

lar glow ("The lamp in his hand had long since gone out. The silver image of some saint once glimmered into sight immediately before him, by the sheen of its own silver, and was instantaneously lost in the darkness again [Saint Paul, perhaps]. To keep himself from being utterly dependent on the priest, K. asked: 'Aren't we near the main doorway now?' 'No,' said the priest, 'we're a long way from it. Do you want to leave already?'" (167), or again, in the same *contre-abyme* as *Before the Law*, it is K. who asks the abbot to wait and this same request even entails asking the priest-interpreter to ask a question himself. It is K. who asks him to ask (" 'Please wait a moment.' 'I am waiting,' said the priest. 'Don't you want anything more to do with me?' asked K. 'No,' said the priest." [167]). Let us not forget that the abbot, like the doorkeeper of the story, is a representative of the law, a doorkeeper as well, since he is the chaplain of prisons. And he reminds K., not of who he is, the doorkeeper or priest of prisons, but that K. must first understand and say himself who he, the priest, is. These are the last words of the chapter:

"You must first see that I can't help being what I am," said the priest. "You are the prison chaplain," said K., groping his way nearer to the priest again; his immediate return to the Bank was not so necessary as he had made out, he could quite well stay longer. "That means I belong to the Court," said the priest. "So why should I make any claims upon you? The court makes no claims upon you. *Das Gericht will nichts von dir. Es nimmt dich auf, wenn du kommst, und es entlässt dich, wenn du gehst.* It receives you when you come and it relinquishes you when you go." (168)

THE LAW OF GENRE

• The question of *genre*—literary genre but also gender, genus, and taxonomy more generally—brings with it the question of law, since it implies an institutionalized classification, an enforceable principle of non-contamination and non-contradiction. But genre always potentially exceeds the boundaries that bring it into being, for a member of a genre always signals its membership by an explicit or implicit mark; its relation to the generic field is, in the terminology of speech-act theory, a matter of *mention* as well as *use*. Derrida sees this not as an occasional and optional possibility but as a constitutive property of genre; and the crucial feature of any such mention, or possibility-of-mention, is that it cannot be said to belong to the genre it mentions. Derrida calls this re-marking, this being inside and outside at the same time, "the law of the law of genre."

The text which raises these issues for Derrida is Maurice Blanchot's short fiction *The Madness of the Day*. It's a text which stages an encounter between the narrating "I" and the law—or rather two encounters, since the law appears in a double guise, both as that which is enforced by its representatives (here medical experts) and as a mysterious, apparently female, figure. Derrida does not minimize the baffling quality of Blanchot's writing; in his introduction to *Parages* (a collection of his essays on Blanchot) he says of his relation to the works one can call "literary," as distinct from those that are more obviously critical or philosophical:

The fictions remained inaccessible to me, as if immersed in a fog from which there came to me only fascinating gleams, and occasionally, but at irregular intervals, the flare of an invisible lighthouse on the coast. I will not say that here they have now emerged from this reserve; on the

contrary. But in their very dissimulation, in the distancing of the inaccessible *as such*, because they give onto it in the act of giving it names, they have presented themselves to me afresh. With a force that is now ineluctable, the most discreet yet the most provocative force, the force of obsession and conviction, the injunction of a truth without truth, always beyond the fascination of which people speak in connection with them. They do not *exercise* this fascination. They traverse it, describe it, they yield it up to thought, rather than making use of it or playing at it. (11)

Among the fascinating topics touched on in *The Madness of the Day* are law (and in this respect the piece is continuous with "Before the Law," reprinted above), gender, affirmation, madness, narrative, and, as the above quotation suggests, fascination. But the story is of particular interest to Derrida because it is not merely a representation of a certain content; if so, it could be rephrased philosophically. Blanchot's text (in its various versions) itself enacts the displacements and overrulings that concern the narrative—not, it might be noted, in some satisfying achievement of organic form, but in a way that challenges the initial separation of content and form that a theory of organic union presupposes. In particular, the use, or rather mention, of a generic designation, and the refusal of the narrative to obey the linearity and closure of the genre, make the experience of reading *The Madness of the Day*—and Derrida's response to it—one which brings home (beyond any discursive explanation) the inability of a law of genre to maintain absolute purity, and the productiveness of this apparent failure of the literary institution.

• "La loi du genre" was originally given as a lecture at an international colloquium on *Genre* held in July 1979 in Strasbourg. The first version of the text was published in *Glyph* 7 (1980) together with an English translation by Avital Ronell (the volume also contains other contributions to the same colloquium). Ronell's translation is given here with some editorial modifications made in the light of the revised version published in 1986 in *Parages* ([Paris: Galilée], 249–87), which contains three other essays that relate to Blanchot's fictions: "Pas," "Survivre" (translated as "Living On/Borderlines"), and "Titre à préciser" (translated as "Title [to be specified]").

Genres are not to be mixed.¹

I will not mix genres.

I repeat: genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix them.

Now suppose I let these utterances resonate all by themselves. Suppose: I abandon them to their fate, I set free their random virtualities and turn them over to your hearing, to whatever mobility they retain and you bestow upon them to engender effects of all kinds without my having to stand behind them.

I merely said, and then repeated: genres are not to be mixed; I will not mix them.

As long as I release these utterances (which others might call speech acts) in a form yet scarcely determined, given the open context out of which I have just let them be grasped from "my" language—as long as I do this, you may find it difficult to choose among several interpretative options. They are legion, as I could demonstrate. They form an open and essentially unpredictable series. But you may be tempted by *at least* two types of hearing, two modes of interpretation, or, if you prefer to give these words more of a chance, two different genres of hypothesis. Which ones?

On the one hand, it could be a matter of a fragmentary discourse whose propositions would be of the descriptive, constative, and neutral genre. In such a case, I would have named the operation which consists of "not mixing genres." I would have designated this operation in a neutral fashion without evaluating it, without recommending or advising against it, certainly without binding anyone to it. Without claiming to lay down the law or to make this an act of law, I merely would have summoned up, in a fragmentary utterance, the sense of a practice, an act or event, as you wish: which is what sometimes happens when it is a matter of "not mixing genres." With reference to the same case, and to a hypothesis of the same type, same mode, same genre—or same order: when I said, "I will not mix genres," you may have discerned a foreshadowing description—I am not saying a prescription—the descriptive designation telling in advance what will transpire, pre-

1. EN *Ne pas mêler les genres*; literally, "not to mix genres"—the French phrase can be either a pure infinitive or an imperative, and Derrida draws on this undecidability in the discussion that follows. An English equivalent would be "No mixing of genres."

dicting it in the constative mode or genre, i.e. it will happen thus. I will not mix genres. The future tense describes, then, what will surely take place, as you yourselves can judge; but for my part it does not constitute a commitment. I am not making you a promise here, nor am I issuing myself an order or invoking the authority of some law to which I am resolved to submit myself. In this case, the future tense does not set the time of a performative speech act of a promising or ordering type.

But another hypothesis, another type of hearing, and another interpretation would have been no less legitimate. "Genres are not to be mixed" could strike you as a sharp order. You might have heard it resound the elliptical but all the more authoritarian summons to a law of "do" or "do not" which, as everyone knows, occupies the concept or constitutes the value of *genre*. As soon as the word *genre* is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: "Do," "Do not," says "genre," the word *genre*, the figure, the voice, or the law of genre. And this can be said of all genres of genre, be it a question of a generic or a general determination of what one calls "nature" or *phusis* (for example, a biological *genre*, or the human *genre*, a genre of all that is in general), or be it a question of a typology, designated as non-natural and depending on laws or orders which were once held to be opposed to *phusis* according to those values associated with *technē*, *thesis*, *nomos* (for example, an artistic, poetic or literary genre).² But the whole enigma of genre springs perhaps most closely from within this limit between the two genres of genre which, neither separable nor inseparable, form an odd couple of one without the other in which each evenly serves the other a citation to appear in the figure of the other, simultaneously and indiscernibly saying "I" and "we," me the genre, we genres, without it being possible to think that the "I" is a species of the genre "we." For who would have us believe that we, we two for example, would form a genre or belong to one? Thus, as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must

2. EN *Genre* in French carries the general sense of "genus," "kind," or "type" (*le genre humain* means "the human race"); the sense of artistic or literary genre; and the sense of "gender," especially grammatical gender.

not risk impurity, anomaly or monstrosity. And so it goes in all cases, whether or not this law of genre be interpreted as a determination or perhaps even as a destination of *phusis*, and regardless of the weight or range imputed to *phusis*. If a genre is what it is, or if it is supposed to be what it is destined to be by virtue of its *telos*, then "genres are not to be mixed"; one should not mix genres, one owes it to oneself not to get mixed up in mixing genres. Or, more rigorously, genres should not intermix. And if it should happen that they do intermix, by accident or through transgression, by mistake or through a lapse, then this should confirm, since, after all, we are speaking of "mixing," the essential purity of their identity. This purity belongs to the typical axiom: it is a law of the law of genre, whether or not the law is, as it is considered justifiable to say, "natural." This normative position and this evaluation are inscribed and prescribed even at the threshold of the "thing itself," if something of the genre "genre" can be so named. And so it follows that you might have taken the second sentence in the first person, "I will not mix genres," as a vow of obedience, as a docile response to the injunction emanating from the law of genre. In place of a constative description, you would then hear a promise, an oath; you would grasp the following respectful commitment: I promise you that I will not mix genres, and, through this act of pledging faithfulness to my commitment, I will be faithful to the law of genre, since of itself, it invites and commits me in advance not to mix genres. By publishing my response to the imperious call of the law, I would correspondingly commit myself to be responsible.

Unless, of course, I were actually implicated in a wager, a challenge, an impossible bet—in short, a situation that would exceed the matter of merely engaging a commitment from me. And suppose for a moment that it were impossible not to mix genres. What if there were, lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or a principle of contamination? And suppose the condition for the possibility of the law were the *a priori* of a counter-law, an axiom of impossibility that would confound its sense, order and reason?

I have just proposed an alternative between two interpretations. I did not do so, as you can imagine, in order to leave it at that. The line or trait that seemed to separate the two bodies of interpretation is

affected *straight away* by an essential disruption that, for the time being, I shall let you name or qualify in any way you care to: as internal division of the trait, impurity, corruption, contamination, decomposition, perversion, deformation, even cancerization, generous proliferation or degenerescence. All these disruptive “anomalies” are engendered—and this is their common law, the lot or site they share—by *repetition*. One might even say by citation or re-citation [*ré-cit*], provided that the restricted use of these two words is not a call to strict generic order. A citation in the strict sense implies all sorts of contextual conventions, precautions and protocols in the mode of reiteration, of coded signs such as quotation marks or other typographical devices used for writing a citation. The same holds no doubt for the *récit* as a form, mode, or genre of discourse, even—and I shall return to this—as a literary type.³ And yet the law that protects the usage, in *stricto sensu*, of the words *citation* and *récit*, is threatened intimately and in advance by a counterlaw that constitutes this very law, renders it possible, conditions it and thereby makes itself—for reasons of edges on which we shall run aground in just a moment—impossible to edge through, to edge away from or to hedge around. The law and the counter-law serve each other citations summoning each other to appear, and each re-cites the other in these proceedings. There would be no cause for concern if one were rigorously assured of being able to distinguish with rigor between a citation and a non-citation, a *récit* and a non-*récit* or a repetition within the form of one or the other.

I shall not undertake to demonstrate, assuming it is still possible, why you were unable to decide whether the sentences with which I opened this presentation and marked this context were or were not repetitions of a citational type; or whether they were or were not of the performative type; or certainly whether they were, both of them, together—and each time together—the one or the other. For perhaps

3. EN The translator's use of the French *récit* has been retained here, and continued throughout the essay, because the argument hinges on the complex of meanings possessed by this term in Blanchot's text; most importantly for this text they include both the sense of a completely fictional narration and the sense of an account of real events which the speaker witnessed or was involved in. See also “Before the Law” above, note 3 and *passim*.

someone has noticed that, from one repetition to the next, a change insinuated itself into the relationship between the two initial utterances. The punctuation was slightly modified, as was the content of the second independent clause. This barely noticeable shift could theoretically have created a mutual independency between the interpretative alternatives that might have tempted you to opt for one or the other, or for one *and* the other of these two decisions. A particularly rich combinatory of possibilities would thus ensue, which, in order not to exceed my time limit and out of respect for the law of genre and of the audience, I shall abstain from recounting. I am simply going to assume a certain relationship between what has just now happened and the origin of literature, as well as its aborigine or its abortion, to quote Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe.

Provisionally claiming for myself the authority of such an assumption, I shall let our field of vision contract as I limit myself to a sort of species of the genre “genre.” I shall focus on this genre of genre which is generally supposed, and always a bit too rashly, not to be part of nature, of *phusis*, but rather of *technē*, of the arts, still more narrowly of poetry, and most particularly of literature. But at the same time, I take the liberty to think that, while limiting myself thus, I exclude nothing, at least in principle and *de jure*—the relationships here no longer being those of extension, from exemplary individual to species, from species to genre as genus or from the genre to genre in general; rather, as we shall see, these relationships are a whole order apart. What is at stake, in effect, is exemplarity and the whole *enigma*—in other words, as the word *enigma* indicates, the *récit*—which works through the logic of the example.

Before going about putting a certain example to the test, I shall attempt to formulate, in a manner as elliptical, economical, and formal as possible, what I shall call the law of the law of genre. It is precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy. In the code of set theories, if I may use it at least figuratively, I would speak of a sort of participation without belonging—a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set. The trait that marks membership inevitably divides, the boundary of the set

comes to form, by invagination, an internal pocket larger than the whole; and the consequences of this division and of this overflowing remain as singular as they are limitless.⁴

The *récit* which I will discuss presently makes the impossibility of the *récit* its theme, its impossible theme or content at once inaccessible, indeterminable, interminable and inexhaustible; and it makes the word “*récit*” its titleless title, the mentionless mention of its genre. This text, as I shall try to demonstrate, seems to be made, among other things, to make light [*se jouer*] of all the tranquil categories of genre-theory and history in order to upset their taxonomic certainties, the distribution of their classes, and the presumed stability of their classical nomenclatures. It is a text destined, at the same time, to summon up these classes by conducting their proceeding, by proceeding from the proceeding to the law of genre. For if the juridical code has frequently thrust itself upon me in order to hear this case, it has done so to call as witness a (possibly) exemplary text, and because I am convinced rights and the law are bound up in all of this.

Here now, very quickly, is the law of overflowing, of *excess*, the law of participation without membership, which I mentioned earlier. It will seem meager to you, and even of staggering abstractness. It does not particularly concern either genres, or types, or modes or any form in the strict sense of its concept. I therefore do not know under what title the field or object submitted to this law should be placed. It is perhaps the limitless field of general textuality. I can take each word of the series (genre, type, mode, form) and decide that it will hold for all the others (all genres of genres, types, modes, forms; all types of types, genres, modes, forms; all forms of forms, etc.). The trait common to these classes of classes is precisely the identifiable recurrence of a common trait by which one recognizes, or should recognize, a membership in a class. There should be a trait upon which one could rely in order to decide that a given textual event, a given “work,” corresponds

4. EN Some paragraphs have been omitted here; they discuss an essay by Gérard Genette, “Genres, ‘types,’ modes” (*Poétique* 32 [November 1977]: 389–421; revised and reissued as *Introduction à l’architexte* [Paris: Seuil, 1979]). Derrida is particularly interested in Genette’s insistence on the distinction between *modes* (which are formal and linguistic categories) and *genres* (which are determined by content). The *récit*, for Genette, is a mode.

to a given class (genre, type, mode, form, etc.). And there should be a code enabling one to decide questions of class-membership on the basis of this trait. For example—a very humble axiom, but, by the same token, hardly contestable—if a genre exists (let us say the novel, since no one seems to contest its generic quality), then a code should provide an identifiable trait and one which is identical to itself, authorizing us to adjudicate whether a given text belongs to this genre or perhaps to that genre. Likewise, outside of literature or art, if one is bent on classifying, one should consult a set of identifiable and codifiable traits to determine whether this or that, such a thing or such an event, belongs to this set or that class. This may seem trivial. Such a distinctive trait *qua* mark is however always *a priori* remarkable. It is always possible that a set—I have compelling reasons for calling this a text, whether it be written or oral—re-marks on this distinctive trait within itself. This can occur in texts that do not, at a given moment, assert themselves to be literary or poetic. A defense speech or newspaper editorial can indicate by means of a mark, even if it is not explicitly designated as such, “Voilà! I belong, as anyone may remark, to the type of text called a defense speech or an article of the genre newspaper-editorial.” The possibility is always there. This does not constitute a text *ipso facto* as “literature,” even though such a possibility, always left open and therefore eternally remarkable, situates perhaps in every text the possibility of its becoming literature. But this does not interest me at the moment. What interests me is that this re-mark—ever possible for every text, for every corpus of traces—is absolutely necessary for and constitutive of what we call art, poetry or literature. It underwrites the eruption of *technē*, which is never long in coming. I submit this axiomatic question for your consideration: can one identify a work of art, of whatever sort, but especially a work of discursive art, if it does not bear the mark of a genre, if it does not signal or mention it or make it remarkable in any way? Let me clarify two points on this subject. First, it is possible to have several genres, an intermixing of genres or a total genre, the genre “genre” or the poetic or literary genre as genre of genres. Second, this re-mark can take on a great number of forms and can itself pertain to highly diverse types. It need not be a “mention” of the type found beneath the title of certain books (novel, *récit*, drama).

The remark of belonging need not pass through the consciousness of the author or the reader, although it often does so. It can also refute this consciousness or render the explicit "mention" mendacious, false, inadequate or ironic according to all sorts of overdetermined figures. Finally, this remarking-trait need be neither a theme nor a thematic component of the work—although of course this instance of belonging to one or several genres, not to mention all the traits that mark this belonging, often have been treated as theme, even before the advent of what we call "modernism." If I am not mistaken in saying that such a trait is remarkable in every aesthetic, poetic or literary corpus, then consider this paradox; consider the irony (which is not reducible to a consciousness or an attitude): this supplementary and distinctive trait, a mark of belonging or inclusion, does not properly pertain to any genre or class. The re-mark of belonging does not belong. It belongs without belonging, and the "without" (or the suffix "-less") which relates belonging to non-belonging appears only in the timeless time of the blink of an eye. The eyelid closes, but barely, an instant among instants, and what it closes is verily the eye, the view, the light of day. But without the respite or interval of a blink, nothing would come to light. To formulate it in the scantiest manner—the simplest but most apodictic—I submit for your consideration the following hypothesis: a text would not *belong* to any genre. Every text *participates* in one or several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. And not because of an abundant overflowing or a free, anarchic and unclassifiable productivity, but because of the *trait* of participation itself, because of the effect of the code and of the generic mark. In marking itself generically, a text unmarks itself [*se démarque*]. If remarks of belonging belong without belonging, participate without belonging, then *genre-designations cannot be simply part of the corpus*. Let us take the designation "novel" as an example. This should be marked in one way or another, even if it does not appear in the explicit form of a subtitled designation, and even if it proves deceptive or ironic. This designation is not novelistic; it does not, in whole or in part, take part in the corpus whose denomination it nonetheless imparts. Nor is it simply extraneous to the corpus. But this singular *topos* places within and without the

work, along its boundary, an inclusion and exclusion with regard to genre in general, as to an identifiable class in general. It gathers together the corpus and, at the same time, in the same blinking of an eye, keeps it from closing, from identifying itself with itself. This axiom of non-closure or non-fulfillment enfolds within itself the condition for the possibility and the impossibility of taxonomy. This inclusion and this exclusion do not remain exterior to one another; they do not exclude each other. But neither are they immanent or identical to each other. They are neither one nor two. They form what I shall call the *genre-clause*, a clause stating at once the juridical utterance, the designation that makes precedent and law-text, but also the closure, the closing that excludes itself from what it includes (one could also speak, without winking, of a floodgate [*écluse*] of genre). The clause or floodgate of genre declasses what it allows to be classed. It tolls the knell of genealogy or of genericity, which it however also brings forth to the light of day. Putting to death the very thing that it engenders, it cuts a strange figure; a formless form, it remains nearly invisible, it neither sees the day nor brings itself to light. Without it, neither genre nor literature come to light, but as soon as there is this blinking of an eye, this clause or this floodgate of genre, at the very moment that a genre or a literature is broached, at that very moment, degenerescence has begun, the end begins.

The end begins, this is a citation. Maybe a citation. I might have taken it from that text which seems to me to bring itself forth as an example, as an example of this unfigurable figure of clusion.

What I shall try to convey to you now will not be called by its generic or modal name. I shall not say this drama, this epic, this novel, this novella or this *récit*, certainly not this *récit*. All of these generic or modal names would be equally valid or equally invalid for something which is not even quite a book, but which was published in 1973 in the form of a small volume of thirty-two pages under the title *La folie du jour*.⁵ The author's name: Maurice Blanchot. In order to speak

5. EN For a bilingual edition, see Maurice Blanchot, *The Madness of the Day*, trans. Lydia Davis (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1981). The page references given here are to this volume, though the quotations have been translated by Avital Ronell.

about it, I shall call this thing "La folie du jour," its given name which it bears legally and which gives us the right, as of its publication date, to identify and classify it in our copyright records at the Bibliothèque Nationale. One could fashion a nonfinite number of readings from *La folie du jour*. I have attempted a few myself, and shall do so again elsewhere, from another point of view. The *topos* of view, sight, blindness, *point of view* is, moreover, inscribed and traversed in *La folie du jour* according to a sort of permanent revolution that engenders and virtually brings to the light of day points of view, twists, versions and reversions of which the sum remains necessarily uncountable and the account impossible. The deductions, rationalizations, and warnings that I must inevitably propose will arise, then, from an act of unjustifiable violence. A brutal and mercilessly depleting selectivity will obtrude upon me, upon us, in the name of a law that *La folie du jour* has, in its turn, already reviewed, and with the foresight that a certain kind of police brutality is perhaps an inevitable accomplice to our concern for professional competence.

What will I ask of *La folie du jour*? To answer, to testify, to say what it has to say with respect to the law of mode or the law of genre, and more precisely, with respect to the law of the *récit*.

On the cover, below the title, we find no mention of genre. In this most peculiar place that belongs neither to the title nor to the subtitle, nor even simply to the corpus of the work, the author did not affix, although he has often done so elsewhere, the designation "récit" or "novel." About this designation which figures elsewhere and which appears to be absent here, I shall say only two things.

1. On the one hand it commits one to nothing. Neither reader nor critic nor author are bound to believe that the text preceded by this designation conforms readily to the strict, normal, normed or normative definition of the genre, to the law of the genre or of the mode. Confusion, irony, the shift in conventions toward a new definition (in what name could it be prohibited?), the search for a supplementary effect, any of these things could prompt one to entitle as *novel* or *récit* what in truth or according to yesterday's truth would be neither one nor the other. All the more so if the words *récit*, *novel*, *ciné-roman*, *complete dramatic works* or, for all I know, *literature* are no longer in

the place which conventionally mentions genre but, as has happened and will happen again (shortly), they are found to be holding the position and function of the title itself, of the work's given name.

2. Blanchot has often had occasion to modify the genre-designation from one version of his work to the next, or from one edition to the next. Since I am unable to cover the entire spectrum of this problem, I shall simply cite the example of the designation "récit" effaced between one version and the next of *L'arrêt de mort* at the same time as a certain epilogue is removed from the end of the double *récit* which, in a manner of speaking, constitutes this book.⁶ This effacement of "récit," leaving a trace that, inscribed and filed away, remains as an effect of supplementary relief which is not easily accounted for in all of its facets. I cannot arrest the course of my lecture here, no more than I can pause to consider the very scrupulous and minutely differentiated distribution of the designations "récit" and "novel" from one narrative work to the next, no more than I can question whether Blanchot distinguished the genre and mode designations, no more than I can discuss Blanchot's entire discourse on the difference between the narratorial voice and the narrative voice which is, to be sure, something other than a mode. I would point out only one thing: at the very moment the first version of *L'arrêt de mort* appears, bearing mention as it does of "récit," the first version of *La folie du jour* is published with another title about which I shall momentarily speak.

La folie du jour, then, makes no mention of genre or mode. But the word "récit" appears at least five times in the last two pages in order to name the theme of *La folie du jour*, its sense or its story, its content or part of its content—in any case, its decisive proceedings and stakes. It is a *récit* without a theme and without a cause entering from the outside; yet it is without interiority. It is the *récit* of an impossible *récit* whose "production" occasions what happens, or rather, what remains; but the *récit* does not relate it, nor relate to it as to an outside reference, even if everything remains foreign to it and out of bounds. It is even less feasible for me to relate to you the story of *La folie du jour* which

6. EN *L'arrêt de mort* has been translated by Lydia Davis as *Death Sentence* (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1978). For an extended reading of this fiction, see Derrida's "Living On/Borderlines."

is staked precisely on the possibility and the impossibility of relating a story. Nonetheless, in order to create the greatest possible clarity, in the name of daylight itself, that is to say (as will become clear), in the name of the law, I shall take the calculated risk of flattening out the unfolding or coiling up of this text, its permanent revolution whose rounds are made to resist any kind of flattening. And this is why the one who says "I," the one who after all speaks to us, who "recites" for us, this one who says "I" tells his inquisitors that he cannot manage to constitute himself as narrator (in the sense of the term that is not necessarily literary), and tells them that he cannot manage to identify with himself sufficiently, or to remember himself well enough to gather the story and *récit* that are demanded of him—which the representatives of society and the law require of him. The one who says "I" (who does not manage to say "I") seems to relate what has happened to him, or rather, what has nearly happened to him after presenting himself in a mode that defies all norms of self-presentation: he nearly lost his sight following a traumatic event—probably an assault. I say "probably" because *La folie du jour* wholly upsets, in a discreet but terribly efficient manner, all the certainties upon which so much of discourse is constructed: the value of an event, first of all, of reality, of fiction, of appearance and so on, all this being carried away by the disseminal and mad polysemy of "day," of the word *day*, which, once again, I cannot dwell upon here. Having nearly lost his sight, having been taken in by a kind of medico-social institution, he now resides under the watchful eye of doctors, handed over to the authority of these specialists who are representatives of the law as well, legist doctors who demand that he testify—and in his own interest, or so it seems at first—about what happened to him so that remedial justice may be dispensed. His faithful *récit* of events should render justice unto the law. The law demands a *récit*.

Pronounced five times in the last three paragraphs of *La folie du jour*, the word "*récit*" does not seem to designate a literary genre, but rather a certain type or mode of discourse. That is, in effect, the appearance of it. Everything seems to happen as if the *récit*—the question of or rather the demand for the *récit*, the response and the nonresponse to the demand—found itself staged and figured as one of the

themes, objects, stakes in a more bountiful text, *La folie du jour*, whose genre would be of another order and would in any case overstep the boundaries of the *récit* with all of its generality and all of its genericity. The *récit* itself would not cover this generic generality of the literary corpus named *La folie du jour*. Now we might already feel inclined to consider this appearance suspect and be jolted from our certainties by an allusion that "I" makes at a certain moment: the one who says "I," who is not by force of necessity a narrator, nor necessarily always the same, notes that the representatives of the law, those who demand of him a *récit* in the name of the law, consider and treat him, in his personal and civil identity, not only as an "educated" man—and an educated man, they often tell him, ought to be able to speak and recount; as a competent subject, he ought to know how to piece together a story by saying "I" and "exactly" how things happened to him—they regard him not only as an "educated" man, but also as a writer. He is writer and reader, a creature of "libraries," *the* reader of this *récit*. This is not sufficient cause, but it is, in any case, a first clue and one whose impact incites us to think that the required *récit* does not simply remain in an extraneous relationship to literature or even to a literary genre. Lest we not be content with this suspicion, let us weigh the possibility of the inclusion of a modal structure within a vaster, more general corpus, whether literary or not and whether or not related to the genre. Such an inclusion raises questions concerning edge, borderline, boundary, and overflowing which do not arise without a fold.

What sort of a fold? According to which fold and which figure of folding?

Here are the three final paragraphs; they are of unequal length, with the last of them comprising approximately one line:

They demanded: Tell us "exactly" how things happened.—A *récit*? I began: I am neither learned nor ignorant. I have known some joy. This is saying too little. I related the story in its entirety, to which they listened, it seems, with great interest—at least initially. But the end was a surprise for us all. "After that beginning," they said "you should proceed to the facts." How so? The *récit* was over.

I should have realized that I was incapable of composing a *récit* of these

events. I had lost the sense of the story; this happens in a good many illnesses. But this explanation only made them more demanding. Then I remarked, for the first time, that they were two and that this infringement on their traditional method—even though it can be explained away by the fact that one of them was an eye doctor, the other a specialist in mental illnesses—increasingly gave our conversation the character of an authoritarian interrogation, overseen and controlled by a strict set of rules. To be sure, neither of them was the chief of police. But being two, due to that, they were three, and this third one remained firmly convinced, I am sure, that a writer, a man who speaks and reasons with distinction, is always capable of recounting the facts which he remembers.

A *récit*? No, no *récit*, never again. (18)

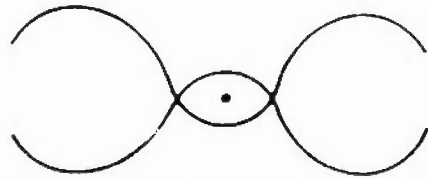
In the first of the three paragraphs that I have just cited, he claims that something is to begin after the word "*récit*" punctuated by a question mark ("A *récit*?"—herein implied: they want a *récit*, is it then a *récit* that they want? "I began . . ."). This something is nothing other than the first line on the first page of *La folie du jour*. These are the same words, in the same order, but this is not a citation in the strict sense for, stripped of quotation marks, these words commence or recommence a quasi-*récit* that will engender anew the entire sequence including this new point of departure. In this way, the first words ("I am neither learned nor ignorant . . .") that come after the word "*récit*" and its question mark, that broach the beginning of the account extorted by the law's representatives—these first words mark a collapse that is unthinkable, unrepresentable, unsituable within a linear order of succession, within a spatial or temporal sequentiality, within an objectifiable topology or chronology. One sees, without seeing, one reads the crumbling of an upper boundary or of the initial edge in *La folie du jour*, uncoiled according to the "normal" order, the one regulated by common law, editorial convention, positive law, the regime of competency in our logo-alphabetical culture, etc. Suddenly, this upper or initial boundary, which is commonly called the first line of a book, is forming a pocket inside the corpus. It is taking the form of an *invagination* through which the trait of the first line, the borderline, splits while remaining the same and traverses yet also bounds the corpus. The "*récit*" which he claims is beginning at the

end, and by legal requisition, is none other than the one that has begun from the beginning of *La folie du jour* and in which, therefore, he gets around to saying that he begins, etc. And it is without beginning, or end, without content and without edge. There is only content without edge—without boundary or frame—and there is only edge without content. The inclusion (or the occlusion, the inoclusive invagination) is interminable, it is an analysis of the *récit* that can only turn in circles in an unarrestable, inenarrable and insatiably recurring manner—but one terrible for those who, in the name of the law, require that order reign in the *récit*, for those who want to know, with all the required competence, "exactly" how this happens. For if "I" or "he" continued to tell what he has told, he would end up endlessly returning to this point and once more beginning to begin, that is to say, to begin with an end that precedes the beginning. And from the viewpoint of objective space and time, the point at which he stops is absolutely unascertainable ("I have told them the entire story . . ."), for there is no "entire" story except for the one that interrupts itself in this way.

A lower edge of invagination will, if one can say so, respond to this "first" invagination of the upper edge by intersecting it. The "final line" resumes the question posed *before* the "I began" ("A *récit*?") and tells of the resolution or the promise, the commitment made never again to produce a *récit*. As if he had already given one! And yet, yes (yes and no), a *récit* has taken place. Hence the last word: "A *récit*? No, no *récit*, never again." It has been impossible to decide whether the recounted event and the event of the *récit* itself ever took place. Impossible to decide whether there was a *récit*, for the one who barely manages to say "I" and to constitute himself as narrator recounts that he has not been able to recount—but what, exactly? Well, everything, including the demand for a *récit*. And if an assured and guaranteed decision is impossible, this is because there is nothing more to be done than to decide without guardrail, without limits, to commit oneself, to perform, to wager, to allow chance its chance. It is also impossible to decide whether the promise "No, no *récit*, never again" is a part of or apart from the *récit*. Legally speaking, it is party to *La folie du jour*, but not necessarily to the *récit* or to the simulacrum of the *récit*. Its trait splits again into an internal and external edge. It repeats—without

citing—the question apparently posed above (*A récit?*), of which it can be said that, in this permanent revolution of order, it follows, doubles or reiterates it in advance. Thus another lip or invaginating loop takes shape here. This time the lower edge creates a pocket in order to come back into the corpus and to rise again on this side of the upper or initial line's line of invagination. This would form a *double chiasmic invagination of edges*:

- A. "I am neither learned nor ignorant . . ."
 B. "A *récit?* I began:
 A'. I am neither learned nor ignorant . . ."
 B'. "A *récit?* No, no *récit*, never again . . ."



The *I* of "I began" appears to carry the full responsibility of the *récit*, at least of the *récit* that could be seen as *included* and which nevertheless also becomes larger than what appears to include it. *I* represents the beginning, the very act of beginning, reminding us by the same token that it is *en archē*, in the beginning, the first word of the book: "I am neither learned nor ignorant." It is required of him or her, of me, of *I* both to begin and to repeat, to give an account of the facts. And, in short, to assume one's responsibilities. But in order to give an account of the facts, a relation begins which relates another relation in which the *I* is included. Moreover, represented here in the sketch I have just drawn as a point, an eye, a point of view, the *I* seems not to belong to the lineage of the two *récits* which are forever intertwined and intersected. The inaugural decision to answer the demand and to "begin" the *récit* does not belong to the *récit*, any more than does the "No, no *récit*, never again" at the end of the book, an

inverse resolution which seems not to cite anything either. "I began" and "No, no *récit*, never again" could therefore resemble *quasi-transcendental* commitments on the part of the *récit*, the modes of which are different, but which are equally exterior to the actual content of the narration. The first describes or notes, in the past tense, a kind of performative: I begin, I began. The other enunciates, in a more manifestly performative mode, in the present tense, a decision engaging the future. It is the decision to begin and then to interrupt the relation for good, to take some kind of responsibility in answer to the demand for a *récit*, which would tear the canvas of a narrative text even as it tends to envelop itself indefinitely within itself. It was inevitable that I begin and that I end, even if I begin with the end, and if "the end begins."

Could it be this simple? and this reassuring? as the purity of a transcendental or a performative, in the end, can always be? Certainly, the two resolutions appear to be inaugural, and the final one itself has the form of an inaugural decision having come spontaneously to interrupt any possible sequence. But these two resolutions immediately become once again *moments of passage*, within the general *récit* entitled *La folie du jour*. If, after "I began: I am neither learned nor ignorant . . ." the simulacrum of repetition continued according to its own logic and the internal necessity of its movement, turning endlessly upon itself, the "I began" and the "No, no *récit*, never again" would be unmistakably inscribed and bound there, taken up in the general fabric, in the citation and the narration, in the madness of a fiction that no decidability can safely interrupt. "I began . . ." and "No, no *récit*, never again" belong to the sequel, to the *consequence* of the text that *I* begin(s) to cite. One could say that they are *implicitly cited*, re-implicated within this singular continuum. No tearing, never again between A, B, A', B', not even within B and B', between the question and the answer.

It is thus impossible to decide whether an event, *récit*, *récit* of event or event of *récit* took place. Impossible to settle upon the simple borderlines of this corpus, of this ellipsis unremittingly canceling itself within its own expansion. When we fall back on the poetic consequences enfolding within this dilemma, we find that it becomes difficult indeed to speak here with conviction about a *récit* as a determined

mode included within a more general corpus or one simply related, in its determination, to other modes, or, quite simply, to something other than itself. All is *récit* and nothing is; the exit out of the *récit* remains *within* the *récit* in a *noninclusive* mode, and this structure is itself related so remotely to a dialectical structure that it even inscribes dialectics in the ellipsis of the *récit*. All is *récit*, nothing is: and we shall not know whether the relationship between these two propositions—the strange conjunction of the *récit* and the *récit*-less—belongs to the *récit* itself. What indeed happens when the edge pronounces a sentence?

Faced with this type of difficulty—the consequences or implications of which cannot be deployed here—one might be tempted to have recourse to the law or the rights which govern published texts. One might be tempted to argue as follows: all these insoluble problems of delimitation are raised “on the inside” of a book classified as a work of literature or literary fiction. Pursuant to these juridical norms, this book has a beginning and an end that leave no opening for indecision. This book has a determinable beginning and end, a title, an author, a publisher. It is called *La folie du jour*. At this place, where I am pointing, on this page, right here, you can see its first word; here, its final period, perfectly situable in objective space. And all the sophisticated transgressions, all the infinitesimal subversions that may captivate you are not possible except within this enclosure for which these transgressions and subversions moreover maintain an essential need in order to take place. Furthermore, on the inside of this normed space, the word “*récit*” does not name a literary operation or genre, but a current mode of discourse, and it does so regardless of the formidable problems of structure, edge, set theory, the part and whole, etc., that it raises in this “literary” corpus.

That is all well and good. But in its very relevance, this objection cannot be sustained—for example, it cannot save the modal determination of the *récit*—except by referring to extra-literary and even extra-linguistic juridical norms. The objection appeals to the law and calls to mind the fact that the subversion of *La folie du jour* needs the law in order to take place. Whereby the objection reproduces and accomplishes the demonstration staged within *La folie du jour*: the *récit*, mandated and prescribed by law but also, as we shall see, com-

manding, requiring, and producing law in turn. In short, the whole critical scene of competence in which we are engaged is *party* to and *part* of *La folie du jour*, in whole and in part, the whole is a part.

The whole does nothing but begin. I could have begun with what resembles the absolute beginning, within the juridico-historical order of this publication. What has been lightly termed the first version of *La folie du jour* was not a book. Published in the journal *Empédocle* (May 2, 1949), it bore another title—indeed, several other titles. On the journal’s cover, here it is, one reads:

Maurice Blanchot
Un récit?

Later the question mark disappears twice. First, when the title is reproduced within the journal in the table of contents:

Maurice Blanchot
Un récit

then below the first line:

Un récit
par
Maurice Blanchot

Could you tell whether these titles, written earlier and filed away in the archives, make up a single title, titles of the same text, titles of the *récit* (which of course figures as an impracticable mode in the book), or the title of a genre? Even if the latter were to cause some confusion, it would be of the sort that releases questions already implemented and enacted by *La folie du jour*. This enactment enables in turn the denaturalization and deconstitution of the opposition nature/history and mode/genre.

What could the words “A *récit*” refer to in their manifold occurrences and diverse punctuations? And precisely how does reference

function here? In one case, the question mark can also serve as a supplementary remark indicating the necessity of all these questions as the insolvent character of indecision: is this a *récit*? Is it a *récit* that I entitle? asks the title in entitling. But also, announcing outside the inside of the story: is it a *récit* that they want? What entitles them? Is it a *récit* as discursive mode or as literary operation, or perhaps even as literary genre or fiction on the theme of mode and genre? Likewise, the title could excerpt, as does a metonymy, a fragment of the *récit* without a *récit* (to wit, the words “a *récit*” with and without a question mark), but such an iterative excerpting is not citational. For the title, guaranteed and protected by law but also making law, retains a referential structure which differs radically from the one underlying other occurrences of the “same” words in the text. Whatever the issue—title, reference, or mode and genre—the case before us always involves the law and, in particular, the relations formed around and to law. All the questions which we have just addressed can be traced to an enormous matrix that generates the nonthematizable thematic power of a simulated *récit*: it is this inexhaustible writing which recounts without telling, and which speaks without recounting.

Récit of a *récit* without *récit*, a *récit* without edge or boundary, *récit* all of whose visible space is but some border of itself without “self,” consisting of the framing edge without content, without modal or generic boundaries—such is the law of this textual event. This text also speaks the law, its own and that of the other as reader. And speaking the law, it also imposes itself as a law text, as the text of the law. What is, then, the law of the genre of this singular text? It is law, it is the figure of the law which will also be the invisible center, the themeless theme of *La folie du jour*, or, as I am now entitled to say, of “A *récit*?”

But this law, as law of genre, is not exclusively binding on genre understood as category of art and literature. Paradoxically, and just as impossibly, the law of genre is also binding on that which draws genre into engendering, generations, genealogy, and degenerescence. You have already witnessed its approach often enough, with all the figures of this degenerescent self-engendering of a *récit*, with this figure of the law which, like the day that it is, challenges the opposition between the law of nature and the law of symbolic history. The remarks that

have just been made on the double chiasmic invagination of edges should suffice to exclude any notion that these complications are matters of pure form or that they could be formalized outside the content. The question of the literary genre is not a formal one: it covers the motif of the law in general, of generation in the natural and symbolic senses, of birth in the natural and symbolic senses, of the generation difference, sexual difference between the feminine and masculine gender, of the hymen between the two, of a relationless relation between the two, of an identity and difference between the feminine and masculine. The word *hymen* not only points toward a paradoxical logic that is inscribed without being formalized under this name;⁷ it also reminds us of everything that Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy tell us in *The Literary Absolute* about the relationship between genre (*Gattung*) and marriage, as well as the whole series *gattieren* (to mix, to classify), *gatten* (to couple), *Gatte/Gattin* (husband/wife), and so forth.⁸

Once articulated within the precinct of Blanchot's entire discourse on the neuter, the most elliptical question would inevitably have to assume this form: what about a neutral genre/gender? Or one whose neutrality would not be *negative* (neither . . . nor), nor dialectical, but affirmative, and doubly affirmative (or . . . or)?

Here again, due to time limitations but also to more essential reasons concerning the structure of the text, I shall have to excerpt some isolated fragments. This will not occur without a supplement of violence and pain.

First word and most important word of *La folie du jour*, “I” presents itself as self [*moi*], me, a man. Grammatical law leaves no doubt about this subject. The first sentence, phrased in French in the masculine (“*Je ne suis ni savant ni ignorant*” and not “*je ne suis ni savante ni ignorante*”) says, with regard to knowledge, nothing but a double negation (*neither . . . nor*). Thus, no glint of *self-presentation*. But the double negation gives passage to a double affirmation (yes, yes) that enters

7. EN For a discussion of the *hymen* as an undecidable term, see “The First Session” above, especially pp. 160–175.

8. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 91.

into alignment or alliance with itself. Forging an alliance or marriage-bond ("hymen") with itself, this boundless double affirmation utters a measureless, excessive, immense *yes*: both to life and to death:

I am neither learned nor ignorant. I have known some joy. This is saying too little: I am living, and this life gives me the greatest pleasure. And death? When I die (perhaps soon), I shall know an immense pleasure. I am not speaking of the foretaste of death, which is bland and often disagreeable. Suffering is debilitating. But this is the remarkable truth of which I am sure: I feel a boundless pleasure in living and shall be boundlessly content to die. (5)

Now, seven paragraphs further along, the chance and probability of such an affirmation (one that is double and therefore boundless, limitless) is granted to woman. It returns to woman. Rather, not to woman or even to the feminine, to the female gender [*genre féminin*], or to the generality of the feminine gender but—and this is why I spoke of chance and probability—"usually" to women. It is "usually" women who say *yes, yes*. To life to death. This "usually" avoids treating the feminine as a general and generic force; it makes an opening for the event, the performance, the uncertain contingencies, the encounter. And it is indeed from the contingent experience of the encounter that "I" will speak here. In the passage that I am about to cite, the expression "men" occurs twice. The second occurrence names the sexual genre, the sexual difference (*aner, vir*—but sexual difference does not occur between a species and a genre); in the first occurrence, "men" comes into play in an indecisive manner in order to name the human race (named "species" in the text) or sexual difference:

Men would like to escape death, bizarre *species* that they are. And some cry out, "die, die," because they would like to escape life. "What a life! I'll kill myself, I'll surrender!" This is pitiful and strange; it is in error.

But I have encountered *beings* who never told life to be quiet or death to go away—usually women, beautiful creatures. As for men, terror besieges them . . . (7; italics added)

What has thus far transpired in these seven paragraphs? Usually women, beautiful creatures, relates "I." As it happens, encounter,

chance, affirmation of chance do not always manage to happen. There is no natural or symbolic law, universal law, or law of a genre/gender here. Only usually, usually women, (comma of apposition) beautiful creatures. Through its highly calculated logic, the comma of apposition leaves open the possibility of thinking that these women are not, on the one hand, beautiful and then, on the other hand, as it happens, capable of saying *yes, yes* to life to death, of not saying *be quiet, go away* to life to death. The comma of apposition lets us think they are beautiful, women and beauties, these creatures, insofar as they affirm both life and death. Beauty, the feminine beauty of these "beings," would be bound up with this double affirmation.

Now I myself, who "am neither learned nor ignorant," "I feel a boundless pleasure in living and shall be boundlessly content to die." In this random claim that links affirmation usually to women, beautiful ones, it is then more than probable that, as long as I say *yes, yes*, I am a woman and beautiful. I am a woman, and beautiful. Grammatical sex (or anatomical as well, in any case, sex submitted to the law of objectivity): the masculine gender [*genre*] is thus affected by the affirmation through a random drift that could always render it other. A sort of secret coupling would take place here, forming an odd marriage ("hymen"), an odd couple, for none of this can be regulated by objective, natural, or civil law. The "usually" is a mark of this secret and odd hymen, of this coupling that is also perhaps a mixing of genders/genres. The genders/genres pass into each other. And we will not be barred from thinking that this mixing of genders, viewed in light of the madness of sexual difference, may bear some relation to the mixing of literary genres.

"I," then, keep alive the chance of being a female or of changing sex. Transsexuality permits me, in a more than metaphorical and transferential way, to engender. "I" can give birth, and many other signs which I cannot mention here bear this out, among other things the fact that on several occasions I "bring something forth to the light of day." In the rhetoric of *La folie du jour*, the idiomatic expression "to bring forth to the light of day" [*donner le jour*] is one of the players in an exceedingly powerful polysemic and disseminal game that I shall not attempt to reproduce here. I only retain its standard and dominant

meaning which the spirit of linguistics gives it: *donner le jour* is to give birth—a verb whose subject is usually maternal, that is to say, generally female. At the center, closely hugging an invisible center, a primal scene could have alerted us, if we had had the time, to the *point of view* of *La folie du jour* and to *A Primal Scene*.⁹ This is also called a “short scene.”

“I” can bring forth to light, can give birth. To what? Well, precisely to law, or more exactly, to begin with, to the representatives of law, to those who wield authority—and let us also understand by this the authority of the author, the rights of authorship—simply by virtue of possessing an overseer’s right, the right to see, the right to have everything in sight. This panoptic, this synopsis, they demand nothing else, but nothing less. Now herein lies the essential paradox: from where and from whom do they derive this power, this right-to-sight that permits them to have “me” at their disposal? Well, from “me,” rather, from the subject who is subjected to them. It is the “I”-less “I” of the narrative voice, the “I” “stripped” of itself, the one that does not take place, it is he who brings them to light, who engenders these lawmen in giving them insight into what regards them and what should not regard them.

I liked the doctors well enough. I did not feel belittled by their doubts. The bother was that their authority grew with every hour. One isn’t initially aware of it, but these men are kings. Showing me my rooms they said: Everything here belongs to us. They threw themselves upon the parings of my mind: This is ours. They interpellated my story: Speak! and it placed itself at their service. In haste, I stripped myself of myself. I distributed my blood, my privacy among them, I offered them the universe, I brought them forth to the light of day. Under their unblinking gaze, I became a water drop, an ink blot. I was shrinking into them, I was held entirely in their view and when, finally, I no longer had anything but my perfect nullity present and no longer had anything to see, they, too, ceased to see me, most annoyed, they rose shouting: Well, where are you? Where are you hiding? Hiding is prohibited, it is a misdeed, etc. (14)

9. Maurice Blanchot, *Une scène primitive*—initially published separately (in *Première livraison*, 1976), the text thus entitled was reinscribed in *L’écriture du désastre* (1980). [EN This work has been translated by Ann Smock as *The Writing of the Disaster* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).]

Law, day. It is generally believed that one can oppose law to affirmation, and particularly to unlimited affirmation, to the immensity of *yes, yes*. Law—we often figure it as an instance of the interdictory limit, of the binding obligation, as the negativity of a boundary not to be crossed. Now the mightiest and most divided trait of *La folie du jour* or of “A *récit*?” is the one relating the birth of the law, its genealogy, engenderment, generation, or genre, the very genre of the law, to the process of the double affirmation. The excessiveness of *yes, yes* is no stranger to the genesis of law (nor to genesis itself, as could be easily shown, for there is also at stake here a *récit* of Genesis in “the light of seven days” [11]). The double affirmation is not foreign to the genre, genius or spirit of the law. No affirmation, and certainly no *double* affirmation without the law sighting the light of day and the daylight becoming law. Such is the madness of the day, such is a *récit* in its “remarkable” truth, in its truthless truth.

Now the feminine, the almost always affirmative gender/genre (“usually women”), is also the gender of this figure of law, not of its representatives, but of the law herself who, throughout a *récit*, forms a couple with me, with the “I” of the narrative voice.

The law is in the feminine.

She is not a woman (it is only a figure, a “silhouette,” and not a representative of the law) but she, *la loi*, is in the feminine, declined in the feminine; not only as a grammatical gender in my language; elsewhere Blanchot will have brought this gender into play for speech [*la parole*] and for thought [*la pensée*]. No, she is described as a “female element,” which does not signify a female person. And the affirmative “I,” the narrative voice, who has brought forth the representatives of the law to the light of day, claims to find the law seductive—sexually seductive. The law appeals to him: “The truth is that she appealed to me. In this milieu overpopulated with men, she was the only female element. One time she had me touch her knee: a bizarre impression. I declared to her: I am not the kind of man who contents himself with a knee. Her response: that would be revolting!” (16–17). She pleases him and he would not like to content himself with the knee that she “had (him) touch.” This contact with the knee [*genou*], as my student and friend Pierre-François Berger brought to my notice, recalls

the inflectional contiguity of the I and the we, the *je* and the *nous*, of an I/we couple of whom we shall speak again in a moment.

The law's female element has thus always attracted: me, I, he, we. The law attracts: "The law attracted me. . . . In order to tempt her, I called softly to the law: 'Approach, so I can see you face to face' (I wanted to take her aside for a moment). Impudent appeal; what would I have done had she responded?" (9).

He is perhaps subjected to law, but he neither attempts to escape her, nor does he shrink before her: he wishes to seduce the law to whom he gives birth (there is a hint of incest in this) and especially—this is one of the most striking and singular traits of this scene—he inspires fear in the law. He not only troubles the representatives of the law, the lawmen who are medical experts and the "psy" 's—who demand of him, but are unable to obtain, an organized account, a testimony oriented by a sense of history or his history, ordained and ordered by reason, and by the unity of an *I think*, or of an *originally synthetic apperception accompanying all representations*. That the "I" here does not always accompany itself is by no means borne lightly by the lawmen; in fact, he alarms thus the lawmen, he radically persecutes them, and, in his manner, conceals from them without altercation the truth they demand and without which they are nothing. But he not only alarms the lawmen, he alarms the law; one would be tempted to say the law herself, if she did not remain here a silhouette and an effect of the *récit*. And what is more, this law whom the "I" frightens is none other than "me," than the "I," effect of his desire, child of his affirmation, of the genre "I" clasped in a specular couple with "me." They are inseparable (*je/nous* and *genou, jeto* and *jetoit*), and so she tells him, once more, as truth: "The truth is that we can no longer be separated. I shall follow you everywhere, I shall dwell under your roof (*toit*), we shall have the same sleep" (15). We see the law, whose silhouette stands behind her representatives, frightened by "me," by "him"; she is inclined toward and declined by *je/nous*, I/we, in front of "me," in front of him, her knees marking perhaps the articulation of a gait [*pas*], the flexion of the couple and sexual difference, but also the contiguity without contact of the hymen and the "mixing of genres."

Behind their backs, I perceived the silhouette of the law. Not the familiar law, who is strict and not terribly agreeable: this one was different. Far from falling prey to her menace, I was the one who seemed to frighten her. According to her, my glance was lightning and my hands, grounds on which to perish. Moreover, she ridiculously attributed to me all kinds of power, she declared herself perpetually at my knees. But she let me demand nothing, and when she granted me the right to be in all places, that meant that I hadn't a place anywhere. When she placed me above the authorities, that meant: you are authorized to do nothing. (14–15)

"I hadn't a place anywhere," at the same time as she granted me the right to be in all places. It's in this way that Blanchot elsewhere designates the non-place and the topological or hypertopological mobility of the narrative voice.

What game is the law, a law of this genre, playing? What is she playing at when she has her knee touched? For if *La folie du jour* plays down the law, plays at law, plays with law, it is also because the law herself plays. The law, in its female element, is a silhouette that plays. At what? At being born, at being born *like anybody or nobody*.¹⁰ She plays upon her generation and her genre, she plays out her nature and her history, and she makes a plaything of a *récit*. In mock-playing herself she recites; and she is born of the one for whom she becomes the law. She is born of him himself, one could even say of her herself, since her gender can reverse itself *in the affirmation; he or she* is the narrative voice, *him, her, I, we*, the neuter gender that lets itself be captivated by the law, subjects itself to her and escapes her, whom she escapes and whom she loves, etc. She lets herself be put in motion, she lets herself be *cited* by him when, in the midst of her game, she says, pursuing an idiom that her disseminal polysemy conveys to the abyss, "I see day":

Here is one of her games. [He has just recalled that she "once had [him] touch her knee."] She showed me a section of the space between the top of the window and the ceiling: "You are there," she said. I looked at this

10. TN *Naitre comme personne*: this phrase releases a number of interpretations: it lets us hear *naitre* (to be born) as *n'être* (not to be), and *personne* as a person and its opposite, nobody.

point with intensity. "Are you there?" I looked at it with all my power. "Well?" I felt the scars of my gaze leap, my sight became a wound, my head, a gap, a gutted bull. Suddenly she cried out: "Oh! I see day! Oh God!" etc. I protested that this game tired me enormously, but she was insatiable for my glory. (17)

For the law to see the day is her madness, is what she loves madly like glory, the sunlit illustration, the day of the writer, of the author who says "I," and who brings forth law to the light of day. He says that she is insatiable, insatiable for his glory—he who is, too, author of the law to which he submits himself, he who engenders her, he, her mother who no longer knows how to say "I" or to keep memory intact. I am the mother of law, behold my daughter's madness. It is also the madness of the day, for day, the word *day* in its disseminal abyss, is law, the law of the law. My daughter's madness is to want to be born—like anybody and nobody [*comme personne*]. Whereas she remains a "silhouette," a shadow, a profile, her face never in view. He had said to her, to the law, in order to "tempt her": "Approach, so I can see you face to face."

Such would be the "remarkable truth" that clears an opening for the madness of day—and that appeals, like law, like madness, to the one who says "I" or "I/we." Let us be attentive to this syntax of truth. She, the law, says: "The truth is that we can no longer be separated. I shall follow you everywhere, I shall live under your roof . . ." He: "The truth is that she appealed to me . . .," she, law, but also—and this is always the principal theme of these sentences—she, truth [*La vérité, c'est qu'elle me plaisait*]. One cannot conceive truth without the madness of the law.

I have let myself be commanded by the law of our encounter, by the convention of our subject, notably genre, the law of genre. This law, articulated as an I/we which is more or less autonomous in its movements, assigned us places and limits. Even though I have launched an appeal against this law, it was she who turned my appeal into a confirmation of her own glory. But she also desires ours insatiably.

Submitting myself to the subject of our colloquium, as well as to its law, I have sifted "A *récit*," *La folie du jour*. I have isolated a type, if not a genre, of reading from an infinite series of trajectories or possible courses. I have pointed out the generative principle of these courses, beginnings, and new beginnings in every sense: but from a certain point of view. Elsewhere—in accordance with other subjects, other colloquia and lectures, other I/we drawn together in one place—other trajectories could have come to light.

Nonetheless, it would be folly to draw any sort of general conclusion here. I could not say what exactly has happened in this scene, nor in my discourse or my account. What was perhaps seen, in the time of a blink, is a madness of law—and, therefore, of order, reason, sense and meaning, of day: "But often," (said "I") "I was dying without saying a thing. In time, I became convinced that I was seeing the madness of day face to face; such was the truth: light became mad, clarity took leave of her senses; she assailed me unreasonably, without a set of rules, without a goal. This discovery was like jaws clutching at my life."

I am woman, and beautiful; my daughter, the law, is mad about me. I speculate on my daughter. My daughter is mad about me; this is law.

The law is mad, she is mad about "me." And across the madness of this day, I keep this in sight.¹¹ There, this will have been my self-portrait of the genre.

The law is mad. The law is mad, is madness; but madness is not the predicate of law. There is no madness without the law; madness cannot be conceived before its relation to law. This is the law, the law is a madness.

There is a general trait here: the madness of the law mad for me, the day madly in love with me, the silhouette of my daughter mad about me, her mother, etc. But *La folie du jour*, "A *récit*?" without *récit*, carrying and miscarrying its titles, is not at all exemplary of this general trait. Not at all, not of the whole [*Pas du tout*]. This is not an example of a general or generic whole. Not of the whole, not at all. Of the

11. EN Several meanings are possible for *ça me regarde* in this context: "this is of concern to me," "it watches me," even "the id watches me."

whole, which begins by finishing and never finishes beginning apart from itself, of the whole that stays at the edgeless boundary of itself, of the whole greater and less than a whole and nothing. "A *récit*?" will not have been exemplary. Rather, with regard to the whole, it will have been wholly counter-exemplary.

The genre has always in all genres been able to play the role of order's principle: resemblance, analogy, identity and difference, taxonomic classification, organization and genealogical tree, order of reason, order of reasons, sense of sense, truth of truth, natural light and sense of history. Now, the test of "A *récit*?" brought to light the madness of genre. Madness has given birth to, thrown light on genre in the most dazzling, most blinding sense of the word. And in the writing of "A *récit*?", in literature, satirically practicing all genres, imbibing them but never allowing herself to be saturated with a catalogue of genres, she, madness, has started spinning Peterson's genre-disc like a demented sun.¹² And she does not only do so *in* literature, for in concealing the boundaries that sunder mode and genre, she has also inundated *and* divided the borders between literature and its others.

There, that is the whole of it, it is only what "I," so they say, here kneeling at the edge of literature, see. In sum, the law. The law summoning. [*La loi en somme.*] What "I" sees and what "I" says that I see in a *récit* where I/we are, where I summon us [*où je/nous somme*].

12. EN Julius Peterson was a German aesthician of the first part of the twentieth century who devised a schema encompassing all literary genres, laid out in the form of a wheel. See Genette, *Introduction à l'architexte*, 56–60.

ULYSSES GRAMOPHONE

HEAR SAY YES IN JOYCE

• When Derrida was invited to deliver the opening address at the Ninth International James Joyce Symposium in Frankfurt in 1984, he had already on a number of occasions made clear the importance of Joyce's writing to his own work, and in the one essay on Joyce he had published at that time, "Two Words for Joyce" (which devotes most attention to *Finnegans Wake*), he had given some account of this continuing importance. But few people in the audience could have been prepared for the long, detailed, circuitous, always unpredictable, frequently comic exploration of *Ulysses* that developed out of the apparently innocuous opening, "Oui, oui, vous m'entendez bien, ce sont des mots français."

The essay's wandering path, as it weaves together the story of its own composition, fragments of the text of *Ulysses*, and a number of the issues which Derrida has addressed at length elsewhere, mimes both Joyce's novel (together with its Homeric predecessor) and a crucial aspect of its argument: the necessary connection between chance and necessity. What must have seemed to most of its first audience a haphazard trajectory becomes, with greater familiarity, an intricately plotted itinerary, a series of circular movements that keep returning to themselves and at the same time opening themselves beyond previously established limits. And one of Derrida's points—broached also in "Aphorism Countertime"—is that what we call "chance events" are made possible only by the pre-existence of a network of codes and connections; hence one of his deployments of the figure of Elijah in *Ulysses*, as the megaswitchboard operator. But the emphasis runs the other way as well; Elijah is *also* a figure for the unexpected, the unpredictability built into any