamb's love of the udders the salvation, a woman of great beauty who knew a few French words all the other words were in the eyes in the hands in the laughs. And the name of our Story of the Clos-Salebier. And to think that we loved and called her all those years – our Aïcha – who was everything for me and didn't know it and neither did I not with knowledge did I know it, I lived it that's all, what's more living was my way of thinking and the skin was the book. I liked the feel of the name Aïcha, nothing sentimental, everything sensual and infantile. And in the end her name wasn't Aïcha and just as none of us knows where this name which wasn't hers came from, none of us knows now which of us learned it from whom and how. At present we all know that in truth Aïcha was named Messaouda. But too late. Something is done, we do not know exactly if, as usual, evil is what's done, if what's done is evil, as I thought to begin with when I learned no doubt from my brother this story of Aïcha who is Messaouda and whom we all including my father always called differently, and at first I was alarmed, but for the past two or three years I no longer think that only evil is done. At first I was horrified: we who were careful, my brother and I, to keep the family from ever committing an aggression on proper names as it always happened in other people's homes, we who didn't tolerate a single false step in the house, we the hypersensitive, the night watchpeople the guardians of morality in the family who became deeply angry at La Clinique when we caught my mother calling Fatma the cleaning lady whose real name was Barta, we the two righteous ones who flew into a rage as soon as in the hallway we caught a member of the family or a close friend saying one of the dirty and dirtying words or proper names, we who had never failed to castigate we had sinned for ten years and precisely against Aïcha which is to say Messaouda or vice versa.

– They always said she was an Ouled Nail says my mother. They said she was a dancer – then when she had enough money they said she married

an old man. But I never knew what to make of what they said, nor who had said it. It was a story. The only thing I know about Aïcha is how I had made a blatant error when I delivered her once, says my mother, I was a beginner, you never know where the snag is, the Moors says my mother (a word we ended up tolerating we the guardians for lack of a replacement to propose, but only in the plural form, the Moors, will pass, 'the Moor', never, without yet being able to give a grammar lesson to my mother, we set aside 'the Moor') the Moors she says under our critical eyes, had the habit of pushing, she pushes, she pushes, and I didn't stop her says my mother avoiding to say Aïcha, it is madness, there is a pillar, there is a rope, she clutches on she pushed all night long and I didn't know it is nonsense. Nothing is more dangerous than doctors and midwives who are not qualified which is what I was then, because a beginner. Afterwards I understood. Slow down so as better to jump. It's what your father should have done. Slow the contractions that serve no purpose, keep your energy I should have said and jump on the occasion. Being a beginner I made blatant errors that I stopped making later. But errors made cannot be unmade. That Aïcha clutching on to a rope on a sort of veranda and whose real name was Messaouda I will never forget her. It was the last child. I never saw her husband. All the rest is a story. 'Ali', I say, the baby god with flies on the eyelids erected under a fez.

I wonder where her grave is. The last page of the life of a woman mapped out, firm, made pregnant year by year, each year a daughter abandoned forever in an unknown husband, the calf is taken away the cow howls all day long the next day or the day after she stops mooing naturally. Bahia the sweet one with a limp, my father saves her from tuberculosis from which he does not save himself. After which Bahia disappears into a distant husband, and from then on people say 'it would seem' about her. My father treats the limping heifer, difficult profession. Lives of cows and calves. I too pulled on Aïcha's udders. I will do anything to leave this country, I thought, and never again hear the mother moo all day long until the moment when the mooing stops without our knowing why, naturally.

- I never saw her husband, all I remember of Aïcha is her eldest son after-the-French he became the Director of the Hospital says my mother to finish the story of Aïcha that was the end although we had thought here is a beginning the hospital went to his head and suddenly he was a drunk, it was a disaster they always said that he no longer knew his mother, but he no longer knew himself. And that's all I know about that Aïcha who remains clutched on to a rope all night long on a sort of veranda, it was madness says my mother, and she passes a critical eye over the midwife that was she at the time. But it has been a long time that she is no longer she. On the couch in my office the aged young girl who is my storied mother, leans slightly, very straight, over the medical book.

- Did you go into Aïcha's house? I hope.

- No says the midwife, I only went for the delivery that delivery lasted all night, I'll never forget that pillar which was obviously in the house.

My heart beating I insist I keep looking even today perhaps a door would open in the City of Algiers if I strike hard enough at my mother's memory

even now I go hugging the wall I feel my way I dream of entering the country of which I am the stubborn aborted runt.⁶

Why was I in love with Algeria as Aïcha, Algeria in the form of that particular woman? Why, how, what was it that inspired me in a naïveté that was determined by a sexual choice? I wanted *her*, and even by transgression, in spite of the paternal law.

Climb down off the story, at Place du Gouvernement in the centre of Algiers. Follow me under the arcades of rue Bab Azoun in 1946. You will see in the window the adorable creature that strikes me with a desire that is absolutely indifferent to all commentary, to all calculation to all reason, it is the *vital creature* suddenly I want it, I must obtain it, it is She. It is as if it were my very life outside of myself. A doll says my father out of the question. He is the king. He sees nothing. Kill me I say. At your age says the king. What age, I say? Nine years old he says. He does not see. I am ninety years old. I am ninety million years old. I am already in the sacred amber of perpetuity. I see my apocalypse. It is exactly she. Beauty and the Beautiful. I see everything. I know everything. The Veil tells me everything. I foresee everything. A Mauresque doll now! I lose my father. We cannot do otherwise. He does not see me. He thinks I am a child. He thinks he is a father. All this is written in another time. It is as if I committed parricide in the Citroën. I know it. I commit it. In the auto I am not the child. There is substitution. There is necessity. Kill me, I say. My father wants to hit me. But he is driving. He is between anger and stupefaction. Anger is his kingdom. Stupefaction is his imbalance. A fear raises its wind in the interior life of the king. There is a madwoman in his auto. It is what he has feared for years. It is not a game. My mother slips away through the window. It is too much for her. She leaves the scene with a flap of wings. She is right. Such a scene could never take place with her present. It happens in another world. I go towards a death I know it. I am given over to the Moorish woman. I am adulterous. I enter into the meticulousness of passion I want everything and I want each part I want the thin face-veil, I want the linen and silk haik, I want the silver hook, I want the ankle rings I want the hidden face I want the hidden ankles I want to be the hook and the rings I want the baggy saroual I want the hidden legs I want to be the saroual I want Algeria. I am furious the king is furious. We remain immobile separated living definitively. A rain of time covers the characters and the archives in the obstinate posture of never-again. How to forgive you? All the rest is disguise.⁷

Whoever speaks of Algeria, yesterday as today, must recognise the structure of this country, its dominant features being masculine and macho, in spite of the dazzling strength of the women, its machomuslim culture in spite of a strong anti-Islamist heritage left by France. Men have power and women strength?

But when I was growing up between the iron bars, I did not know, I loved the *being* named Aïcha. To have lived, desired and strived in this

way is my singularity. I can only try to respond to what will nonetheless remain enigmatic, by making use of analogous experiences, as I recognise them in the works of other agents of the unconscious or other artists.

So as a mirror, I shall take here the loving and sexual mystery that Proust stages as the first time of the entire Search for Lost Time, in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles* . . . The scene, like the porch of a cathedral and like a primal scene, is that of the Encounter-that-does-not-occur. The first encounter that does not and will never occur between the narrator as a young man and Albertine, a young girl who later on will be the fateful young girl the eternal fleeing fiancée, whom he will never have married, whom he would never have married if he could have married, whom, from the beginning to the end of *La recherche*, he will endlessly attempt to not-marry, whom he wants to marry in the paradoxical union of a non-marriage. And whom he loves to death because she is and is none other than *l'être de fuite*: the fleeing being.

The encounterthatdoesnotoccur occurs *at the border* between the inside and the outside of Elstir's painting studio. Elstir is presented as 'the Creator', the genius the inventor of the future of art, god in painting and of painting. The scene is entirely double. It unveils the secrets of two inseparable studios: that of the translation-creation of the visible world into the other visible world and that of the labyrinths of passion. The narrator himself is dissociated, on one hand he is in the studio, on the other hand he is mentally elsewhere, by the sea where he would give anything to cross paths with the young girl. The young girl he desires is not one, she is one of the components of *the little band* of young girls, she is *one or another of the 'beings' or 'creatures' or 'types'* taken straight out of the sculpture studio of the French bourgeoisie, and yet she is forever unique but which is she? Who is she? Or rather which what is she? Because the narrator immediately declares that he is mad not about a certain young person but about *this* profound and multiple *this* that is collected under the proper name of this particular young girl. This *this* named Albertine, and sometimes one sometimes another of these totally surprising and unexpected types, isolated from their place and social class of origin, unclassifiable, equivocal, part vegetable, part animal, part honeysuckle, part pussy willow, part aeroplane . . . Whereas the narrator's head is 'elsewhere', he has the revelation, by apocalypse, of the marvellous secrets of genesis in painting. Which are revealed to us by the same occasion. And what is the secret of that other world liberated from the ordinary world? It is 'the suppression of demarcation', the erasure of sharp borders between the worldly spaces that our intellectual apparatus and our a priori judgement distinguish as earth, end of the

earth, beginning of the sea, end of the sea, etc. This sharing-out of the visible universe where order, property or propriety reigns, along with the law of the separation of genres, genders, classes, species, kingdoms. Under the influence of the divine paintbrush, everything slides and shifts places, sketching movements where all the senses are active and rework the cliché of sexual opposition. The earth and the sea, the erection, the vertical, the horizontal are exchanged, are overrun with waves of light, here men walk on the water like horses who rise into the sky like sails

It is not confusion that we witness, but a deconstruction, an extension of the zones of exchange, a lifting of demarcations, the development of what in politics would be an accomplishment of the dream of the liberation of national flows, of a transnational intermingling.

At this very moment, out of the window – but is this not a frame for the divine painting? – something altogether other than the studio passes before the narrator’s eyes and nose, Albertine passes by without stopping, stretching out her hand for a fleeting touch, moves away and disappears, the figure of elusiveness, of the promise, of temptation, of fugitivity. And of sexual difference. Albertine (who for Proust, we know, was also Agostinelli) is not only an entire band, but also part hooligan, part cyclist, half transvestite and always structurally at once in metamorphosis, in simulacra, in simulation, in multiplication and substitution, Albertine, Algérie, Algeria, Algebra, Aïcha, thus I have returned to the garden of the Clos-Salebier where, long before having read Proust, I attempted to embrace adorable Algeria as she calmly unveiled herself before my eyes in the little courtyard behind the house.

[. . .] that person, reason conceded by necessity, was not her, it was another, yet something else! Something else, what? Someone else, who? [. . .] It is not even indispensable to witness the movement and the fleeing, we need only to extrapolate them. She had promised us a letter, we were calm, we no longer loved her. The letter did not come, ‘what is going on?’ anxiety reappears and with it love. It is these kinds of being above all that inspire love in us, for our own grief. Because each new anxiety that they make us feel removes some of their personality in our eyes. We were resigned to suffering, thinking we loved them beyond ourselves and we realise that our love is a function of our sadness, that our love is perhaps our sadness and that the object of our love is only in small part the young girl with the black hair. But in the end it is above all such beings that inspire love. In most cases love only has a body as its object if an emotion, the fear of losing it, an uncertainty about its return blends in with it. This type of anxiety has great affinity for bodies. It adds a quality to them that goes beyond beauty itself, which is one of the reasons we see men who are indifferent to the most beautiful women and passionately love others who seem ugly to us. To these beings, to these fleeting beings, to their nature, our worry attaches wings. And even when they are with us, their eyes seem to tell us that they are about to take flight.⁸

Aïcha did not know she was on foot or on a bicycle like Albertine and yet she was impregnable from the start.

What did I want to take in my arms, I said Aïcha, I believed Aïcha, but it was Algeria, I sensed it but did not know it, ‘the most exclusive love for a person is always love for something else’ Proust wrote and I sensed that I loved the something else, I wanted to embrace and cherish *the-something-else*, I wanted to erase the demarcation, to pass through the barriers between languages, sexes, antagonisms races and origins. I would like to take the sea with my arms of earth. Yet I did not want to *possess* Aïcha, nor anything else, but only to have *access*. To join my body with the body of something that is mobile, that is not halted, closed, prohibited

Why did I want to embrace and be embraced, why did I want to be admitted by Aïcha?

It seemed to me that she contained the dough or the flesh of what I called Algeria. I wanted to go to her place. But I never went. If I had been to her house would I have been there? Or else, as for Proust and Albertine, had I had the feeling that I was being admitted, would I not have discovered that there was no place or possibility of admission and that the inside gave onto another outside?

But I loved her, I repeat. What’s more I love her still. Which is to say that she exerts a force of attraction upon me whereas I have never been able to say this about France. I would add that the non-love for France as a body, a people, a nation (although not as a language) is paradoxically a factor of freedom. Because there is no attachment.

We must also ask the question of sexual demarcation within a singular being. For example: what is Albertine’s sex? Or what was Aïcha’s sex? As always, we return to the same reflection: that everything is divided, nothing comes together in a unity, and that if Aïcha had all the signs of femininity (always pregnant, a child in her arms a child in her womb), this fecundity and this recurrent addition of one-more to herself was also the phallic part of her. Aïcha was more than one, numerous, like Algeria. And her children, boys and girls, were different colours. In Aïcha, who was so feminine, there was always a child-phallus growing, an addition to her in her womb.

If Aïcha was a nation, she was never one and indivisible, and this was her infinite charm. Yes I believe that we can only love fleeting beings or beings in flight [*des êtres de fuite*] to whom we are bound by the pleasure hidden in non-belonging, who make us suffer (suffering is also a joy), and in this suffering – which tears us apart, grants us the paradoxical grace of an emancipation – the bizarre gift Albertine gives the narrator – or Aïcha me – and which he describes with the courage of cruelty in these terms:

[. . .] I am unable to confer on her retrospectively an identity which she did not have for me at the moment she caught my eye; whatever assurance I may derive from the law of probabilities, that girl with the plump cheeks who stared at me so boldly from the corner of the little street and from the beach, and by whom I believe that I might have been loved, I have never, in the strict sense of the words, seen again.

Was it my hesitation between the different girls of the little band, all of whom retained something of the collective charm which had disturbed me from the first, that, combined with those other reasons, allowed me later on, even at the time of my greater – my second – love for Albertine, a sort of intermittent and all too brief liberty to abstain from loving her?⁹

What would be delicious, yes, would be if an intermittence of the national sentiment existed in an accepted fashion, or the freedom to not love at times the nation one is indebted to and at times to love it, or else to have the right to love it in a critical complex playful manner and without according phallic and fixed privileges to it or the exclusive faithfulness it wants to demand.

However, we know that the nation nationalises and militarises those who see themselves as its subjects.

I wish to be able to cultivate doubly open belonging, belonging-at-the-window, to the sea *and* to the earth, I would like to be hétéronational without being commanded to choose and to obey. I do not want to be deprived of the vital right to disagree or subjugated to the obligatory idealisation which is self-defensive and fatal, to *one* cause or to *one* community.

For the person who is *faithfully complex*, faithful to what at times divides her, and turns her against herself, is freedom not always the freedom to not love what or whom one loves? Is freedom not the risky and calculated possibility, both prudent and courageous, to exercise a critical vigilance that is never unilateral? When I dissociate myself from a scene that wants my allegiance, I am faithful to the dissociation that respects the other in myself.

This brings to mind Jacques Derrida's recent claim before the necessary and honourable dislocation that is caused in people like us – born in Algeria, of Jewish origin, of French nationality, etc. – by the awful violence that is transforming Israel and Palestine into slaughterhouses where hearts, including our own, are torn beating from our living bodies.

My critical vigilance is not unilateral. It is just as active with regard to anti-Semitism or to a certain anti-Israelism, just as active with regard to a certain political stance taken by certain Middle Eastern countries, and even of the Palestinian Authority, not to mention 'terrorism,' of course. But I believe it is

my responsibility to manifest this critical vigilance even more on the side to which I am considered to belong, due to my 'situation': the 'French citizen' that I am publicly manifests greater critical attention concerning French politics than with regard to any other politics, at the other end of the earth. The 'Jew,' even if he is just as critical with regard to the enemies of Israel, attaches more importance to expressing his concern in the face of Israeli politics which endanger the health/salvation [*salut*] and the image of those that Israel is supposed to represent. I think we all do the same thing, and it seems to me that it is better this way. [. . .]

One is supposed to feel guilty as soon as one expresses the least reservation about Israeli politics – this is generally true, and especially today. This is also true of reservations about a certain alliance between an American and an Israeli political stance. One is supposed to feel guilty for at least *four* reasons: anti-Israelism, anti-sionism, anti-semitism, Judéophobia (a concept that is in fashion; there would be much to say about it) – not to mention so-called primary anti-Americanism . . .

I say: no, no, no and no! Four times no. [. . .] I want to be able to freely engage in this critical analysis, to complicate it here, to nuance it there, to radicalise it at times, *without the least Judéophobia, without the least anti-Americanism, and, must I add, without the least anti-semitism.* And even without the least anti-Zionism or anti-Israelism (but here we must distinguish between more than one anti-Zionism, and more than one Israel, you know how complicated it is. A person can be for one Zionism and against another, for one Israel and against another.) One can also be concerned about the politics of this or that Israeli government, as is my case, out of concern for the future, the security, the survival and the honour of Israel, even if I continue to ask myself many questions about the foundation of this State and what followed. [. . .]

In any case, I wonder in whose name anyone can claim the right to single-handedly represent authentic Judaism in the world, or what is ultimately in Israel's interest and the truth of Zionism.¹⁰

I fully share this anger and this demand for correctness and justice. Non-unilaterality is the principle. The principle applies at every moment, in every circumstance. I must say that I can express and exercise this superior right to say *no* to those I love, that is, to myself of course, less painfully in the space of artistic creation (literature, philosophy . . .) than in the public arena of political life, where by definition there is never enough time, patience and love for equity to make its multiplicity of voices be heard.

I hardly knew who (what) Aïcha was, but I entered into her coolness as into a marine cave. With her bare feet on the red earth she seemed to be the sea and when she put on her veils and set off another sea began, a sea I could not take [*prendre la mer*], which moved away without violence and which was the sky.

She who never entered the sea herself, she was excluded from it by

all the powers that conspired to forbid and subjugate her, because the camps of men have always allied themselves in order to push back the sea.

Translated by Eric Prenowitz

Notes

1. Anne-Emmanuelle Berger (ed.) *Algeria in Others' Languages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).
2. Cixous adds here '*natalement = fatalement*' ('natively = fatally').
3. Hélène Cixous, 'Ce corps étranjuif', in *Judéités, Questions pour Jacques Derrida* (Paris : Galilée, 2003), pp. 70–1. This version is slightly different.
4. Cf. Hélène Cixous, 'My Algeriance', in Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 1998/2005), pp. 204–31.
5. Cf. Hélène Cixous: *Osnabrück* (Paris: Des femmes, 1999); *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage* (Paris: Galilée, 2000), among others.
6. Cixous, *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*, pp. 87–96.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 134–5.
8. Marcel Proust, *La prisonnière*, in Jean-Yves Tadié (ed.), *A la recherche du temps perdu*, tome III (Paris : Gallimard (Pléiade), 1988), pp. 599–600.
9. Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grove, In Search of Lost Time*, Vol. II, trans. C. K. Scott Moncreif, Terence Kilmartin and K. J. Enright (New York: Modern Library, 1998 [1992]), p. 581; *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, in Jean-Yves Tadié (ed.), *A la recherche du temps perdu*, tome II (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1988), p. 202.
10. Jacques Derrida, unpublished letter, January 2001, Cixous personal archives.

The Oklahoma Nature Theater Is Recruiting

'Everyone is welcome', 'We seek to employ everyone and allocate them their rightful place', proclaim all the posters for the Oklahoma Nature Theater. It is the largest theatre in the world. It is so vast that some of its employee-inhabitants have never had time to visit. Hundreds of men and women instantly disguised as gigantic angels and demons are being hired amidst a racket of trumpets and patriotheatrical fanfares. The largest angels and demons in the world.

There is virtually no audience. This is because nearly everyone who arrives in Oklahoma, synecdoche of America, becomes an actor, each person preferring to be seen rather than to look themselves, in this Amerika about which Kafka was the first and ultimate reporter. The majority of these people, yesterday's exiles, are today dressed in costume, magnified and welcome. All that remains for them to do is to appear on the stage, which extends more or less from one edge to the other. They do it so good-heartedly that whenever they are asked, 'Where are you from originally?' not one of them answers: from Russia, from Ireland, from Hungary, from . . .

Once suitably disguised beneath scales and feathers, they in effect become purged amnesiacs and are transformed into reborn Americans. Quite extraordinarily, the repertoire has not changed since 1912, date of the first Oklahoma Nature Theater production, dreamed up by Kafka, from his small room with a view over the river and the Verdict bridge (*das Urteil*), but how did Kafka know everything there was to know about America, never having been there? It was telepathic and prophetic genius.

Kafka read letters and stories written by the many young delinquents whose Jewish families Kafka knew, and who rid themselves of their children after the second prank by dispatching them on the *Hamburg*, which set sail from Hamburg for New York, gateway to the other world, where the youths tested their luck: on this continent you will

either sink or swim. Amongst the unwanted travellers from Europe – particularly from Germany – whose journey via the ‘Hamburg-Amerika’ has been recorded and is perhaps found on the Internet (because the ‘Hamburg-Amerika’, being a German company, naturally had a sound sense of order and records of people on board are archived forever), one comes across an entry for 15 July 1901 which lists the names of Karl Rossmann, aged sixteen, son of the Rossmann and Jakob families, and Benjamin Jonas, member of the Jonas and Meyer families, aged eighteen, my grandmother’s younger brother, the eighth and somewhat wayward child. The Oklahoma Nature Theater welcomed and recruited these youngsters without delay, giving them roles as either angels or demons.

The most outstanding thing in this so called ‘American novel’ is that Kafka describes America, not only as the country cannot not be, an unlimited labyrinthine actualisation of the promise, the promised land – something owed, just as would be, will be and will have been every promised land that has been terribly realised, but also as it continues to be and will persist in being. One hundred years ago *Angels and Demons* opened. Today, in Bushite times, the play has changed: *If you are not one of our Angels you are one of those Demons*.

* * *

I was in a taxi going from Washington Square to the big rusty Brooklyn hangar which houses the Academy of Contemporary Music on the left and the Battered Women’s refuge on the right, all of whom are black, coincidentally.

My driver, a corpulent man with a somewhat dubious pinkish complexion and with tattoos along his arms, a rather seedy ex-marine with an air of goodness about him which emanated from beneath the grimy white coloured skin, expressed his concern.

‘What is a woman like you (which I took to mean white and well dressed) doing in a neighbourhood like this?’

‘I am meeting up with my theatre company, which comes from France, that’s one explanation, who perform here, far from Broadway, in this big semi-musical, semi-miserable hangar that looks like a Red Cross shelter, and they are putting on stage plays that fear neither rust nor shit nor blood.’

And so I told him the story of the famous warrior king whose wife assassinates him the very day he returns victorious, as a punishment for their daughter’s assassination, whose throat the king, in spite of himself, had ordered to be slit to pay the reigning gods of the time for the right to

cross the seas and go to war. My driver nodded his head, having nearly been a member of the jury in a similar affair.

‘Where was this?’

‘This happened somewhere between Europe and Asia’, and my driver, putting himself in the jury, wondered who would be in the dock, and if there was the slightest hidden ‘reasonable doubt’ which would decide for or against capital punishment.

‘And to think that these tragedies were written 3,500 years ago’, I say as if it were yesterday.

‘How can that be?’ exclaimed my fellow juror. ‘Did men exist before the time of Jesus Christ?’

‘Just like today,’ I replied. ‘Men hell-bent on war, whatever the price.’

We parted amidst dreamy effusion. He came from Superior, Wisconsin, on the edge of Lake Michigan. I, from Oran in Algeria, but I did not dare to tell him. Whenever I am in the USA I give it up, not that I become an angel or a demon, but out of politeness: I don’t want to disconcert the people I am talking to by invoking unknown spectres around them. Algeria does not form part of their wealth of knowledge. And so I say: Paris, France, in the same way I say Paris, France when I am in India. Oran is so absolutely removed from Superior, Wisconsin. We had in common a primitive interest in throat-slitting amongst families and in the fundamental complicated crimes.

But on the other hand, Superior, Wisconsin is so beyond the powers of our European imagination. Do we have a notion of Montana, of Oklahoma, of the Kentucky border, of Mazar-i-Sharif, of Suleimania, Ithaca, New York? We still cannot comprehend to this day how someone can be Persian. It is inconceivable, both intellectually and morally. ‘To think that seven hundred thousand Iranians live in Los Angeles’, California suddenly thinks, frightened. And starts detaining hundreds of Iranians under the pretext that they are (undoubtedly) Afghans, or else Iraqis.

* * *

I first came across fear in the USA; it was a long time ago, during the sixties. Here are the facts. I was consulting Joyce’s manuscripts in the Beineke Library at Yale. The library décor was reminiscent of a necropolis, a museum, luxuriant, offering cold sensual delight. Suddenly a sharp pain, a stylet went through my left eye; it was a twin attack, in my only ‘corrected’ eye, a stab in the back, lightning. A young man was chuckling as he read Milton’s Samson Agonistes in front of me. What

was making him laugh? Blind Samson's lament, o dark dark dark amid the blaze of noon. O darkness three times dark in the heart of the noon-time inferno. It's so bright that the light I cannot see burns at the very core of my soul. The speck of dust scores through the corneal diamond under the pressure of the contact lens. The word lens, the word contact. The single eye drowns. The other eye without a lens was scratched through in early childhood. Scratched from the world of those who see.

I did not see anything for a moment. I could hear my neighbour in the library laughing.

I was expelled, with this foreign body in my single eye. He was doubled over, admiring the doubly blind Samson, blind in both eyes, in spite of, or because of these two beautiful eyes eager for beauty, but also blind from having been sightless without realising it, and henceforth for all eternity, all the way to the story of the blind who are fighting over Palestine in Israel, Eyeless in Gaza.

Is it (because) at the very instant a speck of dust enters one's eye that fear enters the story? My one 'corrected' eye was bathed in tears, I could not see anything, I was lost and apart, I had fallen into separation, ostracised, deprived of the world.

When my sight returned, I was totally lost. When one is totally lost, one does not know it. One has a foreign body in the eye and one does not know it.

I had landed in America from the West and the next day I entered in a state of Astrayness. I studied alone during the summer at Occidental College, a university completely devoid of people. Not far from this empty space, beneath my stupefied gaze the people of Los Angeles divorced the same day they married, they called love treachery, and setting all memories aside, enjoyed the fabulous present of their country. The Sheriff, a Sioux, a Blue Beard from the town without a centre, was marrying his fourth Swedish wife the same day his eldest daughter was getting married. Each was more than foreign, but each and every one of them was at home in their madness. I was scared of becoming an other. This fear has never left me. It awaits me; whenever I try to go through the West or the East gate, it is there, it stamps my visa, it pushes me on to the stage of the Nature Theater, Perform! it cries. Yes, but what?

To summarise: I have been going to the USA for the last forty years; the moment I land on US soil I become unknown, bizarre and unimaginable and not only to the taxi driver, to the hotelier, to the forty-five year old woman seated next to me in the plane who is flying for the first time and whose friend is the head of the Syracuse Police, but also to myself, I become foreign and distant, as if I were born 3,500 years

ago. It's that the USA has the greatest altering power in the world. From one moment to the next, one ceases and one *becomes*. One can either become American, or one can become an 'alien'. One can be welcomed with open arms like the long lost traveller or in a blink of an eye one can be stopped and thrown across the line, behind the invisible and mobile fence which distinguishes, disassociates, separates, unadmits and integrates one to the other. Having barely landed and approaching passport control I could be someone else. No, I don't look Mexican; I am not a Chicano, nor am I a Sino-Khmer. But seen by Americans with innocence I look as if I could have many possible origins and professions: in the USA I have already been Greek, Iranian, Egyptian, doctor, model, actress, painter, explorer, Parisian, Italian; I myself start to doubt and am ready to acknowledge a string of nebulous guilts.

* * *

'Everyone is welcome'

At O'Hare, Chicago's international airport, with its endless illuminated musical architecture where obeying the security orders I arrive two hours early on 12 October 2002, I am not frisked, no one looks at me, furthermore, no one is frisked or looked at because the two ticket stamping machines have broken down and the only boarding attendant, ostensibly American, is busy trying to dismantle them in vain (I forgot to mention that the USA often becomes India, particularly the airports). Everyone passes through, is passed through, suddenly the United Airlines employee emerges red faced and irritated from the small broken machine and pounces on a suspect, a little Japanese girl about ten years old who comes up to the waist of Her Obesity. She feels her with her finger tips, touches her, she weighs her up from head to toe. The little girl quivers and quakes in her socks.

Why, out of the two hundred passengers, did they pick on *her*? It's as if a Greek tragedy had gone awry. It's fate. It's as if we were witnessing a Japanese Iphigenia in Chicago. Why this crazy and pointless selection? Precisely because it provides the attendant with the opportunity: see what I am capable of, says the police effigy, and tremble. I am capable of the ultimate absurdity, of the most senseless hostility. You may consider yourselves innocent but be warned; I will frisk your innocence until I find its weakness. And above all it is not because you look Chinese – or Japanese – that you can prove to me that you are not an Arab at heart. Isn't anything possible?

There is always some meaning to be found in these logics of persecution. How to say who persecutes whom, who cheats, who lures, who stabs their finger into whose eye? I even feel vaguely guilty and a little pale myself. Why was I so sure I would be the one to be frisked, hey? What do I reproach myself for? For being or failing to be neither this nor that. In spite of myself I am an unconfessed purjured liar. Was I not born in Algeria? Who, in these traps, can say what ‘Algeria’ means; there are so many and contrary Algerias at that, and what’s more I am of intermittent French nationality.

‘French’. What does that mean, who, how much? I read *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, I leaf through a hundred pages, I look for Paris, no, France, no, aha, at last I come across this dwarf, this mite, this tiny little seed!

If our governors read the American papers, what a cure by dwarfism! Ministers: seen from Up High, you are moths. But they don’t read. Neither do the others. Hypocritical readers. If they read, if they looked, if they listened, they would get the measure of just how minuscule they are and they would have good reason to be worried and do some work. They are but mere mites, these chic States who, in the belief they speak powerfully, barely whimper. Sure, they can do some good, or slightly less not-so-good. But when it comes to resisting evil they don’t even dream about dreaming about it.

* * *

Eyeless in USA

It is a known fact, or it is said, that the Americans don’t know anything about the non-American world, they are without a mirror or mentor, the other countries feature in small paragraphs on page twenty-five of their newspapers, their ignorance and their indifference to the ‘world’ as ‘the rest’ of their world incites irritation or hatred in the other countries. But: ignorance on one side and ignorance on the other side of the oceans. I arrive in France. I was in the USA; France, like the other countries, has no knowledge of the American world, indeed the USA in the form of their President and their politics takes up a lot of column space in the newspapers, but this does not mean that there is any reading, clairvoyance, knowledge, justice, analysis. The USA has been seeped in the war for months; in France, like in other neighbouring countries, we are in an ‘as if’ situation, as if it were going on above our heads or as if we considered [*commesidérât*] the state of war declared, prepared, proffered,

the fire already lit months ago by the Very Powerful Patron of the Planet to be a joke that does not concern us: the USA go off to war, the heads of the Rest clean their nails in their State-Provinces, the USA are on the road to war, in a state of pre-war and arch-war, so all the Rest, who are in tow while pretending not to be the baggage carriers, all the Rest are already caught up, engaged, committed, affiliated and in consent with all this martial activity which swells every day but 1) it must not be said, 2) it must not be known, 3) it must not be seen, 4) one must be blindly blind.

One can be proud in France: don't we have enough supplies of small-pox vaccines? In France we are superior.

* * *

Fable: Polyphemus USA

The USA (les États-Unis d'Amérique) is always in the singular in American. The USA has only one person. USA has only one eye, the same one. Any other is all = one for him.

In order to start to comprehend what is seen from the USA's eye – or what it thinks it sees, one has to stand erect before the port of New York and look at the world, right arm raised, brandishing an object which, according to some, like Kafka, is a sword, and, according to others, a torch, to face what is approaching.

It is quite extraordinary to think that it was Bartholdi, a French sculptor paid by the French, who was responsible for symbolising the idea that the USA illuminates the universe in the form of Liberty.

But holding a torch does not exclude being blind. Interestingly, the Statue of Liberty has its back to New York City.

From time to time, USA bludgeons down the torch on a ship load of foreigners arriving from Asia Minor after a long journey in the hope of being offered hospitality and some of those gifts hosts often exchange. And there stands this deceptive raiser of sheep and goats picking out two travellers full of hope, smashing them against the soil for his dinner: entrails, meat, marrow, bones. One would have thought he would stand in solidarity with old compatriots, having once come from a foreign land himself.

In the primitive Homeric version, USA was a rich shepherd who lived isolated on an island; he lived off the animals' produce and from his fat cheeses he doused with milk at meal times. In those prehistoric times Polyphemus had only one round eye and never travelled. What he had

heard said about the Grecians was enough for him. Once he was taken around the whole of the city of Paris in an hour, it had been enough for him. He had seen the Rest of the World on Fox TV. He knew by prediction from history that someone by the name of Ulysses would blind him with his own hands. But according to the fable he was still waiting for a tall and handsome mortal who would spring up cloaked in great force. That is why, already blind before having lost his eye, he had not seen, he had been unable to see that the blinder in person was standing right under his nose. To have one's eye gouged out, the only eye, by Nobody, a begger, a whippersnapper, a dwarf, is what multiplies the Cyclops' pain.

Later the story will start up again. One would so much like to have an enemy who was both magnificent and seductive, and we allow ourselves to be Saddamised. There is no point in being tall or rich or the son of God or of the president, if one cannot discern the real real from the fake. It is possible in the USA to take oneself for and to be taken for the actor president of the USA and to end up actually becoming the president, and following on from this possibility, it is logical therefore to think that others can equally be successful impostors and conmen.

* * *

Before the war, the war

First sign. War is already upon us. For the last few months some of the prestigious and classical university presses have no longer been publishing fiction, philosophy or essays. The budgets are allocated to publishing books on army history and strategic studies.

Idiomatically we say 'before the war', 'after the war'. 'Before the war', during the Second World War, World War II; it was like an imaginary golden age. Before the war, would that be peace? Why is it no one ever says 'during peace'? Because 'peace' only ever existed in a dream. Before the war it was already the war. 'Peace' refers to a time during which 'war' prepares its eruption.

The USA is currently experiencing a gestation of War, a war which to all intents and purposes seems to have been publicly declared between two castrating forces, following the malevolent and sexually charged assault of 11 September, but whose origins can be traced back to Bush the First and before the time of Bush the First etc. In any event, 11 September, with its terribly cruel signals, cruelly phallic, was the wake-up call to the American population, which struck at the very heart

of popular America, the sublime body of the Americans; the totemic posts, the archaic representations, the primitive vulnerabilities, these must not be ignored. All the other countries belonging to the 'Rest', those who experienced hundreds of wars and millions of dead are annoyed by the proclaimed bereavement for four thousand people, three thousand five hundred, and finally two thousand eight hundred dead. But death is not counted solely by numbers; horror competitions alone do not stir the imagination or passions. Trauma has its own roots, its own absolute singularity; there is neither justice nor fairness with regard to massacres, to bereavement, to the identification with a crucified body, with a martyred Hussein, with six million Jews in smoke.

Let us not discuss the weight of the pound of flesh or the length of the wound.

The pain that has penetrated the American heart has its own singular colour and depth, not least because to some extent it is 'the first pain' they have experienced. 'It was time,' will some people say? But there are as yet no winners. What do we know? What do I know about *your* pain? My Afghan and Kurd refugee friends had never even heard of the Jews' pain. Each and every one believes him or herself to be the first, the one and only, the worst, the most. Each people cherishes its own atrocious treasure. And so there it is, the planet's unscathed giant received its first arrow in its body proper. It is the beginning of experience. The grief is as great as the country. It even marks the beginning of wisdom, but of this the Rest of the world is uninformed: so many Americans, powerless citizens in an extremely delegated and relegated democracy, demonstrate endlessly and stubbornly against the war. 'No to war' is the new *Song of Experience* which can be heard throughout the USA. But the great misinformation machine – the press and the media are both accomplices of, and completely subservient to governmental powers – they do not circulate the new sound. Whoever is in the USA in person sees it; can see it with their own eyes. Those in power who do not even have a majority still persist and cultivate the super-powerful warrior mythology. The first victim is its twin half, barely in the minority in Congress but with a majority of votes.

One has to differentiate who amongst the Americans forms part of the terrorised and terrorising tradition, currently the Bushians, from those more numerous than the world will admit to, the entire world including the USA of ceremony and appearances, the world that wants to hate, growl, bite and slit throats in imitation of the Bushians. No, those who make up the US population are like us: Europeans exposed to or prey to a confiscated democracy, or as Jacques Derrida says, fettered,

recalcitrant, rebellious citizens of a democracy-to-come, still dreamed of, still perhaps to be hoped for and defended in a dream. But the dream is the strongest, though the least armed, part of reality. ‘No to the war’ they say, ‘Not in our name’ even if the war is already going on at this point, they are not behind it. Annulled from our shores with limited responsibility, they are conjured away and made invisible and inaudible behind a curtain of newspaper and a wall of television screens which few potential witnesses make the effort to circumvent. The Rest of the world has no desire to be able to like the Americans. One clings to one’s own devil: one is happy. Moral and intellectual laziness is the best shared worldwide vice. The Bushians make me scared. No more or less than any of the other Dog-States, be they Iran, Iraq, my beloved delirious Algeria, the enraged in Israel and the same in Palestine. All those who wish to bite, devour right down to the bone scare me. But the other-Americans, and there are increasingly more of them, I like them more and more.

It is not a matter of indifference where we as peoples locate the danger. The Europeans – let us consider for this purpose that we are more or less a people with a historical, mnesic community, and even if the European body does not know how many people it is made up of, and even if it is fearful of grafts etc. – the Europeans (and I speak here as a mixed European, ‘cut’, or ‘added to’ by an African element), share a long painful history of war. They are former wounded ones, stitched with the past, who remember at present.

Most of the Americans, those who call themselves such, are frightened. Everyday American culture is a ‘culture of fear’. It is a primitive fear, near to the caves, originary, foundational, inculcated at dawn with a supposedly antidotal dose of patriotism. They are fearful. I said culture: they cultivate, they maintain, they appreciate, they produce and consume Fear. It would be incorrect to presume they are ashamed or frightened of being frightened. Quite the contrary: they are not frightened of being frightened, they encourage and praise fear. They are mad with fear and they congratulate themselves. The sage is frightened of being frightened, is frightened of the consequences of fear.

Thoreau was a useless sage: he advised his compatriots not to be frightened, because fear provokes unnecessary cowardice.

After all, the Bushians elected this man who, adjusting his aim of his little eyes, repeats to them every day that they have good reason to be frightened and that he personally has come to bring an end to this fear, with fire and sword. Every Bushian is in possession of one or numerous arms with which to fight fear. He issues warnings. This has now become

a political project. He was once known as ‘the fastest gun’. Now he has become ‘the first’. He pre-fires before anything moves. There are some of the older generation, who do not renounce resistance, I have Senator Byrd from Vermont in mind here, and they defend courage in the face of the dictatorship of fear, and stand up in the Senate against this infringement of the Constitution. But they are taken for old men, out of date, museum exhibits. The Bushian Presidents are young; they have the worst before of them. When the worst finally arrives, wished for or forcefully, they will retaliate in centuples.

* * *

The Sniper

Each year the ‘Oklahoma Nature Theater’ stages a horrific new play in which a man is hunted down. This is because the Bushian spirit is that of a man hunter. The play unfolds to reveal a structure which is reciprocal: a hunter is pursued by other hunters. Throughout the hunt the audience quivers and quakes in fear, because they identify with the prey (who is also a hunter) and with the hunter. One year the Nature Theater staged the O. J. Simpson Affair. One year the Clinton-Lewinsky-Kenneth Starr Affair. In 2002 we had *The Sniper*. *The Sniper* is a play based on Bushian current affairs. It was so successful and caused such sound and fury that even in France extracts were sold, even though we (unfortunately) have hundreds of our own similar scenarios, but if it is *made in USA* it sells, it has become merchandise, whereas exactly the same story – were it to take place in France at Nanterre Council, for example, is treated as a local mishap.

One has to say that *The Sniper* was so well done that one might have thought if not sworn to it that it had all been commissioned and executed from the White House by Rumsfeld’s men, or some other Bushian advisor predisposed to clandestine propaganda. Let me remind you: the Sniper is an anonymous werewolf who behaved ruthlessly in October 2002 in the State of Maryland, and around Virginia and Washington. Let me remind you: all the American Bushites are marksmen. Some are virtuosos. The man who in France would have been referred to as an assassin or murderer was called The Sniper, like a character in a video game. The Sniper shot someone every second or fourth day. He knew what he was doing. The USA quaked and quivered, the whole country talked about it ten hours a day. The victims were anyone, you or I, chosen indiscriminately regardless of race, class or age. The person in

charge of hunting him down (it was very well done) was a good character: Chief Moose, a chief of police a bit Afro-American, who looks like Colin Powell, the perfect man for white and black identifications, virtuous, moral, serious, angry, firm, overwhelmed, reassuring, who could do nothing. All the country's criminologists talked about it, as did the politologues, the experts on terrorism, on Al Qaida, the retired Generals, the strategists etc., and everyone was sick with fear, including my friends. It was appropriate to be frightened, whether one was nearby or far away. The sniper killed one, two, up to nine people, who could well have been one or nine of the 250 million Americans. A journalist interviews a young school boy on television, after another boy from another school had gone on the rampage firing shots at people in school.

'Hey son, you were really scared weren't you?'

'Yes sir, I was very frightened.'

'That's good.'

Had the boy said no it would have been scandalous! But he was a good student. A good patriotic chap. He had his parents and the institution behind him. The schools were immediately closed. Of all the fathers in the town, only one, filmed in the empty public garden with his son, said: 'Life has to go on, I am going to send my son to school.' But the school was closed. On television everyone else was playing the sniper's game. If a nurse was shot, the hospitals were closed. Maryland closed down, no one moved. Alone, the Company of Angels were out and about running errands for all those who were terrorised. Right at the top of the ladder, Bush said: We are frightened. We will get him. Rely on me. God, as always is on our side. However, for the first time in history, civil society called on the FBI and the army. Helicopters flew over Maryland and the surrounding area, carefully searching for the needle in the haystack. Everyone forgot or reminded themselves to think about the bombings in Afghanistan. Because ultimately the Sniper proved not to be Bin Laden after all. But as the scenario had intended, it was an inopportune black man who was playing into Bush's hands and for nothing.

* * *

Saddamisation

We will get him. We, dreamers, idealists, consider Saddam Hussein a monstrous dictator, guilty of genocide, who needs to be neutralised without incurring the cost of chaos which comes with the destruction of human lives, and we who stupidly do our geopolitical calculations think

of him as a deviant and disgusting character. In the USA the Bushites' current favourite werewolf is a character who is both necessary and familiar in the spectacle that makes everyone shudder; everyone calls him Saddam, this is how he is introduced into homes in the guise of a dreadful buddy. All the talk is about him, every day, there's only *Saddam* and *Go More*. Under the pretext of diminishing him, by depriving him of a surname, by giving him a name fit for a dog, we become saddamised, featuring in a perverse scene of a dreadful fairy tale. The Bushian USA conceals an inadmissible desire for its Bugbear in the folds of its puritanical soul. He is cherished, and each and every one is welcome to take his place at the Oklahoma Nature Theater. Everything takes place in Baghdad-Texas. Is there a country in the world where one sees so many obscene masses spread out their tongues and their splendour so frequently and so magnified around this Phallus (elected) promoted amongst all, who makes such great promises of sacrifices. The worst of it is that one can never escape from the Oklahoma Nature Theater, unlike an ordinary theatre, or a nightmare, because it is both the largest in the world and the world itself. At least in these times of terror.

When my friend, the great Iranian writer in exile Reza Baraheni, tells me that the Saddam Hussein he loathes, the mad killer, the Sniper of a million Iraqis, is not worried about the imminent war, so confident is he of winning, it will be another Vietnam, a long war, which will again infest the body of the USA, I am gripped by fear. I realise that unbeknownst to me (I think) I am betting on an American victory after all.

The self-satisfied and narcissistic air of a film star, the big-spectacle plumpness, the calm self-importance of a boxer sporting a moustache who looks at himself in the mirror and believes himself more handsome than the clean-shaven boxer with his fine, square jaw; that's what it is, his conviction, his comfort. It would appear to be his silent way of provoking Polyphemus, while all Ulysses' companions beg him not to provoke Cyclops' anger, given that we have finally managed to place a huge stretch of sea between the giant and ourselves. Perhaps this Ulysses, in a sanguine tyrannical guise, wants to be attacked; what does it matter if he loses a few more of his companions and brothers, he wants the impotent giant to throw some mountains at his hull, perhaps he really wants to be included, alone if need be, in the legend books; the monster wants to be crowned a hero in the eyes of the very people who spit him out and whom he has tortured. Has this Hussein, then, found his own way to be transformed into one of those martyrs that these countries haunted by the religious glory called 'Shaheed' like to celebrate? Of course he will win, and if he loses it will be a supplementary gain. That is why he is always smiling on every poster in which he features around

the world, imitating himself in the charming role of the cinema dictator, whereas on the posters distributed by the other camp, Polyphemus Bush poses ever more angry, the eye of his eye not much bigger than a pin head, surrounded by his advisory ministers with increasingly protruding square chins. Nor should we overlook the fact that he disembarks from his airplane carrying his dog, instead of the much loved ram, who of course appears more human than any Bushian.

The invisible Sniper fired from far away and disappeared as if by magic. The moment the alert was given, all the roads in the area were closed; the army could always be sent in, to bomb where and whom? Up until the day the Sniper left his visiting card not far from his last ambush. It was a tarot card, the effigy of Death. *Death* had written the following message: *Dear Policeman I am God*. Chief Moose was furious: some said that God Death could only speak to the Supreme Policeman, to the White House resident. It was one interpretation.

* * *

Ground Zero

This is the address we give to the taxi driver. He hesitates slightly; because you can reach zero from all sides. I want to reach zero. Not long ago it was Hiroshima's new address. I have wanted to see the depths and the foundations for a year. There was a time when I too went with you to the *Windows on the World* and, like us all, Americans or non-Americans (I thought), we believed we could see *the World* from our window. Those towers and that horizon had the power to provide everyone with a new naïvety, indiscriminately, regardless of race, class, sex or nationality.

Because all humans aspire to a tower of Babel; for children it manifests itself in a desire to be a Grown Up, independent of one's parents. Ground Zero has a great simplicity. It is the tomb of an immense child, the tomb of Childhood. To the left, in front of the now clean depths (because I arrived once the rubble, the thick dust and the thousands of rats had been removed), there is a childlike fresco of the Statue of Liberty which covers the full height of a remaining wall. The people at the fence have their photographs taken. They have come from everywhere. One does not know what the affective value and the interpretation of the photographic document will be. They all babble feebly. The majority of my American friends would not have gone to Ground Zero under any circumstances. According to them it is a remake of the

traders in the Temple. According to me it is naked. It is abandoned, yet nonetheless living and miserable. It is the people looking down on its wound. The workmen are calm characters. Their reasons for being there are purely professional. Their costume, in true Oklahoma style, consists of fluorescent yellow and orange jackets, on which the word *Contractor* is written. The workman works the soil behind the fencing which surrounds Zero. We are separated by twenty centimetres. I ask him what he is doing. He has blue eyes. He answers kindly: 'I am removing the metal from the cement groove.' This is precisely what he is doing.

'Are you building a walkway?' I say pushing my questioning beyond the allocated square metre.

'Yes, it will be temporary', he says, 'but what do we know.' And he does not venture further. A little further on, in search of the church of disaster. There is no lack of churches, the unemployed Afro-American tells us. Pray here, it's right next door. But we are searching for the tiny little church which has seen everything. We finally find what we are looking for, *Saint Paul out of the dust*, after the deluge of dust, surrounded by ambulant-photos-souvenirs, T-shirts, African bracelets, bagel traders' stalls. The four sides of the little building, which dates from another era, are adorned with innumerable rent and heart-rending monuments, soiled, it's a temple to be found in Bombay or Calcutta; a vast number of small teddy bears, hundreds of trophies, caps, football helmets, hand-written streamers, we will never forget you, passport photos showing permanent smiles, mouldy garlands, fresh and decomposed flowers. People walk up and down, pensive, sucking on their giant cups of Coka-Cola; at the corner of these archives of bereavement without any help of sublimation or art, the Summary: a large teddy bear with a green felt crown of thorns placed askew across his forehead, his resigned posture somewhat collapsed in the style of Falconetti in the role of Joan of Arc that Dreyer passed down to us, icon of the infinitely sad resignation to one's fate. Saint Paul is also a little bit crooked and wears a green felt crown of thorns. The great of this earth laugh at our pain, says the teddy-bear-soul of a certain universe. We have already witnessed this scene, it occurs wherever angels and demons of gargantuan proportions stamp things down, reducing everything to nothing, it will take place tomorrow on another continent, indiscriminately, regardless of race, sex, class or nationality. A great wind violently pulls tears from those who did not intend to spill them.

There will be war once again, everyone will cry, wherever it may be every cheek will be moistened by a human tear divided into you and me. Except for Saddam and Go More, who will pose for the television

channels, fake eyes face to face with fake eyes. *Eyes Zero*. The Zero marks the empty place. It marks the place where there isn't any.

25 December 2002

Translated by Jane Metter (revised by Eric Prenowitz)

The Book I Don't Write

The book I don't write? I was about to say. What did I have in mind? Or who? You say that, and the thing becomes a forest, a temple, an army, and each word divides itself up and eats itself.

The Book I don't write, that's generic. The Book I don't write is the one I don't write, only That One. Or perhaps – a Mallarméan use of the Book – Books, I don't write them, in general the book thing is not something I do, but also the Book I don't write is the one *I* don't write, you're the one writing that book, yes there's The Book I don't write, a nominal syntagma, a title, apparently, the whole thing was merely part of a sentence waiting for the rest of it, a subordinate clause in search of its main clause, stepping forth hesitantly, because of its segmented structure. Had I said: I don't write books, or I'm not writing the Book, or *The* book, then you'd have a complete thought to mull over. The strangeness of the statement – for why write about a book you don't write, you're not writing it, so what's there to boast or make a fuss about? Unless you are pointing out – or avowing, or disavowing – the slight awkwardness of the statement it's that the book looks like the subject, the theme of the sentence and yet it stands in place of the object, you can't tell whether it's object or subject, I don't know which is which, the book doesn't either.

I'm thinking of the book I don't write. The more I think about it the more this bookIdontwrite becomes my unknown companion my invisible shadow my secret ally my faceless everything my deathless unliving, or maybe it's the book left for dead by each book I write at the expense of a book I do not write

Is this book a particular book, is it perhaps this book in particular?

– It also means that you write something besides books, says my daughter. You want to write a book, but it's not that easy. No doubt. A book? Do I write books? What I write, whatever it may be, liberates and captures at the same time. Sometimes I write under a terrible

compulsion, like it or not, bowed by such obedience I start to suspect that what I'm doing so compulsively serves some devious purpose, I work blindly perhaps so as never to be free to write that book, which one, the one I am destined, by whom, not to write. Do I write? Is this writing this forever being on the lookout? Bent over the ground that I scratch dig scrape every morning at the first streaks of light, passing from the darkness of night to the night of day, I don't write. I sow, I dig holes, I follow blindly but guided drawn led by voices without sound that I hear breathing the world at me sentence by sentence.

Always there's this urgent need to get out of my house my room my bed myself because of the eruption of dozens of strangers into my room my bed, this expulsion out of my own limits, my own walls, these impostures that push me out of myself and make a mockery of my idea of being at home and right away the door opens, it's always my mother or maybe the thought of my beloved who comes to the edge of the bed, rise and follow me I rise and we go down under the ground together there right away on the threshold always suddenly an empty subterranean passage a vast desert, a station without trains or a labyrinth with tiled walls. I follow you, I follow your idea, where are we going I say, to Omi's sister who lives on the other side of town says my mother. To see Hera she says. Which in this case means that we are taking the shortcut to the house of the dead. For my grandmother Omi died a long time ago and at this age her sister the eldest must also dwell in the afterworld, a hundred and twenty or a hundred and ten maybe. Hera? I tell myself. I'd thought it was Selma. Like all her brothers and sisters except Omi Kronos has swallowed her up. It will be interesting to visit her, so many things and so many sentences we've never pronounced, she's the one from Theresienstadt, we walk through endless corridors, I imagine the meeting, so belated, the emotion, and all we'd have to tell one another perhaps year and years too late, we hurry down under the deserted earth in a gray light full of curiosity. As you can pass from a swollen, overpopulated state to vast regions completely evacuated as you pass from mortal prison to mortal freedom. Always in a rush and this idea of the beloved which first began to trouble me in the Bible already his terrible way of slipping past my door and vanishing without a trace into the next street and this next is the promise and the out-of-reach, nothing more exalting and more painful, you have to search run catch trains on the move steer your whole life in his direction without being able nothing but useless strength, for strength and unstrength he's the one who has them, he belongs to the category of ghosts he returns in obedience to laws over which I have no control, which is why abysses I put paper ladders across expand and deepen in place of the measured

time of continuities, but then, when without any plan, always always as an overwhelming surprise, he turns up, just when you least expect him, when you've given up, when the pressure of waiting has passed, when he appears, it's incredible, I don't believe it and there he is, the unbelieving is so dazzling that in the gush of happiness I stumble, I fall, either into his arms or backwards, or on the side. Either into life or out.

Something besides books, says my daughter.

Rather like one of those irritating cars, which have a tendency to roll backwards or to throw themselves foaming into the maw of the bear or some sort of lion which right away you've got to get on the right side of, some have no brakes, you can leave, but arriving is something else yet again. Or the ones you have to carry on your back.

Maybe prayers.

I could say that each of 'my books' is a book *I don't write*, I who sign H  l  ne Cixous, I she whom I often, too often, hear speak up with authority, try as I will to keep a watch, a sharp ear on her, there with an uncontrollable unwariness goes that voice, yes mine, it's my sound rising – listen, please, it rises all by itself, despite my threats, it's the question of the status of the pronominal form in French – and up it pipes, nothing to be done about it, it asserts, with a very old trace of na  ve jubilation, it darts out with dangerous assurance, so dangerous, that, it's true, stood me in good stead when I was a student but also occasioned some searing downfalls, for nothing is more painful than to soar as an eagle and crash into a blackboard. *I would like to be able to say that I am more modest than H  l  ne Cixous but it is precisely saying that which is impossible.*

And yet it is my wish to bear witness here, and particularly on the occasion of a 'donation' whose true face is the honour of being welcomed into a place inhabited by a people I venerate, that, firstly 1) without denying that I derive benefit from the equivocality, I do not take myself continuously or deeply or simply and comfortably for H  l  ne Cixous. I'll have more to say about this later. 2) I have deposited in the BN¹ in my name and under this name a certain number of texts, especially some of the youngest – which one might perhaps call the oldest – that I doubted when first they came to me, came like letters from a foreign country on my paper, were books and that I could pass as their author. And I still doubt it. Not that the older books, that is the more recent ones, no longer worry me; but with time I have been forced to grow accustomed to this haunting, this internal supplanting, without making too much of it. And I have been compliant, that is the word, I have consented to this usurpation of myself by myself, to this guilt by docility which allows me to benefit in my name from fruits produced

within me by other-powers a certain number of which I am familiar with but not all, to this capitalisation on the work of another, I have followed another, sometimes behind sometimes in front, followed the traces, voluntarily in thrall to the copious dictation of this copious source.

That which in the dark grumbled exuded swarmed: columns of thousands of insects. The walls were pages upright. The pages walls knocked down. I swim in a lather of cold sweat between the partitions of a book. Call that a book, that thing? That yawning coffin on end, a customs house for ghosts, backwards entryway? That haggard violent thing crazy for death? That ooze of fears you don't want to run away from? That rustle of fraudulent voices from behind the pasts, through the cracks in the nights. And I didn't chuck those things out, those larva? The lemures? But I didn't get close to them either, those what, those relics of wild rides, of massacres, dismembered masks, those lacerations, those thrift shop glad rags, that mulch of half dead half living visions. Unnameable fallen vestiges I left them to quiver in a corner of my room, getting on with their plots that I couldn't possibly want to know about. There in the back on the right was a den.

After endless gallops, which threw up walls of white smoke and lasted two minutes Fabrice, Stendhal's sublime idiot,² wondered: this battle into which I've followed my horse that carried me over the front line once, twenty paces to the right and ahead of the generals, twenty braided hats among them, where all I did was follow my horse, may his will be done,

where I was in fact the horse of my horse, his mettle, and where therefore I resembled a beast on this very humid earth an incalculable distance from the line of good and evil,

where all of a sudden the enemy was us

where I saw everything there was to see which is to say nothing, which doesn't keep a thing we know is terrible from happening

where a hundred times I understood strictly nothing,

where at each scene of blood and outcry I saw a curtain of enigma come down across my soul,

where I failed to be at each event, where where I was I wasn't there—

was this battle a *real* battle? Or was it just a battle but not a real one but still. But what does battle mean and real what does that mean? And how to answer yourself when you get carried away by other-powers, in this instance the horse, and not only the horse, when you are whirled about in the coat, under the name and documents of someone else, and therefore someone else's fate and flung onto the roiled field in place of a dead person, left as if and for a corpse who into the bargain in life was a thief condemned to prison? Then when you have *stepped into his shoes*,

when you are *no one but* the successor to a corpse, who to ask what is real, if the battle is real and if the big blonde guy with the red head is really Marshal Ney? You might as well ask a sergeant who is perhaps, with a bit of luck, really real, someone who was there: 'Please sir, is this really a battle?'

The answer: 'A little.'

I too have stepped into someone else's shoes, I mean a master and I don't know what his destiny has in store for me. I began by being a successor, the state of succeeding-to is so powerful, I was so spellbound by the being I lodged and whom I inhabited that the I I habitually used to express myself was masculine.

(Please note: I don't know this, I'd forgotten. Jacques Derrida reminded me of it one day in 1998, when he was rereading certain of my books with a view to writing the text called *H. C. pour la vie, c'est à dire . . .*³ I remember: my friend was speaking to me never suspecting he was manipulating words which in my hands would have been a grenade ready to explode. It was *Prénom de Dieu*⁴ the most frightening the most buried the most outlawed of my demons. I don't remember I was thinking. And I absolutely don't want to remember. The lava's still boiling in that crater. The proof that the thing was by notme wasn't it precisely the masculine mask, an apotrope that I put on to ward myself off? What is strange is that I remember the folly of my existence in those days in its minutest details. I was my tenant, or so I believed.)

The first dead person into whose shoes I stepped was my dead father. You don't choose whom to be haunted by. Fate strikes out of the blue. It's all decided, the beginning and what comes next. Once the succession business gets underway, there's no stopping it. I am a descendent of the dead. I am added up cut mingled tissue issue. My dead live inside me. My father passed from life to my heart of hearts. And after him my son, my dog, later my grandmother, I shall not name all my beings for the happiness of being able to keep is the source of a terrible grief.

'I cannot live with a chorus of larva and lemures who take over the room of me,' I told myself. I was afraid of cadavers, that my horse might put its blunt, innocent feet down on a mortally wounded redcoat, to see a killed body gazing at me with one eye. Who knows who kills whom, whom to kill, who's who?

Suddenly the horse halts in the hollow of a bombarded field, says Stendhal. Startling, isn't it? He stops, short!: there's a cadaver across his path. Here the epiphany of *You* flares up. This You I shall be one day and that I already am. Fabrice's face turns the greenish hue of You. Isn't it maybe *his* death or *her* death, the being he's taken the place of, which

brings him up short in a magic asyndeton. I am the one you were. You are the one I shall be. You change my subject, in kind, in genre.

‘It’s not from our division,’ says the canteen-keeper into whose shoes I see my mother step later. *C’est la vie* she says. That’s the way things are.

But as for me *things* divide me. I am part of *it*, and *it* is part of me.

I am half horror half passionate compassion.

What really struck Fabrice was the filth of the cadaver’s feet. The half and half remains of what was a man. Dirt is human. It’s the nature of man. The remains of human, your own dirt. One does not say of the earth that the earth is dirty. But the dirtiness of the foot whose shoes you’ve stolen, the dirt of the robbed feet is half human, half cadaver half earth, ah! you are returning to dust.

Ah! I would like to be dust. I want to take you in my arms. It’s not impossible. It’s only forbidden. I’ve never consoled myself for not having taken the still body of my father in my arms. He was still. Dead one remains still. There he was. I know, he left leaving his body behind for us a little still. *A little*. A little is a lot. It’s the passage between the realms between the times.

I wanted to hold him in my arms the whole time of a little and we would have shared my warmth between us. But it’s forbidden, I don’t know why. We are punished, condemned. The dead are punished with death and the living too. Among Jews one cuts immediately. One disunites the so-called dead person from the so-called living. One protects. Without knowing whom. One separates. One pronounces the verdict. One washes. One chases away. Fabrice’s cadaver had dirty feet, like you and me. Among Jews one removes the dirt, the humanity, one rushes the dead person away from his peers. I wanted to be the dust and take my father in my dust arms until not a speck of him not one ounce suffered. But it’s forbidden. One shoos the dead away into death proper before the end. One kills them. Not knowing what we do.

So I must have begun to secrete dust, refuse remains of dreams, and all that by transgression, in the dark, with a revolting feeling of sin. Revolt of the feeling against the feeling. In those days in the prime of youth one stands accused. All the time, of everything. To want to, to be able to, to hope to, to guess at, to adore to, to not stop oneself. To encourage life to live. To enter on the other side.

I was horribly afraid of this pile of things seeping through my cracks from the other side. Was I guilty? Fearing so, I was. And what’s more I didn’t exactly know of what, a second fault. I feared the worst. Because of the invasion. Not being able to stop the supervening. The returnings. Not being able not to let things come to pass, unknown, unqualifiable. I had the words. But I didn’t have the names. I didn’t have the envelopes,

the crowns. I had leaderless peoples. There were no doors. Was I a being from the other side. I didn't dare let myself. What have you got to declare? What a question!

For a long while, months maybe, I spoke to no one for fear 'it' showed, as they say. As all the motherly women, the innkeepers, the canteen-keepers warned Fabrice: mind you don't speak to a soul, not a word, you'll get yourself arrested. And if *it* showed? My mental accent. My dust origins. I was choking.

So I went to see Jacques Derrida. And why? Whatever you're thinking, you're wrong. All this happened in the night of my time. Why go and see him? I wanted to show him my monsters in secret, my wounds, the limbs and pieces of my disaster, scraps of cut tongue, baskets of sliced phonemes, traces of fauns, lots of loose sheets of paper to which I consigned in vain the mad and urgent question of the real [*vrai*]. Is that *real*? Veritable or *vair*? (Raving?) How on earth can you ask if it's a *real* battle? The false one and the grave aren't they real too, in a different way? So what did I want to ask him? I wanted to asked him if. And what then.

And I would trust him. And why who him? He was nobody but anyone. Had he been somebody, with a face, a waist, a way of walking and so forth, then no. But I'd already seen him and I'd already read him. I never had the slightest doubt that he was a book which existed. He's the Book that talks, with a trace of an accent. By chance and by necessity – but let me quote him, it's safer. I think he remembers my memories of him better than I do, which is to say more or maybe less, I mean with this perhapsness which renders assurance prudent and folly wise. In the retelling the tale goes deeper. So here it is:

I-met-her-some-thirty-five-years-ago. [*That's no longer a sentence. He's stitched it into a one-word event. – HC*]

And although I probably never understood a thing about it, although I have not yet understood her, we have without a doubt never since been apart. It's *as if* we had *practically* never been apart.

Yes, I'm fairly sure, I-met-her-perhaps-thirty-five-years-ago.

I should like to say and to repeat this sentence like a very long single word, a single vocable, as if I spoke it in tongues, unintelligibly, in a single breath.⁵

What Jacques Derrida right away adds to the evocation of an encounter is a certain salt of uncertainty, something he has the knack of, that I should so like to borrow, for nothing is more soothing than that which at first seems disquieting, the refinement of hesitation. It leaves

everything open. Everything is perhaps, according to him this perhaps is natural, whereas for me unfortunately it rustles with the fear of mourning. Perhaps everything is perhaps. But then everything can also be.

Let me quote him, it's his memory. According to him I was her, and she even, she, beyond a doubt. If only I'd known. 'She had written, she had written me. Before that, she has since told me he says, many long years before, some seven years before, she had seen and heard me – but from behind. She had seen and heard me talking, from behind,'⁶ he says I said. So I had come to fall silent in a foreign language. A strange gift. I had come to make myself strange to him. In a word. Facing an academic jury, for a lecture on the subject of death. Now it just so happens, as neither he nor I could have known, I would otherwise never have written or written otherwise, save to a voiceless faceless utterance, safe from any contact.

'The subject of death'. Luckily I couldn't see his face. What am I saying? I saw a back, not even, a single piece of life without any colour, dark, that's all. An utterance came out of it, groping with listening fingers with ponderous words, firm, attentive, the subject of death, which palpated the back of the subject, death's back therefore, his docile body put in the hands of a faithful subject which wished him well. And which was saying exactly what I'd have liked to hear had I been living in this world, in the realm of mortality. Had he been facing me, there would have been something like an address. But these words went off before me and before him, with the gentle firmness of a doctor's hands searching for the place the pain begins or is hiding. When I asked to meet him (not to see him) I was therefore going to consult his back, the doctor who palpates humanely, with strong neutral hands, the one who no longer speaks but remains.

He seemed to me to be a being who was on the other side of the other side. Many years had passed apparently, but I was sure that he continued to think about the thought of death and that he was one of the people who can fathom its languages. I wanted to show him my monsters, my filth, my anomalies, my animalies, all this unnamed small fry I was collecting in the maw of hells, these rejects, these sorts of half-baked children, and all speaking in sentences as well as in words. And I'll trust him, I said. But not completely, since I didn't trust myself. Plus I was so terrified of the diagnosis that, to be on the safe side, I spoke to him in a foreign language. A language-refuge invented for the occasion. That way, if things went awry, it wouldn't really be me.

And what did he say. According to him: 'But what have we got here? A ULO (unidentified literary object)? What's this I've got? Who'll ever be able to read a thing like this?' All of which he doesn't say but he

thought it and he remembers it. But what *is* this *this*? Just what I was thinking. We were having coffee. For me it was: what's this woman done? At least if it wasn't an ULO, I mean it wasn't a crime, maybe not something shameful.

What I meant to say is that as a successor I wasn't a precursor, a scout of front-lines, nor a denizen of ivory towers, museums, castles, but a creature of the bottom. And what happens on the 'bottom'? A kind of meltdown, metamorphoses by collusion, confusion, osmosis and other dissociative phenomena. Beginning with *Dieu* (God in English) who began by being, by being Di and all of a sudden from one syllable to the next puts his eyes out turns himself into *Diable* (the devil himself). But I was speaking a foreign language, coded, furtive.

So I must have said something like: 'Please sir, this is the first time I've seen sentence eruptions. Is this a real text?' And, of course, he answers: 'A little.' A little! There you have him. It's him totally or him a little. The oracle. The answer with no answer.

– Is it really the Battle of Waterloo?

– Don't you see the Emperor?

It's always the same! Believe me, I'm looking, but all I see is generals galloping, an escort in their wake, flowing manes with dragons on their helmets that keep me from distinguishing their faces. So I never get to see the Emperor except after he is past, hidden, behind a battledress of dragon manes and other beasts I find strewn across my path in my desperate gallop through the squares and streets. True, I feel a kind of sad joy at constantly coming up against animals of all sizes for if they are make-believe and stand-ins, at least they are signs I'm on the road to the apocalypse.

I see generals galloping, I mean I see the braided hats, I never see anything but synecdoches and promises, and no doubt most poignant of all in these moments where I find myself about to see at last, then the vision, its possibility or permission, is withdrawn, is that most of the time I will never even have seen, among the faceless, my own so-longed-for father going by without me ever even being warned. I don't even see that I don't see, I don't even know that I don't know, but someone else in me in my shadows receives the lost information and passes the telegram on to me, more or less. The person in the shadows who notices what I miss, who is in the way of what for me doesn't happen, who brings me news of all the worlds is her, her, as he says in *H. C.* The dream catcher. She who knows no shame. At bottom there is no such thing as shame. It's only by daylight, in the city, that the plague rages. How I used to suffer from shame! Nothing is more shameful than shame. True cowardice. Still today I'm ashamed of having suffered from shame. What was I

ashamed of, or horrified of, or ashamed of the horror of? Why? That's childish.

I could fling my arms around my mother's neck and not recognise her. I could come across my father in the garden and not see him. I could bend over the species of child I honestly thought I'd brought into the world that very morning and no longer know what it was. I could travel for hours the other way from my way to the point of delirium without daring to think that if I hadn't recognised the facades the street corners for hours on end it wasn't by mistake, I'd left in the opposite direction, but I believed as usual that everything appeared strange and abnormal to my ever-treacherous eyes. It was therefore perfectly normal I not recognise anything.

And so I went to the end of the earth where the abyss yawns. On the last day of his life on earth my father, imprisoned behind a hospital window, waved at me. Both of us were voiceless and glassed in. I couldn't make out whether he moved his hands in this direction or that direction, if he was telling me leave or stay. Or come. I stood there swaying. Then I left. Maybe I ought to have stayed. Everything fled from me and it was my fault in one direction or the other. Unable to read faces I wrote. The notebook is not a window one can stick one's nose in it. Joyfully I greet strangers who are not the friends I thought, pass up friends without a smile, I sin, I insult, each time I believe my eyes I miss the Emperor when I don't believe any of my eyes I sink to the bottom of error. These things come out of me were they life were they death, the thing that hits me out of the blue and comes from my entrails is it child or excrement? I could say neither yes nor no neither adopt nor reject. The unclean or *Unheimliche* was my interior environment. I illegitimised everything, unintentionally. Trickery and imposture you abolish you get killed.

– A little, a little this or a little that, I wondered. Not being able to distinguish, attribute, appropriate, separate was scandalous in my youth. Love without racial differences. Without sexual differences. I owe all my fears and books to my short-sightedness.

The dreams came along. More strangers. It took me a while to welcome them. In the beginning I would shoo them away. Yet they are highly skilled workers. But I was afraid to put moonlighters to work for me. It's too easy. One sleeps, one is safe, meanwhile the enchanted dwarfs are telling ten thousand and one nights. When I started to keep them I was conscious of enormous fraud. I don't know at what instance I felt like I was hauling away treasures. I was the owner of a mine, but what does ownership mean when one has the use of property neither

acquired nor inherited? I am the owner of other-powers I don't control, that don't obey me, I have an army of wild horses. I share the fantasy of royalties with them. To be truthful I feed them. My passions, my pains, my storms, my cries of anger or despair are their wellspring and provender. They often give me a hand when I write. Sometimes a kick. If I'm tired, I put a dream on, the first that goes by. All the constructions, the fabulous movable and immovable stage sets are them. They've got all the strength and humour I don't. Have I employed the services of a dream in this text? I could lie to you.

Between dreams and me this is how it works: I 'write' them or rather I note their adventures as precisely as possible. It's an art and a discipline. I'll discuss this elsewhere another time. They on their side write to me. And they write me. They write me letters from my foreign country. They give me my news. The news has all the dates of my history. From them I learn how old, totally forgotten events keep themselves active in my wings. And they set up numerous interviews with dead relatives, never long enough but powerful and ecstatic enough to push back the walls of separation. In accomplishing all that and other miracles, I can say they write me as well. I'm the book to which they stick paperoles.

To the question: is it a book? I say it's always a struggle. What is a book? Never something tranquil, or settled, it's always a savage battle of my wills, between the book and me it's war: whatever one of us wins the other loses. It starts with a secret I fight over. I want to give it away to myself. I want to give it away to the book. I don't want the book to give it away. I want to do everything in order not to give it away. I want to try everything to make it let go, to make me let go. One day I told my brother 'I'm going for the most awful.' It was true. It was a mistake. It was a way of going without telling. It was a way of going which doesn't mean getting there. It was a way of trying to go right up to arriving, with slow staggering steps as you must when you have to fight not to run away, it was a way of beginning to close in on the book by trying to keep it from running away. Or maybe it's a slowness that allows you to sneak up on your prey but who is the prey, me or me? Who decides what keeps us apart? Am I myself my horse? Not everyone is as torn as me. Stendhal addressed himself as '*tu*' in his journal, he has no better friend, if he needs to get away from himself he takes himself aside in his broken English. Even Kafka *substitutoies* himself. When his hands have an argument, true he tries to be fair, but that's not easy for a person, a writer furthermore, who his whole life has favoured his right hand, even if he claims he's never had anything against the left, and what to do if it has always been fearful and easily defeated. The left wrist is you, with your girlish fingers. The right wrist powerful cruel victorious is me.

I have only one hand, and I'm always afraid for myself, because in writing, in the effort to fight myself off to defend the freedom of movement of my wrist and fingers, I twist my wrist, my elbow, I have to bandage my arm, and wrist, to minimise the damage, which makes me stiff and perplexed. Each time, and it gets worse and worse, a part of my body gets beat up in the process.

I said: I'm heading for the most awful. I meant: at the time. There is more awful than most awful, but they don't all turn up at once. There is always a main most awful, which seems the Worst, the Prince of Evil, he stays in the line as long as you haven't found a name for him. That can take years or never. He really is surrounded by serpents and guarded by poisonous pits and blinding clouds. The closer you get the more he worsens, he proliferates the minute you crowd him, his way of hiding is to be innumerable in faces and speeches, he is like a sick person who makes you sick and sickens with words, spinning his notebooks down in a cellar. You can't really portray him because everything he says does thinks lives is false, absolutely everything, his truth is falsehood, his extreme nastiness is falsehood, the worst he can do is to denounce himself as the height of nastiness, his folly like all folly threatens with folly any person who doesn't refuse to listen to him. All the existing portraits of him are by definition fakes. In the old days he used to turn up in the guise of the dragon or Hydra, an allegorical way of masking or reducing the terror of a human being so archi-devious and complex. Furthermore you can't just sit back and hate him because he suffers. Nobody can live in peace with this hideousness at the bottom of the garden or the city. But doing battle is equally disastrous. Still I've never written other than by facing up to his writhing features. It is even what makes me write. That is, to attempt to draw him. I had no choice.

Right away I admit I asked God for help. God is created for these sorts of struggles. Fear makes him necessary. His main job is to be above the melee, to read what for the person who writes in the smoke with bullets whistling by overhead deafened by the blast of the cannons, is completely unintelligible, and to find, among the sentence fragments, charred sheets, smirched pages, the name of that huge unidentified body in the rubble. It's the name which turns the protean monster into an exorcised Book. Pacified. I'm not ashamed to say that I myself have never been able to get by without God, or to make myself God and find the name buried in the rubble. This supreme act is beyond my strength. Each time I have to telephone and to invoke. Weeks can go by before the thing is identified as a book.

In the meantime the body with its dismembered limbs and strange head breathes by means of provisional names, allowing it to remain in

transit among the living. Often I hand it over to my editor like a dubious child. – What's its name? – I don't know yet.

I don't dare say: I'm waiting for God to think of it. I say: it'll come. Meanwhile it resembles one of my painfully familiar and incomplete animals, my three-legged dog, or my mongoloid son in the days before I knew what that bizarre thing was. The point to which everything depends on the name is not well enough understood, for God alone knows. A name I myself might claim to give it would be a fake, a forced name. Of course it might pass. Some names of my books might be fakes in this sense, I shan't say which. I believe the book with a forced name remains a little dubious: I can only resign myself. Isn't it weird and wonderful that so much grace, luck, destiny, richness of readings in literature rests upon the power of a name? *Manhattan, Lettres de la Préhistoire* [*Manhattan, Letters from Prehistory*],⁷ for instance, throughout the hostilities of its genesis, which lasted for months and made me sick, was called *Le Récit* [*Story*]. Beneath this all-purpose hat was a killer.

So I always go straight for the-most-awful, I go for what I flee from whereupon what I flee from flees me too as soon as I force myself to go toward what I flee it flees me. And if the two flights took place in opposite directions and were rectilinear nothing would ever come of it. But these flights go in all directions, unpredictable, contrary, they are animals scattering in the bush, fast, in zigzags, no way to bet on them. When you run away from yourself within yourself and ahead of yourself, incredibly ruseful forces enter into play, the invention of semblances you believe in, errors you don't detect, irresistibly discouraging speeches, is endless, impossible to distinguish good faith from the bad faith which protects it, you become a laboratory for the emission of smoke screens, a factory producing dissuasion, each thought mistakes itself, meanwhile the book develops inversely, producing booby traps, pretending to surrender so as to turn coat on the next page, effacing its tracks, undermining the structure, causing amnesias in mid-sentence by means of who knows what sort of chemistry. Resisting, it fills out, grows up, becomes the enemy who steals my ideas and uses them against me. If there was an alliance it's been betrayed, if I thought at last, after patience immemorial, I could tackle the subject, move painstakingly but surely toward the barrow or mound or tomb where the thing, the secret or the morsel or the dragon's egg sits, but with unsheathed claws, all of a sudden war erupts. Try as I may to hang on, to fight back, I am thrown off course, it's all a trap. The book is like an echo of my voice in the telephone I might take for the voice of the book. The hardest is that it seems to imitate me to the point where I wonder if it isn't I who imitate it.

But I'm getting off track. I am off track. I might come to a standstill.

I backtrack. I enter the battlefield on another page. I fast forward. Very fast. Finally I'm going to put up a struggle I thought without thinking. I glance around, it's almost dark. I seem to be out hunting. I hear six or seven sentences go off nearby. Right away I make a note of them. The first I catch sight of I pounce on. Two pages later, I'm lost. Where was I? Impossible to retrace my steps, there are none. My rapid displacement of the troops, mine or maybe his, his feints, either he leaves only a thin line of troops in front of one of his opponents so as to come down hard on the other (Napoleon 1814) said Proust or someone, or else he employs a diversionary tactic, forcing the enemy to mass troops on a front which is not the main one, his retreats comparable to those with which Austerlitz, Arcole, Eckmühl, Osnabrück began, everything about the book is Napoleonic. Which in no way foretells the end. *A general is like a writer who wants to write some play, some book, and the book itself, with the unexpected resourcefulness it shows in one place, the dead end it produces somewhere else, deviates sharply from the original plan. But this manoeuvre may be part of the original plan.* A writer is like a general, tall, slim, with a sunburnt face and beady eye, who strides past a young person who resembles a dead hussar with false papers and expectations, without seeing him. What pleasure he would have had, the writer, the general, had he recognised the very lively effigy of his own creation beneath the fakes. But nobody to tell him: there's your book. The sun is going down. You hear a crash. Four or five books have tumbled off the desk and got tangled up under their horses. The general himself has taken a tumble and is covered with blood. I pick myself up all the same exhausted saying: I won't write this book. I write this sentence down in my scribbler 'I won't write this book.' There, it's written. There it is in the book. There it is on the side of the book. There it is siding with the book. What was I saying!? How to get out of this mess? Every exit sends you back into the arena.

Like a diversion. Suppose the diversion succeeds beyond your wildest hopes, while the main operation is a flop; the diversion becomes the main operation. A book is a main failure which succeeds beyond your wildest hopes.

What was that I said? – I'm going to put up a struggle. OK, I put up a struggle. The book is proof of that. I am black and blue. My knees are killing me.

Did I write the book that calls itself Manhattan (it calls itself, note)? Did I notwrite it? Did I de-cribe it?

I recall a battle in ten or twenty episodes. I described circles around

the cave in which it slept, with one eye open, trying to wear it out with this crazy circling, disorientate it, get it drunk, make it roll its eye back, close its eye and then leap on it in one fell swoop like Nobody and lay it low. That's how Ulysses did it. This was in 2001. I described it for months, in the process you describe yourself you bewitch yourself you get persecuted during the persecuting, besides when you keep describing circles you soon find yourself hunted down by whatever you are hunting, out in front of what you are running after, it's the hare and the book.

I revolted. All of a sudden I said to myself: I won't write this book. What a sentence! To whom addressed by whom? I wrote it, I read it, it shimmered, it got on my nerves I was increasingly persuaded it told a kind of truth but which?

One day I revolted and I wrote: I won't write this book, that's it, I shall continue not writing it to the bitter end. I wrote that *in* the book. That way it was clear. I was free of responsibility for any misunderstanding. Like it or not. With the same sort of rage I went on writing-but-not-this-book, this book, I wasn't writing but another. An other. An other-power went on. The whole time I wasn't writing it, dreaming only of flushing it from its den, I attacked it from all angles, in every genre, tragedy, comedy, fiction, wondering am I burying what I want to dig up or vice versa? In my opinion digging up buries still you must give it a try. I'd already tried in 1991, 93, 94, 96, 97 and each time there was a diversion, a dispersion of notes and evasions. And before that I'd had a go in the 70s, possibly a number of goes without success therefore a diversion on the heels of the main operation.

Failure eggs me on.

After all I never stopped constantly not writing this book for decades and face to face on a dozen precisely dated previous occasions. This sort of writing which consists in the tenacious rubbing of notwriting on the so-soft membranes of thought produces a strange sort of energy. Strangest of all is repeating the same thought of a sentence and sentence of thought. Ten times in ten years I wrote: 'I won't write this book.' Which signifies my impotence, the failure of the subject's authority over her own decision, the annulling of the oath the moment it is uttered, amnesia or conscious or unconscious forswearing. It's terrible to forget one's word. What's the point of talking, or believing, or writing, or being. Every time I wrote that sentence I killed its previous fellow and put the future cadaver of the sentence I was writing in its place.

How can I have confidence in whatever or me when, upon opening the files in which I archive my quarrels I find myself repeating the same sentence three months or three years later? I promise myself in vain? Or maybe the instant I make this promise I'm already busy betraying

it or maybe the betrayal is already secretly underway and I'm rushing to wring its neck with some magic formula? You ought to beware of a sentence like that the minute you hear it. Furthermore any statement is nothing but the naïve costume in which to drape the transparent shape of temptation. *To want to* snuggles up to *don't want to*. In *not-do*, *do* lies coiled. Why have I so often written (and for starters, said and thought): I won't write this book? Why have I written myself that? You must believe the danger was fresh and pressing. You must believe I truly wanted to believe myself, and believe that I truly wanted not to write this book. It's so difficult not to do what one does not want to do. Do I want what I want? wondered Napoleon. The answer lay in the field. I do what my horse wants. It so happens that the horse (is it the book is it me) struggles all bloody on the ploughed ground getting its feet tangled up in its guts. It wants to follow the others. Worst of all is the animal whose feet get caught in our guts. And this small recurrent massacre of promises and intentions was and is the seal and signature of this Book, its evil talent and the proof that it was there from the start, despite me, against me, beyond me, as sworn enemy accidentally brought into the world behind my back. And of course there's no such thing as an accident. This is why we feel so guilty, rightly or wrongly, about all the world's misfortunes.

And what to make of the lung disease that is one of the main weapons of the Book's character, and later of the Book as character?

How does it happen that I came down with pneumonia the very week I embarked on all these stories of lungs and consumptive man? On the one hand I didn't want to write this book. On the one hand terrible bodily anguish, cough, instead of improvement aggravation, at night I imagine emergency, ambulance call without a voice, asphyxia hospital life gone to pieces and how to let you know? the gigantic spectre of an unheard of separation, previously inconceivable, the Book kidnapped me suffocating not even able to talk to one another. On the other hand, brainstorm at dawn, the book in my body, write to heal myself of the dread, spit it up. Physiowriting. – Can you give yourself pneumonia via a book? I asked my doctor brother. Did the thought of the book contaminate me? Or did the illness call up the book I wasn't writing? Or, to meet him on equal terms, had I summoned up my father's legacy from within? My love of handkerchiefs, my love for the person who in our Age of Kleenex still keeps hankies in his drawer, my perverse love for my father's big handkerchiefs my miserly manner of deploying them in high school, I went all around them, I would read them with my nose, I saved them up.

– We don't know which is egg and which is chicken my brother said.

More than once I have written other sorts of books, those sorts of lava books wrought between brazier and torrent, death rattles of pre-historic entrails, the waters embrace the fires without putting them out the fires swim on the waters, I write these other-books in a state of panic to salvage a scrap of life from the jaws of death, it's frantic, you have to imagine what they call the shores of death, for such exists, they are steep jagged narrow shores where each word gets its footing on the brink of emptiness and each word is still a lifetime, time in this place hasn't the dimensions of our daily time, it's divided into minutes that pain and dread render colossal. Each minute prints itself on the brow of the heart so as to remain indelible gigantic marked for greatness by misfortune. These other-books are therefore the narrow edge of the banks of death, which with their frail, flamboyant lip really do skirt the bottomless mouth, those trembling lips so mysteriously attentive to the infinitesimal shudders of the mortal marvel are dangerous and impracticable. One cannot frequent them. When they occur, the instant they turn up like the birth of a fatality, without reflection or calculation, on the spot, you decide to keep all of them together in the notebooks set aside on the shelf on my left, one very special notebook, up there for years, which I'd always before absentmindedly avoided. Each time I write I must pick a notebook. It's intuitive. Just from the look of the notebook an observer could already guess at the kind of book it might produce, but I am not in the observer's shoes, I am trapped inside the book. Now not only had I never even considered that a book might settle in that scribbler, but instinctively I'd set it aside I'd acted as if I didn't see it, I kept it for Nothing, I kept it for no book, religiously, for it's my love who gave it to me years ago – I know that from the date I inscribed in it. This notebook wasn't a notebook. I'd have had to get past all kinds of phantasms to reach a somewhere place of that notebook. It never occurred to me it might host a book. Everything about it had always excluded lodging a guest. While other notebooks lend themselves like natural parks to multiple landings. They put up with visits from all sorts of different worlds and invite exploration. For material supports and stages of theatres are alike in that the ground engenders more powerful thought than you can imagine, such is the case with my 12-21-93 notebook, which has lain open ever since that date. A rustic elegant somewhat Indian-looking notebook whose cover is a faded red deckled with a stylised lotus and rose motif, comfortably wide pages of unbleached paper, each capable of hosting a tale, a dream, a secret, admirably well-proportioned. In this notebook anything can happen and for decades.

To get back to the notebook that had been lying around for so long,

in 1998 I'd attempted a stop-over there, but it was impossible everything conspired against it, in all directions, the dimensions, the colours, the texture of the paper. A few lines and off I went. Without guessing, without presentiment. This is the notebook and none other which has become the book of Thessie my sorrow my love. It is unlike any other notebook. On the first page it has the date of its arrival; these dates like a birth date that I ritually bestow on my notebooks and scribblers, a baptism, a sign of recognition, a pet name, for all are beings and sacred. The birth date of the long gray notebook is 231294. This means Christmas present. Down in the bottom right-hand corner of the page. But the first words, located diagonally opposite, in the top left-hand corner, are telling: it has to do with *things – to come* (99). So five years passed before anything came. I must have wanted to nudge the long thin notebook into bloom. This notebook contains a square sheet of paper, a sort of publisher's blurb I was careful not to lose. It says: handmade paper from the bark of Daphné Cannabina or Daphné Papyracea, whose common name is Lokta in Nepal. Lokta is found at altitudes above 6,500 feet. Lokta regenerates six or eight years after it has been logged.

Buying this product helps to improve socioeconomic conditions among the poorest strata of Nepalese society. But there you are, no things came. Or was it necessary to wait six or eight years for Daphné to regenerate? In 1999 I'd started a page, a brief trace: Story of my Aunt Eri's first *gefühlte*. The story sputtered out. It was all about a cake that didn't rise, although my aunt tucked it under the pillows of her bed. My uncle also failed to rise in bed.

In 1999, when I wrote 'Things to come' I meant to keep the gray notebook for thoughts, I'd have jotted down those sorts of gleams which start 'What if . . .' and come to me during the day in this or that hour or place where I do not write which doesn't keep the intimation of a book from flitting across the clear skies to my left like a little falcon changed by distance and light into a sort of alphabet squiggle flexed and vibrant. And then nothing came in that lowering gray sky. Of course never once in all those years did I suspect what fate had in store for me. Had I known I think I'd have chucked it out, burned it, buried it. And now *Things to come* which was in vain has become *2002 Thessie*, the ultimate book, the last world, the totally unforeseen relative of the fat book of prayers garbed in well-thumbed soft black leather which must be read upside down and from right to left, the résumé of the Klein-Jonas Family, this book of the dead kept by the living where my grandfather before or after the chapters of invocations kept the family register of births and deaths during his lifetime, in Hebrew and in German, like an Egyptian scribe, then after having written for eternity the beginning of the story of my

mother, you could read the end of the story of the scribe, the brief tale of the writer's death composed in the hand of his widow my grandmother a young woman then the book was kept by his widow my grandmother up to the death of my grandmother then it was my mother her daughter who wrote the brief tale of the death of Omi and this book sits on my shelf to the right of the Bibles and Talmuds. Anyone who has this book in their keeping is the new guardian of death's door. Now it's me on the threshold. You don't know who will be the writer coming after whom. You open these books, you don't read them you weep, you don't know who weeps what, the spring never runs dry, life itself flows between the dead. Death lives. The dead live on.

I open up the Thessie notebook, here's the conflagration that will never be a book, I cannot read it. Its fifty flames eat my heart.

In the end I won't write my brother's book and this I regret. What a character! The more the years go by, the more the character asserts itself, shapes itself, develops its idiomatic stylistic and mental turns, settles into its totally contradictory traits, appears now in a Dostoyevskian light now treading a Shakespearean path, disguised, strong, loud, catastrophic, sleep-walking. Each time I walk beside him, always in an out-sized, good-for-the-imagination landscape, or on the contrary when we curl up in the conversational armchairs, I feel the book take shape, pick up speed, but I can't do that to him, consign him to paper and, without ceasing to take mental note of him I renounce, I try to be content with this bookless character whose versatility nonetheless seems unique in the world to me. It's a pity. In my books my brother makes a lot of noise going past. But that's nothing. A mere syllable of the extraordinary book he'd make. In the end writing renounces writing, so many books flit by, oh, it would be lovely and I don't lift a finger.

Yet, in October 91 in Kingston, Canada, I wrote and proclaimed in public in the presence of my friend Mireille that I will never write a book about my mother, I even dated the promise, you could hardly be more credulous and solemn than that, and right away I did the contrary, a model of innocent forswearing, or forswearing rather. You should never swear, who says swear forswears, forswearing is all there is. October 91 must have been too late, the book had no doubt already begun, was also start well before the war and crimes are about to be committed well before the knife, otherwise nothing would ever happen. Often books begin concealed in non-books, as prenatal spectres. All they're waiting for is an occasion, a break. That's why when the wall cracks they gush out, all written, triumphant and irrepressible. The secretary has only to take the character's letter as fast as possible. Neither Stendhal nor

any human being (nobody) could ever have ‘written’ the 625 pages of *The Charterhouse of Parma* in the fifty-two days between 4 November and 26 December 1838, just think about it. Six hundred and twenty-five pages to which you must add a hundred or so pages because in the whirlwind that sweeps your desk away, you always lose those dozens of sheets that fly off and will require much more time and suffering to retrieve and promptly rewrite. Seven hundred and fifty pages, 52 days, that clearly demonstrates 1) that such days are magically long as was the case for the fifty days pages of the Thessie notebook, they are other-days and other-pages. Nothing human. 2) that the character, that is this book which is to be called and is already called *The Charterhouse* before it begins, exists already, he or she – for the character, being in writing, does not require a sex or genre – mounted on his horse Willpower, is already cantering across the bombarded, disorientated, overpopulated, or at the sound of a single disquieting word, *cossack* let’s say, promptly-deserted fields, awaiting the day, the hour, the place where its nurse secretary, forewarned of its imminent arrival – by some very telegraphic message sent on 3 September 1838, acknowledges reception in these terms: ‘I had *the idea* of *The Charterhouse*.’ In a foreign language, naturally. Which doesn’t mean the receiver takes to his desk on the 4th. He takes his time, like a woman preparing to give birth. Or a general his battle. Or a great thinker preparing to pass on. The preparations are the religious side of the book-character. Each person, each traveller, prepares his expedition according to his own particular rites. Some like certain animals disappear in search of a spiritual state propitious to delivery. Everyone takes stock physically, mystically, materially for all must be ready before the first sentence. The preparations often last longer than the creation or main campaign. Two months, sixty days in Brittany and Normandy *for the Charterhouse*. You take up arms. You’re off. You cannot stop yourself being divine, but it can’t last forever either.

I say divine, for this is the point of view that suits me, but you might say diabolical. In any case these moments are superhuman, they surpass in every way the strength and imagination of the being whose shell is the ground of their breaking. No the writer (the word bothers me) in the hallucinatory season is not god, he is a borrowed-body. We all know that this season is hell and excessive bliss. It’s a time of frightening depression, torture of the mind, heart, memory, an attack against yourself and all the others. Which explains why not everybody always wants to be nailed to a desk by the sword of a pen.

When my friend Marie Odile Germain (urged by a courteous sense of curiosity) inquired: ‘Will having deposited your manuscripts in the

Bibliothèque Nationale have an effect on your writing?’ I said: no. Hardly had she, tactfully, not quite finished putting her question to me, I said: No! Bang. I said No flat sharp quick. And I heard that no. Yes, I noted its familiar ring. It’s the no of denial. The slamming of the door. A no so prompt, so sure of itself, pouncing on the question before the interrogation mark, a no to be regarded with suspicion. Once Marie Odile Germain’s question had been shown to the door I sat down beside myself and I thought. An influence? What influence? Another burial I thought? Always the in-exhumation scene. Admittedly, there had been a plague of libraries in the *Manhattan* book in the year 2001. But in my opinion that came from elsewhere. But perhaps what-will-not-go to the Bibliothèque Nationale wanted to manifest itself. These subterranean manoeuvres take their orders from the secrets and not from me. The secrets dig tunnels, drill holes, wells, cover their tracks with layers and layers of earth. You may, as you read, think that you’ve sighted the slight mound of a tumulus.

I think so often and maybe all the time of the Book I-don’t-write, I am unable to say there are days or moments when I don’t think about it, it’s just the way I think about it that changes, sometimes I don’t think about it face to face but obliquely, off to one side, by means of slight oversights, inadvertently, it sometimes happens that I think of this book covetously but veiled, I may tell myself I’d like to write it but that’s a thought that belongs to the realm of neverwrite, you are happy to toy with ideas that stand no chance of ever becoming a threat of reality. Nor is it exact to say I don’t write the Book I-don’t-write, this would be restricting myself to believing that what is called writing is only the tracing of dark words on bright paper, many are the ways, I wish to believe, of writing the Book I don’t write, that is write it under cover, silently, invisibly, that is let it write itself as it likes on the notebooks of all kinds and species, disposed in surprising number on the shelves of my memory, as present and absent as the thousand books of Montaigne’s library whose tower’s arched and faded wall is proof that having been put where they no longer are they remain standing, reviving and reread every time a mind turns towards their vacant resting place. Having been they are and will be. The wall is there. You cannot separate them. Between the windows that frame the wall you find the rows of the missing, you can almost see them and sniff the leather with its film of mould and smoke of chestnut logs. Their shadows will never rot.

I believe the book-I-don’t-write is the first cause of all my books, the grave and cradle of God. You can neither bury God nor lay him down nor surround him nor shut him in. You can only offer him places where

he feels both loved and free. Free to live, free to be booked and free to come and go as he pleases. The act of thinking about this Book, which is what I've been doing from the first sentence of this text, engages me and stirs my heart from bottom to top, as if I were moving a plot of earth in order to find a beloved tomb. For a tomb is a tragically blissful place. A parcel of the beloved being is kept there within reach of my lips, my nostrils, my palms. The horror of the lost tomb, this family misfortune dating back to 1916 when the tomb of Michael Klein, a soldier with a droopy face under his pointy helmet, vanished into the trees of a Bielorrussian forest, has inspired more than one of my books. Nor can I regret the feelings of regret called up by the misplaced sites of, respectively, the tomb of my grandfather lost somewhere in Baranovici Forest in 1916, the tomb of my father buried in the ground of the Saint-Eugene Cemetery in 1948 then the tomb of my son walled up in a wall of the same cemetery in 1961 then the tomb of my grandmother left carelessly in an unfindable plot in Paris-Bagneux, since the pain I feel for these recurrent demises of tombs so often forces me to recall and reinvent those beings whom perhaps otherwise I would let myself resign to the keeping of a vile cemetery that is, to abandon. The idea that we, me first of all, can so readily abandon the dead making them suffer a sort of suffering that exceeds our small experience, for they are defenceless, prevents me from sleeping. I spend my dreams running around looking for now my son now my father now my cat or my grandmother.

My mother too has her ludicrous way of suddenly going off in search of the lost tomb. When I was in New York in October 2002 compulsively I went to the site of Ground Zero, in search of something. Like straining the sea for the lost grain of salt from my own tears. At the time I was suffering an anguish of dying I couldn't shake off, which ate into everything, creatures and creation, enveloping each object, each instant, each thought of a crepe, tugging the world's landscape into the past under my very eyes.

Monday 30th September at seven in the morning my mother rang me from her invincible life. Today I was at the cemetery says my mother with her mouth full the driver took me down, it was a bad spot, I walked for hours hours hours says my mother, I've just come in. But why go today I asked astonished, or perhaps she'd heard I don't know what imperceptible rustling of my soul long distance? Because I was at the hairdresser's I got a cut says my mother and I said I've got time for once I never have time, the weather's fine. Now I'm having a nibble of dark chocolate. You found it? I say for each time my mother tried she didn't find my grandmother Omi's tomb, there's a sort of tradition at work

there. The driver takes her down to the bad spot according to her but perhaps it's good this way. Now I'm going to eat my sauerkraut, says my mother. A tin. So bon appetit she says, bye. Bang. She hangs up. And she opens the can of sauerkraut. I notice that the sauerkraut, or perhaps it's jet lag, momentarily gives me back my taste for life. This sequence could go into the Book I don't write, I'm going to give it some thought I tell myself. I'm constantly planning to feed this book things which is not an ordinary book but rather a second life off to the side of my life, my other life which gives life to my life, furthermore I don't know which exactly is the first which the second which the other, it's a matter of point of view. If I put myself in my place the one I've just called the second is the first since it's the one that keeps my visible life alive; for me the latter is the life I lead out front of my vital life so as to protect and maintain it according to its immense needs and which therefore in its way sees in turn to the survival of my first life. If I put someone else in my place, my brother for example or a close friend, there's just one life to see, the other can't be seen. And yet it lives. The-book-I-don't-write, if it's unfindable strictly speaking as book, has its notebooks, its thousand little scribblers to shelter in, it is itself a dream but ongoing not always taken note of but indelible leaving no pages blank, real or imaginary, of a very long story which will never be pieced together or delivered to outside reading.

What would I say about this book? I need it. It would tell me so much, if I could write it, cast so much light on corners its non-writing leaves in the dark, it would open to realms and kingdoms whose number and immensity I only surmise, though none of its resources, I can even say without a blush that it would be equal in its countless riches to the fabulous treasure contained in Montaigne's *Essays*, I say that without risk of contradiction for never will it begin to be measured against reality. I can say I know its detailed summary, the exact dates, the hundreds of events, the bends in the road, all but the end, I've got them by heart, no lapse of memory. But that's only the frame and the wrapping. The promise therefore. Had I been able to write it, it would have taken its place among my most precious creatures, fullness unfathomable and infinite cosmos. Just as I open Montaigne several times every week, each time I need to light my mind at the Eternity pilot-light, any page, and a whole world crowds into sight, in fifty lines a journey and a philosophy clothed in tongues of flame.

I'm not claiming it's thanks to my particular genius that the Book would overflow with delights, never could I think or say that. This Book exists absolutely as much and as little as God exists otherwise. As we say of God or the cat, if only it could speak.

But if I got down to it, which will never happen, if, craftsman-wise and passionate, I undertook to translate and transmit its infinities in all their details, it would be better than nothing but hardly. Inevitably this adorable giant would be reduced to average proportions. I would paint it with all my might and in my enthusiasm I would limit it. Still within these limits I would find ten thousand delights for myself. Why did I say ten thousand? Why not a million? There's proof of how I limit things. My desperate desire to bring it to Book bound and submissive to my avidity, is natural. Every being would like, in vain, to help herself to the elusive grandeurs which pass shimmering in the soul's offing. At bottom we are so much vaster and more powerful than ourselves and deprived of our virtues and our strengths by our weakness, marvellous and petty mixtures as we are.

If suddenly I tried nonetheless to turn myself around and against all wisdom prudence and loyalty throw myself into it, I would be bound to fail. There'd be one of those de-railings of which each of my books is the result. Have I ever engineered the attack, planning perhaps to arrive at no other result than a stalemate and the success of a secondary diversion?

No.

I cannot write *The Book* itself but I can note certain of its effects on me.

Yesterday 10 April 2003 I went to Montaigne's castle, as planned and promised for weeks. I had to go there, I felt, because of the Book I don't write. Sometimes you get secret orders. An inner voice, what's more inaudible, orders. Montaigne is the the place and the god of the b.I.d.w. I don't know that from the outside and abstractly. I put it to the test of experience. The fact that I went as promised and on the day planned is in itself a miracle. I could list the obstacles that might have prevented it: the war, the family illness, the accident (car, plane), the storm, the anguish. The previous day it was pouring rain, downpours blanket the tower, my mother has taken to her bed in the middle of the day and the cruel phantasm of her demise springs up, my beloved's voice was so somber on the telephone, my darling cat peed on the chair, one after another all the signs were ominous, I myself was worn out and in agony. At dawn Thursday the weather was exceptionally fine, my mother rose from her bed the cat chirped off I went with my brother.

Montaigne, the tower, the castle, the book, the journey, the saint, the wine, the age, the weather. These fresh starts, what you are apportioned overflows the familiar bounds of the imagination. From dozens of kilometres around long before you find yourself at the tower's site, you've already taken loaves from its oven. I go there tight-fisted, anxious, short

of breath and heart on the other hand enlarged mood humorous complicit the soul as painstaking as it is anxious, ready for anything good or bad, to find and not to find, to groan and to exult, trusting to the devil. I have no other church, synagogue or birthplace in my soul. I come to be reborn, discreetly, every five or ten years. The sweetness of having 1580 in 2003, as if I'd been coming for 423 years or someone living for me. Here lives the book that's already written. Its life is as long as a Bible life. Here once upon a time we were wedded. Friends, here you cannot not be drawn into a nuptial tenderness. Here Montaigne and La Boétie. Here my brother and I. Here my heart and soul. It's something about the stocky Tower and the oceanic and suavely spreading landscape. This is the clock of the centuries. A piety keeps watch without a word. Here the two donkeys dream their model dreams. I was afraid they'd be gone. They were browsing in the East. I don't believe we'll ever come back here together he and I. But there are other ways of returning together. The place preserves them. I put my hand where you'd put your hand on which I'd laid my hand lightly as a leaf without a word at the place on the stone of the pillar where 440 years ago Montaigne leaned his head in the place where in 1557 La Boétie had put his hand slender as a woman's upon which Montaigne had laid his hand, once and for all, without knowing that day that life would be so short, murmuring in a foreign language:

'Chi puo dir com'egli arde é in picciol fuoco,'

as lovers wishing to represent an unbearable passion say, not able to represent the pain in joy other than in such a circuitous fashion. I shall come back to put my hand on the stone of the pillar which says nothing and remembers in stone the prayers and thoughts pressed to its forehead.

The whole domain is a book which keeps hundreds of silences safe in its dreams.

At the corner of the little enclosure to the east of the tower where he hid to urinate I picked some buttercups. Every time there are buttercups. There is no time.

My brother the stiff-jointed let himself down back against the pillar, long legs stretched out along the wall. Then I sat down at his feet. The sky extraordinarily blue. The Book's broad silence. In the distance a cuckoo. My brother says: it's a coo. For he hears only the first note. I say: it's a coo-coo. I say: sixty years since Clairefontaine. That's what I was thinking in the meadow says my brother. Sixty years since the beach in Oran. The two donkeys with their rosy coats. I called them: donkeys! They won't come, they're dumb my brother said. The two donkeys came and I stroked my brothers' pink muzzles. All that was being written and had been written for centuries. I used to pick buttercups with my

brother on the roads of Clairefontaine, sixty years ago when sixty years seemed beyond beyond and we really did have six hundred years to live to get there. I must make a note that in the course of this legendary day (Montaigne 10 April 2003) during which I do not stop living the same day (Montaigne 1 March 1995) I never stop making notes in a little notebook from the B.N.F (2001 64 pages) propped

now on my knees as my brother drives my car, commenting on: 1) the landscape: ‘at the bend it turns into the pale blue of the Dordogne’ 2) life in general (the profit of one is the loss of the other) 3) life and its end (we mustn’t judge our happiness till after death) 4) his own life whose route he traces in reverse giving me all the details of very old bicycle trips Barcelona Toledo Oxford (you’ve heard all this before but you’ve forgotten). Brushing boredom aside I see the character of my brother up on his metaphor. Each book has its mystery which depends to a large extent on the opinion we have of it

now as we sit on the five-hundred-year-old wall while I jot these notes I have a sneaking feeling of sin I’m expecting a gibe from my brother for I’m doing this right under his nose thus introducing into our couple an untimely third party whose name he doesn’t know.

But my brother doesn’t protest. He seems oblivious to the ghosts, responding to our intrusion with a magnanimous indifference. He expands in stature as I watch. My brother is the only person in whose face I dare sin.

I don’t understand how we’ve managed to allow one another so much leeway after all these years. True, I put up with repeated hymns to the bike. I don’t know what he thinks and he doesn’t know what I think. From time to time he gives my right arm a squeeze or I squeeze his left one. Coo he says. Coo coo I say. At that moment the city of Baghdad is being sacked in an ignominious manner, I think about the sacking of the city of Algiers, you didn’t see it says my brother, in 1830 I say, I imagine my brother furious nostrils flaring bright eyes darkened by the passions heaped up in his bicycle shop he’s been raging for dozens of years, he can no longer bear to see the arrogance of those kids and their reign of terror the obscene gestures he’d like to smash them, this time the man grabs his machine gun and pulls the trigger, ‘I am a racist antiracist’ says my brother, I make a note. At that moment the giant statue of Saddam Hussein topples, like a dream, it falls without making a sound. Coo coo I say. Do you hear? That? it’s a hen says my brother. I run my eyes over the most beautiful tower in the world. – Do you suppose it’s circumcised? I ask – What a thought! but you’re the expert. The tower guardian has patient eyes, shimmering like a river. He babysits a gigantic nursling. – Balzac’s not around? I say.

All the rest is fine. Luckily the man has calm eyes. 'He's having a walk,' says Montaigne's nurse. For a minute I was scared, to each its season, each of us must make our preparations, but my love is in its infancy. While I'm with my brother whom I love like childhood itself, as we divide up the four sandwiches carefully selected to please him according to a very ancient law of distribution, three-quarters for him one for me, this is our mass, we also share and eat the same childhood loaves our North African birthright, each day sharing what we have between us, not for one second do I lose sight of my other life with which I share everything I have in my mouth bread speech tongue kiss but to another music.

I could feel guilty.

To be myself now in another time. Time to go says the domain whose owners we are, in passing. No one can stay at Montaigne. Once in the tower you can only go away like a prayer. Besides there aren't any benches says my brother, you may have noticed. You can't sit down. In the tower either you can't use the armchair the guardian never stops jabbering you can't stay in the present for a single second. You can only pass by I say. Time nudges us toward the car. There's no farewell. No one around. All of a sudden we're gone. Sixty years more or less. A cat! says my brother in the car. Black! says my brother. I leap out. It's beneath the car as beneath the possibility of death. Balzac! I cry. That's Balzac? hoots my brother. He takes a step forward. Balzac my love I say by metonymy. Finding him at the very last minute – just what you'd expect of Montaigne.

Just like you, you mean.

The book-I-don't-write,
the night I die I'll spend reading it I thought stroking it.

Translated by Beverley Bie Brahic

Notes

1. Bibliothèque nationale de France.
2. Cixous refers here and in the following pages to the scene of the Battle of Waterloo in Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*, chapter 3.
3. Jacques Derrida, *H. C. pour la vie, c'est à dire . . .* (Paris: Galilée, 2002).
4. Hélène Cixous, *Le Prénom de dieu* (Paris: Grasset, 1967).
5. Jacques Derrida, *H. C. pour la vie, c'est à dire . . .*, p. 12; *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say . . .*, trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 5.
6. Jacques Derrida, *H. C. pour la vie, c'est à dire . . .*, p. 12; *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say . . .*, p. 5.

7. Hélène Cixous, *Manhattan, Lettres de la Préhistoire* (Paris: Galilée, 2002); *Manhattan, Letters from Prehistory*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

The Unforeseeable

It was a viva at the Sorbonne, serious business in those days of doctorates weighty as destinies. The thesis director was Professor Jean-Jacques Mayoux, a man I venerated, noble and implacable, stern as Saint Just, who called himself J-J in secret in order to share in the rages and indignations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, something I only heard about later, an upright man, probative as a surgeon's scalpel, a master who made his disciples feel the cutting edge of his knife, fond of laughter, a chaste lover of literary genius, thus it was that in the final days of his life in a hospital room, on the brink of agony, he bore up with a volume of Blake, a member of the Resistance naturally, though this I was unaware of almost to the day of his death – he wasn't one to boast.

Curmudgeonly, feared, sublime, and therefore, of course, loyal, a man of absolutes, knight of the realm of literature, knight of the faith, nothing could shake him. As for the shaking that Parkinson's disease had plagued him with his whole life long, he never conceded it so much as an inch of his mental life.

For him literature, in the folds of reality literature was the supreme reality.

In those days he was in the middle of old age, it seemed to me, that's how I saw him, me thirty-five, him having gone past eighty without slowing down.

The candidate was a nincompoop one of those dogged but utter duds capable, in time, of gangrening a professor's existence.

In those days of the old-fashioned State Doctorate there were some borderline cases: the candidate who spends twenty or thirty years not-writing his thesis right up to the day

Jean-Jacques Mayoux decided that wherever the nincompoop was he

hogged all the oxygen, he never lacked the words to vent his disgust and lassitude.

The inflexible professor and the wishy-washy disciple had gone grey together.

At last.

On the thesis committee, two young professors, J. Aubert and myself. Besides which two indifferent old gentlemen, members of the Establishment, aged sheep who would follow the ram.

Joyce was the object of our lucubrations. I was a believer. I believed in literature, justice, rule of law, truth, I believed in their necessity and their fragility. In the name of these absolutes, I took the inane chapters of the nincompoop apart, piece by piece. J. Aubert was another just man. We deliberated. That's when J. Aubert and I discovered that Jean-Jacques Mayoux was giving every benefit of the doubt to the character he had been railing against for twenty years. I expostulated.

'I myself am the most flabbergasted of all. I take back everything I said. I abjure and be damned', says Mayoux. 'Here and now I become my opposite. And the reason or the cause is that I have gone over to the other side. From where I am the world looks different, what was important to me does not matter anymore. I see it all.

'Everything is simple, here where it is old, only life and death change places. What do I care about judgements, values, careers, ambitions? This poor fellow exists for a degree. Let him have it. It won't kill anyone. The universe won't even notice. All men are equal, as Genet would say, let all be equal. Let him have First Class Honours.'

And so it was: two Jacques and I against three, the ram and the sheep. I liked Jean-Jacques Mayoux and I respected him.

So, I pondered, once one is round the bend, one can turn into one's opposite? Since that day I have never stopped wondering: when shall I turn into my opposite?

I'll never know who Jean-Jacques Mayoux was, was he J, or J.J. was he one or the other or both who didn't he want to be who will he turn out to have been in fact?

I have nothing in common with Jean-Jacques Mayoux except our love of literature, I'm sure I'll never turn into my opposite, I tell myself but each time I say 'I'm sure' my friend Jacques Derrida responds: don't say I'm sure I myself am not so sure you are sure of being sure nor that it is safe to be sure.

Who can swear never to leave herself behind, never to contradict herself, foreswear herself in the twinkling of an eye? In his *Carnets*, Proust, the great poet of epistolary flight and flighty beings, is reading a book about Ralph Waldo Emerson, someone just like himself

Emerson page 68 I'm leaving wife brother, I trust that this isn't just a fantasy. I have prisoners of my own to set free. If I blame myself for anything it is not for dreaming it's because my dreams have not yet taken my barn and house. Page 73 and 74 against visits. p. 114 every man is an orb endowed with infinite centrifugal force and only keeps his individuality at this price.¹

In other words to find oneself one must run away from oneself or to put it another way one saves oneself only by running away from oneself. Who loves me flees me.

Have I ever turned into my opposite overnight? Was I centrifugal at the moment of being centripetal? More than once, alas.

I never thought I'd turn into a cat lover. But this has happened. Not that I was a hater or phobic. I had my reasons. I didn't want cat love not in my life. Similarly I wanted not to have children, I wanted none of them right up to the day I wanted them, nothing in the world could have made me want not to have them. My reasons had their reasons. One has no choice. One keeps up with oneself. One runs away from oneself. Things get decided. Especially the destined things. The ones that make life turn left instead of right. Things get decided. And by whom? By what? By whom by what it's just because.

By other forces which (are) lodged within us doze and dozing dream dreams which slyly take us where we swore not to go. Those forces: those reminiscences half repudiated half exhumed

in brief the foibles and weaknesses we inadmit to ourselves

What I want to do I end up not doing, so should I say I didn't want to do what I wanted to do? I'm not convinced, there was a struggle and I got the worst of it or rather it got the best of me is how it feels. Should I not want to do what I want to do so as to do what I want to do in spite of myself?

In 2001 I wanted above all to write a story and be done with the ghost of a book I'd been calling *The Story* for thirty odd years and which, each time I tried to sneak up on it, vanished into thin air, each time a substitute turned up in its place, thus more than once I had to lay volumes the size of empty tombs or cenotaphs in the trace of the vanished ghost, but that spring I had everything arranged so *The Story* would not get away, from top to toe I was equipped, I had a notepad in my breast pocket, I had my brother his right arm around me, coming off the plane I headed straight for my desk, instead of which I took the Certes Road with my brother, that was a day of unspeakable suffering, every step of the way I went in the opposite direction to my desire, I walked as if I had my feet on backwards, I clung to my brother so as not to put a primitive bullet through my head, I struggled, I fought myself off, I stumbled, I pushed

myself away, Certes was the last place I wanted to go and I was going there, I wanted above all to go to the Secret which had been getting away from me for thirty years, there I was going and I didn't see it, I was dragging myself, I got a grip on my tongue and I pulled myself in spite of myself with all my strength where I didn't see I wanted to go, I have always done what I didn't want to do, I scared myself, therefore I have always done what the other willed, I told myself, I was telling the truth and didn't know what I was saying, thus I have always wanted to do what my unwill willed me to do I told myself. It's hell or its opposite and its opposite is me, I am drawn and quartered, I let myself be driven out of myself on the other side of myself, we'll go wherever you like my brother was saying, if only you knew! I told myself

and it is I nonetheless therefore an other who is doing this to me I thought the personal pronoun has been betrayed I came here to finally write *The Story*, as the book that is slipping out of my grasp has been called [. . .] I find myself in reality on the road to Certes to the left of my brother like a madwoman, like some hostility come out of my back, a wicked angel puts me in my place legs unsteady leaning on my beloved brother I drag myself to the rack without admitting it, it's not that I am giving in to my brother it's worse than that, murkier, I myself lock myself up outside myself, I make myself *flee*, [. . .] I don't even do what my brother wants but what my contrary wants [. . .] my brother isn't forcing me, when I said as we arrived in Certes: I don't want to go to Certes he responded tactfully: we'll go wherever you like. We took the road away from Certes, towards the Ocean. Where the road crossed the highway I said: let's go to Certes. And my brother took the direction opposite to the Ocean. He was happy to do as I wished, but the sin was already sinning in all directions again, against me against my brother, against my will.²

the truth is I was doing exactly what I wanted to do but I couldn't see that, I thought I was avoiding myself, getting myself off the track, things could hardly have been better plotted

I was betraying myself

Always I've done what I had no desire to do. Therefore I thought I have always given in to the other desire, hence I have always wanted to do what my unwill wanted to do. Every time I had no desire to love I've entered into love with the person I wouldn't have loved. I took the Certes road to not give in to what I resist. I have always emphatically resisted my resistances. I've stood up to myself and won.³

For the unforeseen to happen it has to get around all our best-laid plans, all hint of vigilance. One must be expecting nothing, no one

Make oneself blind. Itwantsblind.

Nothing foretells the tragedy. War is declared a long time before it is

declared. One sees it coming. Tragedy, on the other hand, strikes out of the blue and in the back. It is a beautiful day. Suddenly, up pops destiny. Later that moment of mildness without a hint of a threat will keep replaying itself, the world was innocent the Ocean infinitely pure not a cloud so far as the eye could see. Not even a road. And yet a turn. At the turn of a familiar phrase, everything blows up. One was having a peaceful walk in one's thoughts and suddenly here one is, stuck in the middle of an impenetrable thorn bush, which therefore one could not have penetrated, there's the rub, this bush grew here all of a sudden just after and around me.⁴ Who would have thought it? What are you doing in the middle of the thornbush, the guard shouts. I'm not doing. It's the bush that's doing. Needless to say, for a thing like this to happen it had to be impossible, that one dropped one's pince-nez, that one can't find it, that one is half blind.

So how does the prickly unforeseen thing get there?

It didn't fall out of the sky or spring from the earth. This eruption is caused by a walk, tired of the peace and quiet, the bush was waiting for Kafka at a turn in his thoughts, his own bush, his own mental cruelty always about to catch him up, give him a shake, all he has to do is look away for a moment. The pince-nez was only there to mask the essential blindness.

There was a turn in fate. One missed it. All of a sudden, as if at a bend in the road, one sees. The bend is hard to believe. But all such bends have in common the slightness of the occasion. This slightness is the very essence of tragedy, its landscape, its particular brand of cruelty. All tragedies have for cause and emblem the infinitesimal, derisory, terribly small addition of an imponderable element, a leaf on the shoulder, a slip of the tongue, a moment of distraction, a tear caused by a speck of dust on a contact lens is taken for the tear of a bereaved madonna, the utterance of the word that sets fire to the powder. Without this nothing of a word the powder would have dozed on for hundreds of years. And what is this word which is the cause? A word, maybe a name, nothing special, but the bearer under its banal appearance of a secret, a thorn, a sting, a virus, imperceptible save for the one and only on whom the venom works. The being for whom this poison is destined does not even know before the accident that this or that letter of the alphabet is inimical to him, that this or that syllable means evil or maybe good, too much of a good thing. Only long and repeated experience has taught me that anything can happen when I am least expecting it via the letter and the phoneme G, gee and *j'ai*, everywhere *gee* and *gene*. But there are lots of other signs I still can't read. True, dreams have brought me news of a few virosignifiers. Which doesn't make me a seer or foreseer.

It makes me blind in a different way. The scales form a skaleidoscope. All of Proust's narrator's misfortunes all of his luck and consequently the whole work hangs by the thread of a branch of a childhood eglantine and the colour pink. Not a soul to warn the child: Beware of rose! Beware in the garden, if the hose is green it's because the rose is concealed from you, what a shame your ears are asleep.

Day breaks, the sun is about to rise and still one fails to foresee destiny's pounce. Everything is visible and nothing is seen, everything is readable and nothing read. A garden hose, what a laugh, and yet neither more nor less than a bush full of thorns.

It's like for death, Montaigne's mental fiancée. Of her alone he thinks, he awaits her, he's expecting her, he yearns to seduce her, to reduce her, every day he prays against her, she will come, of that, of that alone he hasn't the slightest doubt, but when? he would like to know, knows he will not, all he knows is that she will come from the side or in back without warning, bump into him.

It's like the extraordinary day of his death, dead as in dead, an unthinkable day for a man in the pink of health who is sufficiently set in his philosophy to say – this is in the fabulous essay called 'Of Exercitation' – 'that we only get one go at it, we are all apprentices the day we come to it.' All the same, it is really to him that death arrives once, an unexpected death, untimely, utterly unforeseeable, and for which therefore he is utterly unprepared, a surprise-death, ahead of time, which does not keep him from dying again later, every time of course for the first and only time.

During our third troubles or second (I do not remember very well which), having gone out one day at a league from my house, who am seated in the middle of all the troubles of the French civil wars, thinking I was in such a safe place and so close to home that I had no need of better equipage, I had taken a gentle but not very firm mount. On my return, I had occasion to make use of this horse to do something that he was unused to, one of my people, a sturdy fellow, mounted on a powerful plough horse that had a desperate mouth, fresh into the bargain and vigorous, in order to show off and get ahead of his companions happened to kick it full speed into my path, and came down like a colossus on the little man and little horse, and overthrew us both with his suddenness and weight, sending us both head over heels: so that the horse lay senseless in one place, me ten or twelve paces beyond, dead, stretched out upside down, face bruised and scratched, my sword which I had in my hand, more than ten paces beyond, my girdle in pieces, no more able to move or think than a log.⁵

I note the circumstances of this admirable event. As always it is a beautiful day. We are off for a walk. The walk promises the unforeseeable.

My twenty-second birthday was when I gave birth to a neither-here-nor-there child, a child of different sort, where I thought to see my son exactly. One takes up maternity in order to continue humanity all of a sudden it's the other world, life as insurrection. They hadn't told me the unimaginable thing might happen: as I bent over this unforeseen newborn, I was born all of a sudden into a new story and everything had to start up again from zero, with no memory

I never know which dream is going to happen to me. I turn out the lamp, with joy and curiosity. What a joy to have to expect to find myself acted in a play I have not written, to have no idea what my next adventure or misadventure will be, to find myself en route for affairs in doubtful taste, to linger in a motley country where in my waking hours I would never set foot, to be home away from home in buildings as impenetrable as Kafka's bush, where, naturally, I get in trouble, to be grotesque if the dream so desires, to be judged, masked, betrayed, given a second chance, disgraced, to be at the mercy of every sort of demon, to enjoy all the mechanical problems of all means of transportation past and to come, to be unable before falling asleep to make any wish that will be granted, to be tricked rolled shown up dethroned.

Sometimes by day I encounter unpleasantness. There I am wounded, offended, into the bargain it is all going to happen all over again in a dream I tell myself mortified, this time I won't escape it. Whereupon I escape. The scene of my troubles shows up but with a time-lag, a few nights have gone by since the quake, here is the aftershock. But in a watered-down comic version. If I'm hoping for a precious apparition, I can always hope. Only on condition I expect nothing and no one does the dear ghost, against all hope, turn up. My dream does as it jolly well pleases and not me.

I never know which book I shall write. Every summer I go off to write the book I have no notion of. I don't even try to know, it's a waste of time. If I knew, I wouldn't go, wouldn't write.

I know only there's a book I shall write. The book is expecting me. A book. It will turn up in The House.

Last year I wrote a text entitled *The Book I Don't Write*.⁶ Every day I think about the book I don't write. I wrote this text for a symposium at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France on the occasion of donating most of my archives to them.

This was my way of laying the book-I-don't-write on the altar of the BNF.

The book of the book I don't write I was beginning to write. What would come of it?

Thus to the archive of the books that have come to me, that have

turned up where I least expected them, I added the shadow or ghost of the book I don't write. From the-book-I-don't-write for cause, lineage, substitution, have come the books which have had themselves written by me.

I never know which book I shall write, to which book I shall go each July (when the wind is from the South) – I count on the south wind.

Do I fear the book won't arrive? So far this has never happened. It could presumably happen once.

For the subjectless nameless unprefigured book to arrive I must enter the House. Outside the House the Wind. I describe what is. The book I have no notion of needs three things before it will come: the House, the Wind and my blind waiting. If I have no notion of the book, the book without i.d., I do have an intimation of it. An intimation without an image. A wordless injunction. When the book does start to arrive it is not at all what I might have imagined. In this case sometimes I submit, it is the more powerful. Often I dig in my heels, I rebel, I try to run away, I double back, I take cover, often I try to throw it off, get ahead of it, I decamp, I write like mad so as to take it by surprise, pass it, leave it behind, I plunge into a forest, a city, I get lost in order to lose it, none of this is planned, note, sometimes it's just the opposite, the book squats in a dark corner of the garden in a briar patch with strawberry trees, I know it is there from the way the twigs move, I head into the field, one may attack head on or from the side, charge or steal up on it, fall back a hundred times only to charge again. I think only of it for months it thinks only of me. We are fascinated. One uses Napoleonic tactics and those of the cat. Infinite celerity, infinite slowness, furor and patience. One gets what one gets. *A victorious defeat*. In any case the aim is not to have done with it but to fight through the night to the first flush of dawn. Then the book shows itself. It is immense, robed in sweat- and blood-tinged fabrics, it fills the horizon, I see it, I examine it, it allows itself to be looked at, I go after it, piece by piece, I discover the scene of it, its offspring, I scan its logs, with scrupulosity, oh! I approve, it has my *imprimatur*. Once it has been contemplated in its entirety, it curls up and disappears into my den of oblivion. I remember it an instant longer, say a few weeks, three or four, I leave it nameless, velour-wrapped body at my editor's. It fades away. A cock must have crowed. Now it rests.

I was not in fact expecting what took place this past summer, the summer of 2003. Here it is in brief: my Mademoiselle Albertine left. I shall come back to this later.

I said: I wasn't in fact expecting this departure, rupture, a departure par excellence, an absolute and utter departition. I didn't expect it, I

swear I didn't. Yet, rereading what I wrote in April 2003 then uttered publicly at the BN in May 2003 one might believe and me too I might have to believe that I had not only intimated or foreseen but perhaps even planned this event, without meaning to naturally, but this would be wrong, a too-hasty over-interpretation. I assure you: everything I did wrote thought about my brother both my real brother and my textual brother in April then said in May 2003 was in no way prophetic or speculative. I was in good faith and without a shadow of a doubt about our immemorial friendly alliance and our two-branched destiny, the real union and the literary one. If there was one life of which I was certain it was that of my brother-and-me. My uncertainty kept watch entirely over the other tower, ours, Montaigne's, that of my beloved and me. There in our antique body I was secretly in fear and trembling. You recall the death of Saint-Loup along with that of Albertine, and the bereaved amazement of the narrator that their lives should have been so brief? She and he used to tell the narrator, taking care of him: 'You who are ill.' And now they were dead. Well all my care and attention was centred on our tower. And it's on my brother's side that death rears its head.

Is it me who doesn't see the end looming up? Or is it death who lures us and throw us off track? During my whole childhood I trembled for fear my mother would die. And it was my father who died in the space of a day. Of course I could tell myself whatever the Analyst would say about that, I could discuss the gambits of desire and fear, added to the murky waters of roles and subjects, hint that my father was my mother maybe, and that the dead or death is not always the one, or what one thinks, who can say that the deceased (dead) is deader than the one alive-apparently, some of the dead have a tremendous power of survival, my father, for instance, I ought also to speak of the inextricably entangled mysteries when it comes to the death of those who are our whole life, of death given to live through and to die from, of dying of death or of life, self-dying, of what dies and what doesn't at the moment of death, never ever shall I shall manage to sort out the fates and destinies for I, like you, am a bundle of contradictions and others.

To come back to that summer's totally unforeseen event. A revolutionary and irreversible event, *the* by-definition event. Something terrible, which *literally* took my breath away. As a result I could no longer write. All of a sudden I became my shadow. My Mr Albertine was gone. As we have been aware since the days of Orpheus, we can descend into Hell as often as we like to search for our other half, we can utilise laws and charms reserved for the gods to deny the fatal fact, we shall without fail repeat the loss.

Later I'll have to unveil another reading of the unconscious of Orpheus and Eurydice. We'll discover other versions in the story of Tristan and Iseult. Each time it's a matter of interpreting a sail or a veil, of a delicate analysis of the theme of something missing and the secrets of the verb to lack. Imagine the person who was (to me) half your memory, who was two of the four-quarters of Don Quixote Sancho Panza, your secret sharer since kindergarten your trainer your blood- and textual brother, your sword and shield, overnight this being is cut off from you.

This event which turned everything upside down, which played havoc with my confidence, my sense of peace, which ripped up one of my hearts by the roots, severed my most ancient tie, massacred a childhood my brother and I had jointly cultivated for sixty years occurred on 15 August 2003 at 10 o'clock in the morning without warning right in the middle of the bluest of blue infinities and the gods looking the other way, or so it seemed. When the sky is crystal clear and mild, the universe a virgin again, hearts in unison, we should look out. Just as when two allies in love do not stop simulating a violent separation in order to exorcise its terrible spectre, push each other away all the better to cling, flee one another so as to fling themselves into a convulsive embrace, announce the imminence of rupture of divorce every morning in order to utterly reject the funereal gesture and batten our promises we should look out. But what's the point? Wary or confiding, we don't order tornadoes around. Events are bigger than their lightning bolt flash. Nobody notices them building up. Because of a fateful short-sightedness. The cause of all my falls and in their wake all my books like blind attempts to shake the scales from my eyes. Every time I fear the death of my mother and my father dies. Every time I believe in peace war turns up.

'In the end I shan't write the big book of my brother', I pronounced in public, 'and this I regret. What a character!' I shan't write the book in which my brother would be the main character. I shall not turn a book around my brother I was saying. That was 24 May 2003, I was on stage in the BN Auditorium, or so it appeared, I was reading the lines I'd written a month earlier while my brother took his midday snooze in the basement of the house, what a character, I say, blinded by the powerful whiteness of the BN spotlights I saw no one in the room, I might have been speaking to myself, still I was addressing my brother in the room unaware that he had 'taken French leave as soon as the lion had his share' as he recounted two days later. I thought I was speaking to him. The lion's share was a reference, my brother said, to J. Derrida's *roy-ale* lecture of which he would not have wished to miss a crumb, which he had hailed with the words: 'the lion has roared,' upon which, belly full of what he considered a virile meal, my brother took off. 'What a char-

acter!’ I said, thinking him present, my character. My brother had gone, I wasn’t informed. ‘At the end of this text’, I was saying, ‘he and I go off to visit Montaigne. “Is it worth re-reading?” he will say to me’ I was saying dazzled. The tenses cross, one isn’t aware of it. I thought I was with him. And most extraordinary of all I thought, while reading the text written in April, is that in the end, by virtue of their successive crossings, they give rise to a hybrid time, this bizarre ‘I’m leaving’, a present which is neither a real present nor a future-present meanwhile I know it holds a past, in the end I left we left, he will leave, he had left, the whole question of the *I* had just been raised in the auditorium, it occurred to me suddenly with a touch of vertigo, this *I* who exits from our outing to Montaigne without getting out of it I’d noted

– that’s what I was thinking while I read the projected tale of the outing I shall make to Montaigne with my brother in order to close the BN text on an lively note. Without seeing the thorn bush pop up, never for a second suspecting I might be about to plant it perhaps I was watering it, urging it along, already it was up around my waist.

If the thornbush is so fearful it’s because it is one those situations no author in the world, not even Dante, can get herself out of. Once one is trapped in one of those thickets high as a rampart which one grew oneself as a person drowning gives the drowning a hand the author’s goose is cooked. All I can do, wretched writer as I am, is multiply the thorns.

In this text, at the time and place I least expected it, at the BN in the middle of a symposium of which I was a little wary all the same as is proper when one is the target, me an ordinary human being, of a spectacular honour, of which I was similarly a little wary like the experienced reader of Shakespeare who rightly fears the royal robes may be too big, and what does one look like with one’s crown down around one’s nose and one’s sleeves dragging?

thinking myself on my guard

I plunged into the worst bush of my life as an author.

When my brother takes his leave (I cannot assess the damage to and consequences for our story and the whole of the work – some thirty or forty books) in my wish to try and understand what could have gone wrong I wend my way back to the BN.

There right in the middle of the Bibliothèque Nationale, thinking that in three pages I’d have my head in Montaigne’s library I was already there, I was taking my brother along a mybrother who takes me along and has been doing so for sixty years in the end these outings with my brother will be all I need. And to think I thought he was in the room my brother in reality. Whereas I was all alone, with the character.

I was all alone with my textual brother as companion for the outing and not my real brother and I knew nothing about it.

Not only was he not in the room any longer, which he had left at I don't know which point in the text, but that was when he left our board forever without warning me, without my foreseeing it. We were inseparable. We are. He takes leave of us. And when I hear about it it will be in stages: 1) two days after the BN symposium he tells me he left after hearing me say the word *versatility* which I did indeed use to describe him. At the word *versatility*, he claims to have got up and *made his way to the door*. 2) Stage two is when I am informed he has resigned. It was therefore during the month of August. At which point I have already written two-thirds of a book in which he plays a main role, when he springs it on me – that he left long ago, that he is no longer part of my story. The shock is so great – terrible, mortal, are the words – that a) I say nothing b) nothing comes to mind in the way of help. I have been amputated and I don't even feel it c) Not until a week after the accident do I suddenly recognise the twin scene to the excruciatingly painful scene of the departure of a being with whom I'd imagined I'd end my writing days. It seems we have just played *for real* the main part of the sequence that constitutes the turning point between *La Prisonnière* and *Albertine disparue*. What has happened to me has the same effect on my heart as the atrocious suffering the sentence 'Mademoiselle Albertine has gone' inflicts on the 'psychology' of the Proustian narrator. What a sentence! Two volumes are needed to reverberate the explosion, as well as the mystery of the suffering expressed in this famous but tough-to-analysis sentence: '*How much more deeply suffering probes psychology than psychology.*' What is horribly true is the *more deeply*. And this 'Mademoiselle' that wrests Albertine from Marcel!

'Mademoiselle Albertine has gone!' How much more deeply suffering probes psychology than psychology! A moment ago, engaged in analysing myself, I was thinking that this separation without seeing one another again was just what I wanted, and, comparing the mediocre pleasures Albertine gave me to the wealth of desires she kept me from (and which the certitude of her presence, the pressure of my moral atmosphere, had let fill the foreground of my mind, but which at the news that Albertine had gone were completely out of the running, having evaporated instantly), I found myself extremely subtle, I had come to the conclusion that I no longer wished to see her, that I no longer loved her. But the words: 'Mademoiselle Albertine has gone' had just produced such heartache that I felt I could not resist for long: I had to make it cease immediately.⁷

It is a few days before the scene, hacked in two like a leg of lamb, and which straddles two volumes of Proust under the cut of François's sen-

tence 'Mademoiselle Albertine has gone', comes to mind. The memory of it is both a relief and a complicated astonishment. To think I am not the only one in either reality or in fiction to be put to such a test. To think that here we have a human classic. To think I worked for months on these passages in my seminar with my researchers and friends, as if they were part of literature. I turned the lines every which way in the voluptuousness of reading, I *read* them, smelt them, imbibed them, without ever thinking that these exquisite nuances these fistfuls of quills fine as angels' hair, which prick you a thousand times, were to penetrate the soul's tenderness *in reality*. These thoughts bring me the relief that literature can bring to someone struck by misfortune, be it death or illness: you too have felt this. This goes so deep into the heart that trembles in 'psychology' that one is instantly projected into another world, one which is accustomed to the outbursts that exceed the bounds of ordinary discourse. *In reality* one pretends all that doesn't matter. It is literature which embraces our cataclysms.

However, my real brother is not Albertine, unfortunately I tell myself. If he were Albertine, if I too had lost her, I could weave a magnificent mourning veil. The comparison ends with the chop of the axe, the utter brutality of the disappearance. Fortunately my real brother is not dead. That's something I don't even want to think about. 'He has *only*', I tell myself, 'secretly killed off a character, a grandiose character whom I love, who promised marvels.' Now the terms I use are not in the least exaggerated. I did say kill. True there was no blood. But there are other ways to kill: cut off the breath, a river of dry images suddenly, chest caved in, one can kill ghosts, hurt them, make them cry out, that the pain this produces are phantom pains does not diminish grief's intensity in the least. Besides grief is a ghost's torture of choice.

Let me add that in killing off this character it is mainly me he kills of course because this character is half me, when I paint it I am painting myself, when I feel sorry for it I am feeling sorry for myself, and it is also, worse luck or the long arm of fate, a natural disaster or divine punishment, a text already shaped, viable, a real child who's been condemned to death.

I must add that my brother, in reality, has read himself as a character on an outing with good grace, pleasure and ever-renewed assent in many a book over the years.

I've even had numerous occasions to congratulate myself before all kinds of audiences as well as in my heart of hearts, on this fraternal wedding of our destinies.

All of sudden everything is topsy-turvy. The unforeseen itself. And as for the famous bolts-from-the-blue, which have caught the attention of

the world in recent years, the 11th of September, say, or the burning of the Château of Versailles, you are at first incredulous and yet the facts are there: of our castle, our towers, only ashes remain. Belief is outdistanced by the facts. A feeling of bad dream seeps into reality and dilates its temporal flesh. You've got a headache. Who could have thought it? And precisely, *you've got to believe* that it could happen. Imagine a rip in the fabric of the ideal inseparable: Tristan and Iseult leave one another for good is the example that springs to mind. We shan't blame either one of them, there's no rush. At the time one is simply knocked over by the explosion.

Hence what couldn't happen has happened, thus what *seemed* impossible carried the gene of its own destruction and we never noticed. Not that we are blind but the thing that is destined to perish as a result of inner capital punishment has, for long periods, sometimes years, every appearance of being immortal.

Upon inquiry, it will be shown that everything could have been foreseen, all one had to do was read the illegible to see the invisible.

Everyone knows that *I* did his best to make Albertine go away believing that that was what *I* wanted most of all. The size of the surprise is in proportion to the size of the analytical error that *I* committed: having wanted the person *I* hadn't seen was his life, his whole life, to disappear.

But in my case if I was blind, the reversal originated with my brother. He's the reverser. You can count on events to repeat themselves.

A change in heart? Why not? Anything's possible.

But I'm galloping ahead. Here I am back where the event takes place without my noticing it: blinded by the spotlights in the BN auditorium, believing myself physically blinded by this harsh flood of light, oblivious to the fact that I am blind in a totally different way, my whole psyche is wearing a blindfold, I am speaking to my brother and nobody tells me he isn't there any more, that he'll never be there again in a book with me – meanwhile I'm reading aloud from part of a book in which he is with me, and without a soul within me to warn me that mybrother-on-outings, that character, has vamoosed, which he can't do, I shall discover later, without taking half the book's flesh along with him. All of that has doubtless been written down, by the Scribe Up There, but not by me.

How little we know ourselves. I believe I am in the most ancient intimacy, in the most familiar withinness; I am outside.

There I was thinking, and reading, and reading myself it seemed to me that I was on a literary path to getting close to my brother *in truth* as never before. A person one is close to becomes *truer*, I was exulting,

when, projecting the full light of one's attention on him, one is able to see them as only the theatre of literature allows.

Now, I was telling myself, I'm off to my brother's *transfiguration in truth*. For I am positive that the book is where the lights come on. In reality the truth doesn't light up.

As I continue, head ringed with visions and philosophical light, a sublime halo hovering in the hard megawattness of the spots, with the feeling I was climbing the stairs of a revelation, I close in all unawares on *the word that trips me up*. I have an explosive letter in my hand and I am about to be blown up, along with all that is dearest in the world to me, in fifteen lines. I know nothing of this. I quote myself:

'The more the years go by, the more the character takes shape, at each of our outings he develops his own style and witty turns of phrase,' I was saying, the more I spoke my thoughts into the room where, seeing not a single face, I imagined a public to come, the more the complexity of my brother seemed to accumulate a force I had never dreamt of at home, a totally unexpected consequence of the symposium, 'the more the character appears in a Dostoyevskian light,' I had written – but with the value added that fiction-writing gives, so that by now that struck me as much truer than a month ago – or sometimes on a Shakespearean path, sallet on his head, in disguise, oversized, loud, catastrophic, the sleepwalker whom you must on no account wake.

'Each time that I walk beside him,' I was saying – on the one hand into the mike at the BN on the other off with my brother in the story of our last trip to Montaigne, I feel the book take shape, gather speed, but I can't do that to him, reduce him to mere paper, and while continuing to take mental notes I renounce the idea of inheriting him in all his reality, I try to be satisfied with this walk-about character whose versatility however strikes me as unique in the world. What a shame. In my books my brother makes a racket going by. But that's nothing. A mere syllable of the gargantuan book he would make. I was saying.

One writes these things in a little 15-square-metre room, talking to oneself, there's only space for the table the shelves and a couch for the cats. Immediately afterwards, you hear yourself uttering these promises in the middle of a 500-seat auditorium, it's not the same at all.

The words have a different intensity and semantic charge when they go from cell to hall.

As for the word *versatility* I shall not deny that I said it, first wrote then said. I add that it's a word which rings pleasingly in my ears and mind. I could write a book on versatility. Naturally I would call it *Versatilities*. Those I love the most are versatile.

'I don't want to be in your books anymore,' says my brother, we were

walking along the ocean front as if we were the only two in the world, it was the hour of the end of our world the hour you don't think of and which arrives to pull the forest up by the roots, crush beings and time with a great roar. That hour is so lovely to look at, with its rounds of lightning whose fire joins sky to earth, that one can let it take one's mind off the message of death. I was afraid it would rain on our two frail silhouettes.

'It is *very* disagreeable to me says my brother that you should call me versatile,' says my brother. 'Take off your tennis shoes and listen,' says my brother; *and nothing was literary any more.*

It was the beginning of the end. I was late catching up. On the one hand I was listening to my brother's sentences, how they ran into one another, their rise and fall, on the other to the rumbling of a storm. Should we stick it out? I wondered.

I don't know why I hung around in literature when we were in the thick of reality. He didn't want to be in my books any more. The End. The gusts of wind got to me. Did I try to argue? I don't think so. Or maybe perhaps, since he'd just said 'Find someone else.' Without my knowing whether it was my real brother or the textual one who was cutting loose, who was speaking.

It reminded me of those impossible conversations in the Bible between some pitiful prophet and the Voice, they don't hear one another, they don't hear what the other one said, they don't dare say: what? they don't hear themselves because of the terrible wind that is deliberately blowing on the mountain so as to prevent all communication, for the end product has to be picked clean as a bone: No. Finished. 'Get someone else.' Who says that? In the Bible, it's the prophet. But it could also be God. In reality. Such a little sentence, it twists and turns, a feather on the back of the howling wind.

Instead of thinking about my brother I was thinking about my book of course, I was thinking of my book brother, if (only) it had been (only) a dream I'd have locked myself up in my room for a few days, thinking about it, about the book, searching for a way to salvage it. But I had heard my sentence, it was simple as a mountain of ice, I was faced with an edict.

Be gone.

Enough said. That's it.

I had myself stated and publicly that I wouldn't write the book of my brother, that was the 24th of May. But this needed to be put in a literary context, a complex and by definition versatile one, some discussion of preterition would be in order, there are all those problems of possessives. What does 'my brother's' mean? And what is 'my brother'? What

relationship between the brother who is beside me, and in me as well, and 'my brother' in the book, what relationships?

Enough said.

Another Possible Version

- You shall not write this book, he says, and this time he is six feet tall.
- But why why I say why. – You shall not write it, says he.

What scares me is the black curtain that falls across the sky's right eye. He's in the right perhaps but the need to taste the taste of my dreams is on my side.

There is no one on earth this August morning 2003 no one on the edge of the universe, your feet leave no tracks in the water, who will know I am going from anguish to anguish accompanied by a yellow angel who is squeezing my throat and walking me to the sound of her ineluctable voice along the marvellous ocean that the gulls have forgotten this morning inundated with the rain that washes evil thoughts away.

Not that I can proclaim either a right or a wrong, how can I say to Hamlet you are killing me without him saying you killed me first to me. It's not the rain that bends me down it is the two anguishes which gore one another and walk all over me. Eat or be eaten.

– Hamlet I say, why do you pour all this froth of soul and chewed-up flesh into my secretary soul each time we go out walking together, the one goading the other one on?

– Because it churns me up so much that volcanically it's natural I should vomit up my entrails which have been enflamed since childhood says Hamlet Cixous. What gets me is I have no way of coming up with an idea that would cure me of the rage of continuing to pour this lava out, I have only you on whom to thunder, hail and rub my wound. You should take off your tennis shoes to listen to me. When you aren't bare-foot you don't have the feel of the earth mixing itself up in our business.

I take off my tennis shoes, I look up. He's no longer beside me.

– Are you sure he's not going to change? I ask myself.

– I can only be sure. I can't hold my brother against his will. The author has no right. It's enough already to be fired by a character, of a brother into the bargain. I won't add suspense to the disaster. As for the sister if I were her I'd never ever hope for the reversal of the reversal of my brother

Hamlet flees from me. Whereas I have come to join him so that we can share our apartment and our suffering, he is walking far ahead of me, I see him fifty yards off striding into the underpass, for the world is now

a labyrinth of gloomy tunnels, he is walking so fast I can't catch up with him, several times I speed up, I have run for miles, I can't push myself more, I shout at him wait for me, but he's doing it on purpose, he wants to keep his distance he wants me to run after him and to run away from me, I'm worn out, I'm getting annoyed, when we reach the edge of the big forest with stony paths he tells me – without stopping – 'take the path that goes up on the right, I'll take the left, the overgrown one, and we'll see if they meet up.' So I take the path on the right, I know perfectly well they're going to meet up, the bare one and the overgrown one, but when I arrive at the crossing no Hamlet in sight. Am I the plague? But I feel he wants to flee from me and so keep me fleeing, as if the verb to flee were a wounded form of the verb to be.

On the phone, while I am on paper like a defeated wrestler, the beautiful voice of the interrupted brother: 'Hello! Saddam Hussein here.'

The world changed yesterday, the continent I've lived on from the start was brought down by a bad rocket, all that was left was the sky, the earth literally burnt to a crisp under my eyes, the catastrophe occurred so suddenly, we were out walking as usual all of a sudden the lamp of day blinked and went out. We blanched, hesitant, great wavering distances cut us off, and then we were cold, separated. What had been our world only a few hours earlier had fallen so fast so far, how we'd lost it! Struck out. Clearly we had no hope of finding it ever again. Two black seagulls flipped over with heartbreaking cries of anguish fifty yards ahead of us.

If only it was 'Mademoiselle Albertine' who had gone I tell myself. One loses part of oneself, one fixes it. Hell lasts for a page. In one page, it is true one can suffer a thousand deaths. But at least the end of the world comes to an end. Right away I start making it come back again, I don't stop telling it to myself and right after that writing it, a hundred times over. She had written a form letter. The letter ended with this phrase: 'Farewell I leave you the best part of myself. Albertine.'⁸ How true it was. At first one doesn't know what 'the best part of myself' is. Is it the absence, is it Albertine, is it the narrator, is it the author? She left leaving him the best part of herself. Or maybe it's the letter? Or the sentence itself, the last one? Once Albertine has gone along with Mademoiselle Albertine the work acquires un hoped-for scope. The gains of departure are so big that not only me, the narrator, the author but the reader, but the whole world, benefits from it. Imagine, if she hadn't left, those torrents of brilliant observations those millions of brandnew thoughts, those so lovely, so subtle representations of horror, those nervous depths

so numerous a century will not suffice to probe them one by one, none of those terrible treasures utterly unique in the whole of literature would ever have existed. I say 'Mademoiselle Albertine' I have in mind the original of course. That Alfred Agostinelli what a miraculous invention of life, I tell myself. That plane falling into the Mediterranean, who could ever have thought up such a miracle?

All departures are not equal. Agony, I've got it. Agostinelli, no way for me to enjoy him. My donor lives, fortunately, it's his character who will never be back to write a break-up letter, hitting hard so as to give me a scare

Unforeseeable: who will I be without the person who is life itself to me.

Cf. Each time unique

Cf. The departure of Thessie – Thessie-kept

Never doubting for an instant then?

It's all because of the Secret. That OfwhichIknownothing this Gift which makes me who I am, I mean I can't stop running after the person or thing I am, that I run after urged on by the hope without hope of one day gaining access to my inaccessible. I write as one tries to save oneself in the dark, running and stumbling. Because one cannot not try. How little one knows oneself! And yet one signs.

So far I've spoken of (my myopia) my blindness. But it's not only mine. The unforeseeable is the subject of all tragedies of fate. What we call the unforeseeable, the catastrophe which happens just because our back was turned, eyes closed to what was up ahead. Samson or Oedipus's eyes were put out because they refused to see what stared them in the face, their own structural blindness. No one is to blame. It is just our cruel human powerlessness, the impossibility of seeing one doesn't see. One doesn't know what one is talking about. One hasn't the vision to see what has never yet been seen.

Our blindness is what makes the event. The one that Jacques Derrida has just given rise to regarding the 'concept of September 11' a dazzlingly clear analysis. I quote a few lines:

The proof of the event, that which, in it, *both opens to and resists experience*, is, it seems to me, a certain *inappropriability* of what has occurred. The event is what occurs and in its occurrence manages to take me by surprise, to surprise and suspend understanding: the event is initially *that which* I at first do not understand. Better yet, the event is initially *that* I do not understand. It consists in *that which* I do not understand; *that which* I do not understand and first of all *that* I do not understand, the fact that I do not understand:

my incomprehension. This is the borderline, both internal and external, I'd be tempted to insist on here: although the experience of an event, the way in which it affects us, calls for a gesture of appropriation (understanding, recognition, identification, description, determination, interpretation from a horizon of anticipation, knowledge, naming, etc.), although this gesture of appropriation is irreducible and inevitable, there is no event worthy of the name save where this appropriation finds itself *stranded*, high and dry on some kind of borderline. But a borderline without a front or a confrontation, a borderline that incomprehension cannot come to grips with, for it hasn't the form of a solid front: it eludes our grasp, it remains evasive, open, undecided, indeterminable. Whence its inappropriability, its unpredictability, the utter surprise of it, the incomprehension, the risk of misunderstanding, the unforeseeable novelty, the pure singularity, the absence of horizon.⁹

Not to recognise is a source of a terror. But as soon as, beyond recognition or non-recognition, the first words come forth, recognising the non-recognition, as soon as analysis arises and calls the shadows by their name of: shadows, from that point I begin to grope at the darkness, to feel myself taken aback, to guess I don't know, that I didn't know that I could have known, that in the future I may again not know, Samson's hair which was the secret of his strength begins to grow back. Without light without eyes one has other ways to (fore)see.

Translated by Beverley Bie Brahic

Notes

1. Marcel Proust, *Carnets* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), p. 79.
2. Hélène Cixous, *Manhattan* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), pp. 11–12.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
4. Cf. Kafka's tale 'The Thorn Bush' [*Das Dorngebüsch*].
5. Michel de Montaigne, 'De l'exercitation', *Essais, Œuvres complètes*, eds Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1962), pp. 352–3.
6. Cf. 'The Book I Don't Write', in this volume.
7. Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu VII: Albertine disparue* (Paris: Gallimard (Folio), 1954), p. 7.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
9. Jacques Derrida, 'Auto-immunité, suicides réels et symboliques', in Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas, *Le « concept » du 11 septembre* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2004), p. 139.

Passion Michel Foucault

On 29 June 1984, the day of the last scene, I cried floods of tears. It was the day of his burial. I see myself outside in a crowd I do not see, he is inside. I am waiting for him to come out. Now he is coming out. What I see of him: his last form. What appears is a body of light-coloured wood. His last costume. On seeing the coffin a part of my heart cracked. Floods of tears burst forth. Would I say I was ashamed? I was undoubtedly the only one in that mourning crowd to cry in torrents, without being able to stop. I saw nothing through the storm of tears, save the stiffened body of clear-coloured wood. And on this body of wood, strange hair of veiled roses. I know those tears well. They are the ones that carry off my soul each time the being that most violently tears apart my heart appears on the stage of the world, and this being is: the marionette. What afflicted me and transported me was not only the feeling of irreparable loss. It was the exact and sublime vision of the whole being and the whole history of Michel in that ultimate figure: the powerlessness of power. Thus he went in the form of the imprisoned and detached soul. A résumé of himself.

Act-Suffer [*Agir-Pâtir*]. I acted a great deal with Michel Foucault, I played with him, seriously played at the theatre of life. We were characters and spectators in a play that always exceeded us. We knew we were enclosed, and we searched for the exits, each of us in our own way. I shall evoke a few epiphanic scenes, in the story that led our friendship from the year 1968 to the last scene.

Between us it was always a question of prison and of freedom, of acting and of suffering, of doing battle, of overcoming and of failing. In 1968 I proposed to him to join me and a few rare friends in liberating the French University – and I must say here that Jacques Derrida, my absolute friend, my councillor and my accomplice, was always involved in the revolutions that we attempted to accomplish then. I had been charged with overseeing the creation of an Experimental University, and

Jacques Derrida wished, as did I, in order for the university to succeed, that Michel Foucault should be part of the adventure, and in the front row.

However, at that very moment, infuriated by French academicism, Michel was about to flee. In a few words I sketched the portrait of the extraordinary action we could accomplish and without hesitation he said yes. There was never any hesitation between us.

From this first yes between us was born the alliance, the friendship and thereupon a pact of engagement: in what followed there was hardly a battle in which we did not find ourselves joining forces. In '68 he was on the threshold of exile, coming from Tunisia to flee the phallogocentric French empire when I put my hand on his arm and retained him a while longer in this country that was paralysing itself, but in which a number of strong beings lived, captains of thought, deprived of a stage and of autonomy. Jacques Derrida, Deleuze, Lyotard, so many others, disseminated and thus diminished by the separation and who found themselves on the raft of Vincennes.

Immediately afterwards there was the GIP (Groupe Information Prison). One has to imagine happiness in the middle of horror. How we went – we were only a handful, completely mad and fearing nothing – to scream our anger before the prisons. It was the theatre acting in the City: Michel is a dreamer who acted out his dreams. We saw the necessity so clearly that we no longer saw the obstacles. I 'went' to the GIP, as one goes to school or to sea. With a naive joy. Here there are two scenes. By chance I had seen Ariane Mnouchkine's production *1789*¹ (I did not know her at the time), and I said to Michel: let's go look her up. Your political theatre needs her theatre. I can see our three-person scene. It happened very quickly. The life-forces recognised each other and came together. Ariane her actors and I created the 'first play' of our adventure. It was a four-minute improvisation to incarnate Michel's work, in the streets. Because one must remember that Michel Foucault's thought always took to the streets and stood before the walls. It came running out of the books and became you and me. We never had the time to perform that four-minute play: no sooner has the van stopped in front of the Santé prison, whose monumental leprosy sits in the middle of Paris, the actors unload the staging, the police are upon them, upon us. And what police they were! The police of the 1970s, violent, armed, striking ferociously from behind their shields. The GIP was an informal group, there was no pressure to join or any command structure, it was neither a regiment, nor a brigade, there was no recruitment, no law or authority, there was an inspiration and an aspiration. We came to the GIP with shared wishes and good will, brought together by an attrac-

tion, a dream, a revolt. It was a complex, multicoloured body of which Michel was the soul. One cannot imagine a freer, less coercive grouping.

How many actors were we who did not know we were acting in a play of which Michel did not know he was the author? About fifty? We were the mystical marionettes of a superior idea the secret and antique coherences of which we did not see. Did we see that we were modestly but fervently beginning again to storm the Bastille? I believe that we did not think; we were led by the obviousness of life, by the passion of Michel. At the end of this minuscule epic, there was the other epiphany: it happened one day in a meeting. The little group of visionaries met from time to time to devise the next actions (which is to say the next sieges, always audacious and powerless, of the various French prisons), and the militant publications, describing the scandalous state of the fortresses and the condition of the prisoners. This was the day of my great surprise: Michel addressing us and proposing the following theme of reflection: what if now we formulated the theory (or an analysis) of our practice? We have run, fought, spoken, the streets and the walls have seen us. And now let us move on to the *causes* of all of these consequences. I was literally sitting next to myself, shocked. And I thought: what are you doing here? Why are you here? A great lesson of living philosophy: the master, the boss, turned around *to ask the action for its reason!* I was amazed! I who believed he knew everything in advance! Someone came to my rescue, among the people present, by responding for me: 'hadn't I always written about prison and been in prison, as the first sentence of my first book (*Dedans*) suggested?'²² I had never thought of it. With a sudden flash of light, I saw a kind of virtual prisoner in each of us. Beginning with Michel, the freest and the most imprisoned of thinking beings. Shortly thereafter Michel turned the keys to the action over to the next generation, that of the former prisoners themselves. Because the action which becomes an institution is soon transformed into an unwalled prison. Michel struggled to displace external and internal bars. I said the freest and the most prisoner. This was always my experience, in the very sweet circle of intimacy. We loved, we loved each other, we spoke to each other of love. One summer day I cried in front of him, I was in mourning of love. I say this because we had a space for tears together. Later on I thought that this was accorded to us, him with me me with him, as grace, by the mystery of our love choices, choices which we had not chosen but which had chosen us. I heard him evoke with nostalgia the paradise of 'childish' loves, which is to say loves of pleasure without repression without inhibition. He dreamed in front of me of the delicious freedom of certain American communities (in comparison with the somber bourgeois French humour, the Californian vision shone

like Beatrice for Dante). Michel lived in an age which is now past but which was still a descendant of the nineteenth century, horribly marked by Judeo-Christian interdictions. He spoke to me with adorable tenderness about Daniel, the boy he loved. With delicacy, with force, he spoke of Daniel's delicacy. With modesty he spoke of his refinement. Naturally, this went beyond the sexual opposition, it was neither on one side nor on the other, it was beyond, because it was love. We were on love's side, the only side which is not an institution.

I ought to talk about homosexualities, about the different loving sexualities which are so complex, so refined, singularities each time, and not at all what we think, but this is not the place.

Back to the marionette. The tears I recognised are tears coming from the deepest and the most mysterious of my psychic mysteries.

They arise [*surviennent*]. They are the ones that took me by surprise in October 1996 in Washington. I was in that city by chance because of a Philosophical Society conference. I slipped away: I went to the National Mall to see . . .

the solemn stand of the Aids Memorial Quilt.³ I said I left to go *see* the Quilt. But can what occurred be called *seeing*? I walked for a long time along this boulevard, with its strange proportions, an immense corridor, this slightly savage forestage which leads to the white mausoleum of power. It was a very beautiful day, as is always the case when there is tragedy. Little by little, people appeared. It was known that for contingent reasons (financial reasons, lack of space, problems of conservation) the thing was being shown here for the last time. I do not know what pushed me. I might have thought it was curiosity. At the end of the dust I finally arrived at the edge of the thing. It was vast like an interior ocean. This ocean was organised. It was a composition, as is well known. Squares of cloth were assembled, sewn together with delicacy. Each square was a thing in itself, a being, a work of art, an altar. It told a story, as is well known. Each piece of cloth had a name. Friends, a family, lovers were brought together in this cloth around this name. This name also had an age. As is well known. It is known and we know nothing. I walked among those beings, those thousands and thousands of loved beings, those forty-four thousand returning children. A breeze made these breasts of cloth breathe. Friends and strangers came to visit this incomparable people. Thousands and thousands of beings who responded with signs, who lifted their dead ones with a sigh, who joined forces against forgetting and negligence, who evoked the charms of their lost life. I began to feel the tears open a path in my body. I had never seen so many dead ones returning together at the call of love. Because it must be said that those who were there, standing or

lying, had a common cause: love which never surrenders. A large man smiled sadly while looking at the cloth face of a name who had died at the age of twenty-seven. Is that your son? I asked. – Yes. They came from Texas. Father and son. All of this was terribly miraculous. The biggest the most tender the most obstinate of life-books of the dead. I could no longer hold back the tears. For whom was I crying? For the dead who were very strong, the dead in the full of life, very young, and so to speak dead of life. All of them children, lovers. I had never cried so much for Michel. I cried for the other Michel too. Michel de Montaigne, the first of these lovers touched by a grace so often condemned, the one who loved Etienne de La Boétie more than any being in the world, ‘because it was him – because it was me’,⁴ so uniquely and so totally that the souls blend and merge into each other, with a mixture so universal that they efface and can no longer locate the stitching that joined them.

‘We embraced each other with our names before having seen each other’ says Montaigne the survivor.⁵

And so it was that in Washington I saw that innumerable embracing of names, which I called by the name Michel, but each name was a life and a poem.

I cried as I never had, lost in afflicted admiration before this magical transformation of memory into a humble army of marionettes. The wind, the footsteps of visitors, the air and the light of thought moved them [*les agissaient*] with a superhuman presence. They spoke with slight movements. Escaped from coffins, from prisons, from prejudice, from punishment. Bearers of a tragic freedom.

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Translated by Eric Prenowitz

Notes

1. The *Théâtre du Soleil*, founded (in 1964) and directed by Ariane Mnouchkine, mounted a celebrated production on the French Revolution, *1789*, in 1970. With the notable exception of the “first play” of our adventure’, mentioned below, Hélène Cixous began writing for the *Soleil* in 1984, and has been the ‘house playwright’ ever since.
2. ‘My house is encircled’, *Dedans* (Paris: Grasset, 1969), p. 13. Cf. Hélène Cixous, ‘My Algeriance’, p. 212. On the last page of *Dedans*, the title of which means ‘Inside’, we read this, in part a distant echo of *King Lear*: ‘Viens, dit-il, allons en prison . . .’ (209), ‘Come, he said, let’s go to prison . . .’

3. The Aids Memorial Quilt of the Names Project Foundation, the ‘largest community art project in the world’ (<http://www.aidsquilt.org/history.htm>).
4. Michel de Montaigne speaking about Etienne de la Boétie: ‘Par ce que c’estoit luy; par ce que c’estoit moy’, in ‘De l’amitié’, *Essais, Œuvres complètes*, eds Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1962), p. 187.
5. Michel de Montaigne speaking about Etienne de la Boétie in ‘De l’amitié’, *Essais*: ‘Nous nous cherchions avant que de nous estre veus, et par des rapports que nous oyions l’un de l’autre, qui faisoient en nostre affection plus d’effort que ne porte la raison des rapports, je croy par quelque ordonnance du ciel; nous nous embrassions par noz noms’, p. 187.

Promised Cities

In homage to the author from Dublin, who was both my hunter and my prey for so many years, I mean to the thief from Dublin to his translator, and his *transhater*, by way of epigraph I shall take my first steps in Cities via a small detour through *Finnegans Wake* where on p. 301 an air of nostalgia for Trieste awaits us. Trieste, the at least triple city where as a young man Joyce used to pass on languages [*était passe-langue*] at the Berlitz School.

Dear and he went on to scribble gentlemine born, milady bread, he would pen for her, he would pine for her, how he would patpun fun for all with his frolicky frowner so and his glumsome grinner otherso. And how are you, waggy? My animal his sorrafool! And trieste, ah trieste ate I my liver! *Se non é vero son trovatore*. O jerry! He was soso, harriot all! He was sadfellow, steifel! He was mistemysterion. Like a purate out of pensionee with a gouvernement job.¹

Whereupon I could stop my lecture, for everything is plurasaïd [*pluridit*] in one go, how a city is like another one how a language always speaks more than another language, that Babel is not bababbeaten [*babattue*], and that there is always more than one animal wagging at the end of a tail, and how, as a dog I eat and gnaw at myself, my own bone, as both a vulture and Prometheus I tear my own liver to pieces.

I am from Oran. I translate: I am from *Hors En* [Out In]. I go from *Or* [gold] in *Hors*. I translate: I go from *Hors* in *Hors*. To start with I am from without [*du hors*]. I am and follow [*suis*] to the letter and to the voice. Then I am an adoring being. I could take all my life by his/her letters of gold [*d'or*]. Letters came to me before the book. The first letters, the first sounds were my city, my land, my family. Since I started feeling and turning my mind to thinking [*me tourne à penser*], I have not been able to distinguish the city theatres from the word theatres. Word and cities swap places, the city makes a theatre for words, the words

make place, city, mines. The word city has always incited me to sing search for double. I write: I cite. To put it otherwise: I translate. I was born in translation, with translation.

Everything I write and say, here – first I say it in my head, straightaway, from my head to fingers with pen I write, everything that gets *out* and that I get out of *En/In*, all that today stands in front of me outside me, a few years ago still stood – back, behind my thought, before me. I did not think of city, I was in it, and I was with it, with my cities. We were only one city which translated itself into twelve cities as well as into dreams of cities. Oran and myself are inseparable. And yet – I quote from ‘*Savoir*’:

Everyday she had to pass by the castle. Help came from the statue of Joan of Arc. The great golden woman brandished her flaming lance and showed her the way to the castle. By following the golden sign she would finally get there. Until the day when. One morning in the square there was nothing. The statue was not there. No trace of the castle. Instead of the sacred horse a world of shadow. All was lost. Every step would increase the confusion. She stopped, petrified, deprived of the statue’s help. She found herself stalled at the heart of the invisible. Everywhere she saw this limitless pale nothingness, as thought by some false step she had entered, living, into death. The here-nothingness stayed, and no one. She, seized up, fallen upright into the fathomless expanse of a veil, and *voilà* all that remained of city and time. The catastrophe had happened in silence.

And now who was she? Alone. A little nail stuck in the gap.

Later in the gap someone abruptly come from the nothing told her that things hadn’t fled at all. They were definitely in their place. So was it she who could not see the statue or the castle or the edges of the world or the bus?²

As one can see, she cannot see where she is. She is so lost that she is in the third person of herself, far from me and I.

She is lost in the lost city. Of the whole city there only remains a remainder of Gold [*Or*]. She is outside [*dehors*] inside. And it will always be like that.

And the word *ville* in French, this present, not *cit *, not *city*, not *Stadt*, not *ville*, not vile, villa, not *domus*, not *domus aurea*, neither family mansion nor house of gold, but villa of pleasures. Ville-villa. Ville, expansion and extension of villa. In Algeria we lived in the Clos-Salembier villa in the upper districts of Algiers. One said *villa* in Algeria. Our houses with gardens were gilded with the Roman word. J. D. El-Biar villa.³

Later on I called my house with a garden in Arcachon villa Eva. It was natural. A city within a city.

And yet, between city and myself, there has always been a veil. I said Oran in the first place, as one would say Ouranos or Gaia. But Oran

has always already been complicated occupied contained fabulated by whom? And by what? By Osnabrück.

But before coming back to Oran, I shall call up the cities that live in me and that have made their nests their knots their walls and citadels in my work: congenitally at first, then sometimes cultured, at first underground then more and more overground until they took control of writing, all unbeknownst to me. There they were, fomenting for decades until the day when there was *Osnabrück*.⁴

But before and ever since there have been Algiers, Pompei, Manhattan, Prague, in other words: Jerusalem, Babel, Ur, and even a little later Elsinore and its ramparts. All my cities have their mythical doubles, their models and my roots.

I see I have omitted Paris. This will call for an explanation. And I should not forget Strasbourg. What makes a city be? The promise. What does the promise promise? Threat, paradise, ruin, loss, reunion, salvation, destruction, the end of errancy, alas the end of errancy, the end of history; no, expulsion, prohibition, exile, Ovid's *Tristia*, Mandelstam's *Tristia*, the no-arrival, the no-return, the no-reunion. One does not come back, not in reality. By dint of not finding (oneself) again while coming back and not coming back, one produces cities which come back in dreams, cities on the horizon, serial Cities. By dint of repeating the names of the desired and never hoped-for Cities, one causes the movement of literature. Next year in Venice. But in order to get to Venice you will have to fulfil twelve conditions and pay the full price for admission: you will go to Venice but only without Albertine.⁵ It is the choice of the two caskets.⁶ One enters a city half dead.

So there was a book called *Osnabrück*. Now that was not done on purpose. I do not give names, they are given to the books, and this very late, once the book has departed from me, by some god or other. So there was a book which bore the name of a city. And conversely. Maybe the book is a city? True there are books that are kinds of cities. Memoirs, archives, plans, monuments. *Ulysses*, as they say, 'takes place' [*se passe*] in Dublin which passes through *Ulysses*. In passing the character Ulysses Homerises and Odysseises Dublin in an imperceptible movement of comeback and haunting [*revenance*], of spectral colonisation, of elevation and lowering which reminds us first of all that a city is such only if it bears within its wall-girt sides the traces of another city, its ancestor, its archaic model. A city worthy of being sung always *sites cites* another city.

What is beautiful and surprising is that, when a city dies in order to be reborn, the same happens to it as to the Tibetan or Egyptian dead. It travels, transmigrates, reincarnates in a most faraway city, but one

which can harbour it in its bosom, that is to say receive it in translation, through acquaintances or connivances, which are either topological or thematic or literal, and quite often small, tiny in appearance.

So then there was a book which advanced under the title of *Osnabrück* and the character that inhabits it is my mother, Eve Klein. Osnabrück my mother's name as a native city. The name of a small city in the province of Hanover. Name: foreign. The titles of my books always remain foreign to me, like the cities – no matter how I pretend to inhabit them. A city takes me. Captures me. Hunts me. I am afraid of cities.

That was a city. Now when I say Osnabrück I no longer know whether I am in the book or in the city.

This book when in French was nearly not called *Osnabrück*. That would have been a French book's suicide. For a book, I am keen to stress, is somehow contained entirely in its title.

Yes, that's the mystery: the title makes the being. The title – for me at any rate – is the essential and sublime translation of the book. Now I nearly didn't. And why? I analyse after the fact: Osnabrück, a barbarously sounding name. Just as Babel sounds well in all languages. Osnabrück: unpronounceable in French. Like Cixous. Osnabrück Cixous, what a name! More and more foreign, brutal, brück, cix scissors . . . O Phonemes. Onomatopoeiae! At the last minute I clung to the principle of anti-cowardice loyalty that drives me. – What is that? Well precisely: it is my treasure and my heritage. I note that I do not have a book titled Oran. I did not do it on purpose.

I said I would come back to Oran, at least in these pages. I'll come back to it.

Whereupon came *Manhattan*.⁷ It is then that this insistence of cities, of names of books of cities of bookcities, drew my attention. There appeared to me in fiction what I had always known and practised in the theatre: places are powerful and decisive characters. They do half of fate's work. They are deities, active hidden powers. Places archive us and act upon us. Chance and necessity. To be born and to die. One falls in order to be born, in such and such a city and the die is cast. To die one can think about it. Montaigne wanted to die on horseback, a marvellous death without a roof. I myself do not know yet. *Manhattan*, subtitled: *Letters from Prehistory*. Manhattan would therefore be the site and the city of the prehistory of my (hi)story? I'll be able to think so. It could be the first of my ruin cities, the place of the first runes would therefore be American.

Immediately I ask myself what is the city of the prehistory of my prehistory.

There is no simple city in my books and in my life. What is the first

city? There are several, obviously. Let's say it would be Troy. Trois three. There are at least three cities in each of my cities.

I was born in Oran and I lived in a double city there. For historical reasons Osnabrück had come to find shelter in Oran. On my double city there was War and the shadow of Pétain with Hitler. In our flat rue Philippe I never knew whether I was in Oran, Algeria, or in Osnabrück, Germany. I said: I am from Oran. I should say: I am from Oran with Osnabrück, from Oran in and out of [*en et hors*] Osnabrück. An impossibility made possible in a very specific place, 54 rue Philippe on the 2nd floor.

In Oran Osnabrück hidden Oran slipped into Osnabrück I lived within without and I still live, in my first house where the christians the jews and the muslims lived in keeping with the cruel reality, all refugees fresh from exile, within was the kingdom of my father the fair doctor, and in the street was France a word in front of which, all those living at no. 54, the Spaniards the French Jews (the Arab), the german jews the Arab were taking identity tests. Within no. 54 there was a grace.

I was in the one and in the other scene at once and separately North in South, man in woman, the masculine in the feminine, together and separately. My German mother and grandmother were telling about Osnabrück. The staircases in the buildings of Osnabrück were using the staircases of Oran. I described the mythical structure of my native city in *Osnabrück*.

The moment when I was born in Oran, I was adopted by Osnabrück. My understanding began with two O's and two A's. I was living in Algeria *Allemagne* [Germany] or in *Allemagne* Algeria anagrammatically, in several languages. My countries begin with *Al*, aleph, alfa. Everything has always been a stage and a theatre. This is peculiar to the City: the City is a theatre, on whose doorstep the place where the drama, that is to say the theatre, is played out (again), stands erect. The theatre, Shakespeare's, Aeschylus', the war theatre, the one which translates the fate of the city into a work of art and rebellion, is a hut which *stands erect*, directing its words to the sleeping inhabitants in the city, right on the city gate, against the deaf wall of the city. The Theatre which is put outside, the prophet, directs its warnings to the deaf and blind theatre which resides within the constructions put up inside.

My double city with a double childhood had a centre, a central stage. It so happens that my family lived twice in the first row of seats which overlook the stage. Once in the Nikolaïort building in Osnabrück. Once at no. 54 rue Philippe, second gallery on the right facing the stage of the Place d'Armes.

All the Algerians know the Place d'Armes. One cannot imagine

anything more theatre-like, more Arabo-Greek, more Shakespearian. The backdrop: a town hall flanked by two lions. On the right, the theatre, on the left in the background, Plato's Pharmacy, run by my pharmacicians, stage left the Military Academy [*Cercle Militaire*] where all that makes me enraged, ethically astounded politically foreseeing etc. happened to me.

Up in the flies 'The mountain', on which *santa crousse* is seated . . . The marabout etc.

The theme of Oran-as-theatre: 'how to enter?', a theme with a double stage and a double plot, one reflecting, relieving or sublating translating the other: how to enter the desired city which can never be found, always never there veiled commanded by a *fort da?* And how to enter among the inhabitants of the city among whom one is without being one finds oneself but crossed out, barred with bars [*barré de barreaux*], struck through, thrown spat out.

My theme: how to enter, how to *arrive* and *manage* [*arriver*] to enter, how to get out of the outside in which one is locked up within the inside?

Kafka's theme: how to get out of the burning bush which one did not enter? My theme: land as one may on the shore on the other side of the sea, or in the middle of the country, one does not arrive.

This is the theme of translation: one does not arrive. There is the 'arrival' or target language [*langue d'arrivée*], one paces it, one rents it, one is a tenant, one adopts and is adopted, one tastes in it the delights of new surroundings one is not of one's blood. At least this is my case. The idea of 'doing' a translation frightens me. The idea of rendering a text in another, to secure (as Jacques Derrida says) the survival of the body of the original:

It would thus secure the *survival* of the body of the original (survival in the double meaning given to it by Benjamin in 'The Task of the Translator', *fortleben* and *überleben*: prolonged life, continued life, *living on*, but also life beyond death).

Is it not what a translation does? Does it not secure these *two* survivals while losing its flesh during an operation of exchange? While elevating the signifier towards its meaning or its value, but while keeping the mournful, indebted memory of the singular body, the primal body, the unique body which it thus elevates, saves and relieves or sublates? Since it is a work, even, as we were saying, a work of the negative, this sublation [*relevance*] is a work of mourning, in the most enigmatic sense of this word, which deserves another development which I attempted somewhere else but which I must give up doing here. The measure of relief [*relève*] or sublation, the price of a translation, is always what one calls meaning, even value, keeping [*garde*], truth as keeping (*Wahrheit, bewahren*) or the value of meaning, that is what elevates itself above the body from which it frees itself, internalizes it, spiritualizes it, keeps it in memory. A faithful, mournful memory. One does not

even have to say that translation keeps the value of meaning, the meaning of meaning, the value of kept value is born from the mournful experience of translation, from its very possibility.⁸

The experience of Cercle Militaire that is the Military Academy.

There were two worlds and I knew it (she knew it), what I did not yet know was that it was forever impossible for me to pass (live) into the other world, impossible as much as forbidden even if (perchance) *one belonged*,

even if, perchance, by some extraordinary chance, I found or find myself overnight *in* the world on the other side, even if by some *extraordinary* chance the ban was apparently lifted, and I could believe the messages of the senses: believe that a portal opened that I entered the garden, that I was inside,

even if I could believe and had believed that by entering Canaan I would become an inhabitant of the inside of Canaan. Here I could believe my definition as a foreigner different from others would thus have ended. The outside which was in me had from then on stayed outside, outside the garden. This being – of the out(side) [*du hors*] I could think I had stowed it in a cupboard from the outside, this state of banishment from birth would have stopped at the portal, I had believed, it will be enough, it is going to be enough I thought for me to enter the garden, to take a few steps for the internal mutation to keep up with the change already performed by my personal envelope.

Let's say I was expecting a birth of myself, to be born in the garden, my being brought into the world, to bring myself (in)to it, I felt full of promise and of exulting anticipation, I squatted in the paths of rich earth lined with flower beds in bloom and it was not coming. The sudden magical metamorphosis was not coming.

I took the entrance exam in the language or in the codes of the other so many times. Each spectacular, failed attempt, working through the voice, signs and discourses; I told ten times and shall still do so ten or a hundred times my attempts my failures my obstinacies for all the wound and all literature will be drawn from these traumatic moments later. How aged three I was initiated within the Military Academy in Oran into as much negative philosophy as there is in Dostoyevsky, I killed and was killed, I was inside and I wasn't. How aged four I had the honour of singing '*Maréchal here we come*' out of a pleasure of doing like all the other children and how my father exorcised me, how aged five I saw marching in with great pomp those that enter by right and might as in Shakespeare, the Americans De Gaulle Fortinbras Henri Vth Giraud all parading in tanks and on horses right in front of my sandals. How I was

on the balcony, a hen by my side, *the* hen and its egg, like a Scandinavian divinity which follows the human world events while crying powerlessly. How I danced on the stage of the Oran theatre, almost blind following the thick chalk strokes drawn for me on the floor so I would not hurl myself into the pit, a scene which started over and over again all my life as a puppet, last time it was at the BN⁹ two years ago I was dancing on (my) words, clinging to my paper and I could not see anything. How each time I have been inside I was radically outside, when I entered the University I came in by the way out. I could add that this movement of a needle which pricks passes enters exits pricks again, or of a fish, is my destinal signature. I will always be found at the door. I know all the secrets of doors. Keyholes.

Now I am going to talk about the hole in the door, this pupil on the face of the wood through which one must imagine looking for it is while sneaking a furtive glance between all these marvellous words of the locks and keys of the psyche, from the *seredure* which clasps the key, a little marvel of eroticism, to the *bold* [*pêne*], striking plate, mortise, the whole scene which translators play ceaselessly, and which make of me as a translator a born locksmith – thus it is while threading one's way (J. D.'s metaphor in *Veils*)¹⁰ and while twisting and turning that, following my child mother wherever she went, I never stopped moving from Oran to Osnabrück, from Osnabrück to the Niebelungen and back. When my mother/and thus myself/were six years old, there was an Osnabrück epiphany through the keyhole. An epiphany in the Judeoworld. One day, my mother and therefore I saw, through the keyhole of the bedroom door in Osnabrück, a whole station. A population of dwarfs was busying itself loading and unloading a train. Then the train left. What my mother believed she saw I also believed I saw it. Osnabrück is *to believe to have seen* and there is no difference between believing one sees and seeing. Where were these active dwarfs from, who were carrying promised yet unavailable treasures? Later on I had my own station, my trains, syntax, rhetoric, poetics and a profusion of verbal dwarfs. We had seen the journey of language. I said *had*. I will add the plane to the train, naturally. Travel tickets spring from language. All of us here today, no matter how glued we may sometimes be at our tables, we are on a journey, entravelled [*envoyagés*], sent journeying we pass through the keyholes of sentences, through the doors of words, through the panes of frames. I mean the window panes.

Two words about Osnabrück. This city has a twin: Münster. In two cities at once the treaty of Westphalia was signed. Europe starts here. All the future of the world passed through the tiny city, in 1648.

Oran Osnabrück city-worlds/world-cities, have I ever seen them? I desired to see them face to face. I think I never saw Oran. I left it. I never came back. Will I be back? Have I ever seen Osnabrück? That's the enigma. I think I went there with my grandmother Omi, in 1952, we were again in Germany for the first time I think but maybe it is a dream, but dream is also a reality.

Osnabrück-Jerusalem or *next year in Osnabrück*

From the 1990s onwards arose the thought of going to Osnabrück, to get lost now – or previously [*voir si j'y suis, ou si j'y fus*]. I did not go. I still have not been there. Always I don't go there. It would be terrible if I didn't go I say to myself it would be terrible if I went. When I *completed Osnabrück* or when *Osnabrück* was *done* (as Balzac would say – *A Passion in the Desert*)¹¹ I only had to resurrect the small city which had turned into my mother's book. That was the least I could do. But before telling you what happened to my trip to Jerusalem Osnabrück I must introduce to you our Osnabrück as I experienced it through the stories my mother and my grandmother told. According to me it was a gigantic Jewish city, some Lodz or Odessa. Until the day when I discovered that Jewish Osnabrück was made up of 450 people or so up to the days of Nazism, about fifty families, that must be the number of families in the *Iliad*. I started writing the book of what remained of Osnabrück it was *Benjamin à Montaigne*.¹² When I completed this remainder I said to my mother and her sister: *next year in Osnabrück in reality*. Nobody wanted to go. Nobody said to nobody that nobody wanted to go. We thought of going to Osnabrück during a whole year, and when the day came to do the suitcases, we undid them.

But for a year I was afraid of the end: the end of the sentence *next year in Jerusalem*. All the while I was afraid of going to Osnabrück and it was not only the book that would be *done* completed, it would be life itself. Then my mother said: Eri (her sister) does not feel like going to Osnabrück. And nor do I. We are not interested. That day I understood that for them too the return to the beginning is the end, the pilgrimage on one's own grave. We felt relieved but none of us said anything. We left everything outside translation. I could write a book on the impossible, what is deferred, promised, hoped for, next year, I could write next year, we'll see.

I never wanted to go to Jerusalem-Jerusalem. I had a few cities where not to go. Among which Prague, Pompei, Jerusalem delivered. Cities too precious in fantasy to risk sinking them to the bottom of reality. Ten thousand times in thought, in dream, in the imagination. Venice for Proust, how much does it cost him? To go there? Not to go there.

I have known for a long time that one does not go anywhere. It is the

cities or the countries that come or do not come to you. Cities are fateful letters. They only arrive lost. They only arrive posthumously.

Though I never saw my cities with-my-eyes-of-flesh, I would at least have ‘seen’ them with my ears, I inhabited their names, their sounds, I tasted them through all my senses, travelled them spelling them out, I received everything in gold as an angel [*en or en ange*], I sucked their juice, their bones, I did not inhabit the name Paris, it never came to my mind, I cried enormously in Oran, I never laughed in Paris never, I never got there I have never been there and I am not coming back from there. One of my lives eventually took place in Ris-Orangis. The word-nouns are our fateful commanders, one cannot escape them. Before fleeing from Paris as I do secretly everyday, I must still acknowledge a debt to it. It is in Paris, not in Algiers, nor in New York City, that I met J. D. We were both in exile in Paris, both terrified, each of us in our own way, both hidden under the belly of the French language in order to try and escape from the Cyclops. This appalling condition with its cunning remedy must have contributed to bringing us closer. What we feared above all else was the word France, we wanted French the French language and its abundant brilliance but not France. We were each differently hidden pariahs who had stowed away from one clandestine state to another on board the City of Algiers. Cities are also boats.

Is there a more forceful metaphor, a boat which is a city or rather a city which comes and goes from one end to the other. One left the city of Algiers for the City of Algiers the ground was shaking, one did not know one was in a metamorphosis. The being in a trance that we were spewing its guts out, one was changing bodies.

Later on when I went to the United States for the first time, and since it was said that here over there I would be admitted into literature, I voyaged myself between two lives on the *France*. A fine steamer that was [*pas-que-beau*].

My languages: I cannot say like J. D. that I only have one language and it is not mine.

I lived in a languaged house [*maison à langues*], on the second floor Spanish Mrs Rico, on the third German with French, on the fourth French with Spanish, on the fifth the Hispano-French of Mr Emile and Mrs Alice Carisio, sibling pharmacians, makers of potions and liqueurs for the Oran Town Council, under the stairs Mohamed’s Arabic, on the galleries Spanish, all these languages tasted of spices, kitchens and languages communicated, fortunately I desired them all except aubergines I don’t know why, and grouper’s heads I know why.

I ate cabbage in German *Kraut* and carrots in cumin in Hispano-Arabic. I could – I should do a lecture on my way of cooking. It is exactly like my way of working a language. I can say that I have never wished to eat-speak pure French. I love and practise French as a foreign language.

My father too (the Larousse dictionary) – I sow to the four winds.

I never did anything but translate that is to say want to taste the taste of *all* the tastes, try all the words, invent new mixtures, bring extremes closer, go to the roots, return to the sources of sources. Since we can no longer speak-enjoy in Montaigne's language, except by solitary enjoyment, Montaigne who wrote foreign Greek Latin Italian in French, we must then foreignise [*forainer*] forward and on all sides.

Since I was a child I have always eavesdropped on words because they were all equally foreign to me, French neither more nor less than German. Still today as in Oran and at the Clos-Salembier, I can hear their declensions, their gradations, their articulations just as they were pronounced, once long ago, for the first time. Still today as in Oran I am hurled into the hunting of the Snark and what a delight when I hear at the end of a ride that the Snark is a Boojum, 'after all', as Lewis Carroll says. My grandfather Samuel Cixous who aged eleven went from the street barefoot to the counter founded the family's first play of signifier-without-doing-it-on-purpose by opening a hat shop bearing the name HighLife. Iglif. First hieroglyphs. Later on I found it hard then a pleasure to move from my language gemtoys [*bijoux*] to English and school German. What languages, so much alive and droll, were for me first refused to let itself be spelt. I thus started and ended up by always having two languages to play with, one having come to me by air the other shemblable and freer arriving by letter.

Do you know Wilhelm Busch? When I was six years old in Oran Wilhelm Busch was my other Bible. Homer, the Bible, Wilhelm Busch.

Wilhelm Busch is the *Iliad*.

Wilhelm Busch is *Vilaine Bouche* [Naughty Mouth].

(I adored him) Wilhelm Busch is Hokusai Daumier Hugo Blake and Chaplin for children and criminals.

Max and Moritz, in other words my brother and me, more than once fell into the impenetrable Busch as scoundrels or as rogues, J. D. would say, and as dogs. Let me introduce to you briefly Plisch and Plum our fellow four-legged creatures:

1st chapter –
A pipe in his mouth,
Under arm two young dogs
That old Kaspar Schlich was carrying. –

He can smoke awfully.
 But though his pipe is glowing
 Oh, how cold is his nature!
 ‘What for’ say his words
 ‘What do I need this breed for?
 Does it perhaps give me pleasure?
 Not at all is my reply.
 But when there’s something I don’t like
 Get rid of it is my principle.’

In front of the pond he stands still
 For he wants to drown them.
 Anxiously with their legs
 The two young quadrupeds thrash about;
 For the inner voice speaks:
 This affair I don’t trust!

Oops! One is sent flying already.

Plisch! – there it slips into the water.

Oops! The second right behind.

Plum!! thereupon disappears.

Job done! shouted Kaspar Schlich,
 Puffing and going away.

But here, as ever,
 Things don’t turn out as one thinks.
 Paul and Peter, who it so happened
 Had stripped for a bath
 Watched still in hiding
 What evil Schlich was doing.

Swift and like frogs
 Hopped they both into the pond.
 Each carries in his hand
 A little dog to the shore.
 ‘Plisch!’ shouted Paul ‘I name mine thus’
 Plum – is how Peter named his.
 And thus Paul and Peter carry
 Both their little puppies
 With haste, yet not without full care,
 Toward the parental abode.¹³

How my mother, a genius for military doggerel [*mirliton mirlitaire*], translated him during the war. Just as she also translated the times into

puppets. This is how we got a theatre of dolls with bodies made of electric wire among which some little Hitler was lashing out.

My father, a marvellous speaker of French, set about learning an invented German language, a kind of hilarious, pantomimed Aliengerman [*autreallemand*]. It is not Joyce but he who initiated me into embodied wordplay [*jeu de mots incarnés*], into transsubstantiation, into signifying acrobatics.

And so I was initiated into homophony and homonymy by the sweat [*sueur*] of my father, sweating it out as he was translating himself into my mother's language

Homonymy will also be the place of all metonymies, of all the substitutions operated by this great opus of substitution. Well, if I already insist on the homonymy, as I shall again and again, it is because I would like, much later, I do not know exactly when, during the course of this session, to select this question of homonymy and therefore of untranslatability as a main thread. For homonymy is, as you know, the crux [*croix*] of translation; it is what, in a language, signals and signs the untranslatable. [. . .] if I was given the time, I could demonstrate scientifically not only that *address* is not, far from it, the only example in this work, not only that there are many other, spectacular ones, but that the entire work of Hélène Cixous is literally, and for this reason, untranslatable, therefore not far from being unreadable, if reading still remains a kind of translating (paraphrase, circumlocution, metaphrase). Yes, I would like later, I do not know when but I hope today, to select this question of homonymy as a main thread [. . .]

And this miracle would come about in the writing of her own language whose coming, event, and *arrivance* would lie precisely in this effectiveness, in this *coup* which abolishes the difference between *making come* and *letting come*. The grace, the address, would lie in making while letting, in making come while letting come, in seeing come without seeing come.

Naming thus the writing of her language, I ask myself whether I am not already summoning, before her father, her mother whose presence radiates over all of us here – and not her mother tongue, which was French, but her mother's language, which she knows like no one else, and in which, as you well know, the difference between *making come* and *letting come* remains at times indistinguishable: *kommen lassen*, means at once *letting come* and *making come*, letting arrive and ordering to come.¹⁴

Ich weiß nicht, I do not know how this primal scene of acrobatranslatability which inaugurated my eyes of writing, how I could decide which of my languages was the most motherly, that of my father great specialist of tongue in cheek or that of my mother.¹⁵

All that took place at the table in Oran, which was always endowed with numerous functions and magical powers and on whose top – yet another theatre – one could find now a chicken's skeleton – thanks to

which my father taught us the rudiments of anatomy – now a chess game, now the sewing machine called Singer or *Singer* depending on whether one felt on the side of my aping [*singeur*] father or of my mother. The result of these duets, duels, these acrobatics of trapeze artists these wordliftings [*vols de mots à la tire*] is that – to repeat here one of the definitions of deconstruction which J. D. gives of its own movement: deconstruction is no more of/more than one language [*plus d'une langue*] – we were Babel and already having fun deconstructing our idioms, seasoning them, tossing them, without being able to say which one was the spice which one was spiced.

I feel nostalgia for a language which would speak several languages freely, without apologising, according to my whim, unexpectedly. It is a dream: this language, we would be several to speak it, this would mean or *want* to say [*voudrait dire!*] that the players would have several equally foreign and familiar languages at their disposal. This hardly exists. This is not done. Save for exceptions, of course, like *Finnegans Wake*, but I do not know whether Joyce *spoke* Wakese at home. One wipes one's feet apologetically when one feels one is borrowing a word from the neighbours. One is committing one feels a breach of hospitality.

I feel nostalgia for the word *Sehnsucht*, its languid appetites, its phonemes.

To tell the truth I do not feel any nostalgia properly speaking. On the contrary. Using the word nostalgia bothers me, betrays me. What I meant was *yearning*.

Why am I telling you these stories? I feel that the idea of City is my overexcitement my hyperviving. At the beginning of literature there is a city, a city-to-be-destroyed. That's what literature is: to destroy the city. The destruction of the city. Is it a good thing is it a bad thing? It is a bad thing which *causes* an art. A sorrow that causes. Literature is a field of destruction a field in ruins, the song of ruins, the archive song of ruins.

I should tell you later about the first destroyed bombarded-gutted city I saw, it was London in 1950, it was still eviscerated. There I felt my first emotion of a foreign language in my mouth. First kiss: to speak the other language, to suck its phonemes, to appropriate and snap up, the most common idioms, to enter a language whose walls have collapsed without the effort of knocking at the door. I entered the English language as an innocent conqueror and I helped myself, without plundering.

I loved to say: *gorgeous* or *tremendous*, I revelled with the sounds of visa-words in my throat, in other words these shibboleths through which one is admitted into the camp of a teenage gang, like *grave* [the

pits – literally: serious], *cassé* [owned – argument: you’re wrong, *you’re owned*], cool [super, great].

From the most run-down estates come the most powerful phrases. Money: a ‘bag’ [*sac*], a buck said *bock* and recently in the suburbs: sequin!

How can one translate buck top tough or big or cool into English? Since they became native to the lingo spoken in Paris and its northern suburbs [*du 93 ou du 75*]?

From London to Manhattan there would only be one step later on. *Londres*, I say here. I was thirteen. I lived in Golders Green, London. And here’s something curious: the fate of this proper noun, which is so proper to England, submitted to translation, like a certain number of other names of capitals, are gallicised whereas other aren’t. Why *Londres*, why not Berlin or Madrid, why *Prague* and why not New York? *And what of Alger?* I lived in a city brought before a translation tribunal for on-the-spot colonisation [*traduite en procès de colonisation*].

I went to Manhattan by sea and in texts. I went there to the letter, to the word. I go to Manhattan as one goes to *Monomotapa*, this country where the *true friends* live as La Fontaine tells us, if there is such a thing. I go there in pursuit of Joyce and following Kafka. Himself following Karl Rossman on the Hamburg.¹⁶ Me following Benjamin Jonas from Osnabrück, on the *France*, like my grandmother’s brother on the *Hamburg*. I am always already in text, when the Statue of Liberty appeared to me in a sudden burst of light, and everything was already written. One cannot talk about Manhattan, one can only try and write it in translation one writes it and that’s not it. Manhattan is a non-finite amount of sleep inhabited by dreamers, Manhattan is also Leviathan or Dreamyathan, one tries to dream the dream but it is impossible, one is dreamt, one is the dreamt subject of the dream, and likewise as soon as one enters Manhattan one is metamorphosed into what? Into a walk-on or a puppet in the grand Oklahoma theatre one feels like an atom played in a play where millions of atoms bustle about, a word in a cosmogonic Narrative, an ant from Lilliput transported on to Brobdingnag Avenue (i.e. as Fatima ‘translated’ it: Broadingway Av.).¹⁷ A walk-on in the Citiest of Cities, the City itself and the Figure-City of any City, like the City big with more than one City, the Old-Young, promised and threatened one, seducing and impregnable, eminent therefore vulnerable.

– it is on this word that this text was cruelly interrupted in October 2004 by Jacques Derrida’s death.

I went there so often with Jacques Derrida or at the same time as Derrida, we were going there, that is to say by plane on 9th October

2004, during the whole of September we said to each other and wondered, shall we make this journey to New York City can we do it and by dint of wondering and conjuring up we made the journey a hundred times without doing so in reality.¹⁸

Translated by Laurent Milesi

Notes

1. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 301.10–20.
2. Hélène Cixous, 'Savoir', in Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 5–6 [translation slightly modified] [tr.].
3. Reference to Derrida's childhood house near Algiers. See, for instance, Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), p. 299.
4. Hélène Cixous, *Osnabrück* (Paris: Des femmes, 1999).
5. In Proust's *Recherche*, the narrator does, in the end, go to Venice, but without Albertine.
6. Cf. Freud's 'The theme of the three caskets' (SE, 12: 291–301).
7. Hélène Cixous, *Manhattan: Lettres de la préhistoire* (Paris: Galilée, 2002).
8. Jacques Derrida, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction "relevante"?', *Quinzièmes Assises de la Traduction Littéraire* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1999), p. 46.
9. Bibliothèque nationale de France.
10. Jacques Derrida, 'A Silkworm of One's Own', in *Veils*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).
11. Honoré de Balzac, *Une passion dans le désert* (1830).
12. Hélène Cixous, *Benjamin à Montaigne: Il ne faut pas le dire* (Paris: Galilée, 2001).
13. Wilhelm Busch, *Plisch und Plum*, 1882.
14. Jacques Derrida, *H. C. pour la vie . . .*, pp. 60–1.
15. On this *ich(Sch)weißnicht*, this I-don't-know-of-the-father, and its translation into or out of the paternal sweat, cf. 'The Names of Oran', pp. 120–2, in this volume.
16. Cf. Kafka's *Amerika*.
17. In Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Lilliput is a land of tiny people and Brobdingnag a land of giants.
18. In the later version of this text, aside from a number of quite minor changes, several paragraphs were added to the end. They are reproduced here:

We had already 'outlived' Nine Eleven we had suffered it, thought it, turned it inside out in every direction, we had transformed the two towers we loved into ghost characters in our works

yet another loss of a member of our body, of a family member. Then I lost Jacques Derrida my double, my twin, my selfsame. One believes one has lost everything. But one can still lose what one has lost. One can still lose even more. I have never been to New Orleans. And yet I lost it. Yet another city which not only its inhabitants lose but us too, yet another

buried Babel, another destroyed Troy, another city not to be forgotten. Another Chicago burnt in order to be reborn from its ashes. If Jacques Derrida were here we would have circulated amongst us the legend of N.O., we would have deconstructed the No, relaunched the yes to life. I would have reinscribed the *or* [gold] in Orleans in Oran. Each city lost or doomed is the first Jerusalem.

'*Each Time Unique, the End of the World*' [a book whose English title is *The Work of Mourning*], says my friend. There are lots of 'unique times'. How can what is *unique* be numerous?

Because we are the subjects of memory and of metaphor. There is only one city. There is only one mother. Yes. But each city bears within itself the face of another city, each city is haunted by another city.

Because we are beings, actors or spectators, or both, who officiate at the *Sacrificial Scene* which the *world* is, as Shakespeare used to say

Why did I suddenly decide to speak to you about Cities, in a place which is dedicated to art, to the search for the secrets of creation?

Because the work, the ideal, dreamt work, does not exist without its stage, its support, its subjectile, its earth. The 'stage' of the visual work of art is double: 1) the work (painting, photo, installation, sculpture, etc.) is born in a genealogy, in a vast time, a sort of library-landscape which remembers-and-forgets, which keeps and brings back to life all the previous works. 2) The other stage is its genetic geography, its spatial context, its urban, political site.

We are heirs and haunted, unknowingly. We are the descendants of a body-city. What I do, or dream, or live, what I flee from or find back in Chicago as well as in Manhattan results from the cross between my cities and my lives. I found and lost beings in Chicago, I found myself and lost myself in Chicago. In Chicago I am both Chicagoing and Chicagone by necessity. And what shall I say about New Orleans? Beyond the thousands of political reflections which spring from the catastrophe, there is the spectre of the Flood (I wrote a lot about the Flood) and the themes of chaos and hospitality. It is the twentieth time in my existence that I have to return a figure to a city and its inhabitants, that is to say to a shattered, disjoined, exiled people. We owe New Orleans a reply. We must invent it. Politically of course, *and* artistically. Not forget it. Not bury it. Translate it. Recall it. Continue to live it. *Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich Tragen*. We must work *towards* the end. With the end, by transfiguring and traversing it.

Volleys of Humanity

We have inherited magic words, which we do not wish to touch for fear of causing their (shimmering) wings to lose a little of their dazzling dust. We have inherited from distant words, Latin words, Justice, Truth, Humanity. Or from a Greek cousin, Democracy. And this inheritance accompanies us, sends us messages, glistening incitements. We are enchanted. Are they allegories? And then all these ravishing words are feminine in those gendered languages. Surreptitiously added to their charm is a pinch of difference, a sexual dusting, a slight exaltation. By virtue of what are we 'human', by virtue of what do we say that we are? By the fact that we read.

We are reading, in the morning as soon as it is day, we read – from the cradle, from the first gaze we already want to belong to a gaze and fall under a gaze, already we are reading. We are giving ourselves to (be) read. We are making links. We are mirroring ourselves in the mirror of the other. Is this the beginning of being human? We are reading whom and what? We are reading 'someone' who reads us. 'What we are doing when we read Jaurès,' Jacques Derrida said to us (and I am listening and reading carefully what he says – I note already he has constituted with two words a community to which we who say 'we' are invited – it is the community-of-we-who-read-Jaurès – or someone equal to Jaurès – an equivalent – the name Jaurès standing for an exemplary representative of any *being to be read*) – I continue reading Jacques Derrida reading Jaurès: 'or the works of those who are no more' (that is, naturally any work for 'to read is always to read in the absence of the author' adds Jacques Derrida. To which I add that to write is likewise to write in the absence of the author) 'is thus, as one will have sensed, to enter into a living-dead, absent-present relation, a spectral relation with the presumed signatory or signatories or the presumed signatory scene of this text.'¹ (NB: One has to understand clearly this living-dead relation,

living and dead already dead and yet living, present as absent – this is what the scene of reading grants to whoever engages in it: communications that shake up the presumed oppositions or contraries.) ‘We speak to them,’ says Jacques Derrida, ‘we listen to them.’² When we read, we are in dialogue with Jaurès. We connect ourselves. With Jacques Derrida. Jacques Derrida with Jaurès. We with Jacques Derrida-with-Jaurès. *List, list, listen to me*, says Jaurès, says Jacques Derrida. I listen. Jacques Derrida says: ‘I have written, I like others, under the gaze of Jaurès.’³ ‘I have wondered “Is Jaurès, there, watching us?”’ And also, given the chance and miracle of the homonymy, ‘Is he there at *l’Humanité* and watching to see if people are behaving well, and so forth?’⁴ ‘He cannot be avoided.’⁵ Says Jacques Derrida. I listen to every word of this confidential philosophical observation and I see *the scene*, which is succulent and moving, I recognise Jacques Derrida reading, in his manner, the manner of any genius, which is to slip back into childhood, to go sit in the classroom where a sublime teacher’s lessons are radiating, with the soul of the pupil who we are awakened to the other’s word. And naturally I say to myself: ‘Surely he is there, Jacques Derrida, ‘at *Humanité*’ and he is watching to see if people are behaving as he would himself like to behave, as well as possible, in the most just and exacting way possible.’ But in this tele-vision of Jacques Derrida the word Humanity does not refer only to Jaurès’s *Humanité*, I mean the *newspaper* with that magnificent name, but to the humanity of Jaurès and Jacques Derrida, the one they have in common and about which the one and the other, the one and later the other, invite us (1) to reflect and (2) to dream. ‘Is he there? At Humanity?’ Hello? Have you seen him up there? And with that we find ourselves in the midst of literature, groping our way, as in a dream, we knock at the door, is that he, there? Who is glowing, sitting down perhaps, keeping watch, at Humanity, at the hotel of Humanity, or else standing to the right of Humanity, which seems to us – indecisive and dazzled as we are, destinies that we are and that we do not control – to be immense and majestic like a Woman People, a kind of Jerusalem seen in kinevision by William Blake. And in the next scene here we are going up to the counter – of Humanity, to ask if he is indeed there. We desire to obtain a ticket for Humanity. We do not know exactly what we are asking for but our desire knows.

We continue to be pupils and teachers when we are curious and want to know more about ‘Humanity’, we gather in a same supertemporal lecture hall all our ignorance and all our experience. I should say, like Blake, the chorus of our *innocence* and our *experience*. This spectral evocation opens us, extends me to you, to us. Every thinker, every being who sets out to think, even if it is not a profession, is in this great

classroom, and feels humble and vast, small and large, surrounded by souls or spirits or, Jacques Derrida would say, spectral presences, burning to ask questions, to ask *the* questions, ours. Kafka is in the back corner with Abraham, and he wonders who is going to save who(m) is going to betray whom. There are many silences *in the plural*. These are silences for listening. Here is Stendhal who stands up. Oh, how he has always made me laugh that one, he is fresh and full of energy like a rose with a bumblebee. And he is going to pose his questions to the one he has chosen for himself as the Jaurès respondent (for respondence is rich and to whomever one addresses oneself, whoever one elects, whoever one reads, has something to teach us for he is the master of our enigma). And Stendhal's master is Montesquieu. Sir, says Henri, Master, what must I think of myself in the end? Was I a witty man or a fool, a brave man or a fearful one?

The same idea of writing *my life* [in English in the text] came to me most recently during my trip to Ravenna: to tell the truth, I have had it many times since 1832, but I was always discouraged by the dreadful difficulty of the *I's* and the *Me's*, which will make one sick of the author, I do not feel I have the talent to get around it. To tell the truth, I am not at all sure I have the talent to make people read me. I sometimes find great pleasure in writing, that is all.

If there is another world, without fail I will go to see Montesquieu, and if he says to me: 'My poor friend, you had no talent at all,' I will be cross but not at all surprised.⁶

We do not have just one master spectre whom we ask to evaluate us, to do our portrait, to do his own, to give us the advice that we give ourselves or do not give ourselves, we have more than one, naturally more than one wise man, more than one just man, and always it is someone before whom we bow and we hope to be raised up. It is the best the most tenderly strict part of ourselves. Thus, Jacques Derrida tells us, I wrote *under the gaze of Jaurès*. He says this when he expresses himself in the space of political problems. He trusts Jaurès. Among men concerned with rethinking politics and the political. For the love of the beauty of history of this man Jaurès. A professor of philosophy, a resister, an eloquent speaker. And surely for the love of the use of the French language. True, it was not Jaurès who proposed the title 'L'Humanité' for the newspaper that is so named, it was Lucien Herr, it is important to say that. But it was Jaurès who blessed and incarnated it. The title, the newspaper, the organ, the aim, the drama. Humanity was assassinated on 31 July 1914. But this, this given title, is the stroke of a master of writing. (Note: Here I would tell you that I am writing this exactly on 12 August, my sheet of paper between two cats – a thing I would say

to Jacques Derrida who knew them. I write between the two cats, and with the two cats. I am a cat being – a humanimal being. And I wonder if Jaurès was an animal person, I am looking. Surely there was animal. It is well known that Stendhal did everything in order to be also a horse. The presence of both cats at once on the two sides of my sheet is highly unusual. I attribute it to the substance of what I am putting down on paper: the point is to turn around the words of Jacques Derrida ‘it is impossible not to admit that what you think you have is not yet at your disposal in a sufficiently determined, sufficiently determining or sufficiently decidable way: you are not yet in a position to determine the very figure of humanity which nonetheless you are announcing and promising yourself.’⁷ *Every word* counts.) I come back to the word Humanity. One word is worth six billion. And I come back to the amazement we feel at the idea that *Humanity the word*, thanks to the call launched by Jaurès and his friends, has become this symbolic place, that some have dared to let Humanity speak (rather than take its speech away) and to give themselves to Humanity without knowing where *he* – the newspaper – or *she* – life – would go. ‘Is he there, at Humanity,’ plays Jacques Derrida, ‘and watching to see if people are behaving well?’ All of this is a treasure in French.

It is crazy what Humanity says to me!

‘Humanity’ – is an abstraction, like Freedom is abstract, and still otherwise. For Humanity is also very concrete. Humanity does not mean only that ‘moral quality’, which is somewhat suspect moreover in its homocentrism, of concern for others. It also refers to a people. To the People. The People of human peoples. It is this French word caressed by the poets – it is not the *Mankind* used in English, which says the human species. As for Humanity, we would like to have invented it, we who seek the most beautiful titles. To name a newspaper Humanity, what a formidable rhetorical and symbolic operation. The ingenious thing is the reverse synecdoche: not the part for the Whole, but the Whole for the Part. No one can escape it!

And thereupon Jacques Derrida raises the stakes with his figure! I mean with this figure that is in any case the word ‘figure’. Already the word ‘figure’ is a syllepsis. This figure is a figure, especially in French. I am dreaming around all these figures. We who in French synecdochically say a *figure* for a face, and this we do even in a very concrete, familiar moment, sometimes a little too much. Compared to ‘go wash your *figure*’, face [*visage*] becomes noble. What face would the very figure of Humanity have? In the word figure as in the word Humanity, the height of abstraction and the height of the concrete are conjoined, and it is Jacques Derrida more than Jaurès who will have gotten the

greatest effect from it. If I had the time I would propose to explain this.

But let us return to the scene of Jacques Derrida's sentence: Is Jaurès there? At Humanity like a saint on the balcony of Heaven?

Jacques Derrida slipped everything into this sentence, comically and celestially in a scene where one glimpses a spectral tribunal, an ethical tribunal.

(Note: When I read 'He is watching to see if people are behaving well' – my two cats stopped *behaving-well* as Jacques Derrida puts it: the war started up again. In their struggle I read an echo of Jaurès and to Jacques Derrida: there is no natural peace. There has to be a peace-keeping *force*. Peace is slumbering war. We are animals whose soul is tainted as the Sufis would say, painted, with a mixture of hospitality and hostility, with hospitality *and thus* hostility, or as Jacques Derrida says, *hospitality*. I say to you yes, yes up to the point at which I say to you no.)

Under the gaze of Jaurès is the title of this 'lecture'. It is not simply a figure, not a simple figure. A figure, a face – with or without face – keeps us, we put ourselves into its keeping – this is for me one of the most secret and decisive ways in which *to show* ourselves 'human'. There is a gaze to which says Jacques Derrida we submit ourselves and that we subject to our interrogations. And he says it very forcefully:

I was wondering if he would agree with what I said about his promise. I could not make him say things with which he would not agree; in a certain way, I was listening to him in the sense in which one obeys, one listens and obeys, and at the same time, I was talking to him and I brought toward him all sorts of problems. In effect, I was making myself into the interpreter of our age, I was asking him for example: 'What would you have thought about the concept of crime against humanity?' – it is a very problematic concept, it constitutes, I think, a positive effect [. . .]⁸

To be at Humanity is to enter into a consultation – into a spectral relation, says Jacques Derrida – for he insists on the living-dead relation that he writes in two words and that I write in one single word – with *the friend* even if the friend seems no longer to speak to us *viva voce* one continues to converse with Jaurès, with Jacques Derrida, for the friend is always internal, the human being lodges the friend, he is inhabited, haunted, we listen, the internal friend listens to us *think*, before we have ventured to speak. We shelter, we share a same psychic space. On the one hand, everything we think is online, internally. On the other hand, we receive the work of those who have preceded us in experience. And the sublime supplementary twist in the order of time is that we, who come later, *we bring problems toward* our watching predecessors.

We climb up and down the ladder of time. We telephone those who have gone before and we inform them of problems whose formulation was unknown to them (thus Jacques Derrida informs Jaurès about the worldwide political displacement brought about by the invention of the Internet, the speeds of communication have changed, have changed everything, but not so much, internal communication has always been ultrarapid, and uninterrupted. La Boétie always responded instantly to Montaigne's thought, there is no cut-off between souls). Nevertheless the problems have to do with their philosophical formulation, their denomination. They are even created by the formulations. For example, Jacques Derrida has his reasons for asking Jaurès: What would you have thought of the *concept* of crime against humanity? He does not ask what Jaurès or Dostoyevsky would have thought of the crime, but indeed of the juridical category that seizes, qualifies, as a universalisable concept, inscribes some act in the codes of International Law. What is new is not the crime, the massacre, people tore eyes out in *King Lear*, raped cut off hands and the tongue in *Titus Andronicus*. Questioning Jaurès about this concept, Jacques Derrida is impelled by the desire, the difficulty, the necessity of bringing about a more human Humanity, of increasing the human of the human, in that equally undecidable sphere where, when we dream of the thing called Justice, we can have the right only to rights. And where too often Rights – human rights, for example, ordered as they are by an outdated rigid rationality, overdetermined by the state of constitutions, cultures, philosophical thoughts and unthoughts, being restricted, conditioned and half-blind – create a shield or a substitute for Justice, whose figure, like that of Humanity, sparkles like an uncertain star in the distance.

'What would you have thought?' Jacques Derrida asks Jaurès. Or else in another scene it is Kant wondering before the portrait of Rousseau hanging in his drawing room.

This approach to spectres, this *appeal*, this interrogation from a distance, what purpose do they serve? It is our way of displacing the apparent ex/communication pronounced by the verdict, by the death sentence, while re-establishing communication. I bring problems *toward* him. And he in turn brings toward me his force of problematisation. Thereupon we *need* their opinion and their *agreement*. 'I wondered if he would agree with what I said about his promise.' Not that I want him to agree with me. But I do not want to *betray* his thought. And the only way not to betray is to remain open to indecision, to the possibility of a disagreement. I need, I hope for the agreement, I solicit the countersignature of the 'absent author' who is half of me, but this must remain in the state of hope. The essential thing is that I recognise in me the watching

presence. We are accompanied and *watched over* by ‘Humanity’ – the one *that is not yet* discovered and to which we devote our dreams and our explorations.

I dedicate the coming page to Jaurès who is not a living dead man like everyone else, he who on 18 April 1904 launched an Appeal that was so *promising*. (Therefore so ‘human’, would say the Nietzsche of *The Genealogy of Morals* for whom man is a promising animal, *ein Tier das versprechen darf*, as Jacques Derrida recalled in his ‘Humanities’.⁹)

Man promises. As soon as there is human being, *it* promises. There is the question, which is that *it* and not me promises. Or at least, me, Jaurès, I promise and I will be faithful for my part to my promise. But that commits only me, and I do not know what It, *All of it* will do, all the Rest, all the contrary forces. Nevertheless this surprise held in store by the promise can manifest itself positively or negatively. Yes, no, we do not know what the future will make of us, ‘Ourselves we do not owe’ (*Twelfth Night*). This is the chance of history. Macbeth might have turned around? This depends on a telephone call from humanity. One cannot say of a man that he will have been happy until his last minute, Montaigne reminds us, and conversely. Humanity is subject to contrary meanings. But not like a weather vane. Our efforts are never in vain, but they are incalculable and subject to time, to duration, to innumerable overdeterminations. Our destinies are ruled by *coups de théâtre*. Life like death does not happen where and when we expect them. How endlessly surprising is the conversion of the cruel Edmund Gloucester in *King Lear*:

Edgar: O, our lives’ sweetness,
That we the pain of death would hourly die
Rather than die at once!¹⁰

Edmund: I pant for life. Some good I mean to do,
Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send,
Be brief in it, to th’ castle; for my writ
Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia.¹¹

As if for example Edmund the unnatural son of Gloucester had heard at the last moment a call from Humanity to reunite with himself, in a human whole. As if he had been contaminated in the last moments of his history by this other possibility of himself, which is Edgar, the possibility of a love without cruelty and of a filial friendship.

If I quote the Shakespeare-world in front of Jaurès, it is because I wonder if he, Jaurès, did not feel himself watched by Shakespeare. My

hypothesis is that, any more than Marx did, he did not neglect the infinite experience of the most canny of geniuses, but that in the dialogue with Shakespeare he claimed to keep the advantage by choosing hope and the future whereas Shakespeare shows us Humanity in the present. I feel a tender emotion as I follow Jaurès's steps, because he sought to push back the hatred that courses through human ranks. He was, without knowing it, without wanting to know it, one of the most beautiful of Shakespeare's characters. He who *knew* that, once he entrusted Socialism (his own) with the mission of Reconciliation with oneself, he was making himself the target of an assassination threat, and who was not afraid even as he trembled and remained alert to stand as human up to the *extreme end*. In other words up to the Sacrifice – and a sacrifice without God, a sacrifice to Humanity, which is not yet human enough, so as to make it by his example a little more 'human'. Here is a man who was not unaware that failure haunted his promise. But to promise (oneself) is to enter into tragedy.

A man? Each time Shakespeare bestows on a character the honour or dignity of being 'a man', which is to say a *man worthy of that name*, a man who illustrates humanity as good, he does so by using the past tense, the preterite. As if honour, rightful honour, did not happen to man in his lifetime. 'This was a man!' These are the last words, the salute to Brutus by Antony in *Julius Caesar* on behalf of Nature:

Antony: This was the noblest Roman of them all.
 All the conspirators save only he
 Did that they did in envy of great Caesar.
 He only in a general honest thought
 And common good to all made one of them.
 His life was gentle, and the elements
 So mixed in him that nature might stand up
 And say to all the world 'This was a man.'¹²

As if one could not decide on this dignity, on being worthy of the name of human, until the last day. So common are our daily temptations: indignity, corruption, cruelty, calculation.

If I am here telephoning Shakespeare, the master in humanities in the plural, it is because he set his whole work around the confused borders where, in the uncertain interweaving/embrace of the incarnations of humankind, the appearances of living beings are seen to waver and fall so often to the monster side, sometimes to remain forever in the depths of evil, sometimes after having sojourned there, to come up at the last minute, as if recovered but too late, to the charms of goodness.

I am thinking of you ‘signatories’ of life in 1914, often I feel that I write under your gaze, (or that I live) that stunned gaze, frightened by the great madness that seized the humanity of 1914, I imagine the immense vain efforts to keep the sphere that turns round itself on your back like a suicidal scarab. One wants to save and one does not save. One sees coming and one does not see. Jaurès sees death coming and he does not avoid it. Why have I found myself so often before this case? I know why, I seek to put my gaze near that of Proust, for example, who in 1914 finds himself dying of an auto-immune attack, under the gaze of all his fellow men, young friends and brothers who are dying mowed down on an external front. To him, the man dying in his bedroom, falls the task of setting up dozens of telephone lines with death’s new subscribers. He must bear up under and think the false survival, the false reprieve, the suspension of incorporation, he who every week incorporates his dear dead ones. And so as to let you hear the bell – his death knell and his doorbell upon entry into writing – of the spectres, I choose a certain letter where a bitter remark about ‘humanity’ slips in:

Alas, the last letter from Reynaldo is so sad (I don’t know the reasons, except the too-obvious ones) that I regret even more his not wanting to take a leave. He says he cannot and he does not want too. But I believe he does not want to. In this he is the opposite of the rest of humanity whose habit when it wants to make others believe it can do anything it wants, is to say: ‘I didn’t want to’ when it was not able. [. . .]

But, and I do not say this only for him, I don’t even say it as much for him as for others, the dead are living so much in me that to be unable to find them on earth seems to me a kind of nonsense and my state of mind is a little that of a madman.¹³

While they are falling, he says to himself, I write, I fall, I write: I fall and entomb. I invent the outerlife, the one I call the True Life. I am one of those who write under the gaze of different figures of death. That this has been decided for me, I know some of the reasons, but not all. When one meets premature and violent Death, one cannot avoid asking oneself what is the very small, very brief human being, what one would be without the incessant weaving of links with this flux of life, which carries us off and surpasses us, Humanity. We are so temporary. I think of my brief grandfather Michael Klein who died a German corporal at age thirty-six in 1916 on the front in Belorussia, for ideas that were morally very great and that would all turn out historically false. I don’t know under whose gaze he signed up, a volunteer as a German Jew, although father of a family but perhaps it was under the gaze of Captain Dreyfus as much as under the gaze of the Kaiser before whom he wanted

to defend a Jewish citizen's loyalty. The poor man, he wants to prove that one can be Jewish and no less a good German, and even, oh horror, a better one.

No, said his wife my grandmother and especially later my mother, to be a good human is not to be a good German or a good Frenchman. And if my mother, who was always first a European, had been able to read the initial issue of *Humanity*, she would have subscribed to the rightful hope of seeing *every nation* reconciled with itself to become a parcel of humanity. I say *hope*. To hope is not to believe. It is to push incredulity further away.

In any case, corporal Klein quickly proved that he was a good mortal like all poor men. We think and we pass on. Happily there is *Humanity* to carry on.

To come back to 1914, and to that moment when everything is internally divided, when socialism is tearing itself apart, is torn apart, thereby imitating nations, where 'Humanity must perforce prey on itself,' as Shakespeare announces in *King Lear*, 'Like monsters of the deep,' where it turns round on its own parcels, where it is the Reason of the strongest that believes it is the best, and where every people proclaims itself the best believing itself to be the strongest in that year 1914, *Humanity*, the one that Jaurès called for in 'Our Aim' in April 1904, took on the figure of Monsters of the Deep, the Leviathans of Hobbes, the Behemoths of Blake – *Humanity disfigures* and devours itself. Well, in that time there were a few beings who struggled so that this *Humanity* would turn less fanatical faces toward the future.

I admire these stubborn giants who stand up without hope and without despair in the face of what I call the Last Extremity. And in each case this point of Resistance is absolutely concrete. When Jaurès is struggling like a titan under the weight of the war advancing on the universe with open jaws, here is Shackleton, a fabulous character, who decides to go to the edge of the beyond where no human being has ever yet been – Shackleton, you know, was the captain of the *Endurance* – I will let this figure take shape – the one who pushed back the limits of human endurance and geography by rolling out the monstrous ice floes of Antarctica, a stronger Ulysses and a more purified Christopher Columbus: 'our aim' for Shackleton is an idea. The synonym of *Endurance: Survival*. The *Survival of the Surpasser* that Shelley chanted in *The Triumph of Life* and that Jacques Derrida picked up and re-encharmed while working on the Superexcitation of Life, romantic *Survival* with Blanchot's *Survival* that is other. One must slip between Life and Death, while breaking up

the glaciers on the way to the open water beyond the beyond. Yes, you notice, I constantly incite the poets to sing. Geniuses – poetic geniuses I would say if that were not redundant: for genius *is poetic*, because it is a *Seer*. Shackleton or Jaurès, Shelley or Derrida, the child Proust, Rimbaud, they see further, they are seers of the *not-yet-seen*, designers of the to-come. Invokers of the still un-thinkable. Just so is Derrida describing not *the figure* of the future but its threshold, the *step beyond* the known, beyond the here, thus the blank space of the suspended ground, *the order that is other*: the *moment* of the Step – the moment in which *I step into action*, in which I act (NB: let us note that human becoming is *action*, taking flight), is a moment that is heterogeneous to the space of knowledge, science, theory, the moment of a leap in relation to the space of knowledge. The leaper beyond is a thief of fire whose seventeen years count for seventy, at seven years a prophet of journeys of discovery for which we have no accounts, of revolutions in customs, of displacements of races and continents of republics without scandals, of tamed wars of religion of impossible todays becoming the next enchantments

It had been remarked that Rimbaud substituted (in his letter to Demeny, a war before that of Jaurès) an antonomasis for the name of Prometheus, not in order to ‘sweeten’ the fine name, but to cause fabulous descendents to be born to the first martyr of Humanity, the branch of the thieves of fire. It is a way of inviting us to a promethisation of sight, so as to arrive blindly, as a seer therefore, at the unknown, through leaps and bounds. To bound [*bondir*], what a word.¹⁴ To see, words and life, through the gaze of another, to make a noun of a verb: To Jaurès. To Derrida. To Humanity (that is to say, to *make* or *do* Humanity – like Augustine saying to *make* or *do* the truth, *Veritatem facere*). To Rimbaud [*Rimbaudire*].¹⁵ I resume: so our poet is really a thief of fire. He has the charge of humanity, of *animals* even. The future has already begun. When will it arrive? Even Rimbaud advances by zigzags, sometimes bounding ahead of the triumphant future, it arrives when the future? in a moment on track #1

Poetry will no longer rhythm action; it *will be in advance*. These poets will be! When the infinite bondage of woman, when she lives for herself and by herself, man – abominable up until now – having dismissed her, she will be a poet as well! Woman will find the unknown! Her worlds of ideas will differ from ours? – She will find strange, unfathomable, repulsive, delicious things; we will take them, we will comprehend them.¹⁶

sometimes as if trembling in the effort driving expectation back with the cautions of a modest potential

The poet *would define* the quantity of unknown awakening in the universal soul in his time: he would give more – than the formula of his thought, than the notation of *its march toward Progress!* Enormity becoming norm, absorbed by all, he *would be* truly a *proliferator of progress!*¹⁷

So to be humanly would be to be *charged with humanity* comma, with humanity humans and animals, proliferating oneself while exceeding one's limits, *moving out* in front and anticipating us. It *would be* or It *will be*? We will see.

Look, here's another poet whose breath I hear:

'Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?'

This is the magnificent Robert Browning.¹⁸

I pick up and relaunch the English word *should* because it reminds me of a duty and a debt that are dear to my heart, that hold my heart. *Should*, you know, is that word missing from French that has so many values and virtues especially in English although it gets half of them from the Germanic: here is the very auxiliary of humanity. This *Should* enjoins, firmly suggests, obliges, reminds us that we *must*, we *owe*, that is, that we are *indebted Schuldig*, advises us to *honour* the debt. What does it mean to *honour* the debt: it is not to pay it so as to erase it, but to *recognise*, accept it, acquit it while keeping it, while keeping oneself indebted. To rejoice even to be oneself honoured by the debt, that is, taken up in the alliance that makes of humanity a set of links that do not alienate but weave the living fabrics of memory. I meet up here with the immense field of philosophical meditation where from debt to debt is thought a sort of debt without debt, contracted before any contract, an advance debt, an advance on the debt, 'an originary liability' says Jacques Derrida, an *alwaysalreadydebt*, where call and respond to each other, beyond Nietzsche, Heidegger, then Levinas, Lacan, beyond whom advance, overtaken and at the same time forerunners, Charles Malamoud who introduces us to the debt from India, and in his turn Jacques Derrida who sets out from Malamoud to relaunch the marvelous mystery of *congenital advance indebteding [devance]*.¹⁹ This field is so large I can only withdraw here into the reserves of silence. But my duty was first to recognise my debts and complicities.

For me, to *find oneself* human in Humanity has been forever, before any knowledge and any reading, to find oneself a rather lame dog, mole, shrew, eagle, girl, brother, lover, simultaneously, born at the same time, born several and several times. I had already died and been born more than once when I discovered, while making my way, other strollers,

naturally poetic ones who had already signed, countersigned, the books of the Humanities of Humanity.

We are twice indebted, at least, or roughly, and rather more than that, as living human beings

1) That ‘man’ (the human) *is born* as debt, according to Brahmanism, that humanity is originarily indebted, as Malamoud reads it for us, I can attest to, I who was born indebted.

2) Thereupon since my births, I have accumulated innumerable debts. I could make a list of them. It would be enormous, it would be prestigious, it would be incomplete. It would be indebted. It would be accompanied by a spectral following, composed of all the human and animal beings toward whom I owe a debt of which I have lost (in any case up until now) the trace.

I owe debts to so many friends that I have never met in reality, although I encounter them constantly ‘in other reality’ since they live beside me on the shelves of my study. I could make a list of my textual debts, that would please me. I love to be indebted, I love my debt. I love being forerun. I venerate my forerunners. I feel protected by their advance, I protect them. To be indebted is our wealth. I can live only from debts. I owe everything to my mother. But before I owe everything to my father. Debt has hold of me. I owe a life to nature says Freud. I owe a life to my daughter. To my son another. One can have several total debts.

Is it a matter of that *culpa-responsibility* about which Jacques Derrida (to whom I owe more than one life) speaks in relation to that in-advance owing [*devance*] which is also my human mortality or my mortal humanity? *Schuld*, and should, go before me. If I wished to say, no, I feel no culpa responsibility, I believe, *Schuld* would say to me: you cannot not. Attached to the light of the debt there is always a slight and delicious shadow of culpability. Moreover, as Proust would say, it so happens that these two word cousins, *schuld* the German and should the English, speak from out of my two maternal languages – German English – to my paternal language French, going out in front of my ambitious French mind by correcting it in the careful voice of my internal mother.

And thus I am led and obliged to speak *here* of Rousseau, the most passionate indebted, the most culparesponsible, the most performatively human of men. As we should deposit in this chapter the whole of the *Confessions* and add to it all the Rest of Rousseau’s oeuvre, which is concerned with nothing but humanity, I find myself constrained by the limits of this session to recall only the musical key the opening note that will resonate later everywhere like the bell with the rebounding ferugineous shrill and refreshing ring that announces to Marcel the begin-

ning and the end of life and of the book, and that Mama is going to be able to come back, from wherever she is, however far may be the past. I mean this *volley of literature* that is the Preamble of the *Confessions*.²⁰ A Volley to itself (in memory of the stolen [*volé*] ribbon) and a Volley to us, stolen in advance in case we might rob him of his volley, I mean both the flight [*volée*] he takes and the blows [*volée*] he flings at himself.

You recall that incredible letter he sends on, to the future, to us, raising himself up like a great revolutionary orator (one might be listening to Saint-Just, or Jaurès, or the strange Couzon of Jean Santeuil²¹ who seems to be drawn from a Jaurès tinged with Danton), where he implores the people who we are 'in the name of my misfortunes and of all mankind', which he is all by himself and which we are into the bargain. Humanity, *c'est moi*, he cries. Humanity, *c'est vous!* he moans. Me, Humanity, in all its truth, you Humanity in all its cruelty, let us unite at least once in order to preserve from annihilation a unique and useful work, which will serve as a first piece of example for *the study of men that has yet to begin*. Literature for the time that neither you nor I will be living any longer. A legacy, to humanity which does not yet know what figure will have happened to it. A legacy of humanity. To Humanity is left the monument of a single one, called Rousseau, says Rousseau, but not tidied up, not disfigured, never yet depicted. For it is a very human trait of Humanity to *need to depict* (or study) the figure of the present and to come, to make Humanity come out of anticipation, to be preoccupied with *the trace* left behind oneself, to desire the end of being judged, weighed, certified human, like Stendhal wanted to be by Montesquieu. Have I been a man? '*as is fitting*' as Jacques Derrida would say.

(We are children who want to be received by human Dignity.) There are in us children who play in the ruins, we steal bits of ribbon, under the gaze of our internal parents. We want to be guilty and found innocent so as to win at every throw. The logic of the prodigal child: to begin by getting a bad grade, being wicked, throwing oneself energetically into evil, and then subsequently becoming the best. What is called progress. We recall that in Jaurès version, it was the parents Socialisms repairing the children nations.

Why do we read *If This Is a Man*²² or yet again why do we write it? Is it by philosophical vocation? So as to enter into a Talmudic conversation with Socrates or Levinas on the Lessons of Humanity? Is it to bear witness? And to file complaint? Or else, because nothing interests us more than Evil and its histories, or history as the history of Evil? And human Life as the history of Death? Here is what Primo Levi tells us in

1976 (about the book published in 1947): ‘The *need to recount* was so urgent in us that I began to write this book *over there* . . . and even as I knew very well that I could not preserve those notes scribbled in secret, that I would have to get rid of them right away because they would have cost me my life if they had been found on me . . . But I wrote this book as soon as I came back and in the space of several months . . .’

No, the point is not to testify, one knows too well when one is at Auschwitz that there will not be, there will never be justice, everything happens beyond, beyond the reparable, beyond the forgivable, beyond the measurable one knows that there is no response. But the notes are more precious than Good and Evil. But one cares for the story more than for oneself, it is the supreme good, the sovereign good, one cares for it more than life, it is the only thing that can be taken away from us, we are the proprietors of Hell the risk is that our own act of property will be torn away from us. The real Hell would be to lose the book of Hell, the picture of tortures, the work of art, the only certain monument, not disfigured, take my life, save my book that is all of humankind. Oh! but Humanity infinitely exceeds what man can imagine. Oh! but the picture surpasses the painter’s suffering. Doing this, noting down in order to survive what could cost one survival one is exactly *at the last extremity*. One would kill oneself in order to survive. But as we know Primo Levi will have delayed the completion of the tragedy. (I will return to this)

Like all great books of cruelty, like the narratives of Shalamov or that unique chef d’oeuvre among all others, *Sang du Ciel* by Rawicz, *If This Is a Man* is concerned to approach ‘The impossible beyond of a sovereign cruelty,’²³ to remain at the pointed tip, on the point of the impossible.

Each time a new world of cruelty opens up – each time our souls gaping with surprise see before them the invention of a universe that is other and worse yet, because every worse theatre wants to beat the current champion for inventions of cruelty, each time we are called to recognise the power and the cult of evil for the sake of evil, each time the diabolical seeks to revoke the torture victim’s human credentials, there rise up poets of cruelty, bards of blood and ashes who come forward to take up the challenge of radical evil by making themselves the thinkers and sayers of the unthinkable.

There will always be artists of Hell to write paint film sing joust, respond to the flames with a larger fire. They triumph over Hell by

naming it, name by name. The work of a Titan Seer and Blind Seer like Milton and that always ends tragically. The victor, and there are victors, does not survive his own triumph for long. And he knows it. He asks the Gods or destiny for a reprieve: the time to have written the book, if not then at least the time to gather the names and the notes of the great apocalyptic register, if not then at least the time to go back down within himself so as to take the human at its root and suffering at its seed, and to glimpse from the *humus*, from the lowest point, the enormity of this Humanity that can do and cause itself so much harm and take so much pleasure in so much suffering. Overcome by terror he 'sees' beyond and he writes what he cannot say. *He has seen*. What is intolerable to see is carried off by the forgetfulness that kills everything in order to assure the humdrum of our daily life. The fact remains that he has had his Vision. Once the terror has subsided the Seer quickly sketches the remnants, the contours of the remains. And it is by the crushing immensity of the remains that we can project the immeasurable measure of the Vision that was seen, that one never sees in the present, that is always *déjàvu*. One remembers, does one remember? the last shrieks of terror of Proust's *Temps retrouvé*, of that precipitous race over the last pages, of that hallucinated step of a man who runs away, terrified, who stammers and repeats constantly I am afraid, I saw, I am afraid, who is suffocating, who succumbs beneath the enormity of the task assigned to him, who swears that he will draw humanity before he dies, who is awaiting death, who runs out ahead of it, who casts forth his last prophetic breaths to warn us, the one who long ago at the beginning of the Search was 'the sleeping man' is terribly awake, he now sees coming toward him the end of man, which is almost as prohibited as looking God in the face. He dies from it. Moreover he has always been (already under the name of Jean Santeuil) a dead man who has not yet taken up his post. Now, he takes up his post. His state of anguish of the Seer surpasses not only the sayer but obviously the reader. We 'see' the text swirl whistling around our heads like a meteor, and most often we close our eyes so as not to be there when the thing bursts.

We have our eyes closed.

Perhaps that is the terrible trait of Humanity that we have such great difficulty recognising: we prefer not to see. What is it? What *makes man*. What makes for the fact that not only man is a wolf for other men, but that for himself he is a jackal. We are the docile servants of Destruction. The more brutal and cruel it is the more we bow down. We do not want anything to do with ourselves. We cannot bear the sight of ourselves. We

train ourselves, we form ourselves, we are athletes of passivity, champions of what Proust calls Habit. After a little while, with eyes wide open, we do not see what we see. Out of indolence and cowardice says Kafka we do not return to Paradise. Cowardice, our second nature. It is understandable: it is exhausting to see daily cruelty.

But for those I would call the knights of humanity it is exhausting to see every day the cowardice of those who do not want to see the cruel face of humanity.

How strong cowardice is, this spineless one is stronger than we are. And it begins so early! You remember little Rousseau accusing Marion, the good, sweet child, his fellow but better than he, of the theft committed by himself and condemning her to death. It was stronger than he was, he could not do otherwise. And this little boy who plays in the ruins of Proust, a very clever child, is seven years old, perhaps eight and he knows everything in advance, with that preceding knowledge that is but divination and sensitivity without knowledge, sublime and implacable superknowledge, which can be bestowed only on a child. He is the incorruptible judge of himself and those near to him and he enters into humanity by a crime against humanity that is on the scale of his means. He will never forget this crime. He will commemorate it to his last line. No, it is not *Totem and Taboo* that I am starting over. It is before and it is worse. The little one kills, it is his grandmother, who is his most maternal mother, who adores him, whom he adores and whom he repudiates, whom he sends away to nothingness, whom he abandons to torture. He is not even a matricide, he is lower, he is complicit in the execution by *cowardice*.

Cowardice. The internal temptation. It is so universal. And how it protects itself. We barely speak of it, we write of it very little because we are so hostaged and ashamed. It is the supreme vice the most widely shared. Cruelty without the excuse of hatred

Look, here is the scene.

my grandmother left, sad, discouraged, and yet smiling, for she had such a humble heart and was so gentle that her tenderness for others and the little fuss she made about herself and her suffering were reconciled in her gaze with a smile where, contrary to what one sees in the faces of many human beings, there was no irony except for herself, and for all of us something like a kiss of her eyes that could not see those she cherished without passionately embracing them with her gaze. The torture that my great-aunt inflicted on

her, the spectacle of my grandmother's vain prayers and her weakness, conquered in advance, trying uselessly to take the glass of liqueur away from my grandfather, was one of those things that one becomes habituated to seeing later to the point of regarding them with a laugh and of taking the side of the persecutor resolutely and gaily enough to convince oneself that it is not a matter of persecution; at that time they caused me to feel such a horror that I would have liked to strike my great-aunt . . . already a man by my cowardice, I did what we all do, once we are grown up, when faced with suffering and injustice: I did not want to see them; I went to sob at the top of the house next to the study . . .

Alas! I did not know that, much more sadly than her husband's little deviations from his diet, my lack of will, my delicate health, the uncertainty they projected onto my future, preoccupied my grandmother, in the course of her constant pacing, in the afternoon and evening, where one saw, repeatedly passing by, obliquely raised toward the sky, her lovely face with its brown and lined cheeks, having become with age almost mauve like the tilled fields of autumn, a line drawn across them, if she went out, by a little half-raised veil, and on which, brought there by the cold or some sorrowful thought, an involuntary tear was always drying.²⁴

– I consider this scene to be the most important cause (let us say over-determination) of the subject's death; likewise of our death: we cannot bear the violence of life unless, in front of our anguish at the sight of the abysses in the human heart, is interposed the beautiful earthly Face, the Face of maternal compassions. It is good and right that Proust did not single out for maternal face the face of his mother but that of his grandmother. This reminds us that the point is not to take refuge in the ideological biological mother. The Face that saves is that of the Smile, the one that opens, welcomes, does not accuse, gives its approval. Thus the Face can be that of a grandfather (Thomas Bernhard) or of a nurse or a sister (Chateaubriand) or of Maman Warens. For the glassworkers of Carmaux, it was perhaps the beautiful face of Jaurès.

It is the one that becomes earth for our soul's lips. We need to kiss, that is the mystery, the earth is Mama's cheeks: we touch them and we take courage again, we touch them with our lips, that is, we sublimate our cannibalism. We do not eat Mama's flesh but we bring to our mouth the proof that her body exists for ours, that there is at least one being in this incomprehensible world who continues us, who shares the pain with us. The child in us wants his or her mother's kisses, this may seem 'neurotic' to those who have chased off the internal child, and yet we want this kiss of peace, the alliance with the cheek, the host, the viaticum, the magic ring, perfect succour, only sure thing, says the artist Joyce, *amor matris*. Flesh and Earth.

Myself I find new strength every evening from my mother (as I find new life from my beloved for mother) I kiss my mother on the right cheek, her left cheek having become unusable, and I am kissed. My mother is chaste and does not really know how to kiss. At ninety-nine years old she still has her shyness. So, in place of embracing she laughs very loud and naïve and good like Proust's grandmother, she promises me not to grow old, so as still to be of use to me in resisting the frightening world. Man is perhaps promising but he is first of all receiver of promises.

I try to imagine who provided the maternal kiss to Jaurès. What beautiful face was the secret of his strength?

One dawning day of this past July, at 5:00 in the morning, I heard my mother weeping. Weeping? Complaining, lamenting to the heavens, like Job reduced to infancy, someone who is in despair, myself I was crying I went down the flight of stairs, thrown headlong to help while there rose up something like the very voice of humanity. Below slept my mother, calm, protected from the supplicating call by her deafness. The lamentation was from a yellow cat at bay in the kitchen, surrounded by my cats, and who was begging for hospitality. But I heard it well and I was not mistaken: it was with the voice of ageless humanity that the cat was calling: Mama! Oh my god! Mama! Help!, he cried with his whole soul similar to mine, and I felt the same pain as if I were his mother, the mother of a besieged living being. Fortunately I was able to save him. In the kitchen I smiled at him and right away he ceased sobbing.

In the morning, when my beloved calls to start the world anew, I burst out laughing. And he sighs: if you did not greet me with laughter, I would die from terror. Now I am going to tell you how and why two persons who were able to resist giving in to death at Auschwitz one day found themselves bereft and delivered over to the horror of life long after having crossed the Acheron. I am thinking of Primo Levi and Piotr Rawicz. Men of exactly the same age, apart from that completely different, equally great in creation, poets and wise men. Piotr Rawicz was my friend, he taught me everything about the life in death that makes for literature, but I have never been his mother. The one who took the place of the mother for him was Anna, the woman he had married upon leaving Auschwitz. How strong Anna was! There were many other women who passed through Piotr's history, all differently kind. But it was Anna who was charged with the kiss of humanity.

In 1944 at Auschwitz, where one and the other were circumventing death, Piotr Rawicz and Primo Levi did not meet. They never met. They

had many things in common and a number of things that separated them. One took the path of poverty. He wrote, for one *needed to recount*, a single, immense book, for he was a knight of destitution. All the rest remained forever in an old drawer. The other wrote and spoke a lot, for no book could ever be for him the only book, and exhaust/slake his *need to recount*, to offer his hand or hold out his hand and for someone to hold it. He too, like Piotr, wrote with the face of 'his mother' held before him to protect his face from the bite marks of inhumanity. But one day in May 1982, I hear Piotr weeping on the telephone like the yellow cat: Anna was going away. A brain tumour carried her off very quickly. It is then that I understood she had been the face of Humanity. For the first time, he told me, he saw Auschwitz again but he said it was worse, he no longer had the defences and the time and the anger; and when one morning he lost the face, he gave himself up to death. A 21st of May. I was not there. Before that I had not known that he survived only in the debt and under the gaze of Anna, owing himself to her and holding himself up shakily by Anna's hand. When he had no more debt he was naked like Job and he went away. Understand me, Anna was not love, but the mother. It was for being born and not dying. And consequently for being able to enjoy loving other tender lovers without sinking into the undeniable Hell. Later I will see Primo Levi, likewise deprived of the Face that keeps horror at a little distance, give himself up to the angels, by his own will. In the case of Primo Levi, the beautiful Face was that of his natural mother, whom fatal illness had painted with the 'Musselman' mask of Auschwitz. Without a mother one can no longer give daily birth to oneself. Both of them, these so very different Seers, were in their lifetimes dead men who had not yet taken up their posts, who remained at their human posts only through solidarity with the people of mortals, but on the condition of being re/pulled back from nothingness day after day, and nourished with that milk that is the humanity of Humanity, *the milk of human Kindness*.

Every day I give my-mother-life (my mother who moreover was named Life at her birth) flowers to read and books to look at. (No, I did not commit a lapsus.) It is thus I give myself a scene called *Reading of my mother*. At this stage, very very high close to the summit of time, when one is going to be a hundred years old, marvellous and slight changes happen in all the features of the figure of human life. I say that as the laboratory researcher I have become. From a lower station I observe the very strong and unknown being who goes before me. I 'read' my mother, with curiosity, microscope telescope, she is very close, so far, planet. To tell the truth I do not 'understand' her absolute agreement

with Living. An agreement, a pact, body to body, an effortless swimming. She feels herself closer and closer to the cats that in former days she parked outside of her own kind. I give her books. Instinctively all those that come to me for her are books of the Last Extremity, but which end well for the moment. To every narrative she asks the question of reality, testimony or fiction. I ask myself the question as well. Is not reality a fiction, fiction a reality, and we the interpreters and authors of everything that comes about. I notice this year that my mother no longer ‘reads’ as I would read: page by page. She ‘reads’ otherwise. In truth she *looks at* the book. She contemplates the geraniums. There is a close relation between the lines of the book and the groupings of the geraniums. To contemplate mobilises her whole philosophy: there is the book, she studies the portrait of the world sensually: she inhales faces. Human Life, in the end, is that: books, everything is book, everything is mystery, everything is resurrection. One must clean up the geraniums, remove the dead flowers. Turn the pages of the book. An old woman who looks for a long time at the figure of the book. That is the milk of humankind.

August 2009

Translated by Peggy Kamuf

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, Interview with Jean-Paul Monferrand, *Fête de l’Humanité*, September 1999.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid. This sentence can also mean ‘One cannot avoid (writing under Jaurès’s gaze).’
6. Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, in V. del Litto (ed.) *Œuvres Intimes*, tome II (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1982), pp. 534–5.
7. Jacques Derrida, ‘Mes “humanités” du dimanche’, published in *L’Humanité* (the socialist newspaper founded by Jaurès in 1904), 4 March 1999; reprinted in *Papier Machine* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), p. 321.
8. Jacques Derrida, Interview with Jean-Paul Monferrand, *Fête de l’Humanité*, September 1999.
9. Jacques Derrida, ‘Mes “humanités” du dimanche’.
10. Shakespeare, *King Lear*, V, 3, 214–16.
11. Ibid., V, 3, 284–7.
12. Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, V, 5, 67–74.
13. ‘À madame de Madrazo’, *Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, tome XIV, 1915 (Paris: Plon, 1986), p. 132.

14. One may hear in it a two-word phrase: *bon dire*, good saying or speaking [tr.].
15. Again, a homophonic echo sounds in the last two syllables: *beau dire*, beautiful saying or speaking [tr.].
16. Arthur Rimbaud, 'À Paul Demeny', *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), pp. 271–2.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 272.
18. Robert Browning, 'Andrea del Sarto'.
19. The neologism *devance* draws both on *devoir* (to owe, to be obliged to) and *devancer* (to run ahead of, be in advance of) [tr.]. For Jacques Derrida's discussions of Charles Malamoud's discussions of debt, see Jacques Derrida, *Given Time*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p. 69n23; 'Passions', trans. David Wood, in *On the Name* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 132–7n3; 'Reste – le maître, ou le supplément d'infini', *Le Genre Humain* 37, 2002 (*Le disciple et ses maîtres – pour Charles Malamoud*), pp. 25–63.
20. 'Here is the only portrait of a man, depicted exactly after nature and in all its truth, that exists and that probably will ever exist. Whoever you may be whom my destiny or my trust has made the arbiter of the fate of this notebook, I pray you in the name of my misfortunes, of your feelings and of all mankind, not to annihilate a useful and unique work, which may serve as a first piece of comparison for the study of men, which is certainly still to be begun, and not to remove from the honor of my memory the only certain monument of my character that has not been disfigured by my enemies. Finally, if you yourself are one of these implacable enemies, do not be so any longer toward my ashes, and do not carry your cruel injustice so far into the future in which neither you nor I will still be living, so that you may bear noble witness at least once to yourself of having been generous and good when you could be wicked and vindictive, presuming, that is, that the evil directed at a man who has never done or wanted to do any can bear the name of vengeance.' Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973 [1959]). [HC]
21. Cf. Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).
22. Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man*.
23. Subtitle of Derrida's 'Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul', in Peggy Kamuf (ed.), *Without Alibi* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 238–80; *États d'âme de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Galilée, 2000).
24. Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann, A la recherche du temps perdu*, tome I (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1987), pp. 12–13.

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