

INFORMATION TO USERS

This reproduction was made from a copy of a manuscript sent to us for publication and microfilming. While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted. Pages in any manuscript may have indistinct print. In all cases the best available copy has been filmed.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help clarify notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. Manuscripts may not always be complete. When it is not possible to obtain missing pages, a note appears to indicate this.
2. When copyrighted materials are removed from the manuscript, a note appears to indicate this.
3. Oversize materials (maps, drawings, and charts) are photographed by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each oversize page is also filmed as one exposure and is available, for an additional charge, as a standard 35mm slide or in black and white paper format.*
4. Most photographs reproduce acceptably on positive microfilm or microfiche but lack clarity on xerographic copies made from the microfilm. For an additional charge, all photographs are available in black and white standard 35mm slide format.*

*For more information about black and white slides or enlarged paper reproductions, please contact the Dissertations Customer Services Department.

U·M·I Dissertation
Information Service

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

8629670

Beitchman, Philip

I AM A PROCESS WITH NO SUBJECT: AUTHOR, AUDIENCE AND WORK
IN THE LITERATURE OF DECONSTRUCTION. EXPLORATORY READINGS IN
SOME MODERN TEXTS

City University of New York

Ph.D. 1986

University
Microfilms
International 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Copyright 1986

by

Beitchman, Philip

All Rights Reserved

I AM A PROCESS WITH NO SUBJECT
AUTHOR, AUDIENCE AND WORK
IN THE LITERATURE OF DECONSTRUCTION
EXPLORATORY READINGS IN SOME MODERN TEXTS

by
Philip Beitchman

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1986

COPYRIGHT BY

Philip Beitchman

1986

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

June 14, 1986
Date

Hannah K. Charney
Chairman of Examining Committee

July 1, 1986
Date

Burton Pike
Executive Officer

Hannah K. Charney
Mary Ann Caws
Fred Nichols
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Table of Contents

Introduction: Author, Audience and Work In the Literature of Deconstruction Exploratory Readings in Some Modern Texts	1
1. Symbolism in the Streets: Tzara	3
2. A Question of Culture Culture in Question: Beckett	86
3. The Rules of Leiris' Game	116
4. The Fragmentary Word: Blanchot	147
5. The Endless Question: <u>Finnegans Wake</u> , I , 6	190
6. The Strategy of Interruption: Sollers' <u>Drame</u>	236
7. A Deconstructed Epiphany: Des Forets' <u>Le Bavard</u>	274
Conclusion: Madness, Theatre, Text	315
Bibliography	343
Renvoi	367

Introduction:

Author, Audience and Work

In the Literature of Deconstruction

Exploratory Readings in Some Modern Texts

Author , Audience and Work

It will be my purpose in this dissertation to explore literary theory and practice in seven 20th century writers whose works are characterized by a high degree of experimentation on a thematic and stylistic level , as well as heavily inflected by the need to reflect upon and justify their own existence. I plan to examine , author by author , certain specific texts that demonstrate these tendencies; but although I will be looking at the authors individually and most often their "texts themselves" I will also be stressing the links between them , both implicit and explicit, and a certain common mood of apocalyptic desperation, disillusion and readiness for change and risk they share.

I am, by no means, suggesting that these are the only moderns who manifest these qualities or who are significant for a prominently iconoclastic attitude toward our Western culture and heritage. I have chosen these writers because I think their works are particularly eloquent , blatant and obvious examples of a decomposition of our society and a dissatisfaction with its norms , traditions and goals that is amply if not omnipresent elsewhere -- and not only, or even mainly, in the field of literature.

In the Literature of Deconstruction

Any theory of literature seeks out or invents those texts in which it can find corroboration, inspiration, support and further stimulation.

As Jacques Derrida remarks, a little dryly, in a well known essay, "Force and Signification,"¹ Jean Rousset's structuralist aesthetic is well suited for Proust and Claudel (since these writers can even be seen as its progenitors) but might be dubiously relevant elsewhere. Although one of the leitmotifs of deconstruction has been a hostility to literary canons and canonization, it has had to find generally its own canon (in fact if not in theory) -- or works and writers that are suitable to its methodology and in sympathy with its overall goals.

We are by no means describing hereby a "mountain" of literature into which theory tunnels to come out with its precious ore; for in this age of rapid communications and even more rapid judgment, sudden reversals and illuminations, in this time when we so much depend on others for therapy, guidance and outlet, when we are so permeated by others that they are who we are, theory is often enough in advance or at least parallel to, the practice of literature; works seem frequently written to order, in another more controlling sense than Valéry meant when he noted the circumstantial nature of his own productions, either by a writer in accordance with his own recent theoretical progress, or with points made and arguments won by or over others at the colloquia, symposia and other stimulating but compelling stations where our intellectual trajectories intersect. A good example of this might be the "collaboration" between Jean Ricardou and Claude Simon so comprehensively recounted in David Carroll's The Subject in Question.² Another obvious instance might be the Derrida-Foucault-Barthes connections and interconnections with the

"made to order" creations of Philippe Sollers, Jean Thibaudeau, Jean-Louis Baudry³ and others of the now defunct Tel Quel tribe, passed on to the paradise of Infini.

The day is past, and perhaps happily, when we were sure of the difference between theory and practice of literature; it seems obvious now that criticism and creation come together and are more necessarily and inextricably intertwined than ever. For another of the corollaries of deconstruction has been the blurring, and sometimes the elision of the border between the two functions, traditionally distinct, of writer and critic.⁴ Deconstruction in literature marks that phase of post-structuralism, at least in some hands, where criticism, finished with merely theorizing about the disappearance of genre and limit and the close collaboration between philosophy, vested interests and literature, has "taken the step," come over, miraculously, to the other side of that which has no other side.

This deconstruction, then, is a structuralism that has "gone wild," taken itself seriously and in so doing has comprised a library of works that are sympathetic to its project. Thus the Romantics, deemphasized if not condemned by the New Critics, and a traditional suspicion reaching back through Irving Babbitt at least as far as Matthew Arnold, for imbalances in education, rigor and judgment, become important again; for they also were no great respecters of borders and limits. Likewise a certain modern literature, often of indeterminate genre, form and even purpose -- of which precisely there will be much question here -- is

important, even fundamental for deconstruction.⁵

If another favored idea of deconstruction has been the "end of literature," in the sense of the end of any special status accorded to it,⁶ then a library of deconstruction is likely to comprise works whose essential purport is to put literature in question. A central place in this library of deconstruction (to employ heuristically a concept of centrality which deconstruction discredits for what must be a library of marginality) would be taken by the works of Maurice Blanchot -- a writer whose major preoccupation has been a many-levelled examination, critical and creative, of the premises, promises, illusions, ambiguities and hopes for the practice of literature.⁷

Aside from the important and well acknowledged role Blanchot has played in the intellectual life of several figures that are among the most frequently cited in connection with deconstruction in America, Jacques Derrida, certainly the inventor of this "new science" (for it is he who first uses the term⁸), considers himself to be very greatly in Blanchot's debt -- a debt that he has humbly acknowledged publicly and eloquently discharged in print;⁹ and, in fact, Blanchot's past and continuing relevance to deconstruction is amply documented in Donald G. Marshall's recent article in a collection of essays devoted to the Yale critics.¹⁰

Blanchot turns out to be a kind of rite-de-passage for those who were to become some of the principal figures of deconstruction. Geoffrey Hartman's interest in Blanchot dates back at least to 1956, when he wrote about him for the Yale French Studies; and in another essay in 1961 he

introduces Blanchot to the wider audience of the Chicago Review.¹¹

Paul de Man also wrote on Blanchot and his praise for him was positively hyperbolic, especially for a critic who is known more for cool judgment than for enthusiasm:

The influence of the critical work has been far-reaching. More philosophical and abstract than Charles du Bos and less conducive to practical application than Bachelard's theories of material imagery, Blanchot's criticism has remained aloof from recent methodological debates and polemics. Yet his already considerable impact is bound to increase; rather than directly affecting existing critical methods, his work puts into question the very conditions prior to the elaboration of all critical discourse and in that way reaches a level of awareness no other contemporary critic has reached.¹²

J. Hillis Miller is no stranger to Blanchot either; for in a recent speech which he made in defense of the deconstructive mood, whose basis was a re-reading of Kant's Third Critique as well as reinterpretations of Goethe, Wordsworth and Coleridge, he uses a brilliant early piece of Blanchot's about "emptiness" as introduction and conclusion to his discourse.¹³

The turn toward Blanchot was significantly a turning away from Sartre; just as Derrida in philosophy has represented a correction of what seemed to him to be the "monstrosity" of Sartre's moralistic and humanistic misreading¹⁴ (a mistake that Derrida grants more charitably than Heidegger

was necessary for Sartre's situation) of Dasein as Existence, so Blanchot in literature represents an alternative to the Sartrean insistence that literature be explicitly and usefully social and that it make communication with others, and engagement in their problems, its fundamental modus operandi. Blanchot opposed, as did his friend Georges Bataille, what they saw as a reduction and distortion of the literary function; and both were held accountable by Sartre in Situations¹⁵ for what he viewed as their asocial posture and mystifying potential; and, indeed, Sartre's review, belying its name, Les Temps Modernes, stubbornly opposed much that was modern in literature.¹⁶

Deconstruction, then, by recourse to Blanchot for inspiration and example, is searching for a more open and permissive philosophy than Sartrean "commitment" can provide. Isolation, eccentricity and social inutility, all anathema for Sartre and reasons for his condemnation of modernism, are all positive points for Blanchot.

Blanchot's innovative and original attitude toward the practice of his own criticism, as well as the sublime indifference he manifests therein to genre and category, will also provide an impetus and precedent for deconstruction to be more open and experimental in its critical methods and styles. Not only the beauty and seductive power of his writings, their "savour" Barthes might say, but also their wide-ranging references, topicality and allusiveness contribute to the inspiration his work affords; and Blanchot violates habitually, and with impunity, the new critical strictures that, for instance, exclude biography and history from a study

of the work, as in his influential series of essays on Kafka; and he is equally willing to operate, in defense of a vision of literature that confronts the paradoxes of modernity, on many different terrains -- philosophical, anthropological, historical and even political. The "text itself" is as important to Blanchot as it was for the New Criticism, but for him the text doesn't stop on the border of the page where it only appears but implies certain important changes alike for the hand that composes as well as for a world that reads or refuses to read.

Where deconstruction turns by turning toward Blanchot is toward a literature that was more open to innovation and more tolerant of discontinuity. Blanchot meant an escape from the reductiveness of Sartrean moral aesthetics as well as from New Critical and other academic strictures on the limitations and functions of critical and creative discourse. To look toward Blanchot was to look toward experimentation, risk, discovery -- toward the accepting of the responsibility for one's freedom that constitutes, perhaps, a deeper fidelity to Sartre than Sartre was often able to recognize.¹⁷

To turn to Blanchot is to turn to much more than only Blanchot; for when we talk of Blanchot we are no longer on that relatively stable terrain where we think we know who or what exactly we are talking about, as when we talk about Hemingway, Proust or Henry James. When we talk of Blanchot an appropriate ambiance might be that suggested by the term "network" that Michel Foucault introduced¹⁸ to describe the aesthetics of the New Novel in contradistinction to the linear style of more traditional

fiction. For Blanchot is a catalytic writer who lets us know in a variety of eloquent ways of the effect that other writers have had on him and who is, in very large measure, his effect on other writers. Derrida's "non-phenomenal" Text, related to Heidegger's equally immaterial Being,¹⁹ is made-to-order for a Blanchot who is very much a disappearing writer behind a disappearing text.²⁰ In the network, then, that comprises Blanchot the individual writer counts for little and what he says, in the sense that it can be captured, learned and identified, for even less; an important source for deconstruction turns out to be, suitably for a doctrine that has turned against origins (and doctrines), no source at all but an example of a certain style of thinking and writing which infinitely and indefinitely proliferates, explores, refers, and circles "in the air," as it were, but never lands.

If deconstruction also leans toward a conception of art as bricolage,²¹ or spontaneous ingenuity, which comes to it through Lévi-Strauss' anthropological insights and their literary application by Gerard Genette, then it seems appropriate also that the almost exclusive concern of Blanchot has been with writers of what he has termed "the fragmentary." These are writers who proceed, or seem to, by fits and starts, who profess no allegiance to any external or prior restraints for unity, completeness and finality, but whose thought and whose life are their writing, which they put together, like the bricoleur on the basis of methods that are more often intuitive and haphazard than organized according to pre-existing plans. Tristan Tzara's, and Dada's and Surrealism's emphasis

generally, on primitive and Eastern "non-directed thought" ²² as opposed to the calculating Western "engineer's" mentality has much in common with Blanchot's aesthetics of fragmentation, spontaneity and intuition with which deconstruction also is deeply imbued; and Nietzsche, whose antagonism to systems and plans is almost legendary, is perhaps the perfect example of "non-directed thought" in action and therefore the fragmentary writer, par excellence, as he is for deconstruction still very important. ²³ Hölderlin, Mallarmé, Musil and especially Kafka are also frequent themes for Blanchot, for they are all inveterate writers of fragments, whose tentative, problematic and functionally interminable art is largely what they write about. Very prominent in Blanchot's library are also his contemporaries Michel Leiris and Louis-René Des Forêts. Michel Leiris' approach to autobiography eschews all linearity and orderly progression, emphasizing instead the evanescent, momentary and contingent nature of a life that resists intrinsically all totalization and rationalization; and what Des Forêts suggests in his writings is perhaps that the things that matter most to us are incapable of reliable explanation, articulation or admission -- as man's plans and projects, and the image of himself and others he forms to go along with them, are incessantly "surprised," derailed and reduced by unconscious, social and natural contingencies over which he has little control.

This network that we see reaching through Derrida and the Yale critics to Blanchot and the "writers of the fragmentary" we may also envision as connected laterally to Philippe Sollers and Tel Quel.

There is a sense in which Sollers and Tel Quel take Blanchot literally in a way that perhaps he was never meant to be: they make institution and ideology out of writers that resist such articulation.²⁴

Sollers is a peripheral, if still significant, figure for deconstruction and other post-structuralist movements, impossible to ignore if only for his importance at a certain conjuncture in the discourses of Derrida, Barthes, Kristeva and even Lacan. It has been argued recently that Derrida has been necessarily "domesticated" for American deconstruction,²⁵ but Sollers would have proved more resistant to domestication, at first because he is too radical and recently because he is too conservative (politically, at least). His pertinence, in the context of this project, is that he makes an explicit ideology and practice out of the intuitions, passions and visions of other writers whose rebellion was rather implicit in their art than contained in any concrete statement they were making or even style or technical device they were using. Sollers becomes on the other hand the consummate stylist and technician, a writer who, for instance, is able to pursue with astounding, obsessive and obstinate rigor a preconceived plan to dislocate systematically the reader. A paradox that may vitiate this effect is the very premeditation of the spontaneity and surprise, as in those "time to be creative and original" periods in school that can become dull routines in their own right. Compared to the less programmed and predictable shocks that Blanchot, Bataille and Leiris spring on us, Sollers may fall a little flat. His work, nevertheless, is still interesting and worth perusal as an accomplished and comprehensive

repertory of the most experimental techniques of 20th century prose (for Sollers is as much an intersection and crossroads as Blanchot). With him the network that was going to extend into deconstruction attempts impossibly, paradoxically and dramatically to become system, method, reliability. Subversion and revolution in art become institutionalized; for us, and in the perspective of what we have been describing alternately as Blanchot's network of the fragmentary or the literature of deconstruction, Sollers may represent a moment of temptation and impatience, that is best to recognize and leave behind -- that of exercising real power and influence directly in any real world. A deeper power of writing and a more effective subversion may lie in insisting on, and continuing to say, nothing.

National identity and even language are no barriers on this network I am describing. Finnegans Wake, vitally important and exemplary for Sollers and Tel Quel, was also an illumination for Derrida;²⁶ and Beckett, whose connections with Joyce come close to being lineal, has his very experimental novels introduced to the French reading public by Blanchot.²⁷

The qualities, attitudes and characteristics that I focus on in this network also do not belong to any programmatic theory of deconstruction, whose existence would be questionable if not contradictory.²⁸ I am instead describing certain aspects and moods that I find to be shared in common by some of the works that deconstruction, and the intellectual ambiance it grew out of, tends to favor. I am far from implying, for instance, that a slippage from the declarative to an interrogative

function is either new to literature or any exclusive property of the network I trace; I am merely pointing out that deconstruction and the readings I perform necessarily focus on these interrogative aspects. I am equally far from suggesting, in my use of the concept of subversion in these works, that subversion is indeed their exclusive concern or primary purpose (except possibly for Tzara and Sollers); instead I am saying that deconstruction, committed to look through and beyond everything, including itself, has a natural affinity for subversion. The "subversive" is an essential element in the vocabulary that enters deconstruction from Blanchot, Derrida, Foucault and so blatantly from Tel Quel and from other influential provenance (Guy Debord and the Situationists²⁹); and so "subversion" now figures prominently in a few chapter headings of Leitch's recent Deconstructive Criticism.³⁰ Such are the avatars of a word, from iconoclasm to what Marcuse would have undoubtedly qualified as "repressive desublimation."

In the reflections which follow also on the dissolution and merging of author and reader, the "withering away" of plot, the general assault on character, and the turning away from all goal and finality, including the very palpability of the text as a last recourse, I am not implying that these developments were waiting for deconstruction or the network it draws from to be noticed. Deconstruction simply is necessarily attracted to works whose authors, characters, plots and purposes become questionable, uncertain and labile, being all of these things itself. This is at once, to alter slightly Paul de Man's wonderful title,³¹ its blindness as

well as the way it sees.

By the "literature of deconstruction," then, is meant those works so mordantly critical of the world which gave them birth and a fortiori, of themselves, that they are remarkable less for the statements that they make or conclusions they come to than for the doubts they cast and the questions they pose and leave permanently open.³² We move, with these authors, from a declarative mood, that, whatever its reservations, accepts the world as it is, to an interrogative one that incessantly questions, denies and subverts it. I do not mean to underestimate the traditionally subversive role of writers and writing, alternately honored and vilified exiles from Plato's Republic, but instead to call attention to an acceleration of this iconoclastic role for literature -- perhaps because of the closing off of other outlets for protest in our tightly controlled and rationalized modern societies. For, after all, the targets of Plato's opprobrium, and that of his Puritan progeny, could congratulate themselves, and, who knows, even take pride in the seductive grace or power that earned their "lies" the sentence of exile. This role of writer, variously identified through the ages, as outsider, divinely-inspired madman or visionary, underground man, irrational or existential hero, intellectual nomad, scapegoat, -- though subversive, and plentifully, of established order, does not call itself fundamentally into question. On the contrary this traditional role for the writer may entitle him to self-esteem for his contribution to the overall health of a social organism in

which he performs the function of antibody. Even those famous exceptions, self-interrogating works that delight our modern sensibilities, from Rabelais, through Sterne and Diderot, to the anguished self-probings in the last century of Poe, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Lautréamont -- these works more glory in the flexibility of a tradition that can allow such liberties than disallow its fundamental premises. With what I call, however, the literature of deconstruction the time for such celebration is past. As Roland Barthes observed, a writer, no matter how blatantly subversive his work, fulfills an essentially decorative and ornamental role in bourgeois society;³³ for here, as the Situationists argued so efficaciously,³⁴ power no longer passes by way of the consensual word, but prefers to intimidate, condition and control by a vast panoply of subliminal strategies that render the subject's agreement the merest formality. In such a society the only unquestionably subversive art may be a terrorism willing to imitate selectively the total violence of state power.

Along with the self-esteem that its exile, whether in the officially sanctioned and well-quarantined "culture" of the academy, the marketplace of commercial publication, or rapidly coopted pockets of "underground" activity, no longer entitles it to, modern writing has been stripped of many of the fictions and comfortable illusions that traditionally accompanied and facilitated its practice. Among the most prominent of these illusions that this literature undermines is that of author, that quintessentially fictional entity who is assigned by our society or who assigns himself credit and responsibility for the world of his work. This

authorial entity tends now to be elided in favor of a text to which the writer merely appends his signature, as under constraint, but which is seen as a product of a collaboration between society and individual, reader and writer.

Not only author, but also character in this literature of deconstruction becomes an unstable element. Just as reader and writer tend to become interchangeable, if not totally synonymous, qualifications, so the fictional creations become engaged in a process that renders them unstable, labile and unreliable. The author himself becomes a factor of ambiguity, doubt and uncertainty, difficult to define, as to demarcate from his narrators and characters, as a common reality or unreality suffuses both creator and creation: rather than the author creating the work it is the work that creates, and demands its author.

This unreality is further enhanced by the parallel existence of a tendency for the characters to be named casually, if at all, as if for convenience's sake, or to be flatly unnamed, reduced to a pronominal existence: these are the "I" 's, "he" 's, "she" 's, "you" 's and "they" 's that substitute, in novels by Blanchot, Sollers and even the more conventional Des Forêts, for personnages that have no other designation. In Leiris' case the autobiographical "I", of all entities seemingly the most reliable, is derealized in successive and simultaneous avatars that contradict and deny each other, as that character which is supposed to be himself takes on the qualities of fiction and myth and thereby becomes subject to endless deconstruction. Beckett's unnamed protagonist

of the final novel of his trilogy, named aptly and paradoxically The Unnamable, is another example of this disintegration of solid identity, as is also the hero of Tzara's long iconoclastic poem, Approximate Man, about whom we are reminded so often that he is no definite entity but instead an amalgam of writer, reader, man-of-the-past, and "new man" in process of gestation.

Very pertinent also for a reading of Finnegans Wake is an awareness of the often-remarked phenomenon of the "porosity"³⁵ of Joyce's characters one for the other, so that they frequently speak with each other's voices. They become, in so doing, interchangeable, elusive and evanescent, keeping the reader from being able to depend on any fixed notions about them and the work they participate in by directing attention always elsewhere -- to a process and an incessantly renewed activity or task that they merely exemplify.

Just as, in the universe of this unending Brownian movement, the author and his narrators and characters become so many motes that merge, collide and lose their distinct place and separable shape and contour, so do the stories they tell and the plots they invent become increasingly questionable, fragmentary, nonsensical, repetitive and circular. In this literature of deconstruction, as in structuralism, diachrony tends to yield to synchrony. Wherever you cut into Finnegans Wake you will come up with, remarkably enough, the same "piece of pie," as a handful of mythologized stories are infinitely refracted and retold from an infinite variety

of points-of-view. Beckett's work also inevitably eschews linear development but circles obsessively and permanently around a few precious threads of story and argument; Leiris' autobiography, in spite of its massive length and pyrotechnic display of avowal and vulnerability actually says very little about the author's life in any chronological or comprehensive sense. A little like Proust's great Recherche it circulates instead obstinately around a very small number of scenes, incidents, ideas or even words that are endlessly ruminated, commented, reinterpreted and deconstructed.

The fact is that very little of note or worth remembering happens in this literature of deconstruction. We are here in that limit world that Beckett likes to evoke where "nothing happens" -- no great battles fought, lovers parted and reunited, ancestral lines extinguished, revolutions carried out or failed, talents developed and matured, sins visited upon oneself or one's progeny -- all that for Stendhal, Balzac, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Dickens and Zola -- and for Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and even Thomas Wolfe constituted a world. Even action in that minimal sense in which it is present, though endlessly cogitated, as in Kafka, Proust, Musil and Woolf, is missing here; for here nothing is written with one hand that the other does not soon erase; nothing is affirmed that is not ineluctably denied, the emphasis always being more on "how can we be sure it really happened" rather than on the significance of what is only supposed to have occurred. The stories or plots in this literature tend to describe their tellers and listeners more than any

objectively ascertainable referent or reality; and the environments in which they develop, the backgrounds against which they are played tend to avoid specific definition and location -- from the "anywhere cities" of Blanchot, Des Forêts and Sollers to the vague vacant lots, roads, beds and fronts of restaurants of Beckett, to the purely symbolic landscapes of Tzara which the hands of a clock that tells no time is likely to dominate, to the very cerebral reality of Leiris that the memory of a provocative painting, that incarnates his sexual obsessions, and the recollections of a few hypnotic syllables, that convey the clash between child and society, are likely to punctuate.

Motivation here is all important, as recently in Derrida's work, "why am I telling you this at this time" ³⁶ becomes an overriding concern, while what it is actually that is being said becomes secondary; and so these stories, or what is left of them, inevitably break down under this insistent, obsidian gaze into the words that compose them, which are then interrogated for meanings and values that are so painfully missing from the larger units of phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter and finally book they cannot help but form. For this is a literature that is obsessively molecular in its outlook and profoundly etymological in its mood, a style not dissimilar to the attention to glosses in the influential philosophy of Heidegger and more recently, Derrida. "What have these words meant in the past," "what do they mean now," and "do they really mean what we think they mean" is a recurrent line our authors take. Beckett, Leiris, Blanchot and Sollers pose these questions constantly and explicitly; and

Joyce's mistrust of the words he has inherited is so extreme he must invent an innumerable multitude of new ones; while a major preoccupation of Tzara's is a revolutionary critique of the traditional meanings of heavily charged concepts like Beauty, Art and Talent and a corresponding attempt to change or float their meanings and uses. Tzara, thus, in one of his major texts, advises at least half-seriously a compulsory change of language on a weekly basis,³⁷ so as to combat our complacency about the words we employ and the ideas we have received with them.

This same mistrust that our other writers show in the attention they lavish on the meanings of words, Des Forêts manifests in another way in his bavard's or "gabber"'s sublime indifference to them; the latter advertizes the attitude that words all mean the same thing -- that is nothing, except the overwhelming need of a speaker to capture the attention of a listener. Des Forêts' talky narrator accordingly assures the reader that he remembers not a single word of what is after all a central event of the novel, if there is one, and certainly a scene about which the narrator has gone to great lengths to make the reader curious -- this is his exhalted tirade or monologue before an enraptured then disgusted audience in a dancing bar; it no longer matters in Le Bavard what exactly is said or left unsaid, as all attention is focused instead on the acts or gestures of speaking and listening -- and the motivations they obey or are meant to fulfill.

This, then, is a literature that has been "stripped" and reduced to what Barthes, in his famous formulation, has called its zero degree -- one that

is devoid of any real and enduring finality, goal or purpose, outside of the necessity and contingency of its performance and its style; for everything here has become temporary and fleeting, a Nietzschean world where the only certainty is the lack of all certainty. This is a literature of the disinherited, as Erich Heller calls it, of transition; and although, especially in its more dramatic moments, which seem to coincide with those all-too-brief interludes when History seems to be offering some hope (Republican Barcelona, France of 1936 or May 1968), it can assume the proportions of apocalypse and an eschatological grandeur, it is equally insistent on the inapplicability of all past solutions to man's actual predicament. There is nothing conservative about this literature, no longing for some pristine, less confusing world; and here it parts company with Drieu La Rochelle, Céline, and with (whatever their experimental modifications) the American tradition of innovation incarnated in Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and even William Faulkner, Henry Miller and, currently, John Barth.

Tzara's diagnosis of Western culture is so severe and his prognosis so desperate that he is ready to give up on it and try to start over on different premises; and Blanchot is not so very far away from this apocalyptic mood, at least in his more extreme formulations -- except that for the latter, perhaps edified by more History (Hiroshima) "starting over" is no longer an option, since all that remains for the latest Blanchot is a kind of tragic recognition of the damage man is and has caused. There stays for Beckett and Leiris a similar sort of noble dignity in the obduracy

with which they endure and continue insistently to deal in their works with a futility from which most others (have to) hide. However these writers who will never "give up" are far removed from a literature that actually had, or still thinks it has, "something to say"; and as we describe it above, Des Forêts' masterful reduction of his author-narrator to the marginal predicament of obsessed, culpable and compulsive talker (whose situation is universal in a world where humanity has been relegated to marginality) attacks equally any claim of literature to transcendence, special status or privilege. This denial of finality is something common, also, to Joyce and Sollers, as both work in this same direction of flattening writer into reader and both into the elemental all-too-human needs that underlie their rapports.

Joyce's ultimate recourse is to produce a new language to be compatible with 20th century advances in the arts and sciences; but now it seems likely that the language of the future (in itself far from guaranteed) is to be the digital, monotonous, monophonic and tyrannical "computerese" rather than a fascinating, polyphonic and democratizing Wakeese (the language of the Wake respects no position or privilege but undermines all hierarchy in its onslaught on the stability of all perspectives). At all events critics seem to agree that the Wake is a profoundly "decentered" and "decentering" experience and work, which by the very laws of its being can neither constitute its own finality nor refer the reader to any transcendent one beyond an inherently mutable and relative act of reading. The Wake can neither represent an absolute nor constitute

one by its very existence, the first because it insists on meaning nothing unqualifiably, the second because that would require the kind of tautological faith or blind fetishism that is manifestly obsolete as well as deservedly discredited for our suspicious modern temper.

It is perhaps Sollers' impatience with this "writing as its own absolute" that led him to look for more substantial anchors, standards and referents for his later work. His notorious, well-publicized and successive flirtations, experiments and involvements in (a kind of) Maoism and now Christianity have at most seriously reduced the perdurability and universality of his creative works (although he continues to astonish, delight, unnerve and enrage through what are obviously very great resources of invention, stamina and just plain nerve) and, at the very least, propelled him outside of the parameters of this literature of deconstruction that his earlier work seemed to accomodate. This evolution or devolution in his work may serve as an example of the consequences of insisting on wresting a finality from a world that is no longer capable of supplying one.

The literature of deconstruction, while incapable of being its own absolute is equally incapable of attachment to any other transcendent goal or finality. This is a literature of the lost -- those who have given up all hope of every attaining to any further shore and who remember indistinctly, if at all, where they came from; and it is not as if there is no urgency involved in this situation. For this time, as Joyce so aptly names it in *Wake* is the "pressant," within which our present and pressing task is

no longer to abide by or even pretend to understand any code or system that is beyond, above, beneath or even within ourselves, but only to stay afloat, and to decline, politely if possible, any offer of rescue or hope of deliverance.

This is a literature that is attached to nothing, not even itself; it resists intrinsically any attempt to understand it, because it refutes in advance that literature or life can be, or was meant to be, understood; and it resists categorization and classification as ineluctably as it does comprehension. What these works elicit, encourage and provide, on the other hand, and what deconstruction seems so well placed to facilitate, is the opportunity of entering their world and playing by their rules. These texts are not objects seen more or less clearly from the outside but experiences we feel or sense from within. They are houses where we know someone or something goes on living, but though we go scrupulously through every room we will never find out exactly who or what that is; and if our obstinate search should turn up a name or two on a mailbox, as it were, we can be equally sure that the labels refer to no real entity but are there as joke, convenience or mere consolation; or alternatively, the names and therefore dwellings are our own, for it is we who now inhabit them -- and the responsible ones, or authors we are seeking are ourselves.

This perhaps may be a deeper meaning to deconstruction's controversial assault on the separation between creative writing and criticism, and of the "answerable style"³⁸ that one prominent figure in deconstruction

has advised as suitable for critical discourse. In other words, instead of clinging to a dated myth of objectivity and the pose of analytic neutrality, criticism should participate in and extend the method, spirit and enthusiasm of the disseminated work. Such an "answerable style" might be the entry of Hegel and Genet (and Sartre) into the confessional, philosophical, political and typographical alembic of Derrida's Glas,³⁹ to which Geoffrey Hartman replies himself in the eccentric complexity of Saving the Text.⁴⁰ A deconstructive strategy depends on the notion that we no longer so much write about a text as explore its ramifications and continue its development by becoming part of a process that intrinsically knows no end or beginning.

This is then the spirit in which the essays that follow were written. In each case I have tried to answer the author with a style and a thematic content that reflects and conveys a participation in the process of his work. This accounts for the variety of the approaches I use (among others, intuitive, analytical, sometimes even eschatological-apocalyptic) and for the varying distance I assume from and tones I take with the text or author in question. It accounts also for my use of the rubric and reputation of deconstruction to introduce these essays; for deconstruction releases me, as does modernity in general according to Blanchot,⁴¹ from the necessity and obligation to unify what I know under the command of any single idea or governing system or concept. It allows me to follow the texts I explore and extend where they take me, as it releases me from the tyranny of map and plan for a journey that, like each one's life,

has never been travelled before.

Exploratory Readings in Some Modern Texts

"il n'y a pas de hors-texte"

-- Derrida

1. Symbolism in the Streets: Tzara

The essay opens with an analysis of the Dada of Tristan Tzara as a rewriting of the heritage of Symbolism. Although in agreement with the Symbolists in their critique of bourgeois society, Tzara parts company with them for their reliance on what I call "exotic remedies." He rejects specifically a Symbolist aesthetic that privileges artistic possibilities as alternatives or antidotes to the necessary boredom and dreariness of life in the "civilized" world. For Tzara the real must be transformed, not merely escaped.

Tzara's early play, Le Mouchoir des Nuages, is then examined for the ways in which it absorbs and then reworks many of the elements in what Tzara saw as Symbolist escapism. The poet, for instance, in this play is devoured by a society from which he can no longer even pretend to stand apart; and Tzara uses masterfully a panoply of techniques to shock and surprise his audience and to insure that, far from being able to contemplate the dramatic event as just an evening's diversion, it is involved in and shares responsibility for what is happening.

A reading of Approximate Man, a long epic poem of 1931, goes on to show Tzara accepting the challenge of attempting to transform a world it

is no longer possible to escape. Fundamental to Tzara here is an anti-Platonism that refuses to recognize in man the avatar or expression of any idea, but insists on the possibilities of purely physical, sensory and sensual presence. My discussion of this poem explores and extends Tzara's attacks on a false culture of museums and concert halls, and a degrading, quantifying time of clocks and machines. Tzara's iconoclasm works toward breaking out of the ghetto, wherein, in order to protect itself against their dynamic and disruptive energies, society confines and quarantines its poets and thinkers.

The strange, hallucinogenic, paradoxical and preposterous implications of the social and personal metamorphoses that Tzara demands are spelled out in grimly and fantastically (sur) realistic detail in a later extended tract of prose-poetry, Grains et Issues, of 1935. This work, which I take up in conclusion, propounds an uneasy but ambitious alliance, on the basis of the dream's power to abrogate ordinary logic, between the idealism of the libertarian-radical tradition (Rousseau and early Marx), which insists on the feasibility of an end of alienation, and the more cynical realism of thinkers like Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche and Freud, who saw man as creature, incapable of happiness, who would be bored enough to wreck any utopia he might attain.

2. A Question of Culture/Culture in Question: Beckett

For Beckett's writer the restrictions and limitations against which

Tzara chafes so adamantly no longer pertain. Far from being a domain of privilege, delight and glory art has become inseparable for Beckett from the boredom, uncertainty and insecurity of daily life: "waiting for Godot" is what we all do all the time.

My essay on Beckett, then, is concerned with aspects of the human condition as revealed and developed by a voice which only happens to be that of a writer. First of all I look at the words of Molloy, where stoic humor and stark pessimism carry the reader into a world too senseless and paradoxical to be objectified and understood, but which can only be felt, lived and experienced. Ideas, abstractions and prejudices are so many hopes that must be abandoned at the gate of this particular inferno.

I then go on to show how it is the cunning of Malone Dies to bring the reader behind the scenes of the novel-in-process so as to share in the responsibility for the illusions being created. The reader is being duped not by the author (who, like Socrates, knows how little he knows), but by himself and by his own need to believe. No credit or blame is assignable, however, for what fools him fools everyone else.

The voice, then, of the third novel of Beckett's trilogy, The Unnamable, no longer belongs to any specific being, for with Malone died the principle of identifiable character, class and function. This book then is pure text, words of uncertain provenance and even less sure purpose, by no one to no one, pleading for some anomalous, unwanted and impossible favor. The voice that speaks here knows all too well that the specific violence

characteristic of our culture is assassination by classification; and so anonymity, elusiveness, disappearance, disembodiment (close to Joyce's "silence, exile and cunning") -- all synonyms for "textuality" -- are the necessary recourses, guaranteeing nothing, for even the slightest chance of survival.

3. The Rules of the Game: Leiris

The individual is for Leiris a no less permeable, unstable and questionable entity than it was for Beckett. For Leiris, however, the "subject in question" is no fictional construct, even a transparent one, but the author and narrator himself. The uprootedness, derealization and loss are accrued and intensified compared with writers who are willing or able to set up intermediaries between themselves and emptiness. For here Leiris strikes a telling blow at Western man where he is seemingly most assured and at home, in the very notion, guaranteed in countless journals, diaries, life stories, that there still remains, whatever else has been swept away, the remnant and consolation of a self -- about which something can be known, claimed, represented, and written.

What has dissolved in Tzara is the myth that poetry is still possible in a bourgeois world that knows no real exception to the universality of its stifling commercial rule and logic; and we have seen how Beckett takes down the myth of the possibility for individuality and character in a culture whose basic rule it is to destroy whatever can be found. For Leiris it is life itself which dissolves into the myth and crypt of art.

My essay proceeds to bring out this unreality and impossibility of life along the axis of a structurally irreconcilable opposition that I apply to Leiris' work between a subjective pole of pure imaginative and emotional freedom and an objective one of social constraint and conformity. That "mirror stage," as Lacan has described it, where you discover yourself as reflected for others, is never terminated for Leiris; for that self ripe for alienation and exploitation that is all the mirror can reflect is an entity that Leiris is as little ready and able to accept as he is to deny. That self for Leiris, hesitant, undecided and reluctant, is forever in pursuit of a harmony that remains always out of reach. This is at once the pathos and charm of his autobiographical art, whose unique quality it is to retain a childlike innocence and wonder in an imagined space and time, that for all its factual guarantees of veracity and actuality is none the less magical and mythical; and that "art of memory," which for Proust was healing and redemptive, as for Rousseau justifying and explanatory, is for Leiris a mere strategy of composition, or modus operandi and vivendi. For Leiris the wounds of existence are permanent and irremediable, and education, sentimental or otherwise, a joke or misnomer; for his text separates itself from any pretention that it should be granted any special status or make any difference -- that is, be more than the complaint that one man was helpless not to utter against a world that denies him the reality he was born to demand.

4. The Fragmentary Word: Blanchot

The implications of this modernity that denies any absolute or enduring finality to art or to any other activity have never been pursued more relentlessly than in the texts of Maurice Blanchot; Blanchot is especially significant for the ways in which he is able to deduce and deal with the disruptive consequences of philosophical conjecture (Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger) and historical conjuncture (the bomb, genocide, May '68), integrating them into the practice and example of his writing. Blanchot invents a text which assumes the task of responding to and taking responsibility for a world that can no longer be understood and explained, much less excused and justified. In so doing, he practices a writing that resigns pretensions to totality, control and glory, but must admit, in all respect to the countless victims of "progress," the abjectness and insufficiency of the effort it must, nevertheless, continue to make.

My own essay follows the thread of his recurrent formulations on what he has called "fragmentary writing" through their explicit statement in his critical writings to their refraction and dissemination in his fictions. The fragmentary writer, exiled from his own work, as from a society whose achievements and logic he puts into question by the very act of picking up the pen, all the same corresponds to the most advanced elements of modern consciousness. He has taken his history and philosophy seriously and so has refused to be lulled or consoled by popular myths like

scientific meliorism or redemptive art. The eloquence and perseverance of this attitude of refusal is what accounts for the importance of Blanchot for experimentation in literature. It may also account for his catalytic role in the formation of specific iconoclastic currents in literary criticism, like Tel Quel and deconstruction, that are exploratory in mood and libertarian or radical in potential.

5. The Endless Question: Joyce

This "limit-experience" of ceaseless defiance and interrogation, known to readers of Bataille, that Blanchot projects as the natural terrain for the writer is also where James Joyce is very much at home. In my essay on Joyce I concentrate on three passages from the relatively accessible Book I, Chapter 6 of Finnegans Wake. In the first passage I show how a paternal figure, identified with authority and tradition, looms mightily over the history of Ireland (a microcosm for the human race) as over the imagination of Joyce. I then go on to describe the multifarious ways in which this figure is reduced and elided in the very same process whereby he has been built up and celebrated. The deconstructive energy of this process is then carried over into a second passage where an incestuous lover's discourse is made into a model for the kind of communication that undercuts and subverts all rationality, abstraction and logic (except its own). The third moment of the process I study is then presented as the hilariously hypocritical harangue of a Professor Jones -- and here I try to show how the very mechanisms of his presentation, through

the noise and interference it absorbs and invites, cancels out any sense it is likely to make.

My conclusions are that Joyce, in Finnegans Wake, is engaged in a complex process whereby he takes down and plows under any structure he erects. Subject, story, character, even the solidity and dependability of words themselves dissolve in the sea of incessant qualification and exception that constitutes the Wake; and the reader is thrown back inevitably from a text which refuses him any firm hold to integrative and disintegrative moments in his own experience and culture. The Wake undoes itself so as to leave its reader alone.

6. The Strategy of Interruption: Sollers

Equally alone is the reader of Philippe Sollers, though perhaps less surprised by his solitude. Common to these writers who participate in what I have been calling this library or literature of deconstruction is a tendency to push the reader away from hypnotic or entranced involvement with the text. As in Brecht's renowned "Verfremdungseffekt," styles of discontinuity become important that remind the reader of the "produced" nature of the event that is the text. Nowhere are these styles more blatantly, comprehensively and insistently put into operation than in the works of Philippe Sollers; Drame, for instance, his novel of 1965, comprises an ample repertory of techniques whereby the reader is reminded of the process that resulted in the book he is reading. The process of the book's creation is indeed the subject of the book in a much more explicit

way than it was for the already self-conscious fictions of Beckett, Joyce and Blanchot, and even for Leiris, who shows himself to be so frequently and painfully aware that he is (only) writing a book. Sollers, however, takes the self-consciousness of these texts one definite step further, for Drame absolutely refuses to be read in any other way except as permanent and incessant critique of itself.

This essay then focuses on what I call Sollers' strategy of interruption in Drame, those means whereby he obliges his reader not so much to read as to wonder what reading is all about. By excluding his audience in advance from any continuous involvement in the text, in a series of cunningly prearranged disturbances, Sollers means to exile his reader from any comfortable experience of the text, and, from this distance, to become curious (as only the disturbed are) about the premises under which reading, and a fortiori, thinking and writing take place in our culture.

With Drame literature moves over definitively, even programmatically into a territory that had already been explored by the other experimental writers in our network, -- where it no longer matters exactly what words are said because what is being shown is that process that permits their saying. The words then tend toward becoming interchangeable, modifiable and unreliable -- they point to a kind of noise, cry, sub or para-text, or to that invisible, indeterminate but compelling world, for instance, that is the miracle that Artaud puts us into contact with in his Rodez notebooks, -- where we become aware not so much of someone's thoughts as of thought itself.

7. A Deconstructed Epiphany: Des Forêts

Louis-René Des Forêts' masterful novel and tour-de-force, Le Bayard, of 1946, makes reading and writing just as problematic and questionable in its own way as Sollers' later Drame. The problem of motivation is uppermost here, for the text of Des Forêts' unnamed narrator is strangely pretext for the expression and satisfaction of needs that turn out to be rather human-all-too-human than eclectic and literary, as the literal dimension of these words is elided in favor of an image of their speaker and listener. For just as the subject of the book is man's infinite capacity to deceive others as well as himself, the signified of these signifiers is always their speaker's need to have others believe in his version of reality, or at least to listen to it until he has accomplished his purpose.

In this essay I discuss the cultural, social and political etiology and ramifications of the narrator's malady, a compulsive need to talk, and I describe the ways in which the author builds this metaphor for the human condition into a device that subverts and derails the reader's involvement in and reaction to the text. In the end author and reader stand gaping at one another, as it were, across an emptiness where once there was a text. The mysterious operation of this book is more to finish with author and reader than to be finished by them.

Notes

- 1 Jaques Derrida, Writing and Difference, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 24.

- 2 David Carroll, The Subject in Question: The Languages of Theory and the Strategies of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 169-200.

- 3 Théorie d'Ensemble (Paris: Seuil, 1968), where these philosophers and novelists are all "working" together.

- 4 Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 22-24.

- 5 Nothing, however, inherently limits the deconstructive "method" to any specific age, as two far-ranging (Renaissance, Baroque, 18th century, even early Christian) recent treatments show: Ralph Flores, The Rhetoric of Doubtful Authority, Deconstructive Readings of Self-Question-Narratives, St. Augustine to Faulkner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); G. Douglas Atkins, Reading Deconstruction, Deconstructive Readings (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983). Derrida, questioned in Positions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), tr. Alan Bass, about "the relation of your work to the textual work called 'literary'," explains the special attention he has given the moderns, for it is they who have taught us how to read those who anticipated them: "Yes, it is incontestable that certain texts classed as 'literary' have seemed to me to operate breaches or infractions at the most advanced points. Artaud, Bataille, Mallarmé, Sollers. Why? At least for the reason that induces us to suspect the denomination 'literature' These texts operate, in their very movement, the demonstration and practical deconstruction of the representation of what was done with literature, it being well understood that long before these 'modern' texts a certain literary practice was able to operate . . . against this representation. But it is on the basis of these last texts . . . that one can best reread . . . the law of the previous fissures." Derrida, like Blanchot who "taught him how to read them" (see note 9 below), finds those moderns most relevant who make the very existence of their literature problematic; for their works already constitute bold deconstructions of the 'literature' of the past.

- 6 Wallace Martin, in his "Introduction" to The Yale Critics:

Deconstruction in America, cites Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller in this connection. The latter he sees making the "argument that literature demystifies or deconstructs all attempts to accord it a special status. . ." (p. xxviii).

7

Donald G. Marshall, "History, Theory and Influence: Yale Critics as Readers of Maurice Blanchot," in The Yale Critics, p. 146: "Blanchot begins his inquiry with those for whom writing is a question."

8

Atkins, Reading Deconstruction, p. 1: "Inaugurated in America in 1966 by Jacques Derrida's devastating critique of Lévi-Strauss at a Johns Hopkins Symposium, deconstruction has become the critical rage. . . ." However at that meeting Derrida uses the word only once, and not very notably: "It is a question of putting expressly and systematically the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself." ("Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in The Structuralist Controversy, ed. by Macksey and Donato, [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972], p. 252, preferring the more ludic term "free-play" which punctuates his speech. Thus deconstruction turns out to be, a little like conversion, a retrospective science. Derrida's exposition of what he calls "a general strategy of deconstruction" waits for the later Positions, p. 41, where he makes of it simultaneously an extension and overturning of Hegelian dialectic, without however the controversial moment of synthesis, which would only constitute a new order to deny. We more reread the Hegelian page, than definitively turn it, since by "turning the page," or pretending to, we merely stay in the same logocentric, phonocentric, metaphysics and tyranny of presence that we have not escaped by merely changing its vocabulary. Those "certain marks" (p. 42), Derrida's often interchangeable indications or signs that are meant to point to no real referent ("hymen," "trace," "supplement," "écart," "dissemination," "pharmakon" . . .) then operate in deconstruction to "resist and disorganize" the dialectical oppositions (e.g. "true-false," "real-illusory," "good-bad," "bourgeois-proletariat") which they continue to "inhabit" (p. 43) but where they "can no longer be included. . . without ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics. . ." (p. 43). Georges Bataille probably said as much in the strange motto, cited frequently by Blanchot and Sollers, "il faut lever l'interdit sans le supprimer." It should be noted also that here Derrida may be hypostatizing a notion of deconstruction that functions more innocently elsewhere. For Paul Ricoeur, for example, deconstruction works in harmony with other terms like demystification and demythologization as elements in what he calls our modern "task of consciousness" that we are led to through a "hermeneutics of suspicion." Cf. The Conflict of Interpretations, Essays in

Hermeneutics, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974). Ricoeur has, of course, been an articulate opponent of Derrida, and the philosophy of difference he stands for, for a generation now. The Derridean (Nietzschean and Freudian) fragmentation of the subject constitutes, for instance, for Ricoeur, the challenge that man must accept to reformulate his identity on more enlightened grounds. The subject, for Ricoeur, is like the morality of Kant, open to debate and even modification, but certainly not to refutation, for we simply cannot live without it.

9 François Brémond, "Derrida et Blanchot," in Les Fins de l'Homme, à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida, Colloque de Cerisy (Paris: Galilée, 1981), pp. 214-218; and, cited by Donald G. Marshall (Yale Critics, p. 136), Derrida's pronouncement on Blanchot, from "Pas," in a special issue of Gramma, is unequivocal in its praise: ". . . never so much as today have I pictured him so far ahead of us. He waits for us, still to come, to be read and re-read even by those who have been doing it since they knew how to read and thanks to him." (tr. Marshall); cf. also Derrida's essay on Blanchot (and Jacques Ehrmann), "Living on/Border Lines," in Deconstruction and Criticism, ed. Bloom et al (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 76-176.

10 The Yale Critics, pp. 135-155.

11 Geoffrey Hartman, "Maurice Blanchot: Philosopher-Novelist," Chicago Review 15 (1961), pp. 1-18.

12 Paul de Man, "Maurice Blanchot," in Modern French Criticism, ed. Simon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 256.

13 "What he saw, the garden, the winter trees, the wall of a house; while he looked, no doubt in the way a child does, at his play area, he got bored and slowly looked higher toward the ordinary sky, with the clouds, the grey light, the day flat and without distance. What happened then: the sky, the same sky, suddenly opened, black and absolutely empty, revealing (as if the window had been broken) such an absence that everything is since forever and for forever lost, to the point at which there was affirmed and dispersed there the vertiginous knowledge that nothing is what there is there, and especially nothing beyond." (Maurice Blanchot, from "Une Scène Primitive," in Première Livraison [Paris: Gallimard, 1936], tr. J. Hillis Miller.) Miller makes the connection with Kant (and modernity) on the basis of arguments in the Critique of Judgment that refute an empirical approach or ground to aesthetic phenomenon

or taste. Professor Miller's speech, which was delivered in November of 1983 at NYU, appeared in a special issue of Genre, Vol. 17, numbers 1 and 2 (Spring and Summer, 1984), as "The Search for Grounds in Literary Study," pp. 19-36.

14

Jacques Derrida, "Les Fins de l'Homme," in Marges -- de la Philosophie (Paris: Ed. de Minuit), pp. 136-137: "Sartre's major concept, the theme of last recourse, the horizon and the irreducible origin, is what they called 'human reality.' What they meant thereby was a translation of the Dasein of Heidegger, a monstrous translation in so many regards. . . the history of the concept of man was never interrogated, just as if the sign 'man' had no origin, no historical, cultural, linguistic limit." (translation and second underlining mine). In an interesting note at the bottom of these same pages, Derrida remarks that the Sartre of La Nausée deconstructs the same "humanism" that was to comprise his ideology of after-the-war. What excuses Sartre (and his generation)'s error for Derrida is the conjuncture of the aftermath of the war, when the "human" needed emphasis especially. Heidegger made no such allowances in the brilliant and biting refutation of Sartrean philosophy that constitutes the "Lettre sur l'Humanisme," Cahiers du Sud, 319 (1953) pp. 385-406. For Heidegger the "human" in itself represents a step away from primordial Being, in the direction of a manipulative and illusory, if unavoidable, conquest of nature.

15

Jean-Paul Sartre, "Aminadab, ou du Fantastique Considéré Comme un Langage," and "Un Nouveau Mystique," in Situations I (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), pp. 148-229.

16

Les Temps Modernes was particularly cold to the adventures of Tel Quel, a matter I document further in my essay on Sollers.

17

Jean Pierre Faye, "Sartre, entend il Sartre?" in Le Récit Hunique (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 286-302.

18

Michel Foucault, "Distance, Aspect, Origine," in Théorie d'Ensemble, pp. 11-24.

19

Rodolphe Gasché, "Joining the Text: From Heidegger to Derrida," in The Yale Critics, pp. 156-173.

20

". . . je ne suis pas un lecteur fanatique des commentaires qui concernent 'mes' ouvrages -- si peu miens. . ." (from a letter by Blanchot to the author, August 26, 1983, underlining mine, quotation marks his).

- 21 David Carroll, "Dogmatism of Form: Theory and Fictions as Bricolage," in The Subject in Question, pp. 161-200. However Derrida deconstructs Lévi-Strauss' notion of bricolage itself in "Structure, Sign and Play," pp. 253-258.
- 22 Elmer Peterson, Tristan Tzara (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971), pp. 91-92; and Micheline Tison-Braun, Tristan Tzara, l' Inventeur de l'Homme Nouveau (Paris: Nizet, 1977), p. 44.
- 23 Norris, Deconstruction, pp. 56-71; Flores, Rhetoric, pp. 22-24; In The Structuralist Controversy, Derrida mentions "the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation and sign. . ." p. 250.
- 24 I am referring to a certain eloquent, passionate but all-the-same forbidding and foreboding orthodoxy that inhabits the pages of Tel Quel's Artaud and Bataille Colloquia (Paris: UGE, 1973), 2 vol.
- 25 Wlad Godzich, "The Domestication of Derrida," in The Yale Critics, pp. 20-40; and Jonathan Arc, writing in an "Afterword," in the same volume, p. 184, about Gasché's article (note 19 above), hints at an American misinterpretation and distortion of Derrida: "He (Gasché) implies that 'deconstructive criticism' in America rests upon a misinterpretation of Derrida. . . . It treats text as a phenomenal entity -- writing on paper -- rather than recognizing in Derrida's use of it something closer to a transcendental concept. . . . Finally, Gasché find in Derrida's work a deep critique of Romantic notions of the reflexive totality of a work or image, but he finds in American deconstructive criticism a reinforcement of these notions."
- 26 Finnegans Wake was subject of many articles over the years in Tel Quel, and its successor Infini, and also has been a frequent theme in the writing of Sollers, Kristeva and Derrida. The latter's "involvement" with the book is recounted in D. Giovannangeli's Écriture et Répétition, Approche de Derrida (Paris: UGE, 1979).
- 27 Maurice Blanchot, "Les Paroles Doivent Cheminer Longtemps," in L'Entretien Infini (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).
- 28 Norris, Deconstruction, p. 1: "To present 'deconstruction' as if it were a method, a system or a settled body of ideas would be to falsify

its nature and lay oneself open to charges of reductive misunderstandings."

29 La Société du Spectacle (Paris: Champs Libres, 1971).

30 Vincent B. Leitch, Deconstructive Criticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

31 Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).

32 Umberto Eco, Opera Aperta (Milan: Bompiano, 1962).

33 Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, tr. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 38: "The bourgeoisie has no relish for language, which it no longer regards even as a luxury, an element of the art of living (death of 'great literature'), but merely as an instrument of decor (phraseology)."

34 Jean Franklin, Le Discours du Pouvoir (Paris: UGE, 1975), pp. 168-169: "What is this mutism? That of the CONTROL which has spared no sector of the space-time, that where the 'semantic field' of a society extends from the space of the sign-flashing environment to the time of adequate response. . .the message realizes its essence in order and control, at the moment when the noumenal yield to the signal. . .a uniformity, that of the information market, whose only transcendence is that of the emitter. . . .The repetition of messages forms the only intelligibility here. . . .Identically, this reign of the instant conveys a control of memory; we are entering into the kingdom of the Great Forgetting, which is also that of mnemonic planification." (my translation)

35 Poétique 26 (1976), special issue on Finnegans Wake, ed. by Hélène Cixous, where many of the articles stress this point.

36 Jacques Derrida, "D'Un Ton Apocalyptique Adopté Naguère en Philosophie," in Les Fins de l'Homme, Colloque de Cerisy, p. 478: "La fin approche, or il n'est plus temps de dire la vérité sur l'apocalypse. Mais que fait-on, insisterez-vous encore, à quelles fins veut on en venir quand on vient vous dire, ici, maintenant, allons, viens, l'apocalypse, c'est fini, je te le dis, voilà ce qui arrive?"

- 37 Tristan Tzara, Grains et Issues, in Oeuvres Complètes, t. 3, ed. by Henri Béhar (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), p. 12.
- 38 Geoffrey Hartman, Criticism in the Wilderness (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980). p. 157.
- 39 Jacques Derrida, Glas, 2 vol. (Paris: Denoel/Gonthier, 1981).
- 40 Geoffrey Hartman, Saving the Text (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).
- 41 Maurice Blanchot, L'Entretien Infini (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), pp. 510, 594-595: ". . . (modernity), bypassing the conception of the work united and closed in itself, organizing and dominating values transmitted by traditional methods, explores the infinite space of the work, with inexorable rigor, but under a new postulate -- not necessarily satisfying concepts of unity, totality, or of continuity. . . the guiding thread - through this process is that with literature we are dealing with a statement that is not reducible to any unifying process. . . (but) frees thought itself from always having to be the thought of unity." (translation and parentheses mine)

1. Symbolism in the Streets: Tzara

". . .the danger of an exclusively technical civilization, which is devoid of the interconnection between theory and praxis, can be clearly grasped; it is threatened by a splitting of its consciousness, and by the splitting of human beings into two classes -- the social engineers and the inmates of closed institutions."

"That the strategic action of those who have decided to engage in the struggle, and that means to take risks, can be interpreted hypothetically as a retrospection which is possible only in anticipation, but at the same time not compellingly justified on this level with the aid of a reflexive theory, has its good reasons: the vindicating superiority of those who do the enlightening over those who are to be enlightened is theoretically unavoidable, but at the same time it is fictive and requires self-correction; in a process of enlightenment there can only be participants."

-- Jurgen Habermas¹

I

In addition to being an inventor of Dada and a participant in Surrealism, Tzara is one of the writers of the 20th century who was most profoundly influenced by Symbolism -- in the sense that he obviously had absorbed the doctrines of this literary movement and utilizes many of its methods and its ideas in the pursuit of his own artistic and social ends. Symbolism, in particular, seems to have been distinguished by an anti-historical bias. Symbolism constitutes, at least in part, a reaction to a school of thought, culminating in Hegel and also the English utilitarians, which believed in progress and reason and which adulated the historical process. The Symbolist writers were unanimous in rejecting this attitude; they saw all-too-clearly its ethnocentricity, its flatness, and the ways in which it reduces man to a purely material dimension. This disdainful attitude toward "what really happened" perhaps culminates in Proust,

whose narrator paradoxically resuscitates a "past that never was," making it a function of pure subjectivity.

Although the Symbolist aesthetic rejected history as a purely factual process it did admit some purpose for it insofar as it supplies material -- metaphors, images, and symbols which have a role to play in the thought-world of the writer. So it is that one of Virginia Woolf's characters muses in The Waves :

Now I will go to the bathroom and take off my shoes and wash; but as I wash, as I bend my head down over the basin, I will let the Roman Empress veil flow about my shoulders. The diamonds of the Imperial crown blaze upon my forehead. I hear the roar of the hostile mob as I step out on the balcony. Now I dry my hands, vigorously, so that Miss, whose name I forget, cannot suspect that I am waving my fist at an infuriated mob. 'I am your Empress, people.' My attitude is one of defiance. I am fearless. I conquer. ²

History becomes a vast storehouse of costumery, where the artist is free to choose those items (masks) which correlate objectively to his subjective moods and fancies. Such is the fundamentally ahistorical approach common to such diverse works as Wilde's Salome, Huysmans' A Rebours, Flaubert's Salammbô, and culminating in Yeats' astrological survey of world history in A Vision and Oswald Spengler's appealing but dangerously unreliable account of this same history in his Decline of the West. We may sum up this attitude in the one word "exoticism," which

for us means the attempt to escape from an intolerable present either into a past which never existed or an equally unreal geographical space.

While Tzara has obviously learned with the Symbolists to disdain history, and also geography, as such -- he doesn't find much consolation, on the other hand, in their "exotic remedies"; for Tzara, as for Dada and Surrealism in general, the problem is deeper and more serious than a dialectic of fact and fantasy can cope with; a novel can be trusted no more than a biography, since invented facts imprison us no less surely than "real" ones; for Tzara the great fiction and the great enemy is time, symbolized by that omnipresent machine that man has set up to rule over him, the clock -- which Tzara, in a utopian mood, prefers to imagine without hands ³

The Symbolists had rejected a historical past, but they had held on dearly to the faculty of "memory" with which they consoled themselves by inventing and then believing in that past which never was. For Tzara, on the other hand, it is memory itself which is the problem, since it deludes man into thinking there was something where there was nothing. This delusion, while understandably comforting and attractive, has consequences that are negative for any future for humanity; so that Tzara carries on a systematic critique not only of the faculty of personal recollection but also of the institutions which serve as a culture's memory -- libraries, museums and academies. His idea is that as long as we do things the way we think we once did them we will be unable to achieve any kind of livable society. We will either be applying our past routines

and formulas to situations for which they are inappropriate; or we will be attempting to live totally in our vision of what the past was; we will never be able to be more than alternately melancholy or manic survivors who feed on the flotsam and jetsom of a civilization and who take it for the real thing; and it is memory which is the great villain in this process, since it sets the limits we can never go beyond. We waste our time, then, living (or writing) in terms of a future that can only be inhibited or confused by the marks we have made, just as we, for the most part, are more harmed than helped by the insistence of our ancestors on giving us something to remember them by: ⁴ the Gothic Cathedrals were not created by individuals who wanted to be remembered but by a people that wanted to be saved. ⁵

II

The marks of memory, as Tzara describes them in his play, Le Mouch-oir des Nuages of 1924, are like the pebbles we drop behind us in the morning on our way through a forest. When we return at night we can no longer see these markers, and we must take a different way back anyway:

COMMENTAIRE

C. -- Ou sont-ils, maintenant, le poète et celle qu'il découvrit comme une note claire de chanson sur le bord de la route? Ils sont en train d'égrener les histoires de leurs vies, comme un chapelet de cailloux qu'ils laissent tomber sur la route pour la

retrouver à leur retour.

B. -- Mais alors il fera nuit et ils ne pourront plus retrouver le chemin qu'ils avaient indiqué au moyen de cailloux sur la route, car le lendemain les cailloux ressembleront aux autres et tout rentrera de nouveau dans la confusion d'où chaque jour nous essayons de sortir.

C. -- Tu a raison, on ne peut jamais retourner sur le chemin de la mémoire. A bicyclette or en auto on retourne au point de départ, mais sur un autre trajet que celui que la mémoire a parcouru. . . .⁶

Tzara's critique of memory is even more total than the well-known Surrealists' distrust of this faculty; for, although the Surrealists distrusted conscious memory, they exploited and used elements coming from the recently discovered continent of the subconscious mind; they therefore found value in dreams, automatic writing and gestalt approaches to literary creation;⁷ but, for Tzara, subconscious, even "racial" memory may be no less of an obstacle than the conscious traces we intentionally follow or leave. We may dream, fantasize, even hallucinate according to patterns no less rigid than the ones that rule our waking lives. It is these very waking lives that, as Freud pointed out, provide the content and focus the needs upon which our dreams are founded. Our subconscious memories, or what we are convinced are such, may then comprise an obstacle no less surely than the ones we are aware of. Memory becomes for Tzara the discredited faculty par excellence because it

incarnates man's temptation to escape from the duty of creating the world anew by duping him into the illusion that the world has already been created. These and other subterfuges -- whether through real or invented history and geography -- and whose definition we may widen to include permutations and combinations of drugs, romantic love, mysticism -- we characterized above by the term "exoticism."

Together with a judgment, both stated and implied, that "exotic" remedies have outlived their usefulness, Tzara's play, Le Mouchoir des Nuages, is nothing less than a repertory and a summary of the clichés of exoticism: the bored bourgeois wife who falls in love with the poet, the banker who loses his money in order to win back the love of his wife, the poet who travels to a deserted island where he now realizes he loves the banker's wife who no longer loves him, the reproduction of a scene from Hamlet which serves the poet as a correlative to his own situation, and the final flashback, twenty years later, at the "follies of youth" -- all of this extensively "deconstructed," we would say, by a chorus of commentators who reflect on such themes as the irrelevance of poetry to life as proved by the inanity of this particular effort:

A. -- . . .Mettez vous à sa (the poet's) place, il a besoin de prendre la poésie pour une réalité et la réalité pour un mirage.

B. -- Quant à moi. . .je n'hésiterai pas une seconde à proclamer que la poésie est un produit négligeable de la folie latente, et qu'elle n'est aucunement nécessaire à la marche ascendante de la civilisation et du progrès.⁸

To make sure that we can never forget that we are being "put on," the acts, fifteen of them, flash by with the speed of light. We make a veritable tour of the world to see nothing. We go from Venice, to Monte Carlo, to the South Pacific, and back to the Avenue de l'Opéra; we even make a little side excursion to the cliffs of Elsinor; and we end up in a squalid little garret twenty years later where the poet, out of ideas, like a banker out of funds, tritely takes his own life -- after which "action" his soul ascends to be sold at a heavenly auction to that supreme bidder in the sky:

A. -- . . . Ils font monter aux enchères son âme dans le ciel. Ils l'achètent par des chiffres Ils font monter sur l'échelle des chiffres l'appréciation de son âme.⁹

The actors themselves can't even escape for the brief duration of the piece from the trap of their own personalities, since they address each other, and are known to the audience, by their off-stage names -- and the commentators double as the minor roles to make doubly sure that we're not likely to believe anything that is happening in front of us, even in a theatrical sense! :

C. -- Voilà pourquoi cette pièce est mal faite. Quoique nous soyons les commentateurs, c'est-à-dire le subconscient du drame, il ne nous est pas permis de savoir pourquoi le poète n'aime pas Andrée.

E. -- Elle est pourtant jolie et intelligente, je la connais bien, vous savez.

B. -- Le fait que vous jouez sur le tréteau le rôle de l'amie d'Andrée ne vous donne pas le droit de croire que vous l'êtes en réalité.

A. -- Mais elle pourrait bien l'être, en dehors de l'action, en dehors de la scène, dans la réalité vrais, qu'en savez vous?

C. -- Oh! c'est ennuyeux, toujours la même discussion sur la différence entre le théâtre et la réalité.¹⁰

This handkerchief made of clouds is not one you could put in your pocket. This is a world of shadow, not of substance; these actors are interchangeable to their root essence, which is nothing. They relate not as authentic personalities but as play-actors who are uncomfortably aware of the artificial nature of the roles they are playing. It is as if the two-thousand year reign of Aristotle over Western art ends with this little play of Tzara's. Nothing is left of the "tragic hero but flawed" of the great philosopher in this comedy where the protagonist dies at the end, when no one cares anyway; and to emphasize this vacuity and utter nullity the poet is not even named. The poet is ultimately no different from the banker -- not named either -- for each tries to maximize his profit from a minimal outlay of resources, as their only value is one of exchange. Becoming someone of consequence and thereby winning love, or whatever other prize accrues to "good behaviour," is a function of pure social status. One has become poet or banker simply by following certain rules -- whether these pertain to the "dérèglement de tous les sens" dear to such as Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Gilbert-Le comte and our own Jim Morrison -- or if

they involve the procrustean fit of reality to a preconceived pattern that results in the fortunes of a Rockefeller, Morgan or Rothschild -- this is a matter of complete indifference. In Feurbachian-Hegelian-Marxian terms one is alienated because one has located one's identity outside of oneself. The poet is therefore interchangeable with the banker; the aesthete with the phillistine. The banker has only to obey a different set of rules, in particular the hallowed revolutionary-mystic maxim, "the more you have the less you are"; he has only to lose his money gambling to become an entirely different character and thereby win the love of his wife which just happens to accrue to that kind of personality.

An entire generation of Russian Symbolists (Blok, Bely, Sologub and others) woke up one morning in 1917 to realize that the Revolution means the abolition of all private capital -- artistic, cultural, poetic, intellectual and philosophical -- as well as monetary; a generation of French-educated Cambodian intellectuals recently faced, nor did they survive, these same typical revolutionary exigencies;¹¹ and we can see here in this play how systematically Tzara, certainly well versed in revolutionary themes by 1924, if not yet a member of the Communist Party, dynamites all the claims made during the preceding symbolist period as to any privileged position for art. The poet, for Tzara of the Mouchoir . . . is simply the banker of the absolute;¹² he is richer and cannier than the banker, for he has made investment in securities that are more likely to weather the vicissitudes of an unreliable market. When the banker realizes the superior return the poet is collecting on his investment, he

is, in typically capitalistic style, ready to embrace the methods of the competition, that is, to become the poet, overnight as it were.

By working to destroy not only the factual past of the empirical philosophers and historians, but also the invented past and present fantasies of the symbolist writers Tzara works out a vast and comprehensive delegitimization of contemporary culture, together with all the privileges and inequalities that are its sacrosanct givens. If the past is the eminence upon which the "great" of history stand, if their privileged access to the "memory of culture" is the reason for the respect and devotion accorded to them, then Tzara, by reducing these eminences and obliterating that memory -- cultural as well as personal -- is sapping the very fortresses of power of their ability to defend themselves.¹³ Tzara here, in Mouchoir. . . is performing that operation which he recommends so persuasively at the Eighth Dada Evening, of April 9th, 1919, and which he, understandably, was prevented from delivering:

Le talent QU'ON PEUT APPRENDRE fait du poète un droguiste
 . . . HYPODROME DES GARANTIES IMMORTELLLES

Il n'y a aucune importance il n'y a pas de transparence ni
 d'apparence.

MUSICIENS CASSEZ VOS INSTRUMENTS AVEUGLES
 sur la scène. . . J'écris parce que c'est naturel comme je pisse. . .
 L'art a besoin d'une opération
 L'art est une PRÉTENTION. . . L'hysterie née dans l'atelier . . .

nous ne cherchons RIEN

nous affirmons la VITALITÉ de chaque instant. . . .¹⁴

The ongoing relevance of Tzara to the problems of Western culture is amply demonstrated by the now banal action of rock musicians smashing their instruments on the stage; and not so long ago the best among them were singing "tear down the walls." Sooner said than done, as we now all recognize -- but that need to erase the difference between artist and public, that intolerable suffocating feeling of being reduced in humanity because one is only a performer, or only part of an audience -- these demands constitute some of the fundamental questions of our time -- questions that have not been solved by being simply adjourned; as a recent article linking Tzara to Punk Rock indicates,¹⁵ this dissatisfaction will not evaporate simply because psychologists are point out to us what we should already know by now -- that we still crave inwardly the illusions of security provided by the petty hierarchies that we outwardly pretend to despise; so that we make at once leaders and scapegoats of our most "beloved" artists -- those who by choice or by destiny have been frozen into that essentially inhuman role -- that of cultural hero. One thinks of the "youthfully dead" Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, or that suicidal genius, sacrificed on the altars of consciousness, who claimed Rimbaud as his major inspiration -- the poet Jim Morrison angrily smashing a microphone against the stage that night in New Orleans, when, still on the young side of thirty, his strength ran out for good.

III

In his epic-length poem of 1931, L'Homme Approximatif, Tzara deepens and further defines his rejection of exoticism. At the same time he points to the possibility of realizing an authentic destiny and purpose for mankind; as a preliminary to this evolution man must strip himself of the excess baggage of his past and the notions, based on an insufficient logic and reason, with which he has hitherto tried to control his life. Tzara is now looking forward to a future that is as utterly new as the first page of an unread book:¹⁶

but let the door open at last like the first page of a book

your room full of unconquerable loving coincidences

sad or gay

I shall slice the long net of the fixed gaze

and each word will be a spell for the eye and from page to

page

my fingers will know the flora of your body and from page to

page

the secret study of your night will be illumined and from

page to page

the wings of your word will be fans to me and from page

to page

fans to chase the night from your face and from page to page

your cargo of words at sea will be my cure and from page to

page

the years will diminish toward the impalpable breath
 that the tomb already draws in.¹⁷

Tzara conceives of man, in this poem, as stretched on the cross of memory, sheltered from reality by words and notions that keep him from knowing effectively what he is supposed to do. The poet is special only to the extent that he is aware of things that others can't or don't want to face. As Tzara so often reminds us "the approximate man is like you, reader, and so many others." The poet, as the ultimate intellectual, he who takes words for things, is uniquely situated to tell of the limits and pitfalls of intellect:

we have displaced the ideas and confused their clothing
 with their names
 blind are the words which from their birth can only find
 their place again
 their grammatical place in universal safety
 meager is the fire we thought we saw kindling in them
 in our lungs
 and dull the predestined gleam of what they say¹⁸

This is that same intellect which has converted our world into the desert, where, at the conclusion of the poem the approximate man pledges himself, in repeated refrains, to wait:

and stony in my garments of schist I have pledged my waiting
 to the torment of the oxidized desert
 to the unshakable advent of fire¹⁹

Tzara, of Approximate Man, has absorbed and transcended the aesthetic of symbolism, a philosophy whose attractions and limitations were so frankly summed up by Walter Pater when he said that the purpose of life was to appreciate beautiful things; Tzara finds in an aestheticism of this sort not only no cause for celebration, or even consolation, but rather a pretext for some savage irony:

continue sharp fears to click above our heads
 your surgical instruments
 vague forebodings sound the shouting depth of the walls
 where we pile up pell-mell knowledge and poetry
 but from our fists clenched and cemented with destinies
 you can never take what the trial of the laughable grain
 seizes from the indecision of a consoling day
 take one step back leprous thoughts of death of vermin
 consolation
 leave to the cultivators of colors and of skies the
 succulent promise
 of man carrying in his fruit the burning and propitious
 blossoming of morning²⁰

Tzara prefers to think of man, instead, and maybe Peter would have approved, of the image at least, as a slow fire -- a blaze that consumes and was meant to consume everything in its path -- past, present and future, and working towards an unknown destiny, whose approximate nature is the only sure sign we have of its authenticity:

a slow furnace of invincible constancy -- man --

a slow furnace rises from the depth of your slow deliberation

. . . a slow fire brightens in the gaping fear of your strength

-- man --

a fire grown tipsy on heights where the coastal traffic

of clouds has earthed over the taste of abyss

a fire climbing suppliant the ladder to the stains

of unbounded gestures. . . .²¹

This fire whose essence is constant motion and pure change will live as long as there is something to burn; however small the combustible it will not be disdained, but like a fading wick will jump across the rim of the candleholder in search of more beeswax; for what remains when we have left behind all those illusions by which we lived; when we are no longer moved by ideas nor motivated by abstractions -- like words of praise and blame? Tzara in this poem is looking for some residue of humanity, some solid ground from which to greet the coming of the future, some excuse for hoping:

morning morning

morning sealed with crystal and with larvae

morning of baked bread

morning of shutters in madness

morning keeper of the stable

morning of squirrels and of window cleaners cool by the river

sweet-smelling morning

breath clinging to the striations of the iris²²

This repetition is not only visual and olfactory in its variations; it is incantatory and prayerful in its tenacity. It is a song with words that could be other words that it will take a "new man" to understand.

What will this "new man," this amnesiac creature be like -- as on that first morning of creation -- this man whose lack of a past keeps him from defining a future? It would of course be perverse of us to assign him an essence that would be affirmed only to be denied, but one can't help feeling that this "new man" of Tzara's will be physically sensitive to a hitherto unknown extent. That Cartesian breach between mind and matter will be finally healed over, as people will begin to think with their bodies and act by intuition rather than by calculation. "No I am not a thinker," Tzara tells us (and we almost can believe him) -- and elsewhere the refrain imposes itself "Do not close your eyes yet,"²³ in other words, "do not make up your mind." For when you have done that you are finished, a (dead) object among objects.

Tzara emphasizes in particular the importance of hands. The "new man" will rely much more on these non-verbal means of communication. He will say all that need be said with a wave, a caress, a blow:

hands that lift from the stern forehead the thick layer

of notched thoughts

carry to the lips the glass where worlds expand

offer alms and debase man's proper bearing

hands tense on the plank that will bear away the lowly
 body
 hand that pray before that plank of air -- unable to
 grasp it --
 telling other hands of the unspeakable possibility
 cool hands musicians of serene discoveries
 hands adept at saving or destroying. . . ²⁴

Tzara finds not only things for these hands to do, he is also conscious of reality as worked upon by hands. The above passage (before my quotation) starts with the image of a street being kneaded, like bread, "under the coming and going of wheels." Those hands, which for Rilke were symbolic of an absolute limit for communication ("ours is to touch, nothing more") or for an infinite yearning for contact with an earthly-astral being, the "angel of Beauty," these "mystic" hands have been stripped by Tzara of the gloves of their metaphysical destiny. They become as native and human as a voice, and as innocent as the desire to help another human being. These are active hands, not only praying or resigned ones. These are hands that we humans use to satisfy or to destroy each other;

hands that catch and tame the beasts come forth in human bodies
 forged in the tension of celestial births
 and also hands that kill. . .
 hands cut off
 but there are also hands that write

peace to some disillusioned wealth to others according
 to the chance of the wells we fall in
 incendiary hands
 the only ones that shine²⁵

The poet of Mouchoir. . . stripped of all transcendence, knocked off his pedestal, and forced to sink or swim in a sea of banal humanity, has evolved into this "approximate man" who, as is so insistently repeated, "like you reader and so many others," has only his hands to protect himself against nothingness. Tzara, as is apparent above, stresses that these hands are not, nor should they always be, so kind. Images of cruelty, blood and destructive fire abound in this poem; and there is obviously some type of compensation attempted here for the aseptic utopias of the positivists that no one could stand to live in. In a larger sense the hypocrisy of all the utopian dreamers has been to deny the animal in man. The attempt to manufacture a man according to a prototype that has been purified of all ambiguity, whim and spontaneity has given rise to that monstrous unbalanced figure that alone is "adapted" to survive in modern society, a machine among machines, and that some structuralists (Foucault) doubt we can still call "man." The bomb has dropped, as Marcuse said at least half-seriously, and we are the mutants. . . . Now Tzara's man is not really man either, which is why he calls him "approximate." "My horizon is limited to the face of a watch,"²⁶ the poet now proclaims; but then what makes him any different from any other cog in the social machine? Machines, introduced as servants, have become the masters

and models, as Hegel predicted they would; and the most relevant Biblical fable is not the one that so fascinated Kierkegaard, that of Abraham and Isaac, nor is it Gide's favorite lullaby, The Return of the Prodigal -- it should be rather that of Esau, who sold his birthright for a mess of porridge. A half million years of human evolution so approximate man can wind up in a third class railway carriage with a timetable on his knees:

so many men have preceded me in the noble furrow of

exaltation

so much soul has been squandered to build the chance I

gamble

in the lonely jail where a blood prowls thick with remorse. . . ²⁷

and elsewhere the clock, probably Poe's Big Ben, is remembered "which cut off heads to tell the hours." ²⁸

The clock and all it stands for here come to resemble the savage god of the Aztecs who demands human

sacrifice as his constant diet. ²⁹

Still Tzara's war is not against time, in the sense of a sobering and necessary reminder of our transience

that renders to life the value it has, but instead against the measurement

and quantification of time that cannot help but become an obsession and

compulsion; ³⁰ the reason why clocks and all other similar devices

are so seductive lies in our anguish with our uncertainty. With clocks,

thermometers, calendars and speedometers et al we can pretend to ab-

solute truth. They are Platonic ideas come to visit us in this instamatic

age -- and in the flesh. Here is a truth that we can know and be familiar

with, and can even talk, or at least beep back at us. Yes here it is in

all its naked majesty the great unquestioned absolute: since we no longer pretend to the big things, we can at least be certain of the small ones; so it is, for instance 10PM, and we have just taken two aspirins. Or maybe our senses deceive us; but we can measure that too. This we know.

These clocks that were brought out in time of dearth,³¹ we have made into the gods that we are afraid to face:

man so fears the face of his god that deprived of horizons
he trembles

man so fears his god that at his coming he stumbles he drowns
horizonless man. . . .³²

We are ashamed to face these machines we have made into idols because we can't but laugh at what they have to say; this is because, except for the clocks that aren't working, they are never right. According to clocks it is never time and it can never be now.

But the approximate man has turned away from these illusory certitudes; he is willing to admit that he cannot know or be exactly anything; he has dealt with the need for certainty in his own soul, which is why he is at once so attractive and so threatening to others. The approximate man is only pretending to have pledged his waiting:

to the torment of the oxidized desert
to the unshakable advent of fire³³

This is clearly a mask for those who still need the comfort of a disguise

that words can furnish. ³⁴ The approximate man is instead "impossible man" -- impossible to locate anywhere; because you have found him do not think he's there; this is Tzara's message for all searchers of identity (and who else would read him?), as it was in a more blatant way Nietzsche's before him. This Tzara, who appears from the East, suddenly, with all the knowledge of a Gurdjeff, all the talent and strange obdurate patience of a Brancusi, this Tristan Tzara, whose very name, adopted, means the marriage of contraries, that of heaven and earth -- he is not about to take us anywhere we have ever been before. His disguise is that of the poet, and his persona that of the performing artist he was at Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich and the famous Dada "happenings" of his early years in Paris, but you will never get him to say exactly what he means. This is because what he means is more or less than what can be said. Above all he is not asking for your admiration, your esteem, or the confession you have to make of his "greatness," that is superiority over you, which would excuse you from the responsibility of your own freedom. His goal is not to create another time-honored cultural monument for humanity to abase itself in front of. Tzara talks to his reader not across a distance, formally, like a lecturer, but familiarly, intimately, like a brother, a friend, or a lover. The human condition is his major argument, its transiency, its futility and the fleeting nature of the sensations that constitute the best of what it has to offer:

you know you will fall apart at your life's end but

you conceal yourself and come in

flower knot of ribbons of human skin

in stations -- but I could never say enough of stations --

there are born fragmented pleasures greeting too brief

in shabby hotels

where even love is only part of a dusty legend ³⁵

Tzara's apostrophe to "stations," though reminiscent of the via crucis would of course be apostasy, since crucial to Christianity is the conception that the trip is made only once; for Tzara, as for those "noble pagans" of antiquity that St. Augustine so took to task, the journey is cyclical and interminable, as he emphasizes the virtues of rootlessness and transiency, in this existence, "which we have only rented." ³⁶ As if the best we can hope for in life is to enjoy the passage through it.

The Approximate Man comes across, in this mood, as an alternately strident and tender appeal to the reader to abandon the gods of the past, those which man worships in the form of History and Memory, and which merely represent our nostalgia for a stability which is no longer to be had. Once, when we thought the sun revolved around the earth we were confident in our own existence; now that we know better we must feel equally sure and confident about our nothingness. For only the knowledge that we have nothing left to lose can enable us to face the future with hope.

IV

Occidental civilization. . . must ultimately end in disorder and demoralization. . . . Peaceful equality can only be built up among the ruins of annihilated Western States and the ashes of extinct Western peoples.

-- Viscount Torio³⁷

In a later and fascinating poem-in-prose, Grains et Issues, of 1935, Tzara is ready to describe more concretely the future he has in mind:³⁸

There will still be subways, for instance, but no one will use them because there will be no reason to hurry. Sexual desire will be satisfied in ways that are at once polymorphous, sudden and spontaneous. The slightest touch will be sufficient to release orgasm or its equivalent in satisfaction. Human contacts in general will be free and unencumbered by the social hierarchies -- which will have been abolished. Tzara has taken Rimbaud's slogan, "il faut changer la vie" seriously, as well as Lautréamont's leitmotif of a poetry that will be made by all. In this sense the symbolist theme of the irrelevance of poetry to daily life in a mechanical age reaches its fruition in Tzara's notion of a daily life that is transformed by and infused with poetry,³⁹ that is poetic to its very core -- a change that can only take place at the "end of History," as Hegel never imagined it to be, when Revolution and Poetry finally meet, as they must (for only one can justify the other), to translate the routines of our lives into endless possibilities.

This new culture will be based on oblivion, that is, on the complete abolition of memory. Tzara here, completing a critique of language

commenced by Dada and carried on by Surrealism, operates a thoroughgoing devaluation of the word, both written and spoken. To make sure that the new attitudes don't become frozen into new compulsions there will be a change of language every Saturday. People will hesitate to trust their thinking to words (and all the more their words to paper), so that gradually the habit of thinking in words will die out. This verbal faculty that Western man has exaggerated way out of proportion comes in for some serious reappraisal: words in the future will have a decorative function only -- a little bit like the brief greeting and inquiries we exchange when we are in a hurry.⁴⁰

Crime and cruelty will be key elements in any future utopia.⁴¹ Tzara, in the earlier Approximate Man had more than hinted at the importance of these sides of human nature -- an importance that the bourgeois epoch has hypocritically chosen to ignore, while practicing real savagery more systematically than any ruling class before it:

let crime at last flower young and fresh in heavy garlands

along the houses

fertilize with blood the new adventures the harvests of

future generations⁴²

For the bourgeoisie the willful violation of order, incarnated in the concept of crime, is the enemy it pretends to fight, while it perpetuates ever greater crimes in the very name of the order it is defending.

The critique that Nietzsche and Dostoevsky have made of the perfect worlds as imagined by the English utilitarians (Bentham, Spencer, Mill)

as well as the French social idealists (Henri St. Simon, Comte) has had a telling effect on Tzara. A world of complete harmony, peace and material well-being would be completely unlivable -- and Tzara's contemporaries, Artaud and Freud, were as well aware of this as he was. A society that pretends its job is over when the needs of its citizens have been met is doomed to be destroyed by this same citizenry. Closer to psychological reality is the ancient Roman world of frank violence and mass sadism.

The major writers of the Symbolist period -- Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Lautréamont all condemn this bourgeois version of paradise as if with one voice, as had Stendhal, Flaubert and the Romantics before them; and Tzara is of course in fundamental agreement with his predecessors on this point; but he pushes beyond the past denunciations and "refusals" in going on to visualize in positive concrete terms a utopia that it will be a pleasure, or at least interesting, to live in, in more than the merely quantitative sense meant by the bourgeois planners. If for the writers of Symbolism, for instance, "boredom" remains the fundamental characteristic of bourgeois society, which, while they remain a part of, they accept as inevitable, in Tzara's utopia boredom becomes simply a redoubtable enemy that can be eliminated with the help of a little imagination. "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires," and "he who desires but acts not breeds pestilence" are two mottos from Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell that could well serve Tzara in this connection.

Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, in a remarkable essay, contemporary with the prophecies of Tzara, "L'Horrible Révélation La Seule,"⁴³ proclaims that human beings are in the process of turning into insects. He allows that, consistent with this mutation, men will become so busy that they will lose their ability to dream, symbolizing the reduction of man to the narrow "one-dimension" of waking consciousness wherein he follows his interest doggedly like an ant under a breadcrumb. For Tzara this dreamlessness is instead a positive phenomenon; in his utopia men will no longer dream because their desires will have been satisfied by their waking lives.⁴⁴ The subtitle then that Tzara gives to Grains et Issues -- "Rêve Expérimental" -- is strangely provisional in this sense. As he explains in a note he means by this phrase a kind of "waking dream" that operates on the frontiers of consciousness and whose purpose it is to facilitate an interpenetration of the worlds of logic and the irrational. Dream here for Tzara is furthermore expressive of the lyric impulse, and as such is not exclusively dependent on the will of the poet (one does not simply decide to dream, though one may find oneself in a situation where one is likely to), but must await the proper concatenation of social forces and personal needs. This dream-poetry is only a provisional strategy, and must be abandoned when it has served its purpose -- when reality will have become a reverie, and poetry, from being a more-or-less tolerated deviation and the affair of specialists, will evolve into the principle means whereby men come to know their world. In the end, for

Tzara, poetry will equal love. ⁴⁵

Tzara is working to resolve some uncomfortable antinomies here. On the one hand he adopts enthusiastically the communist-anarchist critique of bourgeois society. On the other hand he refuses to be blind and naive about human nature, so he relates elements of his vision of utopia to the necessity of cruelty and crime as representing authentically human drives -- aggression, sadism, hatred that will need to find outlets. It is as if he is trying to marry the Marx of the Manuscripts of 1844 with the Freud of Civilization and Its Discontents. Small wonder, as M. Tison-Braun comments in her perceptive little book on Tzara, ⁴⁶ that eyebrows must have been raised in Moscow and Paris over the dubious political orthodoxy of this attempt, as well as the sanity of its originator. Pickled tongue of aristocrat would have been difficult for even the angriest proletarian to digest:

. . . Dogs gorged on gasoline and set afire will be turned loose in packs against naked women, just the most beautiful among them, of course. Old people will be pressed and dried between the leaves of great wooden books and then stretched out in the carpets of middle-class salons. Crystal globes filled with aristocrats' tongues will be exhibited among the pots of jam and mustard in store windows. . . . ⁴⁷

This is of course no realistic scenario and was never meant to be one. Tzara is merely stating that in his version of Communism life will be a complex and interesting affair, something that May '68 well understood

with its renowned slogan, "l'imagination au pouvoir." The fact is, as Freud came to realize with the theory of a "death-instinct" that inflects his later writings, we kill ourselves more than we kill each other (or we do one because we have been brought up not to do the other) -- since our progress-oriented society, whatever its actual achievements is bound to increase the guilt each member feels. Such guilt, which is based on the inability of the individual to exchange anything with society for those "benefits" he reaps from it, augments with each of the inventions that supposedly make life easier.⁴⁸ The Death Wish, or Thanatos, becomes more than Eros (there is acceleration here too, -- hippies, nudity, promiscuity, centerfolds, aphrodisiacs) can cope with. We accelerate our speed,⁴⁹ take to toxics, and engage in what the social professionals call "self-destructive behaviour." When war, inevitable concomitant of the aggressions pent up in each individual, finally breaks out the tension is lifted as socially sanctioned outlets are provided. Anti-smoking or drug, safe-driving et al campaigns as well as legislation pretend to deal with the problem, but only result, even in the rare cases where they succeed, in a change of symptom. "Let the lost get lost," Artaud once remarked in defense of the opium users' right to stone themselves out.⁵⁰

What makes Tzara's vision so interesting is not finally its oddness, it is the practicality of it all, for Tzara was an eager reader of Wilhelm Reich, and certainly well acquainted with the latter's theories linking the development of fascism with sexual repression.⁵¹ Our technical civilisations have lengthened life and made it easier for the masses, only to

have the average man act as if he were already dead. In Tzara's utopia the individual (although the survival of such an entity is highly problematic) will owe society nothing,⁵² except the dubious privilege of having been born. What Tzara is saying is that we need to pay more attention to the qualitative side of life, which we have neglected for the quantitative. We need to take more into account when we make our plans, or even our revolutions, than simply statistical well-being, literacy, nutrition. . . . There is such a thing as desire.

V

In this insistence on universality, this refusal to accept compromise Tzara carries on the symbolist rage at a reality principle which won't let the dreams of totality be realized. The symbolists, for Tzara, were right up to a certain point, but they surrendered too soon to the vagaries and escapes that we have summed up in the one word, "exoticism." They gave in to nostalgia, aestheticism, tourism; they rejected the crass cultural memory (history as facts) of the bourgeoisie, but they refused to let go of the "pasts" or the "elsewheres," which like Yeats and Proust, they invented for themselves to live in. Now it seems to have been pretty much the vocation of Dada and Surrealism to have cut off man definitively from all such recourses. This was done by a vast delegitimization of cultural prerogatives and privileges, and an absolute insistence on the present moment as the only valid area of operation; but Tzara, of Grains et Issues and its inexplicably unpublished companion piece, Personnage

D'Insomnie, is not searching for simply another point-of-view, another philosophic retreat or school-of-thought to replace a past one that has become unworkable; for here he parts company as definitively with Surrealism as he had previously with Symbolism. What Tzara is searching for is deeper than any merely artistic movement can express or satisfy;⁵³ as long as it is still "art," no matter what its formal content or what kind of ideological dynamite it carries, bourgeois society can tolerate and ingest it -- even use it for its own purposes.⁵⁴ The very "freedom" of the artist serves to justify and legitimize a society based on injustice and exploitation for the vast unfree majority -- since the formal principle of freedom has been preserved as a theoretical possibility.⁵⁵

By abandoning this pose of the artist, by insisting on the universal poetry of everyday life, and furthermore by proclaiming that one must take risks⁵⁶ to realize this dream, Tzara is violating the quarantine that bourgeois society imposes upon art, he is "breaking the frame," as it were, by insisting that he has something to say that can be neither postponed nor confined: look around you, he is saying, who really is enjoying, getting off on all of this? -- who doesn't in his heart of hearts, who can't help but wish for the destruction of Western society, together with the "compensations," aesthetic, material or moral, with which it deflects opposition, and its "culture" which it pretends can make up for the eventless nullity and boring "order" it has created?:

The work of defending himself that man has to undertake, and
the compensations that he creates for himself by way of

transference, by trivializing him, by disconnecting the lively force of his instincts, while attacking, little by little, the full enjoyment of life by the augmentation of the quantity of waste and of substitutes and by keeping him from ever getting back again any of this life he has lost, scattered as it has been by the wind around him for the greater glory of things and iron, so that even his smile tends to disappear. . . (all of this) leads him inevitably to wish to destroy the established order of the present world. . .

The psychic situation, socially speaking, of man, of this hypothetical but conceivable being formed of a human residue, of that which has not yet been quashed by the aggressive interventions of the material conditions of existence and of a morality promulgated for the purposes of reducing him and wresting from him whatever pieces of flesh are still alive, -- the psychic situation in relation to the outside world and to the laws that this world has created, and to the laws that man creates for himself due to the decay of his vital instincts. . . is characterized by an anguish at living in the present day society. . . .⁵⁷

What else indeed did the symbolist writers, in their day and way, tell us but that somehow things have gone terribly wrong for us? The birthright has been sold for a mess of porridge. Tzara simply takes that impotent rage of Symbolism into the streets, where he denounces

the deal and asks for his birthright back.

Notes

¹ Theory and Practice (Beacon: Boston, 1973), pp. 282, 40.

² (Harcourt Brace: N.Y., 1931), p. 56.

³ Tristan Tzara, Oeuvres Complètes, tome 3, ed. Béhar (Flammarion, 1979), p. 13: "On peut aisément se figurer la nouvelle nature de ce temps si l'on admet qu'à tous les cadrans des montres que l'on continuera à remonter on arrachera les aiguilles à même leurs racines."

⁴ Francis Picabia summed up this mood very neatly: "Il est inadmissible qu'un homme laisse une trace de son passage sur la terre" (quoted by Tzara in a radio emission on the days of Dada: O.C., t. 5, p. 539). Tzara has of course left us more than a few marks too; these, though, as I hope to demonstrate, constitute a kind of theory that will stand as isolated and meaningless events for a future that does not inscribe them in a living revolutionary praxis. Tzara is by no means the only one the survival of whose work depends on social changes yet to be seen. How much sense will Sartre make for a future (or present) generation in an unfree, centrally-controlled technocracy?

⁵ This point is made brilliantly and exhaustively in Henry Adams' Mont St. Michel and Chartres.

⁶ O.C., t. 1 (Flammarion, 1975), p. 309.

⁷ Tzara is of course as interested in "subliminal methods" of literary creation as his contemporaries; where he often parts company with them (ruptures with Breton, suspicion of Le Grand Jeu's mysticism) is his refusal to relax his intellectual vigilance: "Mais l'homme ne pouvant pas être conçu, en ce sens, comme isolé, les lois de la réalité extérieure étant telles que toutes les coordonnées par rapport à lui doivent toujours, à tout moment, se conjuguer et que même son inconscient est forcé de s'y soumettre afin que rien n'entrave la tyrannique ordination. . ." (O.C., t. 3, p. 239).

⁸ O.C., t. 1, p. 332.

9 Tzara, Q.C., t. 1, p. 351.

10 Tzara, Q.C., t. 1, p. 380.

11 Though there is room for plenty of irony here: The Khmer Rouge were and still are led also by French-educated intellectuals. What they attempted to realize so suddenly and brutally in Cambodia was that dream of a classless society, which goes back through Nizan, Aragon, then Proudhon ("all property is theft"), Marx and Lasalle at least as far as Rousseau and Babeuf, and which they came so firmly to believe should not stay just a dream when they were students in Paris. Pol Pot was educated at the Sorbonne. . . . Humanitarian considerations aside, Phnom Penh was emptied for the best of reasons.

12 Tzara's banker may perhaps be seen in relation to the poet as William Burrough's junkie, in Naked Lunch, sees the Buddha: he envies him because he possesses the internal, therefore permanent "fix."

13 Elias Canetti, Crowds and Power: Power is always exercised at a distance. By reducing that distance, Tzara threatens that power. Those that are near to us can never secure our obedience; the best they can hope for is our cooperation, if we agree with what they are doing.

14 Q. C., t. 1, p. 369. The anomalous Dada typography brings out the iconoclasm much more forcefully than I can render here.

15 Grail Marcus, "Lilliput at the Caberet Voltaire," TRIQUARTERLY 52, Fall, 1981, pp. 265-276.

16 Since I believe it will make for less choppy reading, and because of the availability of a good translation, I'll be citing Tzara in English.

17 Tristan Tzara, Approximate Man and Other Writings, trans. M.A. Caws (Wayne State University Press: Detroit, 1973), p. 61.

18 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 103.

19 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 127, 129.

20 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 107.

21 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 130.

22 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 111.

23 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 118.

24 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 113.

25 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 113-114

26 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 113.

27 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 83.

28 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 71.

29 This analogy was made and tellingly by the Russian Symbolist Dmitri Merejkowski: Atlantis/Europe: The Secret of the West (Steinerbooks: Blauvelt, N.Y., reedited 1971). Quoting B. Diaz' Conquest of Mexico: "Eighty thousand sacrifices fall at the consecration of one great pyramidal temple in the city of Mexico" (average was 50,000 a year); but we moderns match or surpass these figures on our roads alone. . . .

30 Tzara speaks often and eloquently on the theme of the domination of man by the machines that were meant to serve him, as in the following passage from a prose poem in Resumé of Night (1934): "It would be difficult to convince me that a given individual (let's take the one who is right now synchronizing as best he can his organic needs with the time he has at his disposal until the bus comes), sees, hears, feels, perceives at the same speed and in the same dimension as I do what is going on around him and that his watches, meters, and adjectives have not been from the moment of his birth, rigged by the unanimous and constant relationship of things and beings to which he has subjected the norms of his judgements." (Approximate Man and Other Writings, p. 223) The passage quoted in note 7 above is from further on in this prose poem.

For Tzara, subliminal methods (drugs, hypnotism, and what he calls a kind of "waking sleep"), while not to be blindly trusted, may be useful to break the conditioned patterns and routines that our machines and noxious social structures force upon us. These "underground" techniques can only give us a glimpse of what it will take a "new man" to really see. . . .

- 31 "In time of Dearth bring out Number, Weight and Measure" -- Blake, from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.
- 32 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 78.
- 33 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 130.
- 34 Tzara, Approximate Man, where our translator remarks the change in tone: "Unexpectedly the final wail in the desert for the coming of the flame rejects the approximate." p. 258.
- 35 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 50.
- 36 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 79.
- 37 Cited by A.K. Coomaraswamy, The Dance of Shiva (Noonday: N.Y., 1957), p. 122. Coomaraswamy does a comparative study of Indian Vedanta and the eschatological-apocalyptic themes typical of French (Marcel Schwob: Le Livre de Monelle) and especially Russian Symbolism. His approach is therapeutic, similar to such popular but very erudite treatments such as Alan Watts' Psychotherapy East and West. Symbolist novels, works like Bely's St. Petersburg or Sologub's Petty Demon (which, according to H. Peyre's concluding note in his book on Symbolism, represent the summit of the movement in literary achievement) which were written in Russia early in our century are all haunted by the theme of the end of (our) civilization. As far as Viscount Torio goes, whose statement seems to sum up the Symbolist Theme of Apocalypse in its most extreme form, I've never been able to find out more about him, though I've looked. Perhaps he's a pseudonym for one or another of the strange spirits that haunted Russian culture at the beginning of the century -- Rozanov, Solov'ev, or Ivanov -- far easier, at all events, to say such a thing than own up to having said it!

38

Another "prophetic" extended prose-poem that Tzara wrote in close proximity to Grains et Issues was Personnage d'Insomnie. In the latter text men are envisioned as metamorphosing in trees or other forms of plant life. This is nature's revenge on man for his colossal pride and the negligent way he has handled his world: "car les lis végétales, malgré tout, ne s'exprimaient que dans leur propre matière selon une conscience dont l'essentiel échappe encore aux hommes qui, depuis longtemps, avaient oublié la leur et confirme les volontés d'autonomie de la nature que l'homme, qui s'en est profondément détaché, considérera toujours comme une insulte perpétuelle à son désir de tout accaparer." (O. C., t. 3, p. 207). Personnage d'Insomnie, a consummate tour-de-force, lyrical, dense, persuasive and utterly unique, is a bit of a bibliographical enigma. It was never published in Tzara's lifetime, by conscious decision, according to H. Béhar (O. C., t. 3, pp. 561-2), who examines one-by-one the possible motives Tzara had in withholding it from the public, but finds none of them sufficient.

39

This interpenetration of life and poetry is Tzara's fundamental message, refined, repeated and clarified all through his career, not only in his poetry, but in his persistent critical production which incessantly turns on the problems and prospects of finding and preserving the poetic quality in everyday life. A few quotes may be detached almost at random, from a life's work that says, in the end, nothing else: "Toute oeuvre poétique elle-même, en tant qu'expérience, n'est pas uniquement un produit de la raison ou de l'imagination, elle n'est valable que si elle a été vecue. L'image poétique est un produit de la connaissance; or, la connaissance ne peut être une leçon qu'il faut avoir apprise, elle doit être prise au monde extérieur, c'est-à-dire résulter d'une action plus or moins violente sur la réalité qui nous entoure. Toute création est donc, pour le poète, une conquête, une affirmation combative de sa conscience." ("Les Écluses de la Poesie," O.C., t. 5, p. 95); "Le poète non seulement vit l'histoire, mais en partie il la détermine. Pour lui, l'existence elle-même est un phénomène poétique à l'inverse de ceux pour qui écrire des poèmes constitue une profession." (p. 109).

40

Grains et Issues, O. C., t. 3. For the last page or so I've been paraphrasing parts of pp. 9-25.

41

The Marquis de Sade's astounding pamphlet, "Français Encore Un Effort Pour Devenir Vraiment Républicains," figures prominently in surrealist political thought. See, for instance, "L'Utopie Sociale du Marquis de Sade," by Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, in his Oeuvres Complètes, t. 1, ed. by M. Thivolet (Gallimard, 1974), pp. 261-265. See also notes 43 and 44 below.

42 Tzara, Approximate Man, p. 35.

43 Gilbert-Lecomte edited, along with René Daumal and René de Reneville an influential review, Le Grand Jeu, during the early 30's, where this essay first appeared. It has recently resurfaced in the Fata Morgana anthology (10/18) and in the Oeuvres Complètes of Gilbert-Lecomte. The group of the Grand Jeu, dissatisfied with what they considered to be the reigning materialism, but agreeing in principle with the Surrealists about the importance of dreams, the present moment and spontaneity, attempted to astralize or spiritualize Surrealism especially by importing Eastern religion and philosophy. René Daumal, for instance, made himself into a proficient scholar of Sanskrit, and he is the author of the posthumous Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing, trans. Shattuck, and somewhat of a "hippie classic" in America of the 60's. From Surrealism the road led, although not of course straight, to Woodstock. . . .

44 For Gilbert-Lecomte, we no longer dream because, being no longer human we will no longer feel the pang of desire; for Tzara the oneiric faculty will dry up because we won't need to dream, our desires having been satisfied by our activities. In either case the days of dreams are numbered. . . Tzara, Q.C., t. 3, p. 16: "Le sommeil tournera vide et sec car les fées ne viendront plus concasser les pierres de l'existence avec leurs vis d'Archimède, les désirs étant comblés pendant le temps de veille."

45 This "love," unlike the "amour fou" Breton evoked so hauntingly (L'Amour Fou, Gallimard, 1937) involves no mystical or seemingly predestined encounter between two people meant to meet at a certain astral and earthly conjuncture; its nature, instead, is to be indistinguishable, like Tzara's ideal of poetry, from the pulse of life itself. For Tzara, we won't so much find love and poetry as breathe it. Tzara, worthy like a very few others (Eluard, Aragon, Neruda) of the name "Communist poet," needs a love and an art that rises above particulars: "Sous une forme bien différente de celle qui nous apparaît comme telle, la poésie deviendra acte unaniment employé et exercé, principal moyen de connaissance, quand elle aura transpercé le stade de champ d'observation et de deviation spécialisée, voisine du délire et de la simulation, qu'elle occupe encore, pour suivre son destin révolutionnaire qui se confondra avec celui de l'amour." (Tzara, Q.C., t. 3, p. 103).

46 Tristan Tzara, L'Inventeur de l'homme nouveau (Paris: Nizet, 1977), p. 78: "il a du faire hausser bien des épaules de Paris

à Moscou." Micheline Tison-Braun, deeply versed in the literature and lore of Dada and Surrealism, is a splendid student of the specifically poetic side of Tzara's project, which she ingeniously isolates. She is not so satisfactory, however, as a commentator on his theory, which she insists on demarcating I think a little too neatly from his practice. She is eloquent and clever, for instance, on the logical paradoxes and contradictions between Tzara's (or any) revolutionary theory and the living practice of poetry. But she fails to see that for Tzara theory and practice are inextricably intertwined, like flesh and bone on a living organism, and that cutting one away from the other means only you are dealing with a corpse. In the prose-poetry especially, theoretical pronouncement alternates with lyrical effusion, often within the same paragraph or sentence. Tison-Braun, attached as she is to a concept of the work of art, owing much to Malraux, as expression of a "human essence," is perhaps badly placed to sympathize with the wilder ideas and passions of such as Tzara, for whom the real human is an entity yet to be created.

47 Tzara, "Seed and Bran," in Approximate Man, p. 217.

48 cf. Jean Baudrillard, La Société de Consommation (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), where a major thesis is that the true function of publicity in our societies is not so much to sell the product as to ease the guilt, inherited from our Puritan-Christian tradition, we have at consuming it. Baudrillard's later book, L'Échange Symbolique et la Mort (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) is largely concerned with what he considers to be the unilateral relations between modern states, that give all, and their citizenry who can give nothing in return except their lives.

49 The metaphor of speed, rapid transformation and metamorphosis is one of the constants of Tzara's critical and poetic vocabulary. Tzara's play, La Fuite (Paris: Gallimard, 1947) comprises one of his more systematic expositions of this philosophy of "permanent change." Michel Leiris' enthusiastic introduction to Tzara's text could well describe his own project as well as the poet's: "Le thème directeur en est ce déchirement, ce divorce constant, cette séparation qui répond au mouvement même de la vie. Fuite de l'enfant qui pour vivre sa vie doit s'arracher à ses parents. Divorce des amants qui ne peuvent rester l'un à l'autre sans aliéner leur liberté et qui doivent nier leur amour s'ils ne veulent pas eux-mêmes se nier. Mort d'une génération dont se détache peu à peu, pour monter à son tour, une génération nouvelle. Fuite de chaque être vivant, qui se sépare des autres, souffre lui-même et fait souffrir, mais ne peut faire autrement parce que pour se réaliser il lui faut une certaine solitude. Fuite des hommes. Fuite des saisons. Fuite du temps. Cours implacable des choses, qui poursuit son

mouvement de roue. Fuite historique enfin: exode, dérouté, dispersion de tous et de toutes à travers l'anonymat des routes et dans le brouhaha des gares où se coudoient civils et militaires. Faillite, effondrement, confusion, parce qu'il faut ce désarroi total pour que puisse renaître une autre société impliquant d'autres relations entre les hommes, entre les femmes, entre les femmes et les hommes." (extract from Leiris' "presentation," 21 janv. 1946, Theatre du Vieux Colombier -- Tzara, O.C., t. 3, p. 623). Among contemporaries J.M.G. Le Clézio assumes perhaps most obdurately and masterfully the mantle of this "tradition of the transitory" so intrinsic to Dada-Surrealism, in a series of remarkably provocative but unclassifiable "fictions." See, for instance, directly pertinent to the "fuite en avant" praised by Leiris above, Le Livre des Fuites (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). That speed, and the accelerating tempo at which we are all obliged to live, is not always libertarian in its implications is one of the telling points made recently by Paul Virilio; for instance in Vitesse et Politique (Paris: Galilée, 1977), where speed is seen as the fundamental strategy of established (military) power to allow its subject populations time only for conditioned reaction, not calm reflection.

50

Antonin Artaud, Oeuvres Complètes, t. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), pp. 247-251; cf. also Gilbert-Lecomtes (dead at 36 of an overdose) hilariously Swiftian statement on the issue, "Monsieur Morphée empoisonneur publique," in Oeuvres Complètes, t.1, pp. 118-129.

51

It is most unlikely that Tzara would have followed, however, Reich into the further reaches of his sexual pilgrimage. For the former sexual desire would change in nature and quality in a better world, whereas for the latter this was an unalterable quantity or energy that could only be repressed or liberated. Among Freud's students Tzara was perhaps most profoundly influenced by Otto Rank, and, specifically, his idea of "birth-trauma." The latter concept enabled Tzara to rationalize certain connections between primitive culture and a meaningful direction for modern art, on the basis of a shared experience of terror or recoil at the fact of living.

52

Tzara expresses this millennial aspiration of a consciousness that that is liberated from debt very memorably in the final two lines of a late (posthumously published) poem from 40 Chansons et Déchansons, O.C., t. 4, p. 280:

je dis comme je vis
je vois comme la voix
je prends comme j'offre
ma vie est ainsi

je ne dois rien à personne
je dois tout à tous les hommes

53 Tzara distinguishes Dada from Cubism and Futurism on precisely these grounds: "On sait que aussi bien les Cubistes que les Futuristes ont employé des éléments de la réclame, phénomène moderne, en tant que composantes plastiques ou valeurs poétiques. Dada, lui aussi, a usé de la réclame, mais non pas comme d'un alibi, d'une allusion, d'une matière utilisable à des fins suggestives ou esthétiques. . . la signification des œuvres dada prenait le pas sur toute préoccupation esthétique ou moralisatrice. . . Dada ne prêchait pas, car il n'avait pas de théorie de défendre, il montrait des vérités en action et c'est comme action que désormais il faudra considérer ce que l'on nomme communément art ou poésie." ("Dada Contre Art," Q.C., t. 5, pp. 354-355). Tzara rejected Breton and Surrealism eventually on grounds very similar to these, especially in his intransigent lecture at the Sorbonne, "Le surréalisme et l'après-guerre," (Q.C., t. 5, pp. 59-105) which probably comprises one of the most severe (and intelligent) judgments ever pronounced by a major living writer on another. René Daumal, replying to Breton's criticisms in the Second Manifesto of Surrealism of the Grand Jeu venture, had also taxed Breton with being overly interested in his place in the history of literature, in "Lettre ouverte à André Breton," L'Evidence Absurde (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), pp. 153-159. The enormous anger at Breton, on the part of Tzara as well as Daumal, indicates of course the equally enormous respect they had for him.

54 See my introduction, pp. 13-16.

55 This argument is equally valid for the lottery and gambling, surely by no mere coincidence increasingly sponsored or sanctioned by the State: wealth is preserved as a theoretical possibility, and reduced to a merely financial dimension for the impoverished (in so many ways) masses.

56 The invocation of risk and peril is a passionate and convincing repair in Tzara's many studies of other poets (especially the "poètes damnés" and the Romantics) that comprise Les Écluses de la Poésie, (Q.C., t. 5, pp. 5-223). These "appreciations," obviously written over the years, are remarkable, as Tzara was himself, for their consistency of tone and determination; for Tzara had decided firmly, for himself and others who made the "dangerous choice," that one is not a poet with impunity: "L'exemple de Rimbaud nous convie à considérer la connaissance comme un objet dont on ne peut s'assurer l'acquisition qu'au péril de sa vie, en s'emparant de haute lutte. (Q.C., t. 5,

p. 151) : these demands that Tzara makes of the poet he doesn't neglect to make also of the revolutionary: "la lutte sera dure et l'échange demandera la décision du sang. Voilà qui fomentera la terre et scellera la plante nouvelle, du sang." (Q.C., t. 3, p. 80).

⁵⁷ Tzara, Q.C., t. 3, pp. 46-47, 104 (note), my translation.

2. A Question of Culture / Culture in Question: Beckett

. . . And having heard, or more probably read somewhere, in the days when I thought I would be well advised to educate myself, (or amuse myself, or stupefy myself, or kill time), that when a man in a forest thinks he is going forward in a straight line, in reality he is going in a circle, I did my best to go in a circle, hoping in this way to go in a straight line.¹

--- Molloy

I

Our narrators do not feel themselves lucky to have been born; far from being even a mixed blessing, birth has been for them an utter curse. The rewards that being alive may or may not have to offer can not possibly balance out the pains and sufferings of existence: "the mess,"² as Beckett has called it; not only is there no easy way out of this situation, there is no way out at all. Suicide looks inviting for a while, yet turns out to be a disappointment, not only because the decision to end one's life, as Schopenhauer has pointed out, is one more example of an individual's inordinate attachment to the "goods of the world," and thus turns out to be a re-affirmation of the very life that suicide attempts to defy, but also, as E. M. Cioran,³ and others⁴ who have elegantly reformulated the problem, have shown -- killing oneself does nothing to alter the fact that one was born in the first place! Gestation and birth then substitute in our narrators' cosmos for the place of Original Sin, previously reserved by the Christian tradition for "pride," or "overweening thirst for power and knowledge."

One's parents then are nothing less than criminals, for it was they who committed that gross imprudence that resulted in our conception and

birth. If one has accounts to settle with anyone it is most certainly with the authors of our days -- especially with the mother,⁵ who, by neglecting certain elementary precautions, insured our appearance among that motley cast of characters selected for the dubious distinction of playing at being alive. One's mother, if anyone, owes one an explanation certainly -- and this is one of the logical senses of Molloy's pilgrimage, although this "settling of accounts"⁶ is going to be a doubtful procedure; as after an accident when one has been maimed for life (and birth, for Beckett, is nothing less than this accident), the damage can never really be paid for, so it is equally with the unfortunately unalterable fact of having been born.

One can of course, and one is most likely to, take one's parents' place: Molloy has ended up in his mother's room, sleeping in his mother's bed, and giving birth unto words -- which is also a form of "procreation" and therefore a kind of helpless perpetuation of the primordial crime or inevitable mistake. It is as if our narrator were caught in the web of a vast conspiracy whose purport is to point man inevitably toward the future and to insure the survival of a (kind of) world. One was born not because it is good to be alive but because man's cosmos is a self-perpetuating mechanism that cannot change by any rebellion or disobedience: "Can it be that we are not free? It might be worth looking into."⁷

Language, as Barthes suggested in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, is fascist; and he meant this in the sense that as soon as we start to speak (and we are all condemned to speak, since

even silence is a language) we are caught in a network of circumstances and determinations over which we have no control. Language is a tyranny; the words are all there well before we arrived on the scene and will exist long after we are gone. "Best it is never to have been born," so said the Greek sceptic that Nietzsche cites (disparingly, it is true) in The Birth of Tragedy, and Beckett certainly knows this ironclad argument inside-and-out; however, the desire to cancel one's birth can never be more than a form of nostalgia, or wishful thinking, as when the narrator of The Unnamable later speculates: "I'm looking for my mother to kill her, I should have thought of that a bit earlier, before being born."⁸ This enunciation of regret over having been born really punctuates the prose of The Trilogy, and constitutes a kind of serio-comic consolation to which our narrators unceasingly return; yet the rhetorical lament, which expresses the attitude of the "reluctantly alive" cannot alter the fact that the damage has been done.

II

The words are there, then, waiting for us, and our narrators have no choice but to use them. An assumption that it has seemed natural to make about words is that there is a referential or expressive dimension that they evoke and to which they owe their significance and importance. Our narrators tend to treat this assumption as myth, for here there is an undeniable movement of these words toward meaninglessness -- toward what Barthes has called, in his classic study, the "zero degree of literature."

Our narrators' words, first of all, are endlessly repetitive, ceaselessly redundant and self-duplicating. Duplication, thought of by Heidegger as man's original response to and admission of the "insufficiency of pure being," has been described recently by Jean Baudrillard⁹ as the very place of oblivion: we moderns duplicate everything, and at an accelerating pace because the fundamental direction of our culture and kind, its driving passion is to erase everything. Baudrillard's dramatic example of the operation of this principle on its very grandest scale is the World Trade Center in New York City, where the Twin Towers endlessly duplicate and nullify each other. "As above so below," familiar cabalistic slogan, may then take us into the world of repetition and self-reflecting language that constitutes Molloy's modernist discourse, as self-effacing on a textual level as the infinitely proliferating "cubes" are on an architectural one. So it is that Molloy's preoccupation with repeating, ostensibly for the purpose of analysis and examination, those seeming innocuous phrases like "yet a little while," "from time to time,"¹⁰ etc. results in a de-realization of language and its corresponding reduction to the status of mere noise.

The operation of Beckett's insistently sardonic and molecular curiosity on these "little phrases" is of course far from innocent. To examine is, ineluctably, to destroy; "we murder to dissect," the poet said; and Cassirer's book on Einstein¹¹ merely proves what we have known all along intuitively, at least since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, that the inquisitive glance of the experimental scientist is not neutral, but is bound to alter

the objects of his attention. Likewise those we have described as the "molecular"¹² writers, of the tribe of Joyce, Sollers, Leiris, and here Beckett, so interested in what our most seemingly familiar words "really mean," are hardly to leave the language exactly as they found it.

The real effect of our curious narrator's obsidian gaze on language is, then, to alter that which it contemplates. Language is reduced, stripped, cut down, thrown in the waste basket, taken out again, examined for any residual pieces of meat (meaning) adhering to these dry bones, and then tossed definitively into the "ashcan of history." The sense of Molloy's aporetic method, certainly designed to paralyze (Beckett's favorite word) even a minimal confidence in meaning, is to challenge the referentiality of language, or language as we helplessly misuse it, so that those very words that were supposed to approach us to reality can only snatch it teasingly farther away: "A and C I never saw again. But perhaps I shall see them again. But shall I be able to recognize them? And am I sure I never saw them again? And what do I mean by seeing and seeing again?"¹³ What indeed; if we haven't agreed in the first place about what constitutes seeing, it seems unwarranted and premature to introduce the redundancy of "recognize." This is of course but one of many hilarious, but slyly corrosive semantic divagations that inflect Beckett's text; and the outcome of this "investigative" passion for mysteries that are functionally incapable of solution is to establish a separation, or "écart," between the babble with which we fill our days -- and from which our nights give us no surcease, filled as they must be with the dreams

and words of others -- and any real world.

Yet, comically, and we should know by now absurdly, language goes its merry way as if all of this wasn't so, the way, perhaps we continue to ask each other how we are when we haven't the slightest idea of what would constitute being : ". . .it would ill become me not to mention the awful cries of the corncrakes that run in the corn, in the meadows, all the short summer night long, dinning their rattles. And this enables me, what is more, to know when that unreal journey began, the second last but one of a form fading among fading forms. . . "¹⁴ our irrepressible Molloy has the gall to utter, as if such transparent phonic ploys had any meaning other than the physical pleasure of repetition or the mockery they make of all pretensions to "culture."

Man is alienated, in Beckett's world, not only from the language he is forced to use, that is from the self he is obliged to be, but also from the language that others are forced to use and selves they find themselves occupying and protecting. If knowledge of one's self, given these circumstances, is improbable and fleeting at best, communication with others, and a fortiori, community, must be downright impossibility: we are all terribly mistaken; and that is, if any, a basis for such a concept as the "human condition," which may account for the enduring popularity and appeal of his work over the years, at least for a certain public; but what obstructs and largely negates our efforts to relate to each other is that we have each made a different mistake, as we supply "the words of the tribe" with our own definition and, more importantly, significance. The

Tower of Babel, or Leibniz' bumping monads might be apt descriptions of this kind of infernal topography, -- although with Beckett, quintessentially modern, our plight has no beginning, creator, end, or meaning; it is simply funny: ". . .I had no papers in the sense this word had sense for him, nor any occupation, nor any domicile, that my surname escaped me for the moment . . .,"¹⁵ so ruminates Molloy about what must be going on in the Policeman's mind. The duplicated, and therefore devalued "sense" of the word for Molloy, must be something like "toilet paper" and were our hero furnished with suitable documents he would doubtless have used them for what the officer would have thought of as unsuitable, or even unpatriotic purposes: ". . .I was bound to be stopped by the first policeman and asked what I was doing, a question to which I have never been able to find the correct reply."¹⁶ This situation seems entirely natural in view of our narrator's previously assuring us, "For I no longer know what I am doing nor why. . .,"¹⁷ which teases the reader into supposing he ever knew, as does the subsequent ". . .I knew how difficult it was not to do again what you have done before."¹⁸ The lack of solidarity with others in this crucially important area that makes social life harrowing also makes living with oneself questionable. The repetition¹⁹ of "to do," in its various verbal forms, has its inevitably corrosive effect on its meaning; the word tends to be emptied of its significance, becomes something that people only say, a noise they make, and that one makes along with them.

This same divorce we have been describing between word and referent may also be shown to operate on seemingly meaningful statements that

Molly is sometimes given to, such as "I had been bent on settling this matter between my mother and me."²⁰ These words, as all others, turn out though to be comically inappropriate if not irrelevant, as if one's feeling about the "crime of being born" could be dealt with the same tranquil equanimity as if it were a business matter that could be arranged by negotiation between partners who disagree! But the wound of existence is too deep to be patched over by words -- which have been "reduced" in function to a mere demonstration of their utter inappropriateness. There is a radical and comic discontinuity, instead, established between words and what they eventually don't even purport to be able to represent: "Yes, it seems to me some such incident occurred about this time. But perhaps I am thinking of another stay, at an earlier time, for this will be my last but one, or two, there is never a last, by the sea."²¹ This language informs of nothing; we would need a miracle (the possibility of which our narrators frequently entertain) to get water from these rocks; yet mere awareness of the irrationality of the structures that dominate and distort our social and linguistic realities is insufficient to shake us loose from them. On the contrary, the oppressive system, when criticism does not lead to its definitive overthrow, finds itself strengthened and even legitimized by the "liberties" it has seemed to allow: the machine doesn't cease functioning and destroying because its components have been intellectually discredited; it overrides all choice with its own categorical imperative of ceaseless, even if senseless movement: ". . . it is forbidden to give up or even to stop an instant."²² The passive voice here excludes

the reader from the problem of responsibility that Beckett's maleutic-Socratic method²³ teases us at times into pretending exists. Thus it will do us no good to ask for a more definite subject or a change of voice from passive to active -- so that the natural question "who?" could be connected to "has forbidden."

"Everything that is not forbidden is compulsory"²⁴ could well be the motto for such a world. For the process not only interdicts but also enjoins: "To him who has nothing it is forbidden not to relish filth,"²⁵ or not to pretend that you like it. These are the laws of our time that have replaced the Biblical injunctions, the metamorphosis of Jehovah and Jesus alike into an impersonal machine that renders nugatory any attitude, whether of agreement or rebellion on the part of a subject-become-object who is either tele-commanded or programmed to obey.

Words are clearly useless, but this only makes more urgent the need to talk:

Here is the time for the Tellable, here is its home.

Speak and proclaim. More than ever

the things we can live with are falling away, and their place

being oustingly taken up by an imageless act.

Act under crusts, that will readily split as soon

as the doing within outgrows them and takes a new outline.

Between the hammers lives on

our heart, as between the teeth

the tongue, which, nevertheless,

remains the bestower of praise. ²⁶

Rilke, whom of course we quote above, still thought that words, though dubiously reliable as description, could still be used to direct us towards a non-verbal, mystical realm. The justification of the "tellable" is that it leads to the "non-tellable":

Praise the world to the Angel, not the untellable: you
can't impress him with the splendour you've felt in the cosmos
where he more feelingly feels you're only a tyro. . .

Tell him things. ²⁷

However Beckett, like the stubborn and intransigent Tzara, has rejected in advance all mystical or aesthetic option; the situation for him is at once more critical and more desperate. There is only the tellable, since silence either doesn't exist or is not allowed; ²⁸ and the tellable is incapable of utterance by a discredited language that can only distort or alienate the reality it pretends to transmit. It is as impossible to speak as it is to stay silent, like the child worshippers of T.S. Eliot's Ash Wednesday who can neither pray nor go away, ²⁹ or the characters of Maurice Blanchot's fictions who are confronted by a system that can neither be conformed to nor rebelled against.

Language, for Beckett, which has lost all referential function, has acquired no mystical one, in the Rilkean sense, in exchange. The writer thus approaches his task like a penance, a strange and incomprehensible duty, irrevocable like having been born, and which ultimately absolves, means and justifies nothing. Cioran and Blanchot have eloquently

articulated this attitude as the "fall into writing." 30

Molloy has destroyed the words, but he is obliged to begin where Moran ends -- as a writer. The same writer whose language has been stripped of meaning still maintains what we can call an "authorial pose." That is, in spite of the fact that language now is more to be mistrusted than confided in or relied upon, so that in large measure the writer has been deprived of the tools of his trade -- he must write without words, or as if the words meant something other than they say, or can only expose their own fatuousness. In spite of this devastation, what Blanchot was to call the disaster, and Beckett likes to call the catastrophe, there remain still some physical and social concomitants to the act of writing that give it a certain minimal coherence. There is still a hand, though disembodied, such a hand as Blanchot describes Kierkegaard and Proust becoming in their isolation when they wrote their masterpieces.

There is in Malone Dies also an exercise book, and for Molloy some kind of social exchange has been established by means of a mysterious person who comes every week to take away the new writings and bring older ones that have been marked by unknown critics with incomprehensible feedback. "Yet I don't work for money," Molloy says, sounding like Beckett when asked why he wrote in French: "I don't know why I write at all." 31

I I I

After we have been led to the point where we must admit that language

is saying nothing and leading nowhere, we are still left with the figure of a writer and furthermore the idea of there being such a thing as literature. It is to attack such desultory but tenacious notions that Malone Dies gives us an inside look at the process of the fabrication of illusions which any artist, just like any sleight-of-hand magician, is forced to enter. Malone takes us into very close proximity, almost inside the story he is inventing, treating us to a "behind the curtains" view of the mechanism of deception, calculation and implausibility. This technique of the work revealing and commenting on itself we have of course seen operating in Tzara's play, La Mouchoir des Nuages, for there, as in Malone Dies, the fabricated and artificial nature of the inventions is laid bare. Brecht's famous verfremdungseffekt³² and corresponding mistrust of the "hypnotized" spectator is relevant here: Our insight into the totality of the process and our ability to alter it gain at the expense of our ability to lose ourselves in the illusion.

Now I think it is precisely Beckett's goal in Malone Dies that we see more of what goes into the making of literature and believe less in it. It is easy of course to overestimate the liberating potential of such self-revealing art. Borges, for instance, is very cunning in making his reader believe what he has told him is the sheerest fabrication;³³ and there is a sense in which we fall back into involvement with Malone's "tall stories" because the human animal may be incapable of thoroughly living up to that fundamental truth that Beckett in so many avatars expresses -- that it's always the "same old story." Nevertheless, Beckett's self-stripping art

here in Malone Dies may be working to raise or enhance his reader's consciousness rather than fundamentally alter it -- which would be the province of extra-literary action anyway; and in this sense I think he is in solidarity with similarly transparent fictions of his contemporaries, L.R. Des Forêts³⁴ and Maurice Blanchot,³⁵ as well as with the literary tradition of the self-discussing work from Rabelais, through Sterne and Diderot, to Lautréamont and Joyce. In contradiction then to the tradition of the invisible author, as recommended by such as Henry James,³⁶ and as demanded by the kind of reader that doesn't want to see anything get in the way of the story, Beckett's narrators have a tendency to become visible and manifest, and inevitably remind us of the creative hand (and social process) in relation to the creations or products on display or for sale.

This is then the sense of the "full programme,"³⁷ nothing less than an informal outline of the illusion he plans to pull off, that Malone ironically announces at the beginning of his discourse. By incorporating the "present state" of the narrator-writer into this program and furthermore by interrupting his (by now) transparent fictions with blow-by-blow accounts from the realm of this intrusive reality, he both invites the reader to be aware of text as production and makes correspondingly impossible a total immersion in the illusions of fiction. "What tedium" becomes the habitual refrain with which he interrupts the course of his narrative. "I fell asleep" he says as he explains another hiatus, while implying that the glory of art was not enough to keep him awake and emphasizing the

artificial nature of the fictions by reminding the reader of the narrator's own schedule: "There is no time for sleep in my time-table."³⁸ "Live and Invent" he adds shortly afterwards to underline the unreal aspect of his whole project, while not letting us forget the kind of assault on language that Molloy had carried out, by examining these words for their real meaning: "Invent. It is not the word. Neither is live."

Here our narrator explodes a certain kind of traditional author-reader relation, which was based on the latter's being a more-or-less hypnotic subject of the former, but he takes us to a place where even his experimental French contemporaries might be shy of, by exploding the myth of the author who explodes his own myths.³⁹ Malone, the writer who is violating the gospel according to Henry James, by revealing the secrets of his craft, becomes just another one of the gallery of rogues, or metaphors that are no longer necessary, by the time we get to The Unnamable.

Malone finally makes the ultimate authorial intrusion by dying along with his tale. True he has been wondering intermittently: "There is naturally another possibility. . . and that is that I am dead already. . .,"⁴⁰ and he evokes also a Hell-on-Earth landscape, with echos from Dante and T.S. Eliot, in a macabre description of an all-too-real cityscape where ". . .in the corridors of the underground railway and the stench of their harassed mobs scurrying from cradle to grave to get to the right place at the right time. . .till you begin to wonder if you have not died without knowing and gone to hell or been born again into an even worse place than before."⁴¹ The fact is that such an outlandish, though in a way

logical, hypothesis is necessary to account for the critical nature of this situation. What is being attacked here is not only the power of words to render reality, but the nightmarish nature of this reality itself -- whatever the words used to escape or express it we always wind up back in "the mess."

Not only does Malone constantly seek to frustrate the reader's belief in his creations (though this is not to deny that they convince us momentarily through their eloquence, humor and humanity) by his frequent interruptions, musings and divagations, he also attacks the substantiality of his characterizations by changing the names of his characters, denying them consistently any useful social purpose or minimal identity, and even presenting the reader, by way of (non) conclusion with seemingly subhuman or teratological imitations of human life. There is not much to do with such a cast except push it over the brink, and this our narrator does with his last remaining strength. He has stopped eating, or "they" have stopped bringing nourishment; any remaining exchange with the world is thus curtailed. This story is not to be continued, as the narrator, who is its main (maybe only) character, is no more. Literature has followed in the wake of language. The writer is dead. "I am lost. Not a word."⁴² Malone has been felled by the same ax that finishes off his creation McMann. The author no longer plays at God, pretending to exemption from the contingency of his creations. "Like you and me, and so many others," as Tzara's approximate man has it, Malone dies.

IV

Beckett has never let us forget, for long, the presence of Malone not far behind his creations, however picturesque; we are inevitably told ". . .to hell with all this fucking scenery."⁴³ If there was a real story it could only have been Malone's struggle for survival; and the world we are left with when this struggle is over is a desolate one indeed, deprived equally of past and future, of culture and Hope ". . .as if nothing had ever happened or would ever happen again,"⁴⁴ like a stage where there will be no more plays, not only because language has lost its ability to communicate or even designate but because its audience is now aware of this.

Malone had dealt with "the crime of being born," which resulted in his being assigned the role, which he did not choose, of entertainer or storyteller, by being reborn -- that is by being, as he puts it ". . .given . . .birth to unto death,"⁴⁵ and, from the other side, as it were, by tirelessly working to reveal the artificial and socially contingent and conditioned nature of his own role as writer, he has brought literature, and the culture for which it stands to the brink of nothingness.

The Unnamable must now carry on without language and without literature -- that is without words (legs) that can take us anywhere, or means (hands) with which to write. Beckett's avatar is now nameless as well as a quadruple amputee. He is called upon to face nakedly the absolute terror and inexplicable mystery of existence without the

defenses that man has used to protect himself from knowing too much or too little. He is deprived even of a name; and the words which he still must inevitably use are branded immediately as the property of others. His role, quadraplegic signal for a restaurant menu is a ridiculous parody of any role at all -- and in any case is as frequently disallowed as evoked, to leave us essentially with only a voice, severed irremediably from any identifiable human substance -- a "someone," a "you" -- a "they" that can be an "I," or an "I" that is just an "eye," as is also the case with the nouveau roman. Flaubert, and all that he stands for in terms of the artist's painful toil, and all that it is no longer capable of redeeming, is dealt more than a glancing blow when it is said ". . . it's like shit, there we have it at last, the right word. . . ." ⁴⁶

Writing still goes on, of course, even in this apocalyptic universe; somehow something that must go on continues; although, as Dorrit Cohn suggests, ⁴⁷ we need to make almost a "leap-of-faith" to believe our narrator when he assures us he is a writer. Yet this is a writing that is barely recognizable as such, stripped of all its institutional supports and non-essentials, perhaps a throwback to the times of oral poetry. Writing, in this sense, has been dis-invested of its identity; it has become the interchangeable murmur that passes between an "anyone" and an "anyone," as a French critic observes. ⁴⁸ Here we certainly may experience the eerie feeling of the "absence" of the writer from his own work so celebrated by Blanchot as the hallmark of modern art, ⁴⁹ and the "book without an author" theories put into practice by the creators of the

nouveau roman.

The Unnamable, in this perspective, takes on the aspect of a foreign object newly arrived from outer space, bringing us inklings of a kind of experience so unusual that as yet we can have no name for it. Perhaps the reason why this is so is only that what is being said is so obvious that it has been easy to overlook: ". . . is it possible we're all in the same boat. . .?" our narrator (which we'll call him for convenience) suggests at one point, only to retract it immediately, "no, we're in a nice mess each one in his own particular way,"⁵⁰ which only reaffirms this hopeless sympathy with the universality of the human predicament; and earlier we had been told, this time unequivocally, in a statement ringing with Sartrean overtones: "we have all been here forever, we shall all be here forever, I know it."⁵¹

It is no longer a matter here of writer talking to reader, within the security of a classic unilateral relationship brought to its end by the destructive efforts of the previous narrators. In spite of the fact, and who would argue it, that ". . . all change is to be feared. . ."⁵² and our narrator's comical denial, which might be meant to throw us off (or onto) the track: "I have my faults but changing my tune is not one of them,"⁵³ there has been a significant shift in emphasis. We are no longer being addressed as writer to reader, but somehow as "secret sharers" of a common fate. We have all been victims of the same crime, in the same place, "this being the place, according to them, where the inestimable gift of life had been rammed down my gullet."⁵⁴ The "instruction," so sardonically

described, was our common curriculum, although some of us seem to have been selected for the dubious distinction of swallowing more of it than others; above all we have all been branded by a name, which is nothing less than a label to facilitate our being bought and sold, in a word, exchanged.

"But the days of sticks are over": No one now is privileged in this desperate game; we are all equally naked and defenseless before the incontrovertible evidence. The Unnamable is particularly hostile to intellect, which deceives more than flat ignorance, since it pretends to offer explanation and excuse where there is none: "They gave me courses on love, on intelligence, most precious, most precious."⁵⁵ This is the end of an evolution that our previous narrators had certainly helped along. Molloy had been prone to Faust-like summaries of his disappointment with the sundry fields of knowledge,⁵⁶ and Malone casts more than a shadow of a doubt on the validity of the written word when he observes: "my notes have a curious tendency, as I realize at last, to annihilate all they purport to record."⁵⁷ By the time of The Unnamable, however, the intellectual structure, previously under scrutiny, has suffered a complete collapse, along with the particular points-of-view that were characteristic of it. Time itself, as an intellectually divisible and quantifiable entity does not survive the attack: "I say years, though here there are no years. What matter how long? Years is one of Basil's ideas. A short time, a long time, it's all the same."⁵⁸ Basil (intellect) has served his purpose, which was to be the butt of ridicule, and is replaced by

Worm, who cannot take notes, is "the first of his kind" and "has not yet been able to speak his mind, only murmur. . . ." ⁵⁹

The property of intellect has clearly been to separate and divide, to cut oneself off from others by means of illusory feelings of superiority which turn out to be based on "merits" that cannot survive as such under scrutiny. The post-Cartesian primordially of intellect, which has gotten along so well with the class divisions of an unjust society, ⁶⁰ cannot survive the weight of an investigation in the light of one of its own basic postulates -- that is, to examine everything. We should not, however, interpret this anti-intellectuality, which comes forth so boldly then in The Unnamable, as any crusade for the "rights of the flesh" as represented in our century by Henry Miller and D.H. Lawrence, and in the last by Walt Whitman; for Beckett, as for Mallarmé, "the flesh is sad, alas," as sad as the intellect.

The "discourse," ⁶¹ then, to which our narrator refers so frequently, especially in the earlier part of the monologue, is not meant as a unilateral communication to readers who expect to be entertained and instructed. Just as Nietzsche, who tolerated such "mere readers" as little in his time as Beckett does in ours, our narrator shows nothing but disdain for such an audience: "It's the old story, they want to be entertained, while doing their dirty work, no, not entertained, soothed, no, that's not it either, solaced, no, even less, no matter, with the result they achieve nothing. . . ." ⁶² Perhaps a more relevant analogy might be to Baudelaire, whose assault on the privileged and sacrosanct nature of the author-reader

relation so impressed T.S. Eliot: "Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère."

On a less exalted but equally important level, that is the grammatical, the assault on the pronouns which our narrator carries out, with all the methodical insistence of a terrorist completing an assignment, results also in a destruction of the traditional barriers between writer and reader:

" . . . no sense in bickering about pronouns and other parts of blather.

The subject doesn't matter, there is none."⁶³ As we will see

also in the work of Blanchot and Sollers,⁶⁴ what we are left with, when all our pronomial categories have been eliminated and made interchangeable, is no place to hide our precious identities.

There remains only " . . . the terror-stricken babble of the condemned to silence,"⁶⁵ that is, of those who can no longer make meaningful statements because their language has been subject to a massive devaluation. Language is no longer the exclusive property of those whose claim to the goods of intellect is fortified by the unequivocal certainty with which their fictive "I" addresses an imagined "you." The "discourse" in The Unnamable takes on, instead, the quality of a common project and responsibility that we all must share.

In addition to the "onslaught" on the pronoun, the "questioning" style of the prose, or distillation of the Socratic-maleutic method, certainly prepares the way for this development. The Unnamable's interrogation of existence is as perpetual and inevitable as it is functionally unanswerable.

The work is "open," in the sense of Umberto Eco's⁶⁶ well-known formulation because here nothing is or can be concluded or resolved, and everything invites curiosity and reader participation. The prose of The Unnamable, dream-like, insinuating, endlessly iconoclastic and interrogatory accelerates a process that was already in evidence in the two previous narratives: here where it is as if our own minds are speaking and we are actively creating this book as we read it.

Notes

- 1 Samuel Beckett, Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable, trans. from the French by Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, 1955), pp. 112-113.
- 2 Quoted by Ruby Cohn, in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966).
- 3 E.M. Cioran, The Trouble With Being Born, trans. from the French by Richard Howard (New York: Viking, 1976), p. 212: "Not to be born is undoubtedly the best plan of all. Unfortunately it is in no one's reach."
- 4 Georges Bataille, Oeuvres Complètes, vol. 6 (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 444: "J'aperçois la précarité de l'être en moi, non la précarité classique fondée sur la nécessité de mourir mais une nouvelle, plus profonde, fondée sur le peu de chances que j'avais de naître." Guido Ceronetti, Le Silence du Corps, trans. from Italian by André Maugé (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984), p. 37: "L'homme ose se permettre encore des cruautés, alors qu'il commet déjà, tranquillement et de façon répétée, l'acte le plus cruel de tous: engendrer, donner aux horreurs de la vie des êtres qui ne sont pas et n'éprouvent pas de douleur."
- 5 This argument, based on the increased responsibility of the carrier of the child, is made very persuasively by Jerome Peignôt, Les Jeux de l'Amour et du Langage (Paris: UGE, 1974). Such nice ethical distinctions will, of course, disappear from a future of laboratory gestation.
- 6 Samuel Beckett, Molloy, in Three Novels, p. 84: "I had bent on settling this matter between my mother and me."
- 7 Beckett, Molloy, p. 44.
- 8 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 544.
- 9 Jean Baudrillard, "The Orders of Simulacra," trans. from the French by Philip Beitchman, in Simulations (New York: Semiotexte, 1983), pp. 83-159.

10 Beckett, Molloy, pp. 117, 110.

11 Ernst Cassirer, Substance and Function in Einstein's Theory of Relativity (Chicago, 1923), p. 264: "To describe a group of phenomena, then, means not merely to record receptively the sensuous impressions received from it, but it means to transform them."

12 See above, pp. 19-20.

13 Beckett, Molloy, p. 15.

14 Beckett, Molloy, p. 16.

15 Beckett, Molloy, p. 24.

16 Beckett, Molloy, p. 77.

17 Beckett, Molloy, p. 57.

18 Beckett, Molloy, p. 113.

19 The phantom of repetition has haunted and perhaps helped to derange many an able mind. One thinks of Nietzsche's attempts to deal with it, culminating in his triumphant discovery of the Eternal Return, which constitutes the enlightenment at Sils -- and also of the problem of redundancy posed, but not satisfactorily solved, by Artaud, so well analyzed by Jacques Derrida in Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

20 Beckett, Molloy, p. 84.

21 Beckett, Molloy, p. 98.

22 Beckett, Molloy, p. 107.

- 23 Ludovic Janvier, "Style in the Trilogy," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, ed. J.D. O'Hara (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 87.
- 24 Sixties' graffiti.
- 25 Beckett, Molloy, p. 27.
- 26 Rainer Maria Rilke, Duino Elegies, trans. by J.B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (New York: Norton, 1939), p. 75. See also above, p. 60, for a comparison of Rilke and Tzara.
- 27 Rilke, Elegies, pp. 75-76.
- 28 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 551: ". . . there were three things, the inability to speak, the inability to be silent, and solitude. . . ."
- 29 Eliot, Ash Wednesday, section five: "Will the veiled sister pray/
For children at the gate/Who will not go away and cannot pray. . . ."
- 30 E.M. Cioran, The Fall into Time, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1970); Maurice Blanchot, L'Écriture du Désastre (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).
- 31 J.D. O'Hara, Twentieth Century, p. 5, quoting an interview with the author in introduction the the essays mentioned in note #23 above.
- 32 Richard Demarcy, Elements d'Une Sociologie du Spectacle (Paris: UGE, 1973), p. 298: Brecht felt he was successful at this technique if his audience was ready to sit back and "light up their cigars," symbol of their meditative distance from the spectacle! See above, my discussion of Tzara's Mouchoir. . . , pp.47-53 . Henri Béhar had drawn the analogy between Tzara's style and Brecht, in a note discussing "un effet de distanciemnt par lequel, loin de 'participer,' le public est appelé à garder sa lucidité. Esthétique brechtienne en quelque sorte si un perpétuel humour, un traitement désordonnée de l'espace et du temps, une donnée abstraite sans rapport avec l'être social n'empêchaient toute formalisation." A brilliant recent discussion of the influence of Brechtian "consciousness art" on cinema occurs in the French film critic, Youssef Ishagpour's D'Un Image à L'Autre (Paris: Denoel, 1980).

33 For instance in "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero," in Jorge Luis Borges' Labyrinths (New York: New Directions, 1962).

34 Louis-René Des Forêts, Le Bavard (Paris, 1946). Des Forêts' first person narrator denies any truth to the story he has just told. The reader then is left with the insoluble question "did he lie when he said he lied?" This position is similar to the one Beckett leaves us in, where we don't know quite how literally to take what his narrators are telling us, and we're not supposed to know. See above, p. 35 and my later chapter on Des Forêts.

35 Maurice Blanchot, L'Attente L'Oubli (Paris: Gallimard, 1951). Here is a case of the almost total subtraction of fiction from any normative context of time and space, with purposive inconsistency of style to make sure that the reader can never "get his bearings." By refusing and removing the habitual conventions of fiction, at the same time as tantalizing us with them, Blanchot is making us more aware of what these conventions were and the role they served. See above, pp. 31-32, and my later chapter on Blanchot.

36 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in Literary Criticism from Pope to Croce, ed. by Allen and Clark (New York, 1941), p. 544, where he accuses Trollope of "betrayal of sacred office" for having admitted to the reader that he has only been "making believe!"

37 Beckett, Malone Dies, p. 248.

38 Beckett, Malone Dies, p. 265. Following citations in paragraph from same page.

39 Des Forets, Le Bavard, pp. 207-9, actually comes close to this perspective when he has his narrator inform his reader that the secrets were revealed only so that he could talk a little longer.

40 Beckett, Malone Dies, p. 300.

41 Beckett, Malone Dies, p. 310.

- 42 Beckett, Malone Dies, p. 361.
- 43 Beckett, Malone Dies, p. 383.
- 44 Beckett, Malone Dies, p. 385. This resembles very closely the French situationists' indictment of urbanism; Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Champs Libres, 1971), p. 116: "The 'new cities' of the technological pseudo-peasantry inscribe clearly into the terrain the rupture with historical time upon which they are built. Their motto could well be: "Here On This Spot Nothing Will Ever Happen, And Nothing Ever Happened Here" (my trans.). According to the Marxist critic, Lucien Goldmann, in Structures Mentales et Création Culturelle (Paris: UGE, 1970), such "neutrality" forms the background for modern art in general and the alienation it responds to: Mathias, for instance, is to discover, in Robbe-Grillet's Le Voyeur, the utter apathy and indifference of an environment where no one cares, except himself, about the crime he has committed.
- 45 Beckett, Malone Dies, p. 391.
- 46 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 507; the blow on Flaubert is of course more telling in Beckett's French text as "le mot juste."
- 47 Dorrit Cohn, Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 177.
- 48 R.M. Albérès, Métamorphoses du Roman (Paris: Albin-Michel, 1966), p. 142.
- 49 Maurice Blanchot, L'Espace Littéraire (Paris: Gallimard-Idées), pp. 10-20.
- 50 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 517.
- 51 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 404.
- 52 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 407.

53 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 464.

54 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 411.

55 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 411.

56 Beckett, Molloy, p. 48.

57 Beckett, Malone Dies, p. 357.

58 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 426.

59 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 468.

60 Max Weber, From Max Weber, trans. by C. Wright Mills (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 355: ". . . The intellect, like all culture values, has created an aristocracy based on the possession of culture (rational) and independent of all personal ethical qualities of man. The aristocracy of intellect is hence an unbrotherly aristocracy. Wordly man has regarded this possession of culture as the highest good. In addition to the burden of ethical guilt, something has adhered to this cultural value which was bound to depreciate it with still greater finality, namely senselessness -- if this cultural value is to be judged by its own standards. . . . For the perfectibility of the man of culture in principle progresses indefinitely, as do the cultural values; and the segment which the individual and passive recipient or active co-builder can comprise in the course of a finite life becomes the more trifling the more differentiated and multiplied the cultural values and the goals for self-perfection become. Hence the harnessing of man into this external and internal cosmos of culture can offer the less likelihood that an individual would absorb either culture as a whole or what in any sense is "essential" in culture. Moreover there exists no definitive criterion for judging the latter. It thus becomes less and less likely that "culture" and the striving for culture can have an inner-wordly meaning for the individual. . . . For this very reason culture's every step forward seems condemned to lead to an ever more devastating senselessness. The advancement of cultural values, however, seems to become a senseless hustle in the service of worthless, moreover self-contradictory, and mutually antagonistic ends. . . and appears the more meaningless the more it is made a holy task, a 'calling.'

Culture becomes ever more senseless as a locus of imperfection,

of injustice, of suffering, of sin, of futility. For it is necessarily burdened with guilt, and its deployment and differentiation thus necessarily become ever more meaningless." It is certainly in response to such irrefutable arguments as the above that Maurice Blanchot, in probably his most explicitly revolutionary collection, L'Entretien Infini (Paris: Gallimard, 1969) announces "The artist as creative personality, literary figure as exception, poet as genius -- the hero have fortunately no place in our myths. . . .Immortality, hope for posterity, glory and the desire to be known by all, have gone the same way." (my trans.)

61 Beckett, The Unnamable, pp. 404, 413, 422, 424.

62 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 516.

63 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 500.

64 See also my introduction, p.16.

65 Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 492.

66 Umberto Eco, L'Oeuvre Ouverte, trans. by Roux de Bézieux (Paris: Seuil, 1965).

3. The Rules of Leiris' Game: La Règle du Jeu, I-IV

I

We have been concerned with a literature very much directed at a more or less explicit violation and subversion of the culture in which it occurs. Tzara's efforts have been aimed at abolishing society as we now know it, in order to prepare the way for a new, more just, equitable and livable one. We have thus called Tzara a revolutionary poet because of his never-flagging sense of the urgency and primordially of a radical change in the social factor in the human equation. Beckett is, of course, less grandiose and explicit, if no less effective and determined in his iconoclasm; for what he puts into question is, first of all, the literature he practices, along with the roles, assumptions and functions it involves and distributes.

Although Leiris shares with Tzara an ardent desire for social change and, in common with Beckett, is incessantly suspicious of the "literature" he practices, there is a sense in which his writings bypass the level of theory and abstraction (which they nevertheless "play with" interminably) and work instead to engage, involve, attract and/or repel a reader that our other writers treat more formally. Leiris' is a fundamentally subliminal appeal; whatever its formal structure or ideological charge of the moment, his work asks us, as perhaps in a letter from a close friend or relative, to listen, to be aware of something beneath the surface of the words; a pulse, something sexual and/or affective, a communication whose significance is not what is said but in the bond that saying creates between speaker and listener.

While Tzara may be seen to be operating on our consciousness, and Beckett on our sensibility and sensitivity, Leiris works surgically and remorselessly on our human sympathy and on those mechanisms that obstruct or unleash an emotional identification with the other. Leiris', as is the threat of the suicide of its author which is one of his text's most involving recourses, is consummately an art of intimidation, one that, as does a suicide, rejects any enduring accommodation with the world as it is and resists and defies, by dint of its own terrible irrevocability, all attempts at domestication, rationalization and explanation.

II

A fundamental premise of Leiris' literary works, one as often announced as "regretted," is an inability or unwillingness to leave the terrain of personal life and experience.¹ Like Artaud his contemporary and Van Gogh before him, Leiris is perpetually in process of assembling the fragments of a portrait of the self -- this self that turns out, of course, not to be there, except in the highly problematic "finished product" yielded more or less unwillingly to public consumption. It is surely then no coincidence, then, that Leiris' literary speciality, really the only genre he practices with any consistency, and ultimately to the exclusion of all other forms, is autobiography.² The irony here is dizzying, vertiginous, in view especially of the history of the genre -- traditionally meant to accompany, crown, justify or correct impressions about a life that was important for other reasons. This "supplementary" form becomes an end

of a life, becomes its substance, meaning, direction and content: the container becomes the contained, the frame the picture, the legal plea the act one is submitting for judgment -- in a life's work that assumes, in a view of its massive length and stubborn persistence and competence, the dimension of a colossal "détournement" or subversion of the relation that society establishes between the contingencies of personal existence and the necessities of public life.

Autobiography, already problematical and a latecomer as a legitimate literary form, since whatever its pretensions to significance or relevance, it involves an essentially secular and individualistic attitude, becomes with Leiris, by reason of the very skill and determination with which he practices it, an absolute scandal. Justifications for indulging in this autobiographical "vice" have varied, of course, with epoch and author, from St. Augustine's rationale of the positive example of the story of his conversion, to Rousseau's preparation of his earthly dossier for a heavenly tribunal; and to these we may add the rendering of Proust's life into the work of art that inscribes and redeems it. What has not changed, until Leiris, was an unquestioned and unquestionable assumption that we must have some compelling reason that transcends while excusing our narcissism, by dint of social utility, religious duty or aesthetic endeavor, for submitting our personal lives to the dangerous and slightly bizarre joys of public scrutiny.

Justifications, in another sense, of course, abound in Leiris' books -- explanations, rationales, excuses and arguments. Leiris is acutely and

constantly aware of the pressures upon him to demonstrate the cogency, sense and relevance of the stunning and often compromising revelations he makes about himself and those who were close to him. However the very plethora, variety and mutability of these justifications, that are likely as not to contradict each other, militates against their being taken either literally or seriously, except as aesthetic ploys or fascinating baroque mental games. Leiris, in fact, likes nothing better than to hold up to the most intensely critical scrutiny the arguments with which he had excused presentation of his previous writings. Ultimately all of Leiris' "reasons" can only cancel each other out or constitute an extension, modification or mask of what he has already said.

There is no stable place, value or standard in Leiris' text from which to judge the worth and validity of the writing as a totality -- for that same turbulence, unreliability and relativity that inflects the events the work narrates also infects the critical statements it makes about itself. The book's innumerable apologies for itself become in their turn other "events" of doubtful reliability that call in their turn for further commentary and excuse, in an ongoing, functionally endless process. Here there is no immutable or even fairly stable standard, whether religious, social or aesthetic, that can serve as aegis or roof under which Leiris can claim exemption from that taboo, all the more stringent for its being unwritten, against assuming and demanding the world's interest in one's life. If Tzara has been called, deservedly I think, "the intransigent," and Beckett might deserve the name of "the inconsolable" -- then we may also

presume to apply to Leiris the appellation of "the inexcusable."

This is not to say, either, that a writing as personal and vulnerable, as precarious as Leiris', whatever its eloquence, power and sheer ingenuity, can stand on its own, a more or less frozen and independent artifact that leads its own autonomous existence -- of nature of the works of Henry James, Flaubert and even Proust. Just because this work cannot be excused does not mean that it doesn't need to be. The situation is reminiscent of Camus' absurd, located in the gap between human need and nature's silence; for although Leiris' work is incapable of justification, rationalization or excuse, in the sense of anything capable of bearing the enormous weight of its own obdurate self-scrutiny, neither can it stand alone -- for it is compelled by the very nature of the traditions and taboos it has inherited and is obliged to function within, to seek a confirmation and validation that must remain equally elusive and unfindable.

The lack³ in Leiris' text is thus inherent and endemic, a void or vacuum, a desire that no entity can fill or fulfill: what is missing is what is there and what is there is what is missing. This functional incompleteness, to adopt to Leiris Derrida's description of Blanchot's text,⁴ conveys at once the essence, paradox and pathos of Leiris' project. It is at once its sublime gift and its staunch refusal: its gift, in the sense that the reader's sovereignty over this master-less text must equal at least that of its author; its refusal, in the revolutionary sense that it permanently denies to the world the possibility of filling the void

that it constitutes, thereby rejecting any conceivable domestication, or recuperation by any existing society.

I I I

This lack, endemic and perpetual, gives rise to an equally inevitable and ceaseless search. The writer may have forgotten, if indeed he ever really knew, what exactly it is he is looking for, but that only makes more pressing, urgent and desperate the effort to find it; for that something is missing is impossible to deny:

. . . L'espoir de trouver ce qu je cherche s'est, pour moi, réduit peu à peu à celui de trouver, non pas la chose que je cherche, mais quelle est exactement cette chose que je voudrais trouver. Bref, ce qu'aujourd'hui je cherche, c'est ce qu'est ce que je cherche. (A la limite, j'en viendrais presque à me demander si, ne cherchant même plus à savoir quel est l'objet de ma recherche, je ne chercherais pas tout bonnement à chercher, empruntant couloir après couloir, le coeur toujours battant, dans l'attente jamais détendue de la trouvaille. . . .)⁵

The need becomes pure, essential, obsessing and all-consuming, incapable of cathexis on any object as well as, as we see in the parenthesis concluding the above excerpt, of acceptance of itself. What is required is everything in general but nothing that can be named.

It is this very dissatisfaction of Leiris, unhappy even in his unhappiness, that lends to his text its undeniable movement and ceaseless

dynamism, although the very relentlessness of its uncompromising drive may deprive it of a mass audience that seeks, even under the name of art, perhaps more for consolation and confirmation than illumination and confrontation.

"Comment nous attarder à des livres auxquels l'auteur n'a pas été contraint?" Leiris' friend Bataille once asked; and Leiris certainly is as "driven to write" as any, and to write on. Eschewing a naive meliorism and rejecting in advance that all our busy and self-complicating flurry represents either progress for ourselves or the world, it is as if the only real purpose Leiris has in getting to, or making any particular point -- whether aesthetically, politically or amorously -- is to leave it behind; and Leiris' persistent irony and unyielding scepticism may be seen as the means as well as the consequences of this philosophy of perpetual movement that is content not even with itself. It is the function of Leiris' irony to bring out the contingent and provisional nature of even his most apparently "committed" acts and valued memories; and his scepticism is a caustic substance that consumes everything it touches upon, no matter how seemingly noble, well-constructed or secure. Leiris writes with a kind of double, or at least plural vision whose delight it is to bring out the equal validity of mutually contradictory elements. Whether the opposition is between the personal and the historical, the solitary and the social, the aesthetic and the political, Leiris' intrinsically endless ratiocinations, recriminations, divigations and inspirations forbid in advance all definite

conclusion, for the realm of this text, as in Derrida's deconstruction, is that of the undecidable.

This mordancy is exercised not only upon the elements that Leiris finds or creates but also, as is characteristic in this "literature of deconstruction," primarily upon the process itself. Leiris thus incriminates also his own irony, or his own pretence to stand apart from the life he observes, as ineluctably his motives fail to withstand the weight of his own scrutiny. An especially frequent pattern in the text is for the younger Leiris to fail before the test of the older, or the other way around, as maturity fails to live up to the dreams of youth. The outcome of this style is that a sense of doubt, untrustworthiness, unreliability and deception is attached to the statements that the text makes as well as the way in which they are made -- this uncertainty that follows the text even into its most apparently enthralling and hypnotically convincing flights of fancy and imagination. The effect of this style may be to make the reader more or less uneasily aware of the contingent nature of the work (and indirectly of all literature and the culture in which it occurs), as in versions of the Brecht-like "distancing" or "verfremdungseffekt" that we have seen operating in Tzara and Beckett. However, what in these two writers was an occasional, if important recourse, becomes for Leiris the very texture and nature of the work -- almost as if the words themselves secrete a kind of repellant that keeps the reader (and, of course, the author) at a certain distance, and from settling on them.

This is the self-erasing, self-interrogating, contingent and "tormented"

style that sets up objects to venerate and respect only seemingly to tear them down, in a double movement of creation and destruction that cannot even rest in itself, because it moves on ceaselessly to devour its own motives, postures and pretensions. As such this "principle of uncertainty" was doubtless one of the enduring, if ambiguous legacies of Symbolism in poetry, for in this movement the Symbol is notoriously unreliable and mutable, in contradistinction to its status as quasi-absolute in Romantic-Platonic aesthetics. This Symbolist "duality" may be illustrated by Baudelaire's poem, "A Une Madonne," which sets up an ideal of feminine beauty as an object of rapt worship and devotion only to corrupt it all the more surely in the final lines of the poem:

Enfin, pour completer ton rôle de Marie,
 Et pour mêler l'amour avec la barbarie,
 Volupté noire! des sept Péchés capitaux,
 Bourreau plein de remords, je ferai sept Couteaux
 Bien affilés, et, comme un jongleur insensible,
 Prenant le plus profond de ton amour pour cible.
 Je les planterai tous dans ton Coeur pantelant,
 Dans ton Coeur sanglotant, dans ton Coeur ruisselant.

Yet Leiris' "deconstruction" is a good step beyond Baudelaire's already shocking one, where we may nevertheless sense, as Sartre has, a certain choice and satisfaction, if not "bad faith" and complacency, in the sacrilege and self-laceration itself. If for Baudelaire, and even more obviously for Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, Huysmans and d'Aurevilly, a certain

aesthetic-sexual "frisson" or thrill can take the place of the missing absolute, or Symbol, as idol, consolation or guide, no such "échappatoire" or safety-hatch is allowed for Michel Leiris -- for the latter had certainly cooperated with Tzara, Breton, Artaud and others in a rejection and de-mystification of Symbolist "remedies" that, as we point out in a previous chapter, was one of the fundamental ways in which Dada-Surrealism demarcates itself from its predecessor.

Leiris will therefore subject the very process of creation-for-the-purposes-of-destruction to a consistently sceptical and critical analysis. This is a truly dizzying manner here, as is true for Leiris' autobiographical project in general, as Leiris just as commonly will analyze himself analyzing himself ad infinitum. Descartes, in a crucially important moment for Western culture, promised to doubt everything; but he did not doubt, as Leiris does, that he doubts; or, more exactly, why he doubts. Leiris is, for instance, especially mistrustful of the pretensions of any mere "literature" to the status of a self-justifying activity; and it is, indeed, a different literature, more involved, involving, concerned and contingent, that emerges from this suspicious attitude. Leiris' belated preface to his first autobiography sets forth his condemnation of this ideal of the "purely literary work" in a passage that is fairly well known:

. . . Je me résignais mal à n'être qu'un littéraire. Le matador qui tire du danger couru occasion d'être plus brillant que jamais et montre toute la qualité de son style à l'instant qu'il est le plus menacé: voilà ce qui m'émerveillait, voilà ce que voulais être.

Par le moyen d'une autobiographie portant sur un domaine pour lequel, d'ordinaire, la réserve est du rigeur -- confession dont la publication me serait périlleuse dans la mesure où elle serait pour moi compromettante et susceptible de rendre plus difficile, en la faisant plus claire, ma vie privée -- je visais à me débarrasser de certaines représentations. . . . Faire un livre qui soit un acte, tel est, en gros, le but que m'apparut comme celui que je devais poursuivre, quand j'écrivais l'Age d'Homme. . . puisqu'il était évident. . . la façon dont je serais regardé par les autres ne serait plus ce qu'elle était avant publication de cette confession.⁶

In order for the game to be worth the candle there has to be some kind of contact between the game of literature and the game of life; in particular, the literary game has to make a difference in the life of the author. The Hegelian prejudice⁷ is as fundamental here for Leiris as it is for Tzara and others of his generation: only that belief is worthy of the name whose proponents are willing to shed their blood for it. All other "texts," however clever, apt or attractive are relegated to the status of inanity -- by the very reluctance or inability of their progenitors to stand behind them with their bodies.

This supplementarity and ostensible "inferiority" of literary endeavor to other areas of more unqualified action and risk (the "dangerous" sports, war, revolution, or just plain "dérèglement") is another frequent recourse in Leiris' text, as it informs both his generally culpable attitude and the way he handles words and ideas, dangling them, as it were, always

provisionally and teasingly before himself and his reader. In order to compensate for this "inferiority" Leiris is going to have to make a point, maybe even a spectacle, of venturing out on limbs that will possibly be not strong enough to hold him -- and that he will furthermore dare and encourage his reader and critic (himself, first of all) to saw through.

In the kind of literature that Leiris practices, therefore, there is, generally speaking, a deflation of the words themselves, together with their "signifieds," in favor of a sense of the author's adventure and gesture in proffering them -- always in the context of a personal and social conjuncture. The excitement his works afford rises not so much in the things they say (although undeniably original and fascinating) but in the nerve and intention they reveal, convey, and most important of all, serve as an example of ⁸ -- that moment "before the writing" where Blanchot locates and celebrates the essence of modern art.

What draws and holds our attention to Leiris' text is not the words themselves, or what they mean and why they are said (since all such meanings and justifications proliferate so extensively that they erase each other), but instead something that by its very nature, akin to the "leap" of Kierkegaard, or the "ruptures" of Artaud and Bataille where *Tel Quel* found its stormy home, cannot be expressed, defined, contained, or rationalized, but assumes the fleeting existence of "jalon," marker or indication of a desire, vector or the expression of an ever greater precariousness of his project and his person. Leiris' text assumes a nakedness and vulnerability that tends to inhibit an intellectual and critical

response, inappropriate and excessive in view of the fact that the text has already anticipated and accepted any conceivable objection:

. . .j'érige en cas de conscience d'infimes problèmes d'expression, jouant au pur qui ne veut se souiller d'aucune inexactitude je passe des heures à les résoudre, et je m'abstiens d'aborder la vraie question. Comme s'il était une fin en soi, dont je ne pourrais me déprendre, je dépense jour sur jour à étoffer et figoler ce récit déjà par trop ornementé, le fourbissant, le redressant, le truffant de considérations qui souvent brouillent l'horizon plus qu'elles ne l'élargissent! Or ce qui compte, est ce mon récit comme tel ou n'est-ce pas, plutôt, le soubassement de ce récit, ce qu'il ne dit pas qu'à moitié, ce qui parfois (non détecté ou encore trop embryonnaire) ne pouvait pas même être dit?⁹

The only adequate reply to such vulnerability is our own vulnerability, in this text which constitutes more of an appeal than a communication. This evocation of an "undercurrent," as Leiris makes above, constitutes, therefore, the call or "appel" of these words, an absolutely sub- or para-verbal aspect, and a matter certainly more of mood, intuition and suggestion than statement and representation. The fact that words are not exactly what the text is saying may also account for the stubbornness with which Leiris demolishes the structures and situations that he has often been to such great pains to create -- as if author and text were always pointing to an indefinable but undeniable "elsewhere," and that the function of these words were to show the reader that this

place alone, the location which can neither be attained and occupied nor bypassed and forgotten, is what the book is really about.

IV

C'est-à-dire on ne peut "romonter" qu'en acceptant, incapable d'y consentir, la chute, chute essentiellement aléatoire dans le hasard inessentiel (cela que la loi appelle dédaigneusement jeu -- le jeu ou chaque fois tout est risqué, tout est perdu, le hasard de l'écriture).

-- Maurice Blanchot, L'Entretien Infini

In the last chapter of volume 2 of La Règle du Jeu (Fourbis, 1955)

Leiris gives us what he says is the latest version of a text he has been working on since 1939. In that year he tells us that during his tour of military duty in Algeria he had an affair with a fascinating and beautiful Arab prostitute by the name of Khadidja. This woman, who represents by her name alone a sublime epiphany in the life of the author, is described as a kind of combination of the eternal feminine principle and earth goddess. At the end of the tale, and on the eve of his departure, Leiris mythologizes her absolutely as the Angel of Death, and introduces her as a permanent fixture in the structure of his own life, as representing that point where myth and reality become fused, both the utmost point of the penetration of the "miraculous" into his daily life and the point from which he dates his own prolonged but inevitable decline into death. In particular he makes much of a certain vaginal tremor, or orgasm that he perceived Khadidja to have been experiencing in his embrace, that turns out to be symbolic for him as one of the few moments of unqualified communication and reciprocity in his life.

In the next volume, however, of La Règle du Jeu (Fibrilles, 1966) Leiris sees the matter much differently. Before I explain the nature of this change a few words are in order on the subject of the way in which history, as it occurs in the course of the writing of his book, affects Leiris' project. For one thing the time-span embraced by the work is large enough, and the period under consideration so filled with momentous changes, so that history must enter integrally into its composition. This work is in large measure written by history, and also at its dictates and its whims. Often, for instance, years and certainly months will pass between the end of one paragraph and the beginning of another; and Leiris will make sure that we cannot maintain even the illusion of continuity by surprising us with a series of seemingly extraneous statements about the changes in the world around him before returning to the matter at hand; he complains near the end of volume I (Biffures, 1948):

Depuis le commencement de ce chapitre -- phase un peu languissante de mon essai têtue de self-fabrication -- il s'est produit un certain nombre d'événements. Quelques-uns de caractère public et d'autres d'ordre strictement privé. J'ai noté le débarquement des troupes alliées, puis la libération. . . . Je n'ai pas noté un deuxième voyage que j'ai fait en Afrique. . . . Bref, tout se passe comme si, dans la course que s'est engagée au cours de ce chapitre entre moi et le temps, j'étais constamment distancé et comme si ma plume s'efforçait vainement de poursuivre une actualité qui me fuit. La faute en est à la lenteur de cette plume qui peine

toujours comme pour remuer des montagnes , quand je la voudrais
si cursive.¹⁰

The gap between volumes 2 and 3 of La Règle du Jeu is even more telling. Between the respective dates (1955, 1966) of the publication of these two volumes 11 years have elapsed and certain historical events have taken place which have altered Leiris' perspective considerably. For one thing there has been a war of independence which Algeria has waged and successfully concluded, and which, together with the resounding defeat in Indochina has put a definitive end to France's imperial period and also sharply divided a country, by threatening it with civil war, that was so euphorically united after World War II. For another, the Chinese Revolution has been consolidated and is in its period of radical innovation and optimism. Leiris has been to China as an invited guest, and what he has seen there has made him rethink his own methods and goals.

So it is that in this later volume of his autobiography, Fibrilles, he now looks at this episode of his with his Algerian mistress Khadidja, that he had described in such idealistic terms in his earlier Fourbis, with eyes that are much more soberly political. He now sees that there were imperialistic aspects to his adventure with this woman, and that, however innocent his intentions, he wound up colonizing her with his sensibility and depriving her of any true human autonomy. Leiris further admits that the language he used to describe her probably bore very little resemblance to what she was; and he was thereby describing someone who

either never existed or who no longer exists.

The pretences to relevance, accuracy and significance of literature itself is directly incriminated in this pitiless and exhaustive self-criticism, since whatever its formal excellence (and Fourbis got good reviews), it can no longer pretend to any but the most self-serving contact with reality. Leiris' literary "immortalization" of Khadidja can protect her neither against the ravages of time nor against the changes produced by historical events:

. . . Mais le temps n'en garde pas moins sous sa coupe le personnage livresque dont les vingt-trois ans devraient échapper à tout changement: avoir peint Khadidja comme pour l'éternité ne l'a pas protégée -- même en tant qu'héroïne de conte de fées -- contre l'action aux mille ressources des années, puisque la perspective que les récents événements m'ont imposée doué ce conte naïvement vécu d'une signification qui rabaisse singulièrement celle que je lui donnais en décrivant mon merveilleux commerce avec cette fille à la fois si servile et si fière que je ne pourrai plus, désormais, regarder exactement des mêmes yeux.¹¹

The irony of this situation is further compounded by the realization that Khadidja could never even have recognized herself in the portrait that Leiris has made of her, that is appreciated the "work of art," excluded as she was by birth and class from such refinements. The literary product is thereby reduced in status to a dimension of utter marginality and inutility, or even cosmic joke:

. . . Pour que cette image ait une consistance dont ne suffit pas à la doter sa formulation écrite, ne faudrait-il pas, en premier lieu, que l'intéressée puisse s'y reconnaître comme dans un miroir où elle se découvrirait telle qu'en elle-même enfin? Or, en admettant que Khadidja soit à même de me lire, l'histoire que j'ai racontée et la façon dont elle y est montrée lui resteraient impénétrables ou, s'il en était autrement, la feraient sans doute rire autant de voir attacher une telle importance à de simples relations de fournisseuse à client que de se trouver promue du rang méprisé de putain à celui de magicienne, de démon de midi ou d'ange de la mort. Ainsi non partagé et rien que subjective, cette image -- idole dont la fixité n'empêchera pas sa signification de se perdre -- relève de l'onirisme au même titre que les rêveries auxquelles je m'abandonne à son propos. . . .¹²

Just as the earlier Leiris had seen in his affair with Khadidja the furthest point that life would allow him in his efforts for personal communication and contact with others, this slightly later Leiris now views his trip to China as the very acme of his efforts toward political relevance and universality. If the orgasm he seems to have shared with Khadidja may represent for him a kind of subjective epiphany then his permanent love affair, or flirtation with the idea of world revolution may represent an objective one; and just as, upon sober reflection, literature is incriminated, if not refuted then certainly reduced in importance, by the existence of a real live Khadidja, so this same art would be threatened, at least as

practiced in the countries of advanced capitalism by modernists such as Michel Leiris, by the generalization of the Chinese Revolution. This situation is paradoxical and contradictory to the very core, and may explain why many a modernist is ineluctably ostracized by the very revolution he has helped to bring about; Leiris cannot help but to wish for, and within the limits of his capacities, to help promulgate change in society that would make what he does no longer necessary: "Je vois mal comment une activité du genre de celle qui m'absorbe pourrait y être classée ailleurs que parmi ces reliquats bourgeois -- si ce n'est pas féodaux -- qui appellent une rééducation." ¹³

This literature which Leiris so dramatically claims, earlier in his autobiographical career, should be an act turns out to be, from a revolutionary point of view, an act of masturbation. Nevertheless Leiris remains tireless in formulating and re-formulating, in a continual effort to match his political commitment to the sense of his writings, the exigencies of his style. From a theoretical point-of-view at least, Leiris is as close as he ever comes to certainty as when he talks about the need for revolution:

Sur ce globe il y'a trop d'humiliés et d'offensés, à cet état
de chose un bouleversement radical est l'unique remède, à ce
bouleversement on ne peut procéder sans violence. Jugeant ainsi,
je donne raison aux révolutionnaires. ¹⁴

The idea of the need for world revolution is the exception, if there is one, that proves the rule of his otherwise total irony -- even if such a change, as seems inevitable, would result in making the author a superfluous man.

Leiris' ironic gaze is instead focused on the ambiguities of his own real commitment and the infinitesimally small contribution he sees himself making to the revolutionary cause. So he continues in the above-quoted passage, in a movement of self-doubt that his readers come to expect, to question his own sincerity:

. . .Mes opinions sont révolutionnaires. Mais cela ne prouve pas que je suis, moi, un révolutionnaire. Engoncé dans mes soucis et dans mes habitudes, facilement désarmé devant des adversaires. . .je ne saurais m'en targuer sans imposture.

Nevertheless the Leiris of the final volume of La Règle du Jeu (Frêle Bruit, 1976) seems to have made his own stylistic and thematic adjustments to the revolutionary cause, in terms of the increasing centrality of explicitly political events (May '68, Occupied Paris) in the texture of his narratives and also in terms of an increase in the expository clarity of the prose, since by now he has fallen away from much of the elusive and involuted style of sentence structure as well as from the exhaustive inventories and rhetorical-oneiric flights of fancy of the sustained, lengthy blocks of writing that comprise the first 3 volumes. This "heavy" style, reminiscent and probably owing to Proust and Faulkner, and similar, in another vein, to Claude Simon's, had reached its paroxysm of singleminded fury in the almost 300 page essentially unbroken monologue that Leiris so aptly called "La Fièvre La Fièvre" in volume 3. Leiris' manner now in volume 4 is suddenly calm, reflective, full of typographical caesurae, and broken upon frequently by strange poetry or little Cioran-like philosophical gems.

His style evolves toward the lapidary, aphoristic pole, as the text becomes dissemination, fragmentation -- a chain or network of islands or forts, in attempts-"essais" just to catch a glimpse of a reality avowedly too overwhelming and exigent to do very much more than to try to be aware of it. Citing Che Guevara's saying, "La Revolution Va Vite," Leiris in this mood talks about the necessity of adjusting his own methods to the needs and rhythms of the moment:

Vitesse nécessaire de la Revolution, face à des événements qui n'attendent pas. Rythme auquel je devrais personnellement me plier, appliquant cette leçon dans les limites étroites de tout ce que je fais et de tout ce que j'écris. . . Brefs et facilement isolables, les textes que j'amasse ici peuvent être publiés avant qu'entre eux et l'événements externe ou interne qui m'avait requis l'écart se soit par trop creusé. Gain appréciable. . . explosion d'aphorismes, phrase ou petits groupes de phrase qui disent beaucoup en peu de mots et maintiennent à l'incandescence la matière mise en oeuvre; peut-être, éclatement de la phrase elle-même. . . ?

Alchimie en chambre, vers quoi -- si jamais j'y parviens -- aura contribué à me pousser cette alchimie planétaire, la Revolution qui fait flamber le feu où se métamorphosant les êtres et les choses.

15

Leiris here is reworking, in this political arena where he felt his presence was required, some of his fundamental intuitions about the

relations between individual and society, as mediated and controlled by language, that informed the first dazzling pages of La Règle du Jeu. Language, the young Leiris had ruefully discovered, is inescapably social in destiny. It belongs not to me, but to you, or to me only insofar as it relates to you. Thus in the chapter, "Reusement," which opens Biffures, Leiris ruminates at length on the education involved in discovering, as a young boy, that "reusement" is really "heureusement." The "reusement" belongs subjectively and personally to the individual, and is meaningful to him alone, whereas the "heureusement" represents the language that was there waiting for us before we were born, a kind of terrorism (in Barthean terms) that we have no choice but to accept and undergo; whose inevitable concomitants are the imperatives of social existence and the needs of others.

There is no such thing, of course, as a definitive victory for this other that lays claim to language in the name of society, not at any rate for a writer of Leiris' dynamic and rebellious energy, incapable of accepting any enduring compromise with the world-as-constituted. For Leiris' imagination, which he himself calls Corneillian,¹⁶ -- that is, theatrically dialectic, tends to go to extremes, but these extremes are meant more to be left behind than occupied. Leiris prefers to maintain the tension between the "enemies" unrelaxed, unforgiving and exigent rather than let himself settle into any formula or comfortable modus vivendi or scribendi. Instead he wavers and oscillates, alternately embracing and eschewing his own most cunning articulations of the problem. Although in what follows

we deal with the personal-subjective and social -objective aspects successively they should therefore be seen as operating simultaneously.

On the one hand Leiris plunges with what seems to me an unprecedented ambition, determination and nerve to the roots of his subjectivity; he explores the limits of confession and avowal in L'Age d'Homme; he sounds the depths of a kind of Freudian cabala of letters, prelinguistic sounds and early memories of tunes and toys in Biffures, calling forth in great profusion, for instance in the chapter "Alphabets," the multiple meanings hidden for him in the most simple syllable, or even the personal mysteries cloaked and evoked by a mark of punctuation. He continues on this subjective slant all through La Règle du Jeu, always careful to stress the priority of what events meant to him over their purely functional or social context. Thus the memorial to Max Jacob, that he treats in Fourbis, triggers for him what he calls a "descent into hell" that has little to do with the social ceremony in which he participated all the same. Frequent also is Leiris' eccentric and arbitrary self-designation as a strange modern incarnation of a medieval alchemist or hermeticist (even in the few quotations I've made there are at least several allusions to himself as this wise) who plunges into the dark night of his own soul there to find or refine the gold of his spirit. In Fibrilles, volume 3 of La Règle du Jeu, this subjectivity reaches its farthest extension and limit, both in subject matter and form. For the subject of this book is Leiris' attempt to take his own life, and his prose style is as elusive, demanding and difficult as it

ever gets: for the most part, interminably long sentences that go, seemingly by pure process of association from point to point, so that it is next to impossible to remember (if that indeed is what the reader is supposed to do) what the author was talking about a few pages, or even a few paragraphs or lines previously. Leiris here is like a horse wilfully trying to shake his rider, determined not to be broken into any kind of coherent sense or stable meaning.

On the other hand, and consistently all through his work, Leiris goes to great lengths to establish also the objectivity of his enterprise. He frequently interrupts himself with self-criticism, reminders, calls-to-order and self-advice. During the course of this long autobiography he habitually surfaces to ask himself whether the goal he initially set for himself still makes any sense, whether he has unwittingly abandoned it, and whether indeed his work has any direction. Among the considerations he entertains most frequently is the thought of dropping the autobiography in particular and the practice of literature in general. The action of writing is seen as in no sense an a priori given but a decision that is made and renewed on the basis of information that ceaselessly intrudes on the attention of the writer. That writing fulfills certain subjective personal needs for Leiris is obvious enough, but he seeks above all to establish an objective necessity for it. As Leiris reminds himself and thereby his reader so frequently, he is trying to do something with his words; and he never tires of asking himself what that is, or how well it has been said (and understood) and whether or not it is still worth saying:

Quand mon projet prit corps sous cette forme. . .j'eus recours. . .à l'expression de bifurs pour désigner, dans mon jargon personnel, les matériaux si peu commodes à étiqueter que je voulais amasser et brasser: soubresauts, trébuchements ou glissements de pensée se produisant à l'occasion d'une fêlure, d'un miroitement. . . . Me référant au terme de "bifur". . .j'entendais mettre plutôt l'accent sur l'acte même de bifurquer, de dévier, comme fait le train. . . .A mesure que le livre, page après page, s'alourdissait. . .l'élan initial se perdait; il n'est bientôt plus resté des bifurs que le nom . . .je perds de vue mon but ultime qu'étouffe la foison de détails plutôt qu'elle ne concourt à y mener. . . .C'est pourquoi. . .j'ai décidé, sans plus tarder, de laisser tout en plan.¹⁷

To underline the objectivity of this "decision to quit," it should be mentioned also that the above self-criticism was undertaken as a reply to critical remarks directed to Leiris by friends, and also by negative newspaper reaction, on the occasion of the appearance of the "Dimanche" chapter of Biffures in Les Temps Modernes (1945); but also in Fibrilles (1966), two books and almost twenty years later, Leiris is still taking account of the critical response to his nevertheless ongoing work. The generally favorable critical response to Fourbis (1955) does not satisfy the exigent Leiris of Fibrilles. He would rather his work be rejected completely than admired for the wrong reasons. This feeling of not being understood, and thereby of not attaining his objective goals, he then goes on to describe as one

of the causes for the depression he fell into, after his return from his "enlightening" trip to China (his wife had cut out all these "favorable" notices and they were waiting for him), and that led him to attempt to take his own life.¹⁸

Thus, as we have seen, Leiris oscillates perpetually between a Scylla of subjectivity, or personal fulfillment, and a Charybdis of objectivity, or social relevance and legitimization. There is no middle course possible for him between the two antipodes, nor is it possible for him to get too taken with one or the other, for following the Homeric imagery, these are dangerous entities that forbid human entry. His object, in any case, is not to attain, master, or possess one or the other, or even to get by both of them, but to maintain their contradictions at fever pitch, at a maximally endurable level of tension and provocation, by taking them both ceaselessly and simultaneously into account. Characteristically, instead, he "cheats"¹⁹ on one with the other. He plunges into his paradise or hells of subjectivity in order to escape the tyranny of an objective world (wherein one didn't ask to be born); but in turn he tries to interpret, justify or redeem his personal experience (dreams, hallucinations, fantasies) in alternately mythological, psychological and political -- that is, objective terms. By oscillating incessantly from one point-of-view to the other he refuses to be dominated or truncated by one at the expense of the other.

Although he uses, and abundantly, the materials of madness -- though he subscribes, and sincerely, to the goals of revolution -- he is, by his own admission, neither a madman nor a revolutionary. He cannot be so

easily defined, and thus dismissed, either by his readers and critics, or by himself, -- certainly his own most exigent critic. He is, instead, fully the man of his age: this time when we no longer believe in the abstractions and ideals that consoled our ancestors, though we still use such ploys when it suits our purposes. We no longer believe that the houses we live in will last much longer than we do, and we are certainly aware that the sky above our heads hides no heaven behind it. This movement, this dynamism, this reluctance to be trapped or confined by any system, as exemplified by Leiris' reference to the game in the title of his autobiography, so that rule comes through almost as a contradiction in terms -- what does this mean except that we now play the game of life for its own sake, and that we are always ready to change the rules, even to change sides, so as to keep the game from becoming more important than those who play it.

Notes

¹ ". . . au fond, je ne peux écrire, je n'arrive à écrire --à peu près! . . . -- que sur ce qui me touche personnellement, d'une façon affective. C'est pour cela que j'ai été amené à toute cette littérature autobiographique." -- "Entretien Avec Madeleine Chapsal," in Pierre Chappuis' Michel Leiris (Paris: Seghers Poètes d'Aujourd'hui, 1973), p. 113.

² I am not minimizing Leiris' very important and expert work in other genres (poetry, criticism, a novel and a surrealist "glossary") and even in another profession (he is a trained ethnologist), but simply pointing out the centrality of autobiographical projects, which are (all editions Paris: Gallimard):

L'Age d'Homme, 1939
La Règle du Jeu I, Biffures, 1948
La Règle du Jeu II, Fourbis, 1955
La Règle du Jeu III, Fibrilles, 1966
La Règle du Jeu IV, Frêle Bruit, 1976
La Ruban au Cou d'Olympe, 1981

³ Jeffrey Mehlman describes Leiris' aesthetics as a "poetics of lack" in his Lacanian-Structuralist study of Leiris, "Reading with Leiris," A Structural Study of Autobiography (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 65-150.

⁴ See my next chapter, "The Fragmentary Word of Maurice Blanchot," p. 170.

⁵ La Règle du Jeu IV, p. 311.

⁶ L'Age d'Homme (Paris: Gallimard, 1939, 1946), pp. 10-13.

⁷ This is part of the well-known master-slave dialectic from Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: The master's superiority to the slave turns on his willingness to risk his own life. Marx turned this dialectic "on its head" by calling for proletarian revolution, that is, a reversal of roles -- and Leiris and his generation (Blanchot, Bataille, Tzara, Breton, Sartre and of course many others) further twist it by applying it to intellectual acts as well.

8 Philippe Lejeune, Lire Leiris, Autobiographie et Langage (Paris: Klincksieck, 1975), p. 155: "Je ne prendrai donc plus l'oeuvre de Leiris comme un objet à interpreter, mais comme un exemple à suivre, une pratique de l'écriture, d'où on peut dégager les règles d'un savoir-faire."

9 Leiris, La Règle, IV, pp. 199-200.

10 Leiris, La Règle, I, p. 222.

11 Leiris, La Règle, III, p. 227.

12 Leiris, La Règle, III, p. 229.

13 Leiris, La Règle, III, p. 34-35.

14 Leiris, La Règle, IV, p. 155.

15 Leiris, La Règle, IV, pp. 153-154.

16 Leiris, La Règle, IV, pp. 388-389.

17 Leiris, La Règle, I, pp. 256-257, 264.

18 Leiris, La Règle, III, pp. 87-88. Another important "reason" was the "double-bind" of an infidelity: ". . . n'ayant d'autre choix qu'entre la trahir elle en ne lui disant rien ou trahir l'autre en livrant mon secret." (III, p. 92). Leiris' "concluding" interpretation of his inconclusive act, from which it seems only fitting that death should be "lacking," is very much in the spirit of that Hegelian "risk," as described briefly in note # 7 above, that alone can confer seriousness to his words: ". . . je me reporte à mon suicide manqué comme au grand et aventureux moment qui représente, dans le cours de mon existence à peu près sans cahots, le seul risque majeur que j'aurai osé prendre. Et il me semble aussi que c'est à ce moment-là que, mariant vie et mort, ivresse et acuité de vue, ferveur et négation, j'ai embrassé le plus étroitement cette chose fascinante, et toujours à poursuivre parce que jamais tout à fait saisie, que l'on croirait désignée à dessein par un nom féminin: la poésie." (III, p. 292)

19 By this pejorative I mean an inevitable infidelity, whose "objective correlative" might be the symbolic role that Leiris' adulteries (blown way out of proportion, it seems to me, to their actual importance) play in the autobiography. On another level, Leiris-the-bourgeois "cheats" on Leiris-the-revolutionary, and vice-versa. Inauthenticity, insincerity, and a concomitantly perpetual anguish and anxiety, -- these are the givens of Leiris' world; abandon all hope (of serenity) ye who enter here!

4. The Fragmentary Word of Maurice Blanchot

The work of Maurice Blanchot, in its strange intensity, poses the most crucial problems for any student of literature, art, or culture, as well as for anyone seriously interested in the craft of writing. Blanchot's work falls, not so neatly, into two main categories: (1) critical (2) creative. The critical pieces were mainly written as reviews of recently appearing books for the NRF, over a 20 year period (from about 1945 to 1965) and have been collected over the years into six volumes, all published by Gallimard. What I call the "creative" work consists of about ten novels, récits, dialogues and recently collections of "fragments" which have been appearing regularly since the novel Thomas L'Obscur was published in 1941. Blanchot is no great respecter of "genre." His critical pieces often have a fictional, even poetic quality about them; and his non-critical work is often as abstract and maddeningly complicated as the texts of a Kierkegaard, Husserl and Heidegger.

For Blanchot the only works worth considering are those which explore the limits of the human adventure and therefore are ready to take up certain fundamental problems of life and death, memory and oblivion, culture and anarchy; he is, for instance, much occupied with the question of whether there is any authentic purpose for literature and art in our modern technocratic societies that increasingly marginalize if not exile entirely these forms of activity. Furthermore what matters is not the works in themselves but the themes they invent and provoke, the experiences they originate in, and the times they point the way to. Blanchot is no fetishist of the written word; the important thing for him is not what exactly the

author said, but what he meant. Typical of this existential attitude toward literature (which he shares with Tzara, Valéry, Leiris, Bataille and some other provocative moderns) is his judgment on the meaning of Gide's career: "Just like the best of Rimbaud and Lautréamont the influence of his works is in the direction of making of literature a vital experience, an instrument of discovery, a means for man to feel himself, to try himself, and in this attempt, to try to overcome his limits."¹

Just as the distinction, for Blanchot, between critical and creative prose is blurred (for himself as well as in his approach to other writers), so is that between philosopher and thinker, novelist and poet. Whether he is talking about Sade or Nietzsche, Hölderlin or Kafka, Rousseau, Breton, Mallarmé, H. Lefebvre or M. Foucault, even Leon Trotsky -- the intensity and level of involvement remain the same. So little is Blanchot concerned about what "form" the individuals he talks about write in that at times it seems that he has a special sympathy for the kind of writer who leaves little or nothing behind him, citing approvingly Heidegger's judgment of Socrates as the "ultimate writer" and dwelling at length on Mallarmé's famous preoccupation with the "work as absence." In an article on the French diarist, Joseph Joubert (1754-1824),² Blanchot talks about this writer's lifelong preparation to put himself into the condition of being able to start writing. The fact that Joubert, a man whose multifarious talents were acknowledged by contemporaries as gifted as Benjamin Constant, left nothing behind but his journals, proves only that he was willing to sacrifice "the results of art to a discovery of the conditions that

make art possible."³

Blanchot's predilection is not particularly for writers who leave "complete works" behind them (Dickens, Balzac) but for those that leave magnificent fragments (Kafka, Nietzsche, Musil) for the future to puzzle over. In L'Entretien Infini he talks about the fragmentary work being more in tune with the exigencies of the time we live in, "bypassing the conception of the work united and closed in itself, organizing and dominating values transmitted by traditional methods -- it explores the infinite space of the work, with inexorable rigor, but under a new postulate -- not necessarily satisfying concepts of unity, totality, or of continuity." ⁴

Referring to the German thinker Walter Benjamin, an inveterate writer of fragments, he cites his insight to the effect that, for the History of Art, the fragment is a catastrophe, whereas for the artist himself it might be a more adequate expression of what he really has to say than many a finished work that he has been forced, by society and necessity, to complete. Blanchot, as theorist of the fragmentary, resists any intrusion by culture or society upon the works of art. The society demands of art only "finished products" to be stored in its silos (libraries, memory banks, museums, archives)⁵ or exchanged in its markets, where its real energy and potential for affecting life can be defused and/or quarantined, -- whereas for Blanchot art is nothing if not incomplete and problematic. It supplies no answers; in fact it only asks more questions; for the society this art, which comes across as pure question "and questions the very possibility of art, can only appear as dangerous, hostile and coldly violent."⁶ Society, and the

culture that is its mainstay, are interested only in limited and finite works that are easy to digest or at least to classify, and are thus opposed to the finest of the "new art" and is "exigence infinie à laquelle l'expérience artistique nous demande de répondre, expérience qui ne peut s'accomplir que dans des oeuvres de fragment, lesquels suffisent à ébranler de leur présence tout avenir de culture."⁷ The message of the work of art is thus seen to consist not in itself, nor even in any moral, philosophy or idea it purports to propose, nor in any stylistic quality⁸ or textual integrity, but instead in its capacity to challenge its audience to question their lives.

This is not to imply that Blanchot dismisses all traditional approaches to these problems, as far as they go; he admires, for instance, the ingenuity of George Poulet's studies in the metamorphoses of the circle as a literary figure, but only is suspicious of its relevance to the "new art," which can have no use for circular forms because we are now dealing with an art whose center is at once everywhere and nowhere -- in other words, absent. Blanchot then goes on to wonder what will happen to man the day he has to renounce the hypothesis of a "curved universe" -- or any other way to define it optically or systematically. The question such a day will surely pose will be whether or not man is capable of a "radical interrogation," which is tantamount to asking for Blanchot the question that recurs incessantly in his work -- whether man is capable of literature.⁹

Just as Blanchot finds an early example of the modern writer's preoccupation with the "fact of writing" to be in the anguished self-consciousness of J.J. Rousseau's pen,¹⁰ he locates the quintessence of this

"philosophy of the fragmentary" in the German Romantics -- particularly those who wrote for the short-lived but influential *Atheneum Review* (1798-1800). Blanchot characterizes Romanticism as the exigence and experience of contradictions, with a distinct vocation for disorder. It was that age that promoted the mixture of writer and philosopher that Blanchot sees as having become a commonplace in XXth century art. In that time "la littérature annonce qu'elle prend le pouvoir."¹¹ Failure and success in worldly terms become inverted for the world of art; what Morse Peckham has eloquently characterized as the "success of failure" and the "failure of success,"¹² Blanchot was to use elsewhere to argue that, contrary to Sartre's well reasoned attack, Baudelaire's success lay precisely in the pathos of his social failures (even to live up to his own ideals); and Blanchot pleads similarly, and at great length for those two magnificent "misfits," Lautréamont and Sade.¹³

The German Romantics invented an art whose equivalent was the "non-transitive word" -- a word without an object¹⁴ -- an art that is useless for the society and the culture in the terms we describe above. The attitude of these artists makes of literature a question, not an answer. They dream of a total novel that approaches the condition of poetry and that can only be conveyed by the exigencies of the fragment -- because only the fragment can take into account the "interruptions," breaks, cracks, "fêlures,"¹⁵ and lacks that comprise an artistic consciousness. Blanchot cites A.W. Schlegel as not being discouraged by the incomprehensibility of those fragments to his contemporaries: "Future centuries will know how

to read them;"¹⁶ and Novalis talks of the fragment as "seed," this same fragment which in its discontinuity can alone express the irony inherent in the Romantic attitude. The fragment is not to be confused, of course, with other literary forms -- such as aphorism and maxim, to which it is both closely related and totally opposed, because these forms represent a historical, often political need for unity and coherence -- that is, the attempt to close the fragment in upon itself, "finish" it, and make it useful and even quotable socially. Nor is, of course, the fragment to be taken too literally. Fragmented, whatever their stylistic continuities and massive lengths, are the works of Musil, Beckett, and Leiris, because of the "jagged edges," or uncompromising refusals of these efforts to fit into any conceivable explanatory paradigm. What makes a work fragmentary is not its length (or lack thereof) but its resistance to incorporation by the world around it or to come.¹⁷

The hero of and heir to the fragment is of course Friedrich Nietzsche, whose works float like icebergs in the seas of Western thought; for Blanchot, whose great enemy is System in any form, the great betrayal of Nietzsche was the posthumous publication of the Will to Power, which was nothing less than an attempt to convert a fragmentary writer into a systematic philosopher, in obedience to the whims and dictates of political expediency. Thus the contradictions, paradoxes and oscillations of the writer, that comprise the very pulse and life of the work, were flattened out, ironed over and selectively mis-read or ignored, as a power-oriented culture uses the death of the artist as an excuse to convert him

into material for its mills.

Nietzsche, as Blanchot reads him, saw clearly that the contradictions of progress were also the risks and existential predicament of humanity -- that is, "man is choosing to produce a world where the man of knowledge is no longer permitted to subsist as such and where it would no longer be allowed to him to work according to the objectivity of knowledge, but according to the arbitrary meaning of the new world."¹⁸ Nietzsche saw that a certain point of no-return had been reached for humanity, and that mankind as we think we know it has ceased to exist.

To bring this issue closer to the present Blanchot cites the dialogue between Ernst Jünger and Martin Heidegger, published under the provocative Nietzschean title Crossing the Line, on the occasion of both writer's and philosopher's 60th birthdays. Fragmentary writing is seen as corresponding to the exigency of a rupture which demarcates the new age from the old. In discussing Jünger's The Wall of Time, Essay on the Atomic Age, Blanchot emphasizes the qualitative changes introduced into the very nature of life by modern technology: "la bombe est un avertissement visible de la menace invisible que toute la technique moderne dirige contre les façons de l'homme."¹⁹ The underlying purpose and value of our technology, Blanchot says in a later text, is not to make life easier for us (which everybody is right in saying it does not do), it is to insure that we can never feel complacent, secure, "at home" in the world again.²⁰

The break, or rupture demanded by fragmentary writing implies a separation from traditional thought -- the major defect of which was its tendency

to be frozen into systems that give us the illusion of understanding and dominating existence. Blanchot is thus anti-intellectual both abstractly (opposed to classical and scholastic modes) as well as concretely (opposed to purely materialistic and technocratic concepts). This iconoclasm is exercised in the name of a higher destiny demanded for a creature that is far from certain will be man (at least as we know him) -- and in the name of art: "La coupure exigée par l'écriture est coupure avec la pensée quand celle-ci se donne pour proximité immédiate, et coupure avec toute expérience empirique du monde." ²¹

Here Blanchot is close to being a revolutionary with his pen. He has certainly shown elsewhere that he would shed no tears over the complete disintegration of modern society and the power structures which comprise it. ²² Traditionally art has always been monopolized by elitist elements in society. Max Weber, among others, has argued convincingly that the oppressed and alienated masses do not have the leisure or opportunities to develop the inclination for such pursuits, whether "mystic" or "artistic" as will always be the pastimes of an aristocratic elite. ²³ The millennial dream of a "universal art" is destined to remain just a dream.

The fact is, though, that the imbalance and inequality of this situation has provided a source of permanent instability in history -- an instability that has been accelerated in our own revolutionary times to the point that the privileges of the elite to enjoy their art "in peace and quiet" are being visibly threatened. For Blanchot this is not a problem; the end of traditional art and culture, the sinking of what Allen Ginsberg calls "the

whole boatload of sensitive bullshit" would evoke no complaints and call forth no regrets -- as indeed it should not, for what will pass will be the art of "finished products" whose function it was to supply answers and justifications for the cultural and social hegemony of those in power.

The ars nova on the other hand can not be threatened by this cataclysm because its real existence is not in the museums, concert halls, schools and libraries but in the mind and spirits of its creators; for Blanchot there is a strict analogy between revolution and this kind of art, in the sense that both imply a radical break with the past. The new art, far from being elitist in character would demand as its precondition the end of human alienation. In the meantime we are cut off from even an approximate knowledge of what real writing would be. The closest we can get to it would be graffiti or something like a cry in the night -- as simple, elemental, obvious and necessary as throwing a bomb: "cri du besoin ou de la protestation, cri sans mot sans silence, cri ignoble ou, à la rigueur, le cri écrit, les graffites des murailles. . . 'car en effet je m'étais rendu compte que c'était assez de mots, assez même de rugissements et que ce qu'il fallait, c'étaient des bombes. . . . ' " ²⁴

The idea here is that writing exists in some mental realm of pure anticipation outside of its concrete form in language and certainly exterior to any alienated embodiment in print. ²⁵ The above reference to "graffiti" and "cries in the night," as well as the unidentified citation that calls probably from some wall to the simplicity of violence lead us ineluctably back to the fragmentary (both cause and result of the bomb): These nothing-if-not-

transitory expressions are ideal fragments because, unlike aphorisms and maxims, they are forms that are impossible to socialize or control. Graffiti by its very nature must appear as a kind of spontaneous guerilla warfare, explosions on the walls we pass. Putting aside all arguments as to its relative aesthetic worth, which would be class-biased in any case, it is clear that graffiti interferes with the morale of an orderly citizenry on its way to work. It touches the untouchable, marks the unremarkable, turns the system against itself, and opens up the perspective of there being another dimension than blind obedience. It is provocative to the utmost extent, because at the same time as it poses embarrassing questions to the powers in place it answers these questions itself, by proposing to all and sundry the unspeakable heresy that the time to live is now. It points out blatantly and permanently (hard to erase) the gap between the system's stated goals and the paucity of its realizations.

The power of the fragment is thus founded on its ability to express certain profound incompatibilities in the nature of things -- first of all between man and his power to communicate (his inability to express himself), and also between the universe that we live in and the "world where writing (which for Blanchot means nothing less than freedom) calls us." These incompatibilities, to which Nietzsche was certainly susceptible, play a part in the theme of "difference," as expressed by J. Derrida, as well as in the philosophy of the absurd, as pronounced by Camus ("the absurd rises from the unreasoning silence of nature in the face of human demands"). Another way of expressing this would be to invoke the

concept of the "limit-experience," which Blanchot borrows from his friend Georges Bataille.²⁷ The fragment thus conveys, or invokes the limit-experience in the sense that it involves the perennial conflict between that which is thought to be possible and that which might be possible. It is an attempt to answer the question, by continuing to pose it, of what man is really capable of, and what his real limits are. The fragment, as limit-experience, is the "answer which man receives when he has decided to put himself radically into question."²⁸

A fragment is the kind of statement that is neither an affirmation nor a negation. A negation, for Blanchot, is only another form of affirmation, and Blanchot's ideal literature is fragmentary, in the sense that it neither affirms nor denies: "The guiding thread through this process is that with literature we are dealing with a statement that is not reducible to any unifying process."²⁹ Like the deity in the negative theology of the mystics Boehme and Eckhart, literature can be conceived of only in negatives -- we can say only what literature is not, but we can no more identify literature with this negation than the mystics could positively find their god in his own absence.

That these attempts to talk about the experience of literature are strictly modern, Blanchot would be the first to admit. In L'Espace Littéraire for instance he traces the evolution of art from classical antiquity, when it was the "parole des dieux," to the Renaissance, when it was "parole de l'absence des dieux," to the 18th century as "parole juste, équilibré de l'homme," then to the 19th and 20th centuries when it becomes

"parole des hommes dans leur diversité, puis parole des hommes déshéritées, de ceux qui n'ont pas la parole, puis parole de ce qui ne parle pas en l'homme, du secret, du désespoir ou du ravissement. . .," asking himself inevitably "que lui reste-t-il à dire."³¹

What history has performed has been a progressive stripping of the work of art of any and all functions. If we search around "the bottom of the pot," so to speak, to find some way of conceiving of art in our time, we find only an art that stands for and by itself -- and that inhibits any attempt to say it is something else. "This is what we have been left with, for now!"³²

This reduced, nihilist vision of literature is also conveyed in the novel Thomas L'Obscur, which reads as an allegory of art, and human communication in general being stripped to the bare essentials -- which presumably remain. The written text dates back to 1931 and the publication to 1941. The second edition, that of 1950, is changed only by deletions;³³ as if to say that we can add nothing new to art, except by cutting away to get down to its essence.

The characters of this book are not personalities, so much as mere names. Thomas, the hero of the novel, reminds one nevertheless of the independent, ruthlessly logical artist-type that Joyce projected in the Stephen Daedalus of Portrait of An Artist As A Young Man & Ulysses; Anne as a mutation of the hero in search of an authentic death such as Rilke propounded in the Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, wherein he has the

young exile in Paris complain that no one "dies their own death anymore -- they die the death belonging to their disease."

The doctor, and any expert upon whom we call to explain to us the inexplicable, to objectify our maladies,³⁴ is entirely useless in explaining, retarding, or otherwise dealing with the death of the patient, Anne; though it is doubtless comforting to the relatives to have him there: "Le médecin se pencha et crut qu'elle mourait selon les lois de la mort, ne voyant pas qu'elle était déjà parvenue à l'instant où en elle les lois mouraient. . . (2ème ed., 1950, p. 96).

There is no way to grasp concretely the reality of what is going on in this book. Thomas goes for a swim, true, but is that what is happening when it is said "tout se fut borné pour lui à continuer avec une absence d'organisme dans une absence de mer son voyage interminable" (p. 11)? Every definition that is advanced is instantly retracted or infinitely refracted. Anne literally "disappears" under Thomas' gaze (Chapter III): her aspect changes from solid and attractive to shadowy and evanescent as he looks at her. The words that Thomas looks at in Chapter IV are reading him back and seem like "a series of angels opening up on the infinite up to the eye of the absolute" (p. 28). There is also a matter of a thinking rat and a speaking cat that have suspiciously human concerns. Blanchot is obviously doing everything in his power to keep our sympathy, understanding, or even attention from settling on any tangible object.

Blanchot is particularly tricky with pronouns and likes to play with narrative levels and voices, always lurking with an unexpected "I" and

"He," "We," "They" and "You" when the reader is least ready for it, a little bit also like schizophrenics who are liable to refer to themselves as impersonal objects -- though this habit of Blanchot's of mixing up the pronouns doesn't get full vent until L'Attente L'Oubli of 1962.

As Michel Butor has it in an important short article on "L'Usage des Pronoms Personnels dans le Roman," and to which, not surprisingly Blanchot explicitly refers the reader of L'Entretien Infini: "Dans le roman, ce que l'on nous raconte, c'est donc toujours aussi quelqu'un qui se raconte et nous raconte. La prise de conscience d'un tel fait provoque un glissement de la narration de la troisième à la première personne."³⁵ Likewise Thomas, who is a writer, is having a bad case of "pronominal slippage": "the words He and I start their carnage in his senseless person" (p. 29). If the "he" is inauthentic because it hides an "I," then the "I" is no more satisfactory since it also sends us back to the "he": in Rimbaud's glorious formulation "I is another." We are caught in a maze of infinitely reflecting mirrors, and the variety of routes and approaches Blanchot embraces merely convinces us more surely that there is no way out of this labyrinth, as there was no way into it.

The trouble with the third-person narrator of traditional fiction is that this "person" is always more or less of a transparent lie -- since whatever happens is always only the account of a person who claims "I saw it," but disguises the claim in order to give it more authority. On the other hand the "I" of the "sincere" writer, whether keeper of journal, or teller of eye-witness account, is in no better shape, since we are manifestly trying to

resurrect a "subject" that was unsatisfactory in the first place: like Beckett's unnamable "I go on saying I knowing it's not I," or Blanchot's almost-blind speaking cat: "Je dis moi, guidé par un instinct aveugle, car depuis que j'ai perdu la queue toute droite qui me servait de gouvernail dans le monde, je ne suis manifestement plus moi-même" (p. 37). So we go on using the only words we know, victims of some kind of hereditary echolalia, unsatisfied with the education we have received, but not able to do much more than continue repeating by rote the lessons we have learned.

Such a dilemma as the above must have led Butor to make his unusual experiment with telling a story exclusively in the 2nd person (La Modification), as it accounts for the general lability and interchangeability of the pronoun (as well as the name) in Beckett's Unnamable, Joyce's Wake, and Sollers' "experimental" fictions. Here, with Blanchot, as utterly as anywhere we confront that phenomenon so widespread in modern literature and consciousness: a total dissolution of the concept of identity, or fragmentation of the self into myriad irrecoverable shards. We are here in some kind of threshold landscape or in-scape, or outside of same, where subjects and objects are neither themselves nor something else but merely "neuter."³⁶

The beings who dwell in this end-of-the-world territory come off like mutants or clones, objects left here to carry on by themselves by a creator that has long since left and will not be heard from again. They are robots that are no longer entitled to say "I"; and we may say that the only difference between people is that some have realized what has happened to

them (Thomas, Anne) and some have not (Anne's relatives, the doctor, or Louise, in the first version of the novel of 1941, who tries to add Thomas to her "collection"). Since Blanchot is not at all foreign to the image of the bomb as marking a qualitative rupture between past and present, I think it is apt also to cite Herbert Marcuse, theorist of "one-dimensional man," who frequently assured the audiences he lectured to "the bomb has dropped and we are the mutants."

For Blanchot the pathos of this situation, equally incapable of acceptance as of denial, may be what he is trying to express in his frequent references to apocalypse, which certainly form an important segment of his critical and creative vocabulary: about Anne it is said that "son impatience se confondait avec l'espoir de participer à un cataclysme général ou, en même temps que les êtres seraient détruites les distances que séparant les êtres" (p. 56). This is a nothingness which involves a mood more despairing and nihilistic than any Pascalian "abyss" could possibly be. The "bet" that Pascal urges us to make is that there is, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, a sense to the universe. Blanchot's people run the risk of there being no universe at all; but even if that is so our instincts and conditioning oblige us to continue asking the questions that belong to a time and space that no longer exists -- as if we don't have words yet to describe what we are experiencing, or as if words were only serving us provisionally until we come upon a better way of saying what we mean. Thus Anne wonders aloud to Thomas "Who are you really," when it is obvious to her immediately that the question not only cannot be answered

it can't even be asked, or what is really important is what you are saying about yourself by asking the question, "Anne qui n'existait encore et qui n'existait plus, suprême moquerie à la pensée de Thomas" (p. 70). If there is a theme to this novel it is surely our inevitable insignificance to each other, as well as our total uselessness to ourselves. We cannot even call this situation "ironic," or refer it to "the laughter of the Gods." The Gods aren't amused not only because they don't exist, but because the enormity of the destruction we have wrought in the 20th century, alike in our environment and in ourselves, has bereft us of the standards, values and norms upon which such irony was based. The Enlightenment was the last to laugh, as the Romantics were the last ironists.

So it is that our situation cannot even be called "pathetic"; it is instead meaningless: Anne understands at last that it is best to say nothing, "à quoi bon -- ce mot aussi était le mot qu'elle cherchait, -- Thomas est insignifiant. Dormons" (p. 98). Thomas' grand monologue on death in Chapter XI makes even this resolution seem premature and unwarranted.³⁷ Everything Blanchot gives us he takes back immediately. There is clearly no peace (answers) to be had, either in life or in death, no way of unifying our thoughts and doubts around any single center, thought, idea, or conclusion; and the conclusion is equally forbidden to us that we can come to no conclusion.

The two stories, or conte and récit, which were published in Le Ressassement Eternel, by Editions de Minuit, in 1951, were written in 1935-6;

the hero of the first tale, L'Idylle, an anonymous man who is given the name of Alexandre Akim -- mostly for the sake of classification: "Ce nom étranger lui convient aussi bien qu'un autre" (p. 9), has been arrested and detained for vagrancy in a kind of country club-work camp, very distinctly related to similar institutions in Kafka. Vagrancy, nomadism, lack of permanent address -- all very artistic qualities for Blanchot, are all anathema for the bourgeois order of things -- for obvious reasons, armies, schools, factories, stores cannot be staffed with vagrants. So that the basic house rule, punishable by a beating so severe it always results in loss of life, in case of infraction -- in fact the only real rule is that the prisoners are not free to wander. A prisoner is free in fact to leave only if he marries, that is if he enters another institution that assures him a stable identity for the society.

The model for this kind of escape from one prison to another is the marriage of the keepers of the institution, who are a husband-and-wife team. Akim insists on thinking of married life in general, and the relationship of his keepers in particular as an idyll; he is unable to see the harsh life-and-death struggle going on beneath a deceptively calm exterior. He himself decides to marry, not only to escape his prison, but because he believes in the happiness of his keepers. He lets himself be lulled into a false confidence on the night before his wedding, and he wanders away from the prison, is apprehended and punished according to house rules. It is as if Akim, who has been described as "un étranger. . . il ne deviendra jamais un homme d'ici" (p. 46), is constitutionally

incapable of living anywhere, that is, as an artist he is considered a permanent menace to the established order -- an order that must extinguish him to preserve itself.

The second story of this book, Le Dernier Mot, introduces us to a world in which the structures of power have been definitively destroyed. Our first-person narrator wanders into a city landscape that is deprived of any permanent orientation. In particular, the central symbol of permanence, memory and authority -- the library -- has been or is about to be abolished. The iconoclasm is close here, in time as well as mood to the surrealist rage that inflects those astounding tone-poems-in prose that Tzara composed in the mid-thirties, Grains et Issues and Personnage d'Insomnie, especially in the attention that Blanchot pays to the "breaking up" of the language and the subsequent promise or prophecy of semiotic anarchy; for language here is in disarray: "Il y eut un temps où le langage cessa de lier les mots entre eux suivant des rapports simples et devint un instrument si délicat qu'on en interdit l'usage au plus grand nombre" (p. 105).

The last word -- the ultimate sound -- is not a noun, since the substance on which it is based is no longer there, but instead something evanescent and fragmentary as a prepositional phrase or article. Blanchot's narrator thus explores the linguistic and symbolic depths involved in our everyday, apparently not-so-innocent use of phrases such as "jusqu'au," "il y a" and especially "ne pas." The narrator is furthermore alone in being bewildered by the anomaly, the sheer strangeness of a world in which

words have lost their resonance and meaning, at the same time as the social institutions that are supposed to supply a space for communications are crumbling; everyone else sees this "limit-situation" as perfectly natural, as if they had been living so long on the brink of nothingness that it has become nothing special to them.

As the tower in which the narrator has taken refuge is crumbling from its foundations, by dint of the social assaults it is no longer able to contain, the narrator is alone in being worried (through the voice of a young woman who somehow starts articulating his disaffection) by the finality of this event. His hosts continue to maintain, even while they and their world are being swept into destruction, that there is nothing extraordinary taking place, nothing to be concerned about. . . .

Blanchot's curious first-person narrator continues his adventures in a short story first published in 1948, in review, under the ambivalent title of Un Récit? and then reprinted in 1973 under the hardly less strange rubric of La Folie du Jour, in book form, by Fata Morgana. Blanchot's hero, now finally nameless, is patently imprisoned -- he is being kept against his will, ostensibly in an institution, where he is being frequently challenged and interrogated. He is especially annoyed at being bothered because he has not been putting what are called his talents to some obvious social use:

They said to me (sometimes it was the doctor, sometimes the nurses), You're an educated man, you have talents; by not using abilities which, if they were divided among ten people who lack them, would allow them to live, you are depriving them of what

they don't have, and your poverty, which could be avoided, is an insult to their needs." I asked, "Why these lectures? Am I stealing my own place? Take it back from me." I felt I was surrounded by unjust thoughts and spiteful reasoning. And who were they setting against me? An invisible learning that I myself searched for without success. I was an educated man! But perhaps not all the time. Talented? Where were these talents that were made to speak like gowned judges sitting on benches, ready to condemn me day and night? (The Madness of the Day, trans. by Lydia Davis, Station Hill Press, 1981, pp. 13-14)

The fragmented consciousness obviously on display here does not satisfy the authorities -- either medical or otherwise -- who demand that the narrator constitute himself into an authorial entity, an "I" capable of taking responsibility for his actions and giving sequence and coherence to what he has to say. It later on becomes clear that what the narrator is being treated for is having "lost the sense of history," in other words having lost the beliefs in sequence, coherence and totality that constitute and are mainstays of the society we live in.

For the authorities though, there are no excuses; the story they are dedicated to pre-exists any decision one might make about it, and it is the one they are determined to hear. This "story" must have a beginning, a middle and an end -- and it must be capable of a "summing up," with a detachable moral preferably. These are people in power, whose power is derived precisely from the unswerving allegiance they swear to their ideas --

which they treat as absolutes. For them there is no such thing as disagreement -- there is only treason. The reason, for them (and everything has a reason for them) that the narrator will not tell them the story they want to hear is not that he is unable, but that he is unwilling. The function of the "experts" they assign to his "case" is to break down his resistance by recourse to the sophisticated techniques of bilateral interrogation alluded to below, and, thereby, to get him to tell them their story -- that is to pretend that there is such a thing as history, in which men are born, live and die -- and that this, and this only is what existence is all about:

I had been asked: Tell us "just exactly" what happened. A story? I began: I am not learned; I am not ignorant. I have known joys. That is saying too little. I told them the whole story and they listened, it seems to me, with interest, at least in the beginning. But the end was a surprise to all of us. "That was the beginning," they said. "Now get down to the facts." How so? The story was over!

I had to acknowledge that I was not capable of forming a story out of these events. I had lost the sense of the story; that happens in a good many illnesses. But this explanation only made them more insistent. Then I noticed for the first time that there were two of them and that this distortion of the traditional method, even though it was explained by the fact that one of them was an

eye doctor, the other a specialist in mental illness, constantly gave our conversation the character of an authoritarian interrogation, overseen and controlled by a strict set of rules. Of course neither of them was the chief of police. But because there were two of them, there were three, and this third remained firmly convinced, I am sure, that a writer, a man who speaks and who reasons with distinction, is always capable of recounting facts that he remembers.

A story? No. No stories, never again. (p. 18)

The point that Derrida makes about the conclusion of this "story" is applicable to Blanchot's work in general, and certainly to many of the most advanced elements of modern art. He notes "an essential unfinishedness that cannot be reduced to an incompleteness or an inadequacy."³⁸ The fragmented and unfinished quality of this art can in no way be explained as a deterioration either of ability or of will, but is an intentional decision whose concomitant is the blurring of the separations upon which traditional art was based. The author invites the reader to finish, or better yet to continue the work that has been only started, by leaving the work open, by refusing to "toe the line" or close the circle -- by refusing to create the kind of work that can be digested by the culture, and by insisting in sticking irremediably in the same culture's throat! The fragment which cannot be incorporated by a culture can neither be definitively rejected by it either, that is relegated to that ghetto outside of time, history and discourse that society reserves for phenomena like manifest insanity

and blatant sabotage that directly affront its order. The fragment, cunningly instead, has mastered and utilized the discourse of power (as Blanchot above very definitely starts his story) to the degree that order therein recognizes too much of itself to be able to expel the fragment totally without committing a kind of suicide too; like the wayward relative grudgingly supported by many a disgruntled family the fragment survives and endures by means of intimidation.³⁹

L'Attente L'Oubli, published in 1962 by Gallimard, carries all these tendencies involved in this Philosophy of the Fragmentary as far as Blanchot, or anyone else that I know of, has taken them. In its lucid incoherence and acosmic ability to disorient it stands as a kind of miniature Finnegans Wake. Here the fragment truly comes into its own, for the work is made up entirely of fragments. The characters (unnamed, naturally) are a "he" and a "she" about whom next to nothing is known except that he is some kind of writer and she is some kind of reader. In addition there is a dubious narrator who usually prefers the impersonal third person singular but who also falls at time back into first or even second person, so that it is intentionally unclear whether it (the narrator) is talking about the characters, itself, to itself, or to us. The function of this "non-narrator" is doubtless to destroy, or "deconstruct" any sense that is in danger of being made.

"Who is speaking?" (p. 7), "she" asks "him" after reading a few of his lines, and this is a question like many others that is not meant to be answered, perhaps not meant to be asked. What was it that brought them

together, the narrator asks, was it chance? (p. 8) and this question likewise stays without answer. Blanchot's favorite grammatical construction is of the contrary-to-fact conditional types: "Il aurait voulu avoir le droit de lui dire . . ." (p. 11). What's happening between the characters (l'événement) is not a fiction, but that doesn't mean it is true either: "Plus tard il pense que l'événement consistait dans cette manière de n'être ni vrai ni faux" (p. 13). A hotel room where a conversation takes place is totally non-specific -- it is any room, anywhere. The city they are in, the windows they look out of are totally neutral too. It is as if the reader is waiting with the characters (the reader is surely one of Blanchot's characters) someplace or anyplace, and hearing a word being spoken, without knowing for sure who exactly it is that is speaking and why. When the impersonal? narrator states for instance: "Avec quelle mélancolie, mais quelle calme certitude, il sentait qu'il ne pourrait plus jamais dire 'je' "(p. 34), the reader may well wonder who or what really is speaking; furthermore, if this be the narrator, how he obtained access to this rather specific bit of information, and whether, indeed the third person here isn't some kind of feint to describe the inevitable first person singular that one just can't bring oneself to say -- in other words, whether there isn't an author hiding somewhere behind the ruses.

This narrative discontinuity is further enhanced by numerous disturbing devices. In some of the fragments a first person narrator appears who

calmly (it seems) commences to talk about himself -- with no quotation mark, or any other indication of shift in time, as when it is suddenly said: "Quelqu'un en moi converse avec lui-même. Quelqu'un en moi converse avec quelqu'un (p. 46)." Whoever this last "quelqu'un" is supposed to be the reader can only, and in fact is probably only supposed to, guess. The fact is that nothing is more shocking, in life or in art, than to hear a first person voice being expressed where none was expected, as if our tools suddenly started to talk to us, or as if a stranger on a train were to say to us, without preamble, and inexplicably, "As I was saying. . . ."

Just as Brecht's theory of theatre, that we have referred to so frequently in these pages, the audience is invited to distance itself from the hypnotic and therefore noxious effects of the spectacle and to think of how what they are seeing connects with life outside the theatre, so is Blanchot's reader forced outside⁴⁰ the text, if only to wonder if the explanation he is searching for might not lie outside this or any text. When for instance, Blanchot introduces the refrain: "Fais en sorte que je puisse te parler" (p. 24), he writes it in italics. This of course alerts the reader that something special is going on, but what is it that the reader is supposed to be particularly aware of? This phrase has in fact just been dropped on the page as if it fell out of the sky and landed in the book. There is no narrative preparation for it, and absolutely not a clue to who is talking. It is as if the book was talking, an eerie effect similar to that which Beckett achieves in the unidentifiable rant that constitutes The Unnamable. The mystery is compounded as the "fais en sorte que je

puisse te parler" is repeated three times in three pages -- each time in italics -- as if the reader were a tourist who was lost in a strange city and had circled the same block three times to see the same meaningless (to him) sign. By now we have been lost long enough to know our way around, but do we? If we persevere to page 57, the obstinate reader then is relieved to find this same phrase supplied now comfortably with quotation marks and introduced as something that "she" has said frequently to "him."⁴¹ The narrator then assures us, in his dubiously reliable third person style that "Il ne pourrait plu jamais oublier cette prière," whereupon the reader will perhaps wonder what makes it a prayer and how this narrator who doesn't seem to know what he will say next is suddenly omniscient enough to know that "he" will never again forget it.

A little later on the reader seems to be directly addressed by the narrator: "N'est-ce pas ainsi que vivent les dieux? Solitaires, uniques, étranger à la lumière dont ils brillent. Ils me dérangent peu" (p. 66) . . . and by the end of this passage Blanchot introduces a "we" which presumably includes author, narrator, reader, characters and all of extant humanity: ". . . Les anciens dieux, les anciens dieux, comme ils sont proches de nous" (p. 67). The assumptions of this last sentence, aside from the incredible arrogance of the repetition -- as if that were to make this absurdity any more acceptable -- are strictly speaking remarkable -- as if we were suddenly on the most intimate footing with someone we just met, who knows our most intimate feelings and is entitled to speak of us in conjunction with himself. The narrator becomes suddenly

our best friend of the moment with whom we have perhaps just taken shelter from the same stormy text under cover of the same porous roof.

Elsewhere the narrator addresses himself familiarly as "tu" and seems to blend it in with the "he" it? has created, as in the fragment on page 73: "Ce que tu as écrit détient le secret . . . et toi, c'est seulement parce qu'il t'a échappé que tu a pu le transcrire." Finally what seems to happen in this work is that certain words acquire a peculiar density and resonance -- that make them independent of the "secrets" they transcribe. Words like "attait, don, oubli, commencement, attente, douleur." These words acquire a life of their own, like a modern cabala,⁴² and seem to use humans more than they are used: "Elle parle, parlée plutôt que parlant, comme si sa propre parole la traversait vivante et la transformait douloureusement en l'espace d'une autre parole. . ." (p. 150). This is not to say that the words of L'Attente L'Oubli can be understood, or "tamed." Just like children who are one step ahead of their parents' attempts to control them, Blanchot's words are always up to new tricks, just when you think you are beginning to figure out the old ones.

Blanchot's method is neither that of accretion, nor of palimpsest; the snake sheds its old skin before it puts on a new one; and the new one is for all practical purposes the only one it has ever worn. The meaning, the message, the center is there -- but it is unfindable, in that you'll never be able to put your finger on it: "Il cherche, tournant et retournant avec, au centre, cette parole et sachant que trouver c'est seulement chercher encore par rapport au centre, qui est l'introuvable" (p. 132). Blanchot's

butterfly will never be "pinned and wriggling on the wall" to satisfy an obscene science's obsessive need to classify. His fragment will always fly away; as there is nothing to hold it down.

The fragment, as Blanchot conceives it, and as he indefatigably argues in a recent book, L'Écriture du Désastre (Gallimard, 1980) is neither a negation nor an affirmation. Fragmentary writing comes into play when language, "having exhausted its power of negation, of affirmation has put. . . knowledge to rest" (p. 80); it is a "writing outside of language, nothing else possibly than the end (without end) of knowledge, and of myths and of utopia. . . ."

He who has said no, to being, essence, System, History has only shown that he believes firmly in the permanence of his own negation as well as that of the structure he attacks: "dire non, c'est dire avec éclat que le non est destiné à préserver" (p. 102).

The disaster that fragmentary writing conveys is not an event that happens in historical time. We customarily date the modern epoch from the Copernican and Galilean hypotheses that unseat man from a central place and role in the cosmos; but though man was no longer central he still existed in rapport with some kind of enduring structure and was to some extent sheltered by a certain relation or lack of relation to what he perceived to be the truth; but the disaster of which Blanchot speaks strikes at what is left of certainty after the discoveries of the Renaissance abolished man's centrality. Blanchot cites Bataille's stunning formulation

that "The sun no longer exists" as symptomatic of our common disaster. That is, we who have been moved around in the cosmos have now shuffled off of its entirety. Disastrous is the adjective that Blanchot uses to describe our contemporary non-relation to any cosmos. "Dé-s-astre" brings forth the idea of being separated from the astral, from the stars and heavens: and fragmentary writing takes place then under no sky, on no earth, and outside of historical time, just as the récits of Blanchot have evolved over the years to a stripped or dépouillé condition that estranges them from all tangible root, contingency, circumstance or location:⁴³ "fragmentaire sans fragment ce reste à écrire qui, à la façon du désastre, a toujours précédé, en le ruinant, tout commencement d'écriture et de parole" (p. 199).

The fragmentary word neither affirms nor denies; its existence is unnecessary, implausible, unproved, unfindable, untraceable. It neither takes place nor does it fail to take place. There is no authorial "I" to take credit for it, to begin it, or to bring it to any conclusion. The fragment neither begins nor ends: "tout commencement est recommencement." You don't write it, it lets itself be written, though there is nothing automatic about it. It is like a disaster which "ruins everything while leaving all exactly the way it was" (p. 7); for it, theories are fine and necessary (including the theory of the fragment), but also profoundly interchangeable. Likewise fragmentary writing doesn't militate against any particular law but must just observe with a little humour: "Le dessein de la loi: que les prisonniers construisent eux-mêmes leur prison. C'est le moment du concept, la marque du système." Unlike the aphorism the fragment neither

evolves, nor is it perfectable. You can't succeed a fragment. The fragment uses words as if they were a form of silence; what counts, as when we speak to each other in friendship or intimacy, is an undertone, what Blanchot, and also Tzara, calls a "cri"⁴⁴ or appeal underlying everything we say; for all the sense these wandering words make is read into them by the insistent reader or critic who has his own dialectical exigency (God) or ideology to satisfy. The sense of Blanchot lies more in the French "sens" as direction, not a meaning but a movement. . . . To say you can't succeed with fragments, that they come from and go towards no unity, is also to say you can't fail with them either: "Put no trust in failure, that would only betray your nostalgia for success" (p. 25).

Where literature, culture, art, philosophy stop, and where progress can push no further, that is where the fragment comes suddenly up against us. The fragment doesn't contend with or try to modify the dominant discipline and ideas (it is not "teachable" and therefore can never assume a place on any syllabus, program or curriculum). It lets them gradually exhaust themselves with their increasingly obvious futility. What we are incapable of saying, explaining or expressing by any theoretical structure: the reality and impossibility of death, the non-relation between our ideals and our practice, and between our dreams and our waking life, -- the horrors of Auschwitz, the bomb and the Gulag that we're just starting to be able to talk about, and that no system of knowledge, no dialectic can justify or rationalize without demonstrating its own complicity; here the fragment has something to say (for the fragment the bomb has always

just dropped) and contribute, because it doesn't conceptualize these events; it merely listens to them and thinks about them in sadness: "Apprends à penser avec douleur. . . . Douleur elle désunit, mais non pas d'une manière visible (par une dislocation ou une disjonction qui serait spectaculaire): d'une manière silencieuse, faisant taire le bruit derrière les paroles" (p. 219-220).

The fragmentary writer does not oppose (he may even support) all that Systems or Revolutions can do. He lets them have their say, and when they have finished, takes over what is left, what remains. He writes not out of a will or a desire to write, or for gain, fame, glory, distinction, or out of deep sorrow or overwhelming joy. He treats his writing as a sign, on the contrary that his will has failed him. He more falls into writing than rises up to it; so that what he says is merely a reminder of what cannot be said. Like Narcissus, who does not recognize himself in his own image, the fragmentary writer cannot see himself in his own productions. He will of course admit "I wrote that" to an examining magistrate, but inwardly he does not believe it or knows that it makes no difference. He is not corroborated, not strengthened and made more secure by what he has previously put down on paper. After all, however well received, these were just things he was forced to say at the time. His old phrases then may even work against him, "elles réintroduisent une assurance à laquelle on croyait avoir cessé d'appartenir, elles ont un air de vérité, elles disent: tu a pensé cela il y a longtemps, tu es donc autorisé à le penser de nouveau, restaurant cette continuité raisonnable

qui fait les systèmes, faisant jouer au passé une fonction de garantie, le laissant devenir actif, citateur, incitateur, et empêchant l'invisible ruine que la veille perpétuelle, hors conscience inconscience, rend au neutre" (97).

He writes then "against the grain," reluctantly, having no confidence either in the power of words (or their non-power) or the possibility or advisability of the "other" (reader, culture) responding to them. He can be a writer paradoxically only in the sense that he is not a writer: "on ne peut que devenir écrivain sans l'être jamais: dès qu'on l'est, on ne l'est plus" (p. 101). Just as no man is a prophet in his own land the fragmentary writer is forever exiled from the land of writing; and it does him no good to lose that "I" so precious and so bothersome to us in the west, the ego that Montaigne, Schopenhauer, Stirner, Gide have alternately glorified or excoriated. In the nouveau roman of Sarraute, Simon, Pinget, Robbe-Grillet, as well as in the "ready for anything" explorations and divigations of Sollers and his "tribe," remnants of that "subject" that so much is made of losing are easy enough to find the debris, if only in their characteristic styles; but Blanchot's disaster is more nearly allied to the double-bind frustrations of mad Artaud: ". . .le moi ne se perd pas parce qu'il ne s'appartient pas. Il n'est donc moi que comme non appartenant à soi, et donc comme toujours déjà perdu" (p. 105).

Responsibility for this state of affairs is primordial and innate. Though praise and blame are to be eschewed, since there is no freely choosing subject to fix them upon ("all faults are faults of position"), we are born

responsible for a situation that we did not help to create. The fragmentary writer, who like Blanchot has been contemporary with the unspeakable horrors of the 20th century, he who has lived through the war has the responsibility somehow to disseminate his attitude that life cannot go on as it was. Without pretending to be able to explain these events, we have had to admit that a kind of turning point has been reached; we don't hold our heads up quite so high as before, as humanity seems a creation more damned than blessed, and more to be pitied than damned.

We moderns can go nowhere, neither into life (it is too late for that) nor death (we have already died -- at Auschwitz and Hiroshima), only repeat, monotonously, insistently, unchangeably, a litany of regret, an inaudible cry -- a testimony not even meant to be read or heard, except by inconsequential accident, the way we see graffiti from a passing train, or catch a glimpse of a stranger's face in pain. This is what our fragmented lives and writing mean . . and not even that.

Notes

¹ Maurice Blanchot, "Gide et la Littérature d'Experience," in La Part du Feu (Gallimard, 1949), p. 209. My translation, as elsewhere, unless otherwise noted.

² Maurice Blanchot, "Joubert et l'Espace," in Le Livre à Venir (Gallimard, 1959).

³ Blanchot, "Joubert," p. 71.

⁴ Blanchot, L'Entretien Infini (Gallimard, 1969), p. 510.

⁵ A contemporary Argentine-French author wryly invents the ". . . NATIONAL CORPORATION OF CHURCHGOING GUARDIANS OF COLLECTIONS AND THEIR HOUSES OF COLLECTION (all houses of collection, and idem, houses -- deposits, warehouses, archives, museums, cemeteries, jails, asylums, homes for the blind etc. and also all employees of said establishments). (Collections: example: an archive keeps files in a collection; a cemetery keeps corpses in a collection; a jail keeps prisoners in a collection)."

-- J. Cortazar, Hopscotch, Ch. 133.

⁶ Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 514, paraphrasing Adorno's Theory of The New Music.

⁷ Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 511.

⁸ Maurice Blanchot, L'Écriture du Désastre (Gallimard, 1980), pp. 154-5: "Le don d'écrire est précisément ce que refuse l'écriture. Celui qui ne sait plus écrire, qui renonce au don qu'il a reçu, dont le langage ne se laisse pas reconnaître, est plus proche de l'inexpérience, inéprouvée, l'absence du 'propre' qui, même sans être, donne lieu à l'avènement. Qui loue le style, l'originalité du style exalte seulement le moi de l'écrivain qui a refusé de tout abandonner et d'être abandonné de tout. Bientôt il sera notable; la notoriété le livre au pouvoir: lui manqueraient l'effacement, la disparition.

Ni lire, ni écrire, ni parler, ce n'est pas le mutisme, c'est peut-être le murmure inouï: grondement et silence."

- 9 Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 514.
- 10 "Rousseau," in Le Livre à Venir.
- 11 Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 519. For Blanchot, as for his generation (Bataille and Lévinas) this power has to be read as a non-power, whose efficacy lies precisely in the fact that it confers neither prestige nor privilege: ". . . nul sceptre pour celui qui écrit, fût-il déguisé en baton de mendiant: nul appui et nul cheminement." [Maurice Blanchot, Le Pas au Delà (Gallimard, 1973), p. 67.]
- 12 Morse Peckham, "Towards a Theory of Romanticism," PMLA LXI (1951), pp. 5-23.
- 13 "L'Échec de Baudelaire," in La Part du Feu: Lautréamont and Sade (Editions de Minuit, 1953).
- 14 Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 524; or in the terminology of Barthes and Sollers the signifier with no reliable signified, or whose signified is either itself, or subject to what Lyotard calls "dérive," a floating, drifting and mutable rapport between sign and meaning.
- 15 No one more eloquently than Gilles Deleuze has described the necessary ambivalence of the critical attitude toward these "disturbances"; "Chacun risquait quelque chose, est allé le plus loin dans ce risque, et en tire un droit imprescriptible. Que reste-t-il au penseur abstrait quant il donne des conseils de sagesse et de distinction? Alors, toujours parler de la blessure de Bousquet, de l'alcoolisme de Fitzgerald et de Lowry, de la folie de Nietzsche et d'Artaud en restant sur le rivage? Devenir le professionnel de ces causeries? Souhaiter seulement que ceux qui furent frappés ne s'abîment pas trop? Faire des quêtes et des numéros spéciaux? Ou bien aller soi-même y voir un petit peu, être un peu alcoolique, un peu fou, un peu suicidaire, un peu guerillero, juste assez pour allonger la fêlure, mais pas trop pour ne pas l'approfondir irrémédiable? Où qu'on se tourne, tout semble triste. En vérité, comment rester à la surface sans demeurer sur le rivage? Comment se sauver en sauvant la surface, et toute l'organisation de surface, y compris le langage et la vie? Comment atteindre à cette politique, à cette guerilla complete?" -- Logique du Sens (Editions de Minuit, 1969), p. 184. A large order, to which doubtless the "nomadic intensities" and "schizophrenic fluxes" of

of the authors (and Guattari's) subsequent work was meant to respond. See also my chapters above on Tzara and Leiris, the first deciding for a social resolution (revolution) to the challenge of risk, the second more for a personal one (suicide, adultery and general self-laceration).

16 Blanchot, L'Entretien, pp. 524-7.

17 Le Pas au Delà, pp. 61-2.

18 Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 220 Deleuze's point in Nietzsche et la Philosophie (PUF, 1962), and one of the books Blanchot reviews in L'Entretien Infini, is highly relevant here. There the will to power is interpreted as being detached from any tangible object, just as Proust's desire in the same author's Proust et les Signes (PUF, 2^e édition augmentée, 1970) is found to be independent of Albertine's physical presence: Our modern world, impatient for answers, noise, substance, sperm, -- is incapable of respecting that distance that makes possible the integrity, therefore the very existence, alike of philosophy (Nietzsche) and art (Proust).

19 Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 403. Blanchot's position is of course not to be confused with Luddism; we cannot defeat the machines by destroying them. As in Heidegger, who he is paraphrasing, technology is seen as a kind of destiny, a necessary avowal of man's constitutional lack or inadequacy, and one that cannot be avoided simply by being denied.

20 L'Amitié (Gallimard, 1971), pp. 9-61; here Blanchot, opposing both optimistic (Malraux and Teilard de Chardin) and pessimistic (Duthuit and Situationists) evaluations of the technology that makes the museum possible, describes the function of that institution as not so much to enable us to experience other cultures (an impossibility, at all events) as to uproot (dé-racinement) us from any trusting rapport to our own environment. The significance of the museum in particular and technology in general is that it makes us all strangers (in a larger sense than meant by Camus), nomads and wanderers on the moving surface of the planet.

21 Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 391.

22 "Le Refus," in L'Amitié; or "La Littérature et le Droit à la Mort," in La Part du Feu. This latter essay, translated by L. Davis for a recent anthology of Blanchot's criticism, The Gaze of Orpheus (Station Hill, 1981) establishes a strict correlation between literature and revolution: "The writer seems himself in the Revolution. It attracts him because it is the

time during which literature becomes history. It is his truth. Any writer who is not induced by the very fact of writing to think "I am the revolution, only freedom allows me to write," is not really writing. . . . Sade is the writer, par excellence" (p. 40). Sade's active participation in the French Revolution, lavishly described by Blanchot in Lautréamont and Sade (see also above, p. 80 note 41), parallels Blanchot's far from negligible although very self-effacing participation in May '68. These iconoclastic "affirmations" need to be balanced also with the very nuanced attitude toward rebellion that Blanchot develops in the novel, Le Très Haut (Gallimard, 1948), whose burden it is to demonstrate the complicity and isomorphism of a guerilla opposition with a law that it not so much defies as replicates. What attracts the writer therefore is the revolutionary energy; what repels him, and in fact evicts and destroys him, is system in any form, even a "revolutionary" one.

23

See pages 114-115 note 60 above. The (perfectly reasonable) hostility of the masses toward art is discussed by J. Baudrillard in "The Beaubourg-Effect: Implosion and Deterrence," October #20 (Spring '82), pp. 3-13. The masses throng to Beaubourg to celebrate the destruction of art; they have understood, as they have always known, that art has nothing to do with them, and is a supreme mockery of their real condition.

24

Blanchot, L'Entretien, pp. 392-3. The passage continues with a version of what was one of Tzara's perennial slogans: "et que je n'en avais pas dans les mains, ni dans les poches." "Nothing in the hand, nothing in the pockets" was how Tzara frequently expressed the surrealist attitude of nakedness and vulnerability before the exigency of a revolutionary conjuncture, as well as an opposition to all "investment," whether aesthetic or financial, that blocks availability for change. See above, pages 43-54, my discussion of Tzara's Mouchoir des Nuages, with its theme of the practical interchangeability of poet and banker.

25

It is important to be reminded that for Blanchot the writer does not relax his rigour, logic or expertise, but replies to a "double exigence," by continuing to speak two languages; one, the discourse of power that insures he either will be heard or cannot be ignored, two, a language of cry, impulse and violence that means he is saying something: L'Écriture du Désastre, p. 101, Blanchot citing Fr. Schlegel: "Avoir un système, voilà qui est mortel pour l'esprit; n'en avoir pas, voilà aussi qui est mortel. D'où la nécessité de soutenir, en les perdant, à la fois les deux exigences." See also below, the conclusion of my discussion of Blanchot's La Folie du Jour, pages 168-70.

26

L'Espace Littéraire (Gallimard, 1955), p. 314.

27 For the intrication, often even interchangeability of the discourses of Blanchot with Bataille and also Lévinas, around the concepts of proximity and communication as non-reciprocity, see the excellent but abstruse Joseph Libertson, Proximity: Lévinas, Blanchot, Bataille and Communication, (Nijhoff: Le Hague, 1982). For Libertson, -- Blanchot, Bataille and Lévinas project insistently certain principles of "non-power" and "non-knowledge," inevitably marginal and iconoclastic, that confute if not abolish traditional class-and-power centered philosophy (Platonic and Cartesian) as well as its modern phenomenological offshoots (still relying on the authority of the perceiving subject.) The realization is inescapable that very much in Blanchot is a more or less manifest dialogue or conversation with Bataille, Lévinas or both. Reciprocally the presence of Blanchot in the works of the latter two is equally inescapable. See also my remarks about Blanchot, the catalytic figure who is a network of other writers, in my introduction, pp. 8-9. The writer, then in Blanchot's sense, is not so much someone identifiable as producer of specified works to which he lays claim, but instead is a kind of general symptom, malaise or condition that speaks through him, and as often through others through him (Blanchot is always, critically at least, dealing with another writer) or through him through others (Blanchot's frequent presence in *Tel Quel*, *Deconstruction*. . .). One may object that inter-textuality has always been the nature of the literary beast. To which it may be replied that we are not dealing here with the practically influential, but so frequently with the absolutely indistinguishable.

28 Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 302.

29 Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 594-5.

30 Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 595.

31 Blanchot, L'Éspace Littéraire, p. 314.

32 Blanchot, L'Entretien, p. 595.

33 What is dropped from the second version is all that went into making a novel traditionally: a circumstance, contingency, social setting, psychology, motivation -- also the other woman of the habitual romantic triangle (a Louise) is similarly elided. As to what is left, perhaps we can call that nothing, and call that nothing the fact of a man and a woman face to face with death, their own and each other's, or as Blanchot

says in a later text, Le Pas Au Delà, p. 177: "Rien, c'est ce qu'il faut: supporter l'insupportable rien." Although the differences between the two versions of Thomas L'Obscur are obvious fully at a glance, Evelyn Londyn compares them exhaustively, if a bit tediously, in Maurice Blanchot, Romancier (A.G. Nizet, 1976).

34 Françoise Collin, Maurice Blanchot et La Question de L'Écriture (Gallimard, 1971), p. 124. Relying on the theories of G. Canguilhem, Collin states that we don't so much go to the doctor to cure our maladies but to exchange them for social approbation.

35 Michel Butor, Répertoire II (Editions de Minuit, 1964), p. 62.

36 Daniel Wilhem, Maurice Blanchot et La Voix Narrative (UGE, 10/18, 1974), pp. 249-284. Also R. La Porte, "Le Oui, Le Non, Le Neutre," Critique #229 (Juin, 1966), pp. 588-90.

37 Evelyn Londyn complains in the book mentioned in note #33 above that Blanchot thereby vitiates the aesthetic impact of the book by having Thomas tell us, and at length, exactly what he means. In my view Blanchot's strategy is intentional -- since it subverts the tendency of a reader to "appreciate" the novel as a "work of art" and thereby defuse its explosive capacity. The "work of art" that is this novel thereby commits suicide, and what is born in its place is the word (la parole) which is listened to (as Lévinas has it) not because of its content, message, style, or form, but because someone, or something is speaking (prend la parole).

38 Jacques Derrida, "Living On," in Deconstruction and Criticism (Seabury Press, N.Y., 1979), p. 103.

39 In this sense Joyce could get away with the magnificent act of sabotage that is the Wake because of the credentials to sanity provided by his earlier work. It was too late for his principal source of support (Harriet Weaver) to cut him off once she found out what he was really up to -- destroying the English language.

40 "Le dehors" is one of the frequent verbal recourses for Blanchot; an outside, it should by now almost go without saying, of no inside, simply the temptation (attrait) and impossibility of approach to everyone and anything, especially all unity or certainty (even nihilist denials turn into versions of the discredited theology). A very good book

that explores facets and aspects of this "dehors" of Blanchot is Georges Preli's La Force du Dehors; exteriorité, limite et non-pouvoir à partir de Maurice Blanchot (Encres, Recherches, 1977).

41 Just to make sure that you don't, by dint of repetition, mistake this statement for an affirmation, Blanchot mischevously turns it into a negation: "Fais en sorte que je ne puisse te parler" later in the book. Like a coin in an unused currency it's worth as much when you turn it over.

42 The mystical analogy is tempting, but must be resisted. Blanchot's "cabala" is too mutable, labile, shifting and treacherous for any belief to rest in. The words he uses are in perpetual process of mutation and sliding; and their meanings as soon assigned as retracted; they replace each other without difficulty and hindrance, just the very opposite of the sacred. R. Laporte, in a recent text, calls Blanchot, not very seriously, a "mystique devoyé" ["Une Passion," in Deux Lectures de Maurice Blanchot (Fata Morgana, 1973)] but I think the religious metaphor reflects a momentary obstruction or fixation of the reader rather than the text which, by its nature, is always ready to move on.

43 More specifically, at a certain point in time (about 1948) Blanchot abandons the novel for the récit, ostensibly for the increased nudity and simplicity of the latter form. Within the récit form itself there is an evolution away from contingency and circumstance until near total anonymity and atopia of Attente L'Oubli of 1962, and the unidentifiable interlocutors of the conversations of L'Entretien Infini. In the recent collections of "fragments," Le Pas Au Delà of 1973 and L'Ecriture du Désastre of 1980, the récit "goes underground," is present by fits and starts, but characters are not so much unnamed as inexistent, just voices that state, argue, doubt, interrupt, implore, cajole -- and that ask only -- to be heard; this mixture of philosophy, memory, dialogue, non-wisdom is more of an incitation than a collection, and is obviously meant that way: "Tous les mots sont adultes. Seul l'espace où ils retentissent, espace infiniment vide comme un jardin où, bien après qu'ils ont disparu, continueraient de s'entendre les cris joyeux des enfants, les reconduit vers la mort perpétuelle où ils semblent naître toujours." -- Le Pas Au Delà, p. 31, or the kind of infinitely provocative statement that breaks apart in the mind (or breaks a certain kind of mind apart) as you read and are read by it.

44 Tzara seems to me to be very close to Blanchot, though,

perhaps because of excess of proximity, Blanchot never mentions him, preferring to deal with surrealism through the more anodyne (than Tzara) Breton. Tzara's genius, whose hallmark was its ability to alternate between the courage and tenacity of deep obscurity and moments of shattering revolutionary vision and statement, resembles that of Blanchot's, where the sheer inexplicability of a look, cry or laugh coexists with radically undeniable insistence on confronting blatantly the most urgent questions of our time. The following, from Tzara's L'Ecluse de la Poesie, looks like it could come from L'Entretien Infini: "L'insupportable sentiment d'étouffement que ces êtres éprouvent est du à l'ambiance où ils vivent et qu'il s'agit pour eux de nier Le cri, ultime expression de l'homme traqué par sa propre insuffisance. . . .Toute la différence entre les faiseurs des vers et les poètes enracinées dans la détermination de leur être entier est contenue dans ce danger auquel les derniers exposent à chaque moment leur conscience." (Oeuvres Complètes, V, p. 130.) Tzara and Blanchot coincide also, and are opposed to Breton, on an important, sensitive and controversial issue in their mutual distrust of automatic writing, arising out of their almost constitutional anti-mysticism and anti-platonism: automatic writing implies a belief in an ideal essence or truth, whether transcendental or unconscious, that manifests itself when conscious control is eliminated.

5. The Endless Question: Finnegans Wake, I, 6

I

Book I, 6, of Finnegans Wake (pp. 126-168) starts with a kind of brief introductory passage which sets our scene in (a kind of) space and time. Shem then begins his interrogation with a question-to-end-all questions, a question so long, involved, abstruse and absurd that it is a question in name only. The voice and mood here are in an epic register; but what is it that is being enunciated, celebrated, announced in this avalanche, this rain, this thunderstorm, this earthquake of words? The reading here is some of perhaps the easiest it has been in the Wake. The clauses connected by semicolon that stretch over these 13 densely-packed pages all relate back to the same interrogatory subject; those infamous Wakean sentences that never end and seem never to have begun, that crawl like long snakes around our consciousness are conspicuous by their absence here. Joyce's phrases instead now are short, abrupt, often staccato and naturalistic; fairly plain English even peeks through now and then:

. . . business, reading newspaper, smoking cigar, arranging tumblers on table, eating meals, pleasure, etcetera, etcetera, pleasure, eating meals, arranging tumblers on table, smoking cigar, reading newspaper, business; minerals, wash and brush up, local views, jujutoffee, comic and birthday cards, those were the days and he was their hero . . . (127).

It is not as if there isn't still plenty to wonder about here; for one thing the sheer diversity of the utterance is never more dazzling and

awe-inspiring; but lists, even an abstruse, surreal and endless one like this one, make for comparatively easy reading. Lists tend to be selective, exhaustive, monological and exhausting -- as well as comforting. We habitually put things we want to acquire or do on lists, and thereby assume that reality can be controlled and things accomplished; and we habitually resort to lists in moods of confusion and dissatisfaction. Particularly serviceable is the kind of list that covers everything, or has ambitions to do so, as if we will eventually hit the target if we just keep firing. Such is the list that Shem here supplies; its complexity and diversity are compensated for by the terrible simplicity of a question which is sufficient unto itself and is its own answer. Thematically all the descriptive items here refer to the archetypal conglomerate and nexus of the Father; and this list is, in fact, a halcyon biography which mixes elements pell-mell from many disparate realms, including (among an infinitude of others) history, politics, mythology, geography, war, perversion and religion -- as if the Father was somehow the sum total of all of these avatars. Also, a consistently maintained tone of epic encomium surrounds this larger-than-life creature and balances in the larger scale of the Wake the comical-caustic denigration of an earlier list "of all the abusive names he was called" (pp. 71-2).

Joyce's literary precedent in thus "mythifying" his hero is, of course, Rabelaisian hyperbole. HCE

. . .lights his pipe with a rosin tree and hires a towhorse to
haul his shoes; cures slavey's scurvy, breaks barons boils;

called to sell polosh and was found later in a bedroom; has his seat of justice, his house of mercy, his corn o'copious and his stacks a'rye; prospector, he had a rooksacht, retrospector, he holds the holpenstake; won the freedom of new yoke for the minds of jugo-slaves; acts active, peddles in passivism and is a gorgon of selfridgeousness. . . (137).

By the use of a familiar and time-honored style like the "gargantuan" above Joyce seems to be facilitating the forward progress of his reader, just as elsewhere in the Wake he makes every effort to slow him down or even stop him completely in his tracks. The "what" with which the question has begun (126: "What secondtonone myther rector and maximost bridges-maker was first to rise taller. . .") provides a certain minimal direction and structure for the numberless clauses that follow; the forest may become deep but the way back is clearly marked, so one advances boldly into these thickets. However experimental Joyce gets within the clauses in vocabulary, mutant and invented words, and sheer anomaly of the diction and its referents,¹ there are limits set on how lost the reader can get; for the end of each clause always throws him back to the controlling structure of the initial interrogation. We are, of course, here as always in Finnegans Wake, in the position of a reader who is in the process of learning how to read in a foreign language, but now the learner's task has been explicitly facilitated, as he has been supplied prior access to at least one solid level of an argument -- in the same way that a book, movie, or program in an

unfamiliar language is likely to make more sense if we have some idea beforehand as to what is going to be said.

Our hypothetically obdurate reader knows already through a few skirmishes with the nine lines introducing the chapter and perhaps through the help of Campbell's Key. . . , Tyndall's Reader's Guide. . .² and other commentaries, that, on one level at least, something very basic and familiar is taking place, something that has a theatrical nature and setting: "Who do you no tonigh, lazy and gentleman?" (126), namely one of the fundamental rituals of our culture -- the examination and/or public interrogation: "this nightly quisquiquock." The test, the examination is a ritual at once threatening and comforting; the threat lies in one's being put on the spot to answer, and well, for one's time; the comfort is in the assumption both that one's knowledge counts and that there are answers to the questions that life poses. At this point in the Wake the "reassuring" aspects of the ritual dominate. Whether the reader has made it this far into the text or is just looking for a reasonable place to browse, the binary and dyadic structure (inherent in the question-answer format), even if it turns out to be only a semblance, mockery or parody of one, must seem like an oasis of stability and substance in the Wake's ocean of limitless referentiality. Reinforcing these more-or-less dependable but certainly welcome hints at a controlling structure for the chapter, Joyce, so scrupulous about removal of scaffolding after completion of the work,³ has made a point here of letting the numbers stand. We may not know what the questions or answers are, what they mean or why they are being asked

and answered; we may not even be able to tell, at times, a question from an answer, or we may forget in the digressions, amplifications and divagations of the text that there are questions being asked and answered; but we always know which number it is, we know how many are behind us and how many we have to go.

Whatever the complexity, though, of the later interrogations and responses, here in the first of the questions Joyce is making the reading as much of a flow as it ever gets to be in the Wake. That typically obscuring tactic of the run-on (non) sentence, whereby Joyce so frequently "loses" his reader, by dint of erasing his tracks, in a kind of illimitable confusing present, is absent here -- where the clauses all refer back so compellingly to the initial question.

The (comparative) clarity and consistency of the grammar here is paralleled by an analogous reliability in thematic referentiality. HCE is the constant subject of concern, preoccupation and focus and his numberless avatars and manifestations all point to a figure that the reader grasps and accepts (in the sense of Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief") as being somehow larger or other than life; he is therefore not subject to correction by our merely human criteria of time and space, common sense and logic. HCE is at home everywhere, in all times and places; the totality of the visible and invisible world, and all possible realms of spirit, psyche and imagination is subject to invasion by his energy, power and influence:

. . .as far as wind dries and rain eats and sun turns and water

bounds he is exalted and depressed, assembled and asundered; go
 away, we are deluded, come back, we are disghosted; bored the
 Ostrov, leapt the Inferus, swam the Mabbul and flure the Moyle;
 like fat, like fat-like tallow, or greasefulness, yea of dripping
 greasefulness; did not say to the old, old, did not say to the
 scorbutic, scorbutic; he has founded a house, Uru, a house he
 has founded to which he has assigned its fate; bears a raaven
 geulant on a fjeld duiv; rux the halo off his varlet when he appear-
 ed to his shecook as Haycock, Emmet, Boaro, Toaro, Osterich,
 Mangy and Skunk; pressed the beer of aled age out of the nettles
 of rashness; put a roof on the lodge for Hymn and a coq in his pot
 pro homo; was dapifer then pancircensor then hortifex magnus; the
 topes that tiplied on him, the types that toppled on him; still starts
 our hares yet gates our goat; pocketbook packetboat, gapman gunrun;
 the light of other days, dire dreary darkness; our awful dat, Timour
 of Tortur; puzzling, startling, shocking, nay, perturbing; went puf-
 fing from king's brugh to new customs, doffing the gibbous off him
 to every breach of all size; with Pa's new hef and Papa's new
 helve he's Papapa's old cutlass Papapapa left us; when young-
 headed oldshouldered and middlishneck aged about; caller herring
 everydaily, turgid tarpon overnight; see Loryon the comaleon that
 changed endocrine history by loeven his loaf with forth bannucks;
 (136)

Joyce here is throwing the paint on his canvas in large blobs of color,

giving the brush a few brisk turns then looking back to his palette for a new hue. Now in the throes of his riotous first question we are in the midst of, as Lessing never dreamed it could be, writing as an art of space.⁴

A characteristic of the modernist text has certainly been an emphasis on a spatial, as opposed to a temporal pole of writing -- and a corresponding focus, as in the nouveau roman, on the descriptive as opposed to the narrative functions of the text. The effect of this displacement has been to de-thematize, de-psychologize, and de-moralize writing by locating it in a dimension of pure autonomy and intransitivity -- where it no longer has to mean but can simply be.⁵

Seeds of narration live on though, in their modest, insistent way. Diachrony is not utterly forgotten, nor completely transgressed, as stories, like tenacious grass in ruptured paving, have a way of peeking through this hyperbolic, synchronic edifice:

. . .heavengendered, chaosfoedted, earthborn; his father presumptively ploughed it deep on overtime and his mother as all evince must have travailled her fair share; a footprinse on the Megacene, hetman unwhorsed by Searingsand; honorary captain of the extemporised fire brigade, reported to be friendly with the police; the door is still open; the old stock collar is coming back; not forgetting the time you laughed at Elder Charterhous's duckwhite pants and the way you said the whole township can see his hairy legs; by stealth of a kersse her aulburntress abaft his nape she hung; when his kettle became a hearthsculdus our throstyites set

their lymphamphyre; his year-letter concocted my masterhands of assays, his hallmark imposed by the standard of wrought plate; a pair of pectorals and a triplescreen to get a wind up (137).

The staccato exigency of his overwhelming question make it impossible or unnecessary for Shem to do any more than hint at stories yet to be told or ones that lie beneath the surface and never can be told but whose existence is just meant to be sensed in a rudimentary way; and certainly one of the most pervasive effects that Joyce achieves here lies in this skill of his to evoke the existence of powerful and perdurable currents of narration that run beneath the surface of his description and occasionally erupt like geysers into the full light of day. Joyce, like Mallarmé, values suggestion over definition. He would rather hint at yet-to-be-discovered recesses than tell us of what never happened as if it did. For Joyce, as for Mallarmé,⁶ "facts" are the grossest of fictions (frequent in the Wake is the neologism of "ficfact"),⁷ and there is more truth for him in the wildest of rumours than in the most compendious and apparently exhaustive of academic treatises. This accounts for the tremendous respect shown in the Wake to gossip, hearsay, and the kind of snatches of information and scandal that one gleans haphazardly from sources like advertisements, newspaper headlines, propaganda, folksongs, jokes and all such imponderables.

This strange monologue-in-the-form-of-question of Shem's invites a more comfortable reading than elsewhere in the Wake, for the reader knows, as wild as the words and referents get, who is talking and about what. But what Joyce gives us with one hand he always takes away with

the other, for, in another sense, reader participation is repelled by the relentless, unilateral rush of the 13 pages of delivery. The monolith of this first question is more meant to be gaped at in astonishment, amusement, confusion and disbelief rather than related to; it is an astounding tour-de-force that cannot be "digested" anymore than can be a pyramid; nothing here is real (for long) or natural; everything is exaggerated, uncanny, unsuspected and extreme. It would take a god, no merely mortal reader to identify with this infinitely refracted panoply that comprises HCE; and certainly he is not, or not only, a character in a book, but a living symbol, "the word made flesh," a catalyst, inspiration, a source and focus of energy, a perpetual and compulsive process of production, and a sublime mockery or parody of everything he is reported to be, who

with one touch of nature set a veiled world agin and went within a sheet of tissuepaper of the option of three goals; who could see at one blick a saumon taken with a lance, hunters pursuing a doe, a swallowship in full sail, a whyterobe lifting a host; faced flappery like old King Cnut and turned his back like Cincinnatus; is a farfar and morefar and a hoar father Nakedbucker in villas old and new; squats aquart and cracks aquaint when it's flaggin in town and on haven; blows whiskery around his summit but stehts stout upon his footles; stutters fore he falls and goes mad entirely when he's waked; is Timb to the pearly morn and Tomb to the mourning night; and an he had the best bunbaked bricks in bould Babylon for his pitching plays he'd be lost for the want of his wan wubblin wall?

Answer: Finn MacCool!

This machine-in-perpetual-motion incarnates and exemplifies a principle of constant flux and dynamism that underlies Finnegans Wake.⁸ If to judge is to "fix" things in time and space, then HCE is impossible to judge, almost impossible to conceive or think about.⁹ For HCE won't stay long enough in one place for us to make up our minds about him or conceive what he is, was, and will be. For here, the temporal dimension, and with it, the laws of cause and effect are utterly elided.¹⁰ There is never any cause, or any sufficient one certainly, why HCE is one place rather than another, does what he does and is what he is; the rapid alternations, contrasts, shift in color, register and tone insure that the only solid idea a reader can maintain is that of many different HCE's. Above all there is no standard of truth or reality to appeal to or rely on through his peregrinations and metamorphoses -- most of which are couched anyway in terms of reported gossip, hearsay and otherwise unreliable sources. We are, to employ David Hayman's neat formulation, "doubly distanced"¹¹ from our hero, first because we know of him only what is said; second because these reports, scattered, contradictory, rhetorical and fragmentary, float in a kind of gravity-free space of language, disconnected from any single unqualifiable anchor of meaning. HCE ultimately is just a magnificent collection of images, guaranteed by no reality, cause, purpose or source -- just simply there, as a mountain of words resting on thin air, or a sunset over a nonexistent sea. Human existence, and the

communication with other which commonly gives it meaning, tends to be reduced or expanded, in this perspective, to versions of the purely mythical or literary, like an invented letter that alludes to a love affair that might have been: "Dear Hewitt Castello, Equerry, were daylighted with our outing and are looking backwards to unearly summers, from Rhoda Dundrums" (135).

The existence of time in HCE's world of signs undergoes a mutation¹² which corresponds to his "liberation" from contingency, since here is a character who moves and acts in a dimension that is far removed from any allegiance to any practical exigencies. Here indeed is a creature who was never born, nursed, reared and educated, but bursts fully grown (at no specific moment), as if from the forehead of Zeus. Along with any rational sense of a slow evolution in time, of precedence and "before and after," HCE similarly explodes the laws of cause and effect. It makes as much, if not more sense to say that the past is caused by the present as the other way around, since HCE rewrites history to suit Joyce's rhetorical needs of the moment. Similarly the future becomes the already has been. The recent, the long ago, the far-into-the-future are compressed here into a single tense that the Wake likes to call the "pressant."¹³ This apparently is a kind of dream-like time that liberates the subject from the trammels and limits of his own and others' contingency and wherein he assumes a god-like mobility. He relates in this dimension equally to and with his own past and future avatars as well as to indifferently the dead, the living

and the yet unborn -- as this dream-logic, exceptional in the life of the normal man, becomes the very rule of his world. In the Wake the dream is never over.

Above all the subject in this oneiric landscape is not exposed to that inherently human quandary of choosing to pursue one direction at the expense of another. There is no "road not taken" here. Intrinsically and perhaps tragically human is the situation where choice becomes destiny. Deciding on any particular activity is tantamount to excluding others. Even to think, to concentrate on any matter is to define everything else as momentarily irrelevant "conclure, c'est exclure."¹⁴ Now characteristic of HCE is a tendency to refuse this exclusion; to think and act and yet be infinitely available for all other thoughts and actions; to do, feel, be, think, sense and know everything; in a word, to accomplish an impossible project of including all within one's purview.

HCE embodies then this god-like exemption from the limitations and quandaries of mere human existence, that is, of ordinary waking life, since for him the exceptional, the miraculous, the uncanny have become the rule. Birth and death, both his own and others, those perpetual parameters of life, become for HCE mere words, figures of speech that can be altered or erased to meet the desires of the moment. Everywhere the limitations of reality and language yield to the onslaught of his unqualified being; not only is he larger than life, as he

changes blowicks into bullocks and a well of Artesia into a bird of Arabia; the handwriting on his facewall, the

cryptoconchoidsiphonostomata in his exprussians; his birthspot lies beyond the herospont and his burialplot in the pleasant little field; is the yldist kiosk on the pleninsula and the unquest hostel in Saint Scholarland; walked many hundreds and many score miles of streets and lit thousands in one nightlights in hectares of windows; his great wide cloak lies on fifteen acres and his little white horse decks by dozens our doors; O sorrow the sail and woe the rudder that were set for Mairie Quail!; his suns the huns, his dartars the tartars, are plenty here today; who repulsed from his burst the bombolts of Ostenton and falchioned each flash donsaduck in the deep; a personal problem, a locative enigma; upright one, vehicle of arcanisation in the field, lying chap, flood supplier of celiculation through ebblanes; a part of the whole as a port for a whale (135).

HCE will not be "pinned down" and defined not only because he is perpetually being re-defined, re-explained and re-presented, but because the language that captures him is in a permanent state of mutation and evolution. The language acts like a seive that lets everything through but sense. We cannot say therefore that we ever know HCE unqualifiably one way or the other; nor can we ever say that we have even approached knowledge of him, for though the imagery may seem occasionally fathomable, though contradictory and immediately brought into question by the next flight of words, the very orthography pushes us away, as if the words themselves were subject to a kind of slippage of meaning and referent, were

denied the paste or glue that makes them stick to objects in the so-called real world, leaving behind a kind of shell, remnant or residue of meaning, though conveying the kind of heavy emotional charge characteristic perhaps of psychotic discourse: "ace of arts, deuce of damimonds, trouble of clubs, fear of spates" (134).

It is as if this language were a body whose integument were attacked by a virus or some other infectious and discoloring mechanism that has altered its appearance visibly and irrevocably but left enough of the original intact to leave it teasingly recognizable. The Joycean onslaught on language itself thus even is not totally unqualified. He destroys but not utterly. The "ace of hearts, two of diamonds, three of clubs and four of spaces" still lurk visibly behind the newly created entities, enriched now with a few more layers of intimation and suggestion. Joyce has moved the word then to a point where it no longer means exactly what it used to, nor does it mean or not mean exactly anything else either. This is perhaps the sense of the famous "operation" that Joyce performs upon the living body of language and from which all of us involved in the study and practice of literature are still experiencing the fallout.¹⁵ He has disturbed, and profoundly, the link between signifier and signified, making it seem tenuous, alterable and ambiguous, making us unsure what we really mean when we think we are talking about things; he has loosened and stretched that tie, replacing definition and substance everywhere with connotation and suggestion, moving language massively from the pole of prose to that of poetry, and in the process blurring the distinction

between the two: "So?/Who do you 'no tonigh, lazy and gentleman" (126).

These above are words that are neither transparent for any definite message nor sufficient unto themselves. They occupy an indeterminate realm which is the Joycean terrain par excellence, where words cannot make up their minds what they say or cannot say, and where all is hesitation, ambiguity and uncertainty. The question that Joyce poses is at once endless and unanswerable. Any answer that is supplied comes through as mere formality, or as a further extension of the question which, properly speaking is infinite. Is indeed there any sense through this interminable first question, that eventually is cut off rather than ends, that our two-word answer, "Finn MacCool!", that we have surely anticipated and consulted, is going to solve anything? All that can be known "for sure" merely adds to our ignorance, as on a map where all the indications lead away from our destination -- which can be shown on no map.

In this quasi-mystical perspective, that may remind one distantly of the "negative theology" of such as Boehme and Eckhart, those things we think we know turn out to be obstacles and ignorance. Our "knowledge" is a negative rather than a positive quantity, a "no," that is a negation and denial, fruit of our impatience and frustration, rather than "know" -- ledge. We can get closer "tonigh" (t) but that doesn't mean we'll know any more when dawn breaks. We can slide up and down and back and forth across the slippery and non-resistant surface of Joyce's endless attempts to circumscribe, present, hide, reveal and veil HCE, but we will never come to know him; for the one rule we cannot violate here is the absolute proscription

of any stability or fixation.

There is no point of rest in the Joycean cosmos, no central place,¹⁶ or strategic post, no privileged point-of-view from which the rest can be surveyed. The text itself, far from pretending to the status of sacred object, was and is subject to constant correction, emendation and reinterpretation. HCE "like a heptagon crystal emprisoms trues and fauss for us; is infinite swell in unfitting induments" (127). We must be satisfied instead with the multifarious images and the corresponding concept of language whereby "true" and "false" are no longer absolute standards but merely words among words and as such subject to the same mordant acid of mutation and evolution that affects the language as a whole. What is left of the "false" when "fauss" is put in its place, or of "truth" that has become merely "trues"? Is it more or less, better, or worse? We can't say for sure and even if we could we probably would change our minds eventually, as time works its changes upon the reader also. All we know is that "trues" and "fauss" are other than true and false, and have perhaps invaded each others domains¹⁷ -- and that when we look into this "heptagon crystal," certainly another attempt of the Wake's at self-description,¹⁸ we are more likely to be fascinated by the changing play of light, pattern and color than enriched by any solid contribution to our stocks of knowledge. Furthermore, once we look into this crystal, we are subject to the rules of the prism ("emprisoms") that privilege no abstract prior entity but changes the world according to the exigencies of its structure. The Father, then, seen through the prism of the language of this first indefinitely refracted

question is likely to emerge as a paradoxical, ambiguous and tenuous being.

If the Father has been, historically and traditionally the locus of all stability and certainty, the surety of an origin and that we come from and are going to somewhere, then what is manifest here is a massive dislocation of this image. The Father can no longer be relied on; he has been fractured into a million shimmering shards. If, furthermore, the Father is identified with sense, structure, authority and law (grammar, in short) then all of these are threatened too. Joyce has effected an Einsteinian revolution in the meaning of the figure of paternity. The Father as law-giver, norm, standard and judge is no longer possible to locate; he has become a vector of historical change, a victim of "progress," evinced and exploded by the pressure of the contradictions he was not able to master -- he has passed in sardonic apotheosis into the centerless vacuum of limitless space; for the Father's position, always untenable, has become impossible; the contradiction of his role lay in the difficulty in conciliating his political and social function as father-figure with the weakness to which all flesh is heir to. Hence the Joycean obsession with the strangely haunting case of the Irish leader Parnell, ruined by sexual scandal -- as shown, for instance by the massive presence of the word "hesitancy"¹⁹ (a misspelling of which was convoluted evidence of the Church's plot against Parnell) in myriad allusions and versions: HCE "is unhesitant in his unionism and yet a pigotted nationalist" (133; underlinings mine -- Pigot played a signal role in the case against Parnell).

As certain unforgettable pages of A Portrait of the Artist make clear,²⁰ the fall of Parnell left all of Ireland a confused and disillusioned orphan. In a climactic early scene of Portrait Stephen Dedalus' individual sense of abandonment and loss, affected by bitter quarrels in his family about the case, is transmogrified in a feverish dream into a universal vision of pathos and emptiness.²¹ The Telemachus motif which underlies the structure of Ulysses thematically also has much to do with this nostalgia for a vanished absolute; but here on the terrain of the Wake we are no longer in the realm of wishful thinking, or dreaming at the limit. Finnegans Wake will no longer make sense out of a world that doesn't make sense to begin with; it is no longer searching for a standard to go by, for a god to replace the one that has died, or for a kind of modern absolute. Finnegans Wake brings no new answers to the age-old questions, but instead shows these questions up for what they are -- as being basically senseless, obsolete and functionally unanswerable.

Past a certain point of development the rhetorical device of amplification,²² so intrinsic to the creation of Finnegans Wake turns out to be a technique of annihilation. Saying too much about something may be a surer way of reducing it to ashes than saying too little or even nothing (when we say little or nothing there is still implied that something might be said, if not by us then by others, if not now then sooner or later). By saying as much as can possibly be said and more, Joyce is reducing the object of his lucubrations to dust; and nowhere is this negative process more comically active than in his celebration of the Father of question one.

By maintaining the concentration of his focus, piling haphazard rumour, upon improbable event upon wild and striking metaphor, figure, analogy and contrast what ultimately is circumscribed turns out to be a nullity -- as if to prove the point that if you keep talking about the same thing for long enough you will wind up talking about nothing, or not knowing or caring what you are talking about (even if that still mattered). For Joyce insists on stretching this question way beyond the point where it or any question can any longer make any sense; he is not developing and describing his character, as is the traditional fictional practice, for later use and cogitation. He is getting rid of HCE once and for all (though nothing ever happens once and for all²³ here), burying him with adjectives, as it were, so that not a trace of reality is left.

This rhetorical destruction of the father-figure is paralleled by Joyce's preoccupation in the Wake with the theme of patricide. The murder of the father is certainly one of the major recurring motifs in Finnegans Wake, of which the assassination of the Russian general, "caught with his pants down,"²⁴ is the single most exploited avatar; and the story of Oedipus,²⁵ archetypical parricide, is as relevant for the Wake as Hamlet was for Ulysses. What is left then, when Shem is finished with his father at the end of question one is a kind of desert, an emptiness, or vacuum that our mythical answer "Finn MacCool" doesn't do a lot to fill. In a sense, though maybe the boards have been cleared for action, at least provisionally. Now that the father has definitively "shot his load," been described out of existence and neutralized he is no longer a factor in the Joycean equation.

His rules, laws, authority no longer need to be taken into account. The destruction of the father by the language he himself created is the necessary precondition for the creation of a new cultural idiom. The figure of the father has been "de-mythified," so that when he enters the game again (though he is conspicuous for his absence for the rest of the "questions" chapter) it is as just another contingent individual in a world or family of such.

We therefore interpret these 13 unrelenting pages of alternating rant, apostrophe, encomium, ridicule, celebration, nursery rhyme, bric-a-brac et al as tantamount to an intentional deconstruction and deflation of the figure of the father. Nietzsche's wry remark,²⁶ near the beginning of Twilight of the Idols, about the negativity inherent in the Socratic quest for total knowledge, might apply as well to these overwhelming pages. When we have said all that can be said about something then we are done with it. It is perhaps hostility toward the phenomenal world that informs our drive for (complete) knowledge of it, especially where this knowledge is, or pretends to be exhaustive. Intellectual and cultural history and tradition turn out to be only some, among others (e.g. military, commercial, religious), symptoms of aggression.

II

Question ten shows us Joyce at just about his most comically sensual and seductive. This is "intimate" writing replete with onomatopoeic sounds of sexual preplay, full congress and the orgiastic grunts and groans naturally associated with such acts. The Wake's style in language is indeed

ideally suited to convey such effects, since, like sex, it undercuts the normal communicative patterns of everyday discourse.

Our introductory question here is mere pretext for unlocking the mechanism of the text. It operates, in typically Wakese obliqueness, more by suggestive intimation than by bold direct statement: "10. What bitter's love but yurning, what' sour lovemutch but a bref burning till she that drawes do the smoake retourne?"(143). Shaun seems to start his answer off in the form of an address to his sweetheart-and-sister; polysemy is temporarily minimized as he speaks here in words that very nearly resemble plain English:

Answer: I know, pepette, of course, dear, but listen, precious! Thanks, pette, those are lovely pitounette, delicious! But mind the wind sweet! What exquisite hands you have, you angiol, if you didn't gnaw your nails, isn't it a wonder you're not achamed of me, you pig, you perfect little pigaleen! I'll nudge you in a minute! I'll bet you use her best Perisian smear off her vanity table to make them look so rosetop glowstop nostop. I know her. Slight me, would she? For every got I care! Three creamings a day, the first during her shower and wipe off with a tissue. Then after cleanup and of course before retiring. . . (143-4).

Without much, or any, warning, and without our being able to say precisely where it happens, we notice, by a shift in gender that the sex and identity of the speaker has altered: "He is seeking an opening and means to be first with me as his belle alliance" (144). We have been warned in

the introductory nine lines of the chapter (126) that others are likely to answer Shem's questions in Shaun's place; and we are accustomed already, in the briefer preceding questions, to having the 12 disciples (customers), the morphios (28 hours), even old Kate and Joe (servants in a saloon) speak his name. In the world of Finnegans Wake, as in what we have called the "literature of deconstruction" in general, an individual, a subject is a permeable and unstable entity liable to be "possessed" by other (momentarily) more insistent beings with more urgent things to communicate.²⁷ In this case the consciousness of Izod comes very quickly to dominate and direct that of the brother. He becomes instantaneously putty in her hands, listener-reader-voyeur -- the entranced and ineluctably stimulated audience to a re-living of her sexual life:

Pool! What are you nudging for? No, I just thought you were. Listen, loviest! Of course it was too kind of you, miser, to remember my sighs in shockings, my often expressed wish when you were wandering about my trousseurs and before I forget it don't forget in your extension to my personality, when knotting my remembrancetie. . .I'll always in always remind of snappy new girters, me being always the one for charms with my very best in proud and gloving even if he was to be vermillion miles my youth to live on, the rebberend Mr Polkingtone, the quonian fleshmonger who Mother Browne solicited me for unlawful converse with (144)

The tone of the entire answer to the tenth question is consistently maintained on the level of lovers' smalltalk. Joyce, always interested in

the transforming effect of powerful emotions upon language, here studies the ways in which sexual arousal commutes language into adjunct of desire. These are words whose meaning is clearly a matter only of context and situation. They are meant to evoke and reproduce the events they describe, performing thereby the traditional function of erotic-pornographic prose from Petronius to Cleland, Sade, Klossowski, Bataille, Henry Miller and D.H. Lawrence, to engage, involve, compromise and culpabilize the reader. Language, at any rate, in the context of sexual act, can only demonstrate the contingency and interchangeability of words. There is something going on here obviously that the words merely point to or indicate without pretention to expression, description or containment; for here the contained clearly overflows the container:

Ha! O mind you poo tickly. Sall I puhim in momou. Mummum.
 Funny spot to have a finge! I'm terribly sorry, I swear to you I
 am! May you never see me in my birthday pelts seenso tutu and
 that her blanches mainges my rot leprous off her whatever winking
 maggis I'll bet by your cut you go fleurting after with all the glass
 on her and the jumps in her stomewhere! HaHa! I suspected she
 was! Sink her! May they fire her bor a barren ewe! So she says:
 Tay for thee? Well, I saith: Angst so mush: and desired she
 might not take it amiss if I esteemed her but an odd. If I did ate
 toughurf I'm not mishy-missy (144-5).

The sexual metaphor is one that translates everything into its own terms; it allows of no difference, but renders all the world a scenery or decor for

its performance; the sexual act, of course, does not exist ontologically separate from the culture of signs and signals in which it is embedded; but it interprets these as being preliminary, accompaniment or aftermath of itself. It refuses to recognize the sacrosanct dignity of our most precious cultural products and rituals but treats them all, from popular song to classical opera, as so many pretexts. Thus sex is the kind of tyrant that establishes equality by fiat, being profoundly suspicious of hierarchy and its accompanying claims to privilege and status; it stands not in awe of Mozart, Beethoven, Shakespeare, but sees them as so many "dirty old men" trying, like anyone else anyway they can, to seduce, in the literal sense of the word, their audiences. Izod, who incarnates the purely sexual as closely as any character in the Wake, thus notices and perhaps produces sex everywhere; she spares no one and nothing as she levels all of life to its common denominator. Especially suspicious in Izod's eyes is the pedagogical-academic situation, wherein the pretense to knowledge and the assumed need of the student for a "guiding hand" supplies student and teacher with scene and opportunity.²⁸ Joyce explores elsewhere and plentifully in the Wake such classic examples of the "détournement" of the pedagogical into the sexual as Paola and Francesca²⁹ and Heloise and Abelard. In Izod's world, as we witness and participate in it here, there is no such thing as an innocent desire to acquire or impart knowledge. The pedagogical-academic-exhortatory posture is incriminating in its very nature. The book, the poem, the "lesson" (to borrow a figure from Adamov and Ionesco)³⁰ is just so much preplay for the

main event and purpose:

Of course I know, pettest, you're so learningful and consider-
ate in yourself, so friend of vegetables, you long cold cat you!
Please by acquiester to meek my acquaintance! Codling, snakelet,
iciclist! Mydtaper has more life to it! Who drowned you in drears,
man, or are you pillale with ink? Did a weep get past the gates
of your pride? . . .Pore into me, volumes, spell me stark and spill
me swooning . . .More poestries from Chickspeer's with gleechoral
music or a jaculation from the garden of the soul. Of I be leib in
the immoralities? O, you mean the strangle for love and the
sowiveall of the prettiest? Yep, we open hap coseries in the
home. And once upon a week I improve on myself I'm so keen on
that New Free Woman with novel inside . . .For creepsake don't
make a flush! Draw the shades, curfe you, and I'll beat any
sonnamonk to love (145).

This sexual motif thus undercuts and deflates the seriousness of all
"high" culture, art and politics. The morally strident Swift accordingly
is remembered solely for his lifelong infatuation with younger women:
"How vain that hope in cleric's heart Who still pursues th'adulterous
art" (146), invoked habitually by permutations of the names of Stella and
Vanessa. . . .³¹ Likewise what peeks through of Parnell's political ca-
reer in the Wake is only the adultery that brought him down and the trial
that cleared his name but broke his spirit, as evoked so frequently in the
syndrome of "hesitancy" and "piggotry." ³²

Joyce, indeed, has an unerring eye for weakness in human nature, for the corresponding gap between ideal and reality -- and a perpetual delight, almost an obsession, in discovering the foibles in the lives of the great. One could almost say, as Sartre says about Flaubert,³³ that he was eager to confirm an essentially cynical view of humanity. Biographical details confirm that Joyce often shows very little trust in the motives and actions of others, even those closest to him.³⁴

Indeed, the reduction that Izod effects of all experience to the sexual is tantamount to cynicism in action. For just as cynicism refuses to recognize the claims to honor, disinterest, holiness and any abstract ideal, so Izod's consistently sexual-intimate tone tends to undermine belief in these too. That state of sexual excitement which she provokes by assuming in her listener is enough in itself to reduce all history, philosophy, literature and religion to that timeless moment when the urgency to climax is the only meaning there is in the world. So that when the teacher opens his mouth it is not exactly to ask a question or express an intellectual reservation. All such scholarly attitudes are nullified as she repeats and rehearses with her teacher the lesson she has learned so well:

. . . Now open, pet, your lips, pepette, like I used my sweet parted lipsabuss with Dan Holohan of facetious memory taught me after the flannel dance, with the proof of love, up Smock Alley the first night he smelled powder and I coloured beneath my fan, pipetta mia, when you learned me the linguo to melt. Whowham would have ears like ours, the blackhaired! Do you

like that, silenzioso? Are you enjoying, this same little me,
 my life, my love? Why do you like my whispering? Is it divinely
 delusious? But in't it bafforyou? Misi, Misi! Tell me till my
 thrillme comes!

Beckett's famous observation that Finnegans Wake is not about something. It is that thing itself." ³⁵ could well apply to the above. A reader who could stay immune from the seductive power of these images and sounds would have to be incompletely human. Joyce has a way of seducing his reader along with his characters, of luring one, as in certain "climactic" scenes in Ulysses, into sub- or pre-verbal situations where pretensions are collapsed and affectations assaulted.

This practice may amount to a radical critique of the traditional separation of reader from text-and-author, similar in intention to the kind we are going to see Sollers operate, in the next chapter, in his novel Drame. All of this puts a certain pedagogy and academia in a not always so comfortable position. The work is no longer worshipped, studied as monument, but enters our lives, and in this case, maybe our beds, as intimate friend with whom we have an ongoing relationship. The work points to no meaning but participates in a process of which it is merely a part. The joke in the Wake is always on those who think they can reify this dynamic process by abstracting a message, explanation or some other guiding idea from the work, always on the preacher, pedagogue or author who likes to pretend that he is not already participating in the process he describes:

. . .Shshsh! Don't start that, you wretch! I thought ye knew all and more, ye aucthor, to explique to ones the significat of their exsystems with your nieu nivulon lead. It's only another queer fish or other in Brinbrou's damned old trouchorous river again (148).

All of this is not to imply that Joyce's exclusive focus on the sexual in the tenth question is equivalent to an epic celebration of the sexual impulse, à la D.H. Lawrence perhaps, which would amount to a reification in itself.³⁶ Joyce, instead, presents the sexual as a perfect model of a process which abrogates and undermines the separation and hierarchy of traditional attitudes -- in the sense that it dissolves and renders nugatory all identities, certainties and absolutes.

With Joyce we never stay on a terrain that we have come to know, but instead always pass on.³⁷ This is why, concurrent with rhetorical devices and styles that force us to focus on any particular area there are always compensating mechanisms at work that help us forget where we have been; and we call this quality in the Wake precisely the self-erasing,³⁸ which operates here by the selfsame mechanism of amplification by which an area is exhaustively explored. As we have seen with the interminable first question an extensive developement in any one direction can be tantamount to a kind of closure. As we experience through the limited consciousness of Izod all the permutations and ramifications of the sexual instinct and explore, if not submit to, its mysterious

power that has reduced, in Joycean terms, the great men of history to the status of thralls, and makes all "serious" human activity mere masks for its workings, we are left as readers in the numbed and drained state that might appropriately follow a sexual act in real life. If, after the first question, we are finished with a certain kind of father, because an over-supply of information has made us despair of ever separating fact from fiction, life from avatar, here also a monomaniacal passion spends and erases itself in the very process of its realization. The "nevers" and the "always" cancel each other out in Izod's passionate conclusion, in a rhetorical explosion so utter that it leaves no residue of meaning, no memory behind:

. . .Never that ever or I can remember dearstreaming faces, you
may go through me! Or ever for bitter be the frucht of this hour!
With my whiteness I thee woo and bind my silk breasths I thee
bound! Always, Amory, amor and more! Till always, thou lovest!
Shshshsh! So long as the lucksmith. Laughs! (148)

III

Jones' halcyon lecture in answer to question eleven is as madly comic a piece of writing as Joyce ever produced, perhaps as exists in English literature. This lecture is a non- or anti-lecture if there ever was one; the speaker, Jones, is some sort of psychoanalyst (allusion to Freud's English biographer) as well as bigot, academic and pedagogue -- with all the tics and eccentricities of these respective and inclusive trades.

Speaking in Shaun's name, by process of substitution whose workings we analyze above, he has delivered a resounding "no blank ye" in response to Shem's question whose gist has been whether he would befriend his own down-and-out brother. The rest of his long answer is by way of amplification and justification of this initial "no." He musters his arguments from every conceivable source to support his position that is already unalterably taken. Prominent in the panoply of his proofs, or non-proofs are the doctrines of Marcel Jousse, a French philosopher in whose work Joyce took great interest,³⁹ and according to whom primitive man communicated rather by gesture than by word: "The speechform is a mere surrogate" (149). Underlying Jousse's teaching was apparently his suspicion of language as being an inferior form of communication and a corresponding Rousseauistic mistrust of progress and civilization. According to him, the gift of words represented a very equivocal advance for humanity at best; words only became necessary because we had lost the power to communicate through authentic and powerful gesture. Jones, the speaker, a man of words if ever there was one, thus paradoxically deflates and de-emphasizes the significance and meaning of his own argument, and indirectly of all argument and rationality by allusion to a philosophy which discounts the verbal to begin with.

If words are an inadequate form of communication then the supposition is that you can't do very much with them, nor can they or those that live by them, the class of intellectuals, be taken very seriously. It becomes functionally a matter of indifference what exactly the lecturer is saying,

since, in the final analysis, he is only an ape, grinning, grunting and grimacing before others of his kind. Thus words from the mouth of our speaker, Jones, tend to drop their meaning and to resemble mere noise. In Jones' hilarious parodic version of some of the basic disputes of Western culture what creates this irresistably comic effect is precisely this supercilious attitude toward language. For if language is to be reduced to the status of a mere adjunct or surrogate of gesture then there are no limits to the uses you can put it to. Propagandistic discourse has known this trick for at least a century; and the motto of all totalitarian regimes, as Hanna Arendt would have it, might very well be: "There is no such thing as truth."⁴⁰ Such an attitude towards words makes them into more-or-less free floating signifiers whose only meaning is their effect on their audience, a form of advertising whose purpose is to modify the opinions and behaviour of those addressed (Jones is exquisitely and constantly aware of the presence of his audience). These words are, as it were, free of gravity or anchor in any real world; they show no respect nor allegiance to any enduring notions of meaning or significance; all you can do with them is to make fun of them; the more abstract your language the greater the comic effect, since you are exploiting a gap that is all the greater between the pretention of the word and the little or nothing it ostensibly renders. Thus Jones' target of predilection is quite naturally the intellectual and the type of words he is likely to use:

. . .Talis is a word often abused by many passims (I am working out a quantum theory about it for it is really most tantumising

state of affairs). A pessim may frequent you to say: Have you been seeing much of Talis and Talis those times? optimately meaning: Will you put up at hree of Irish? Or a ladyeater may perhaps have casualised as you temptoed her à la sourdine: Of your plates? Is Talis de Talis, the swordswallower, who is on at the Craterium the same Talis von Talis, the penscrusher, no funk you! who runs his duly mile? Or this is a perhaps cleaner example. At a recent postvortex piece infustigation of a determinised case of chronic spinosis an extension lecturer on The Ague who out of matter of form was trying his seesers, Dr's Het Ubeleleft, borrowed the question: Why's which Suchman talis qualis? to whom, as a fatter of macht, Dr Gedankje of Stoutgirth, who was wiping his whistle, toarsely retoarted: While thou beast' one zoom of a whorl! (Talis and Talis originally mean the same thin, hit it's: Qualis.)

[149-150]

The targets of Jones' ridicule are the absurdity, fatuousness and pretention of the Western intellectual tradition,⁴¹ which takes its chimeras, wishful thinking and fancies, its reason for reality, which it then proceeds to manipulate and corrupt with the good conscience and "innocence" afforded by the separation it assumes as unquestionable between the thinker as human being and his thoughts. It is precisely Jones' role to deprive Western thought of its good conscience; for him thought is always conditioned, if not vitiated by its source. He has denied from the outset that words and the systems we form with them can have any cogency or meaning

apart from the needs and drives that inspire them in the speaker, thinker or theorist himself. Words, deprived of any referential reliability serve only to reveal, more properly, to expose their user. The intellectual is defined as obsessive neurotic or paranoid psychotic because he insists that his words have a natural relation to reality. Just as the cynicism of Izod in question ten elicits the sexual component in every supposedly "higher" activity, so here the ad hominem attitude of Jones uncovers the disturbed mental case behind every glorious contribution to humanity's stock of knowledge. Implicit in Jones' attitude is a critique of Western science, based as it is on a strict isolation of knowledge from its source, so it can become both an object of study and a means of experimentation and manipulation. In Jones' world, on the other hand, there is no such thing as an enunciation separated from its source. For Jones the detective is always himself the primary object of his investigation:

. . . (I should like to ask that Shedlock Homes person who is out for removing the roofs of our criminal classics by what deductio ad dominum he hopes de tacto to detect anything unless he happens of himself, movibile tectu, to have a slade off) [165]

The theory is always contaminated by the theorist, whose complexes, ambition, egoism and blindness qualifies as well as very commonly vitiates the theory.

In terms of information the clarity of the message is always obscured by the "noise" surrounding it, with which it exists in a permanent state of dialectical tension. In Jones' lecture the interference is subject to a

double articulation, first of all arising from the mentally aberrant state of the speaker (and of those he speaks of, from his point of view) and second from the resistance and distraction of the audience. The message, thus, is always all but drowned out by the interference, like a radio emission which barely comes through due to static. Jones, though ostensibly oblivious to the way all his personal digressions and ad hominem libels and digs impede the delivery of whatever it is he has to say, is preternaturally aware of the potential for rebellion simmering in his classroom, just as speakers in the Wake generally are sensitive to and try to anticipate and guide their reader-listener's reaction.⁴² Whatever the obscurity and/or relevance of his address, permeated as it is through-and-through by the purely personal and evidently extraneous, Jones remains determined, as Joyce in a larger sense certainly was, not to lose his audience:

As my explanations here are probably above your understandings, lattlebrattons, thou as augmentatively uncomparised as Cadwan, Cadwallon and Cadwalloner, I shall revert to a more expletive method which I frequently use when I have to sermo with muddle-crass pupils. Imagine for my purpose that you are a squad of urchins, snifflynosed, godlingnecked, clothyheaded, tangled in your lacings, tingled in your pants, etsitaraw etcicero. And you, Bruno Nowlan, take your tongue out of your inkpot! As none of you knows javanese I will give all my easy free translation of the old fabulists parable. Allaboy Minor, take your head out of your satchel! Audi, Joe Peters! Exaudi facts! (152)

What this reminds us of is the fact that a repressive, or at least intimidating power structure is always the more or less hidden precondition for "peace" in the classroom; before someone can be heard, the potential for disruption must be eliminated and a social space cleared for the reception of the message.

Jones' lecture is threatened from within by intrusions from his personality, so that it becomes at points a kind of intellectual strip-tease, and from without by an audience which is always on the verge of escaping from his control. The lecture creates and defends the space in which it occurs, and the effect of its delivery is very much in the direction of a laying-bare of this mechanism. Though he articulates for his listeners thematically some of the most familiar controversies of the Western intellectual tradition, he surrounds his points with such a bewildering barrage of interference that the purported message becomes secondary to a host of other factors.

Levy-Bruhl, the eminent French anthropologist, and as respected and revered figure on the contemporary intellectual scene, a natural target for Jones, thus becomes the brunt of a wildly suggestive and digressive passage, where information and interference are mixed so inextricably it is in the end impossible to tell one from the other:

Professor Loewy-Brueller (though as I shall probably prove his whole account of the Sennacherib as distinct from the Shalmanesir sanitational reforms and of the Mr Skekels and Dr Hydes problem in the same connection differs toto coelo from the fruit of my own

investigations -- though the reason I went to Jericho must remain for certain reasons a political secret -- especially as I shall shortly be wanted in Cavantry, I congratulate myself, for the same and other reasons -- as being again hopelessly vitiated by what I have now resolved to call the dime and cash diamond fallacy) in his talked off confession which recently met with such a leonine uproar on its escape after its confinement Why am I not born like a Gentleman and why am I now so speakable about my own eatables (Feigenbaumblatt and Father, Judapest, 5688, A.M.) whole-heartedly takes off his gabbercoat and wig, honest draughty fellow, in his public interest, to make us see how though, as he says: 'by Allswill' the inception and the descent and the endswell of Man is temporarily wrapped in obscenity. . . (150).

The distortions of the name of Levy-Bruhl, as they appear here and on the following page ("Professor Levi-Brullo, F.D. of SexeWeiman-Eitelnacky finds . .Professor Llewellys ap Bryllars, F.D., Ph. Dr's showings") tells us much about the lecturer's feelings about academia, titles and research but very little about the anthropologist. What comes through here is not any thematic content of the words themselves, which refer too wildly to be tamed by the organizing force of any mere abstraction, but the posture, or "gesture" of the lecturer, His words form no timeless structure, but are almost pure contingency, for they could be replaced by others which would work as well. It is as if these words worked by themselves, informed by an attitude, but set free like a machine that has been coded

in a certain way. If the words call attention to anything it is to their speaker and, indirectly but surely, to their writer; and to the trail they have left behind.

Notes

¹ A close-to-random sampling: 'shows Early English tracemarks and a marigold window with manigilt lights, a myrioscope, two remarkable piscines and three wellworthseeing ambries (127). . .hacked his way through hickheckhocks but hanged hishelp from ther hereafters (130) . . . tronf of the rep, comf of the priv, prosp of the pub (136) "

² Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake (N.Y.: Viking, 1966), 107-132; William York Tindall, A Reader's Guide to Finnegans Wake (N.Y.: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1969), 111-130; E.L. Epstein, "The Turning Point/Bk I, chapter vi," in A Conceptual Guide to Finnegans Wake, ed. Begnal & Senn (University Park, Penna.: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1974), 56-70; and for a gnostic-emanationist (Blakean), maybe eccentric summary: Frances Motz Boldereff, Reading Finnegans Wake (Woodward, Penna.: Classic Non-fiction Library, 1959), 114-121. This list, like my other bibliography for this chapter is selective, not exhaustive.

³ As in the case of *Ulysses*, where chapter headings from The Odyssey, which accompany its appearance in review, disappear from the book.

⁴ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Laocoon, trans. E.A. McCormick (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), p. 91: ". . .time is the province of the poet, just as space is that of the painter."

⁵ This probably simplifying prejudice in favor of space, and at the expense of time is very prominent in a controversial book by Wyndham Lewis in the twenties, Time and Western Man (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927). An article by Michel Foucault ("Le langage de l'Espace," Critique 203, 1964, pp. 378-9) a review of the then "radical fringe" of contemporary writing (Ollier, Butor, LeClézio) describes what he calls the "literatures of time" (Greek, Biblical, Renaissance) as being literatures of return to authority, father, grammar and source; and Foucault defines the project of modernity (Joyce, Nietzsche) as a refusal of this domination of the past.

⁶ See David Hayman's comprehensive study of the influence of Mallarmean aesthetics on Joyce: Joyce et Mallarmé (Paris: Lettres

Modernes, 1956), 2 vol. The symbolist influence is apparent in the transition to the indirectness and suggestiveness of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man from its earlier draft, written more in the style of realism, Stephen Hero.

⁷ "utterly impossible as all these events are they are probably as like those which may have taken place as any others (110). . . Just a Fication of Villumses (241-2) . . . as a matter of ficfact (532)."

⁸ David A. White, The Grand Continuum: Reflections on Joyce and Metaphysics (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), p. 8: "Because the narrative of the Wake never stops and never starts, the Wake is also defined by the continuous semantic motion. Rest, the classic antithesis of motion, enters the picture only from an extraliterary source, that is, when the reader decides to halt the perpetual seep of the narrative at some point."

⁹ Margot Norris, The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake: A Structuralist Analysis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 78: ". . . the reader is trapped inside the dream in Finnegans Wake. A dream can't be analyzed from the inside, because the dream is precisely the place where self-knowledge breaks down. . . . The confusion of the reader of Finnegans Wake is a fitting response to a kind of terror implicit in the world of the dream, a terror confronted by Alice in Through The Looking Glass when Tweedledee suggest that she is merely a sort of thing in the Red Knight's dream."; Michael Beausang, "Vivre en Marge," in Poétique #26 (1976), pp. 228, 231: "Marge marque la limite de ce que nous pouvons savoir. En termes scientifiques, 'she introduces herself upon us at 'absolute zero or the babbling pumpt of platinism' (164). En apparaissant au zéro absolu, elle apparaît à ce point hypothétique où les substances ne pourraient conserver aucun mouvement moléculaire ni aucune chaleur. Elle désigne aussi les limites du langage. . . Wake -- sillage: le mot dénonce l'absurdité de toute position fixe dans un monde constamment fluctuant." Claude Condou, "Le Corps à Lettre," in Poétique #26, pp. 175-6: "il n'y a plus de différence entre chanter, manger, penser, entre la Bible et une expression courante, entre l'histoire et le fromage. Tout est nivelé dans une absence de valeur, de hiérarchie, d'opposition. . . Ici tous les elements, dès que produits, s'annulent les uns les autres, et ne se produisent en fait qu'en fonction et en vue de cette annulation mutuelle. . . ."; Gilles Deleuze, Différence et Répétition (Paris: PUF, 1968), pp. 80, 94, 159: "L'éternel retour se rapporte à un monde compliqué, sans identité, proprement chaotique. Joyce présentait le vicus of recirculation comme faisant tourner un chaosmos. . . ce qui compte c'est la divergence des séries, le décentrement des cercles, le 'monstre.' L'ensemble des

cercles et des séries est donc un chaos informel, effondré, qui n'a pas d'autre 'lois' que sa propre répétition, sa reproduction dans le développement de ce qui diverge et décentre. . .il s'agit toujours de rassembler un maximum de séries de points (à la limite toutes les séries divergentes constitutive du cosmos), en faisant fonctionner des précurseurs sombres linguistiques (ici mots ésotériques, mots-valises), qui ne représentent sur aucune identité préalable, qui ne sont surtout pas "identifiables" en principe. . . ."; Umberto Eco, La Poétique di Joyce (Milan: Bompiano, 1966), pp. 116, 119, 126: ". . .nessuno dei personaggi menzionati rimane se stesso ma diviene continuamente qualcos'altro. . . un 'epica notturna dell' ambiguità e della metamorfosi. . .riverrun introduce alla fluidità dell' 'universo del Wake: fluidità delle situazioni spazio-temporali."; Daniel Giovannangeli, Écriture et Répétition, Approche de Derrida (Paris: UGE 10/18, 1974), p. 152: "Jacques Derrida a fortement souligné la relativité que rencontrent toutes deux les entreprises de Husserl et de Joyce. Alors que Husserl est conduit par sa problématique de l'univocité à une réduction méthodique de la langue empirique, destinée à en isoler 'la transparence actuelle de ses éléments univoques et traductibles,' à l'opposé, Joyce s'installe résolument dans l'empiricité de la culture facto-historique, dans l'équivoque généralisé d'une écriture qui ne traduit plus une langue dans l'autre à partir de noyaux de sens communs, mais circule à travers toutes les langues à la fois."; Helene Cixous, "La Missexualité," Poétique 26, p. 249: "La féminité du text de FW, le text énigme comme féminité. L'imprenable."

10

White, The Grand Continuum, pp. 8, 52: ". . .the classical divisions of time -- past, present, future -- lose their powers of differentiation. The relations of 'before' and 'after' become meaningless, if what is understood from one possible perspective as 'before' can also be understood from an equally possible perspective as 'after'. . . . If however, a cause does not precede an effect on temporal grounds, then apparently any cause can be seen as an effect and any effect can be seen as a cause."; Joyce, Finnegans Wake, pp. 482-3: "Now the doctrine obtains, we have occasioning cause causing effects and affects occasionally recausing altereffects."

11

David Hayman, "Double Distancing," Novel 12, 33-47; and "Surface Disturbances/Grave Disorder," TRI-QUARTERLY 52, 182-196.

12

White, The Grand Continuum, p. 53: "With difference overwhelming identity, it then becomes impossible to conceive of time (as well as everything else) as anything other than a continually undifferentiated flow. . . ."; As noticed by Jean-Michel Rabaté, in Poétique 26, p. 157, Joyce is certainly influenced by the theories of J.W. Dunne on the reversibility of time. Cf. Dunne's two books: An Experiment with Time

(1927) and The Serial Universe (1934). Dunne is referred to by name in the Wake: ". . . the key of John Dunn's field" (516). Dunne was also influential on a certain current of American scientific humanism as espoused most notably for many years by Oliver Reiser, from his chair of philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh: Philosophy and the Concepts of Modern Science (1935), Planetary Democracy (1944) and The Integration of Human Knowledge (1958).

13 Joyce, p. 221: "Time: the pressant"; p. 295: "Now, as will pressantly be felt"

14 The formulation, which sounds so much like Henri Michaux', is actually Enrico Castelli's from L'Enquête Quotidienne.

15 Philippe Sollers, Vision à New York, a conversation with David Hayman (Paris: Grasset, 1981), p. 225, where Hayman quotes Sollers back to himself from a recent contribution to a Joyce colloquium: "You are, whether you realize it or not, completely buried in a religious consciousness, of whatever sort it is. Joyce was possibly the only one capable of taking leave of it.

D.H.: Really?

S.: If not Joyce, then Finnegans Wake

D.H.: As text?

S.: As operation (my translation and underlining); Philippe Sollers, "Joyce & Co." TRI-QUARTERLY 38 (Winter 1977), p. 107: "Since Finnegans Wake was written English no longer exists. It no longer exists as self-sufficient language, no more indeed than does any other language."; and Julia Kristeva has talked of Joyce's, in the same breath as Bataille' "fissuration de l'instance logique," and the common subversion they operate on the "great semantic unities of ideology and knowledge," in Bataille, Colloque de Cerisy, (Paris: UGE 10/18, 1973) pp. 282-3. The definitive literal statement of the contemporary lineage of the Wake is the issue of TRI-QUARTERLY 38, In the Wake of the Wake, edited by David Hayman and since published independently as a book.

16 Norris, The Decentered Universe, pp. 1-22.

17 Rabaté, Poétique, p. 164: "Dans tous les cas, l'opposition vrai/ faux est éliminée."

18 Another close-to-random sampling: ". . . a tesseract maker

of mosaics (100). . . a polyhedron of scripture (107) . . . collideor-scope (143). . . farced epistle to the Hebrews (228). . . scribnerly (229). . . a holy cryptmas (344). . . The lewdningbluebolteredalluck-truckalltraumconductor! (378). . . map of the soul's groupography (479) . . . our book of kills (482). . . allnights newseryreel (489)"

19

Richard Ellman, James Joyce, new and revised edition (N.Y.: Oxford UP, 1982), p. 32: "Joyce, as later hints make clear, fancied himself as a Parnell. Ireland's 'uncrowned king' was now on his way to becoming her tragic hero. There were three final acts to the play. The first was the attempt of the London Times to discredit Parnell by printing a letter, alleged to be in his handwriting, that condoned the Phoenix Park murders of 1882. The villain here was Richard Pigott, whose two sons were at Clongowes with James Joyce; in February 1889, before the Special Commission, Pigott was unmasked as a forger by his misspelling of the word 'hesitancy'." See also James Atherton, The Books in the Wake (N.Y.: Viking, 1959) pp. 100-104.

20

James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (N.Y.: Viking, 1965), first published in 1916, pp. 27-39.

21

Joyce, A Portrait, p. 27.

22

Joyce, Wake, p. 533: "How I am amp amp amplify;" compare, for example, the 13 pages of the final version with the single page reproduced by David Hayman below in A First Draft Version of Finnegans Wake (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1963), pp. 92-93:

(1) What secondtonone myther rector buildes & bridgemaker was the first to rise taller through his tale beamstale than the bluegum be baobab baobabbaum or the gigantes Wellingtonia Sequoia, went nudi-boots into a lifey lifeyette when she was barely in her streama trickles tricklies, was well known to weas clout a conciliationcap on the ecker of his hooth. sports an [a chainganger's] albert over his, [hullender's] epulence, had several successive succesivofal coloured serevanmaids on the same [big] white pascious drawringroam hearthrug horthrug, § killed himself his own hungry self as a young man in anger, [bred manyheaded sons stepsons and [a] leapyouroun daughter, [& appeared to the shecook]], found food for his five when the-market allmarket allmarker was goflooded, † brewed pressed the beer of sapientia ale age out of the nettles of rashness, put a roof on the house lodge for God Hymn and a cog in the his pot for homo, † was waylaid by a parker and beshotten by a buckeley, kicks liatals lintile to when be's cuppy and gives eluakke casts Jacob's § to the hi. childer on the parish, owns the bulgiest bungbarrel that was ever tiptapped in the private privace of

Mullingar Inn, hears the cricket on the earth and hat annoys the life out of psachess predicants, made Man with guts one jerk and minted money with n:ong many, ‡ blows whiskey about around the head but thinks stout upon his feet, [was dubbed out of joke and limned in raw ochre.] stutters when he falls and gets goes up mad entirely when he's waked, § is Timb in to the pearly morn and Tomb in by the weeping mourning night and if though he had all the red baked bricks of bould Babylon for to his lusting placys he'd been he lost for the want of ewing ogling a-poor an old ould wubblin' wall?

Answer - Finn MacCool!

23

One writer, for instance, wonders if there is any real "dépense" (in the sense of Bataille's potlatch and confusion of sex and death) in Finnegans Wake, where nothing is definitive, not even definitively lost: Daniele Ferrer, Poétique 26, p. 239: "Le texte limite ses pertes par une récupération si habile, si minutieuse, exerce une telle maîtrise sur les forces qu'il met en jeu, qu'on peut se demander si, en fin de compte, il y a dépense réelle ou dépense mimée."

24

Allusions abound throughout the Wake, but pp. 338-355 focus on a dramatization of the incident.

25

Norris, The Decentered Universe, p. 28.

26

Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, trans. R.J. Hollindale (London: Penguin, 1968, first published 1889), p. 34: "Did he himself grasp that, this shrewdest of all self-deceivers? Did he at last say that to himself in the wisdom of his courage for death? . . . Socrates wanted to die -- it was not Athens, it was he who handed himself the poison cup. . . ."

27

Norris, The Decentered Universe, p. 11: "The singularity of individual experience -- its uniqueness - is undermined by the replication of events and the instability of characters." Ferrer, Poétique 26, p. 236: "Le parleur et le parlé, l'accusateur et l'accusé, le questionneur et le questionné, tout apparaît donc difficilement différenciable." Joyce, p. 626: "But you're changing, acoolsha, you're changing from me, I can feel. Or is it me is? Im getting mixed."

28

Interesting that she supplies those hilariously unacademic footnotes to the "lessons" chapter, pp. 260-308: "Come, smooth of my slate, to the beat of my blush! . . . when I remembered all your pupil-teacher's erringnesses in perfection class. You sh'undn't write

you can't if you w'udn't pass for undevelopmented. This is the proper way to say that, Sr. If it's me chews to swallow all you saidn't you can eat my words for it as sure as there's a key in my kiss. Quick erit facio-facey. When we will conjugate together. . . with love ay loved have I on my back spine. . ." (279); and Juan's later "lecture" to the "students" of St. Brides is hardly less provocative: "Whalebones and buskbutts may hurt you (thwacaway thwuck!) but never lay bare your breast secret (dickette's place!) to joy a jonas in the Dolphin's Barncar with your meetual fan, Doveyed Covetfilles, compulsing paynattention spasms between the averthisment for Ulikah's wine and a pair of pulldoors of the old cupiosity shape." (434)

29 "Turning up and fingering over the most dantellising peaches in the lingrous longerous book of the dark" (251).

30 Le Professeur Tarane and La Lecon, respectively.

31 Atherton, The Books in the Wake, pp. 114-123.

32 Atherton, The Books in the Wake, pp. 102-103.

33 Jean-Paul Sartre, L'Idiot de la Famille (Paris: Gallimard, 1971-2), 3 vol.

34 Ellman, James Joyce, pp. 279-281.

35 Samuel Beckett, W.C. Williams and others, Our Exagmination Round His Factification For Incamination of Work in Progress (Paris: Shakespeare & Co., 1929), p. 14.

36 Margaret Solomon leans this way perhaps in her exhaustive survey and analysis of sexual symbolism in the Wake, Eternal Geometer: The Sexual Universe of Finnegans Wake (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois UP, 1969), in introduction to which (p. viii) she announces her discovery of "the reasons for the major symbols of the book: namely the male and female sexual organs of the human body." But that leaves unanswered the Nietzschean question: "and what does sex mean?"

37

This is certainly the picture that is conveyed by Ellmann, James Joyce, of Joyce's near-constitutional nomadism, that of a man who tries to solve his problems by moving on, once the situation he has been living in becomes too thorny and/or complicated: "Departure from his country was a strategy of combat. (p. 110). . . Joyce did not wait for peace of mind. He never possessed it. Instead he moved from crisis to crisis. (p. 210) . . . No one was in fact quicker to find life tedious, or more eager to shun equilibrium, whether by drinking or moving. (p. 224)"

38

Claude Condou, Poétique 26, pp. 175-6. See middle of note 9 above.

39

Stephen Heath, "Ambiviolences, Notes pour une Lecture de Joyce," Tel Quel 50 & 51, Summer and Autumn 1972, pp. 22-43, 64-78 respectively. His commentary on Joyce and Jousse is in the second article, pp. 68-71; Joyce, p. 468: "In the beginning was the gest he he joustly says"

40

Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950).

41

This tradition, and the system of education whose purpose is to inculcate it is subject to extensive ridicule and parody in the *Wake*, especially in the "lessons" chapter (260-308); cf. note 27 above.

42

Bernard Benstock, Joyce-Against Wake (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), p. 19, fn.: "At various instances Joyce seems to be interrupting to allow the weary reader to plead for a halt."; Joyce, p. 108: "Now patience; and remember patience is the great thing, and above all things else we must avoid anything like being or becoming out of patience."

6. The Strategy of Interruption: Philippe Sollers' Drame

"Drame is a novel that can be read as a poem"

-- Roland Barthes

"The words in Drame refer to no known reality, but instead to each other"

-- Leo Pollman

I

There are two principal characters in Philippe Sollers' novel Drame (Paris: Seuil, 1965) : 1) an "il" or "je" who represents a writer or narrator, often in the act of writing and/or reading the book, preparing to write it, or reflecting on or reacting to the action; 2) a "tu" which most often refers, as with Blanchot's L'Attente L'Oubli, to a woman-and-reader. There are also some other people that serve as a kind of background or distant audience: nameless individuals going to work, indistinguishable and interchangeable, and whose command of the language consists of a few banalities; or anonymous heads gathered around the bed of an accident victim. There are also a few other shadowy beings that emerge from paintings that are described: for instance, a melancholy man across the river from a nursing mother. But these and any other people described in Drame are only permutations or temporary expressions of the writer-reader's fugitive identity, so that essentially we are only concerned with a "me" (or "he") and a "you" (woman-and/or-reader).

What takes place between "you" and "me" is sexual, literary, philosophical, political, or frequently merely some kind of silence or silent communion (although an exhaustively commented one). "You" are alternately my sounding-board, constant critic, contact with reality outside of

myself, obstacle, detour and correspondent. Your purpose, as much as any, is to interrupt me before I go mad or too far.

Interruption is the very essence of Sollers' style in Drame. Without interruption the words become an endless monologue, a rant; our author, articulate and prolific to an almost miraculous degree, has no trouble thinking of words to follow the ones he has written: "Mais du côté 'parole,' il découvre l'absence de limites: cela peut se décrire sans fin, cela peut se décrire sans fin en train de se décrire, etc." (98).

Some of the techniques whereby Sollers keeps his text in a perpetual state of deviation and obstruction are: parentheses in which exceptions are presented or conditions described, or that begin but do not end or end but did not begin; irregularities in register, tone, even punctuation; cutting a textual flow off in mid-sentence, word, phrase, syllable or in the middle of a conversation or thought; self-quotation from earlier in this novel or from Sollers' earlier books; the application of quotation marks to seemingly familiar words ("my life" is a favorite) and asking what they really mean with not even the shadow of an answer; evident and sudden pastiche of other authors' styles and ideas (Bataille, Proust, Faulkner, Robbe-Grillet, Blanchot. . .); the schizoid tension of having the first and third person singular so thoroughly interchangeable; the gratuitous location of events in time, indifferently past, present or future or indeterminate conditional -- so that the tense of the verbs as well as the meaning of the adverbs acquires the status of sheer formality; citation of other authors, often obscure and enigmatic (traditional mystics

like Boehme and Swedenborg); instructions that emanate from the text on "how-to-read-me" or self-criticism by the writer on questions of literary theory and practice relating to this text, others, or to culture, literature, or just about anything and everything else in general; ambiguous and untrustworthy use of analogies, "painted" scenes, metaphors that are immediately denounced but never renounced. It must have been these techniques, along with a host of others, that led Henri Peyre to judge severely that "the book diabolically attempts to bewilder, astonish and remain impenetrable to the reader."¹

Efforts to simplify or rationalize these processes of interruption seem vain, even when they enjoy the sanction of their author. Sollers tells us considerably, for instance, on the back cover, that his novel is divided into 64 squares of the game of chess, which is supposed to represent "time projected into space"; and other commentators, as well as Sollers in an interview,² have suggested the 64 hexagrams of the I Ching, a Chinese text of divinatory wisdom, as an equally valid correspondance. According to this scheme, the "odd" chants would be narration, standing for, as in Greek drama, the judgments of a chorus that sees things from an objectively social point of view. The "even" chants would be personal discourse, representing an individual. The qualities, however of the narrator of the "odd" chants seems just about identical to that of the speaker in the "even" chants, so we are dealing here more with an interpenetration. Whether or not we agree that the two entities can be distinguished it seems obvious that they have complete access to whatever the

other is thinking or/of writing, and for all practical purposes the reader has to see them (as well as himself) as parts of a single process.

However nugatory the apologies for them may be this organization of alternating chants serves the larger purpose of Sollers' strategy of interruption, for aside from the multifarious devices of interruption that, as we observe above, the text employs so ubiquitously, it also avails itself of this structural method of insuring discontinuity and abrupt change: the chants, of unequal length, tend to run no more than two or three pages, and often less, so that whatever narrative tangent we are on we may be sure that it will shortly be altered.

Complicating matters further is the fact that Sollers' is the kind of text that only seems haphazard, accidental and gratuitous; in reality it forgets nothing it has uttered, so that not only is the reader kept in a state of unrest due to the structured alternations but he is also inevitably going to be exploring the text in all directions, especially backwards, looking for hints of things that may have been dropped but now mysteriously reappear. Lest things appear to be too predictable in their very contingency, Sollers occasionally "pleases" his reader with a passage of lovely prose poetry, or lets a description run on for a page or two.³ Once we even seem to get an orgy. These are, however, rare treats, isolated in the text like those moments are in life.

As demonstrated by the obviously ineluctable return of the word "D'abord," with which it opens, this is a text where the word "finish" has no place and where another aesthetic or ethic than that of the "beautiful"

is in control. Accordingly the text affords neither space nor station to appreciate what we have read, nor is there such a thing here as discrete, self-contained segments that we can admire or reflect on separately. For every word here is conditioned and qualified by every other word and is therefore never part of a chapter than can be thought of as being finished, but instead is perpetually liable to explanation, interrogation and mutation. We don't start and finish one of these chants the way we might with a segment of traditional fiction, so that, if our memory is good enough, we might return much later to "finish up where we left off." We are instead reading these chants simultaneously and in all directions and dimensions. The fact that they are separated on the page, that is the fiction.

In the world of Drame, therefore, one doesn't finish what one has to say, or utters a statement, gives voice to an opinion or prejudice or expresses an emotion that is meant to be appreciated in isolation from whatever else is happening. For one thing nothing here is ever completed; for just as in ordinary conversation, we frequently don't wait for our interlocutor to finish a thought, phrase or even word before responding so do these chants habitually end and/or start with an abrupt hiatus of some sort: three dots, a "however," a dash or some other device that indicates that nothing is going to be concluded or decided, although it may be taken up again later from the changed perspective. The model for this type of style may be the interview or other event on the media -- where also the content of the message, as we have been aware of at least since McLuhan,

must yield to the structural exigencies of the means used to communicate it, and where whatever one has to say is subject necessarily to truncation, distortion, exploitation and abortion by whatever else must urgently be emitted. For here, as in Drame one ends not when one concludes but when one's time at the microphone, so to speak, has elapsed; and the philosophy of such a "mediated" world might well be that there is always something happening somewhere else that is more important and therefore claims with greater priority and insistence our attention and care.

Adding then to the interruptions structured by the alternating chants are the many times our text is fractured, fragmented, broken in upon, as listed above, by observations about environment, light or weather, undocumented citation, self-quotation, double or one-sided parentheses or other typographical anomaly (for instance, leaving a blank space where a word should end a sentence, but dutifully including the period),⁴ descriptions of paintings or scenes that are immediately relegated to a merely linguistic existence, figures introduced by teasingly imprecise statements like "it seemed as if" that pile one upon the other with the obvious messages that none is to be indulged (in). The repertoire of Sollers' discontinuity is endless and far-ranging. We even get some punctuationless prose, perhaps in anticipation of later exciting and controversial developments in Sollers' writing -- and, of course, self-examination, recrimination, observation, measurement, calculation ad infinitum.

One of the devices that Sollers uses most consistently to damn the flow of the narrative, to "stop literature in its tracks," as it were, is to

examine commonly used words for meaning that might escape the casual user. Such a style, which Heidegger and Derrida employ in philosophy, we have named in our introductory chapter the "etymological" or "molecular" outlook in literature, whereby the writer holds up to anxious doubt and scrutiny the very words he is forced, like everyone else, to depend upon -- and we have discussed this tendency in its various modalities in other writers in our "network of the literature of deconstruction" (Tzara, Beckett and Blanchot, in particular). The typical formula for this "molecular" interpolation in Sollers' Drame is: x does y ; but what is "x" and what is "y," and what does it mean "to do." Nothing else can transpire evidently while these simplest notions remain unexplored. Everything comes to a stop while hermeneutics takes over:

"Et ce langage: faux, borné par rapport à notre présence que je regarde au-delà des vitres se jouer en bas maintenant dans les reflets lumineux de l'eau sur pierre, incessamment débordante, la même, renouvelée. . . Rien ne ressemble moins à un roman que notre histoire, et pourtant c'est bien le seul roman dont j'aurais envie de te parler (celui que personne ne pourrait écrire, celui qui s'écrit en nous devant nous). Le seul qui serait gagné sur ce que nous pourrions, cédant au mensonge, appeler, comme dans les romans, notre vie." (27)

and later our narrator considers suicide, but what stops him is that he can't decide who this "I" is that kills itself, just as he hasn't been able to conceive what this life is that makes it "mine":

. . .Se tuer? Mais qui se tue, s'il se tue? Qui tue soi? Qu'est-ce que "qui" là-dedans? (il ne peut pas se tuer puisqu'il n'est pas ce qu'il est, puisqu'il est en définitive négligeable quant à ce qu'il est; et il aime son ignorance. . . (91)

I I

What is it then that "happens" in this book? What is the event that Sollers talks of on the back cover? :

Le mot drame est ici employé dans son sens le plus ancien, non pas celui d' "action" -- encore moins celui d'intrigue psychologique -- mais plutôt celui d' "histoire," d' "événement."

The reader, of course, is allowed to grasp, in a rudimentary way, that certain things take place. There is an accident referred to a few times, and sexual contact, or a metaphor thereof, is not infrequently evoked between the "je" and "tu"; at one point the presence of a third person, of indeterminate sex, seems to call forth the description of an orgy; and our heros seem to do a lot of walking, and as much talking and reading. They read passages that sound like they could be from or about this book; and their talk is often incomprehensibly banal, or obscure and enigmatic and oracular. They talk certainly in circles, never really deciding anything, and they walk similarly, always leaving and returning to those same fixed points that are never really described. They spend a lot of time in their room, looking out of the window frequently, -- as if it were somehow important here to go to the window as a contact with reality, talking

maybe about what they think, saw, or "what's on the other side of words," and particularly privileging their dreams. Going out seems to be another deeply meaningful gesture, fraught with terror and suspense, although the world as they see it seems to be a pretty drab affair, at least in its civilized aspects: crowds of people mechanically and somnabulistically going about their daily business (of which our heros have none) as if they were hypnotized subjects of some nameless controlling force.

This is a world of rampant anonymity, as in the ultimate fictions of Blanchot: nothing here has a name of its own, as pronoun has supplanted noun in some inexplicable but undeniable sidereal revolution whose outcome is that person, place, object and phenomenon have become just so many classes or types. And the topography of this limit-landscape is certainly a simulacra of the environment, insofar as there is one, for Blanchot's L'Attente L'Oubli that we described in an earlier chapter.

Occasionally a more substantial detail peeks through, however, We find that somehow a port city is involved, and much is correspondingly made of "port" as synonymous with a kind of lost identity or security that is now forever unattainable; and nameless boats, winds, sea and mountains enter occasionally in descriptive passages that, as shown above, interrupt or re-direct the flow of the text. All of these elements, together with the night and day, and the varying qualities of light, and panoramic views of the earth as seen from a plane, seem heavily laden with a symbolic or psychological meaning that nevertheless remains vague and imprecise. We feel the importance of these things by virtue of the

attention lavished upon them, without ever being sure as to what exactly they are supposed to mean.

The anonymity, or complete absence of proper names and nouns from the text further compounds this indeterminacy. We don't know where we are, except that we are vaguely in a city with a port, in a hotel room from which we can see the mountains and the sea -- we look at workers, merchants, machines (plenty of cars), even each other; everything is at once hauntingly familiar and especially strange; everything has a dual existence and a lack of existence, equally something and nothing -- anything. Even the words in which the book is written are once called an echo, but this would be paradoxially an echo of an echo, where one is incapable of finding any sound that was first. This is a post-platonic world of simulacra, of copies of no findable original, that is copies of copies that Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze and others have used as metaphors for modernity -- a world of which representation is impossible since it is already and only semblance.

Sleep, dream, night, waking (veille), city, sea, even sex -- all of these seemingly substantial entities are there, but only as part of an autonomous universe of signifiers. They lead, come from, and refer endlessly only to themselves and each other. They are "rien qu'une agonie sans fin reprise au vol par un autre, et un autre, et un autre encore" (30), the almost automatic substitution of one passenger, pedestrian, car, book by another-yet-the-same -- mere stations or relays on a spiralling road that goes nowhere inside of some incomprehensible destiny or rendezvous

rather than anything solid or identifiable in their own right.

By a frequent incursion of the words "problem" and "failure" we are also given to understand that there are problems to be solved or failed. But we are allowed neither to solve these problems nor abandon them. At that very moment when the narrator is ready to abandon, a way of egress, a possibility is inevitably suggested: "une langue se cherche, s'invente" (147), . . . Comme si la véritable histoire ne pouvait pas être dite (il la sent pourtant en lui pas à pas, immuable). Comme si le véritable projet se dévoilait enfin avec l'abandon du projet --" (115). This "true story" is no longer a story, with all that the word connotes in terms of representation for amusement or edification, but simply the affirmation that something is happening, the event itself, -- the drame being sheerly the struggle with questions that can be neither answered nor abandoned.

Nothing then can be told here, but there is something to be done, recognized, inspected, learned, but only from the inside -- as words that learn of the larger text to which they have no choice but to belong. Mention is made occasionally of "following the thread": "Où trouver le fil? Comment le tenir? Où, la coulisse? Où, l'arrière-plan permettant le recul?" (73). These are questions without answers and they are meant to be; but what is most endemic, precious and salutary in our Western tradition are not the things which we find or create, which commonly work against us anyway, but the seeking attitude, between the lines, as it were, of the texts we read and are -- this thread which is, as it should be in all good work, invisible.

Drame is part of a literature not of answers but of questions, not of solutions but of problems.⁶ We are led ineluctably to treat whatever answers we stumble over only as a starting point of further doubts and questions, in this text of the perpetual "D'abord" :

Il devrait suffire de tenir le fil. Mais c'est justement là l'opération la plus difficile, la plus trompeuse -- car comment être sûr, somme toute, savoir si l'on est dans la continuité juste ou seulement dans son envers chaotique et glacé? Sur une page fictive, la multitude des livres viennent présenter leurs versions contraires: comme si la bibliothèque s'était contractée pour finir en une courbe tangente à cette page toujours reblanchie (impression, projection, disparition par effleurements successifs, et c'est exactement cette ombre qu'il faudrait retenir, faire passer devant le regard entraîne dans une glissade sans efforts et sans fond). Roulé dans les mots. . . .S'ils viennent en premier lieu (et tu es parmi eux, transparente, tu marches à travers eux comme un mot parmi d'autres mots), je sais qu'il y aura en moi, pour leur répondre, une réserve infinie, des croisements, des vies "tout autres" un instant perçues en correspondances dans leur champ d'action. . . Rien qui ne puisse avoir un sens, indiquer un sens. (80-81).

We are dealing here with a kind of meta-metafiction that not only contemplates itself but also contemplates itself contemplating itself. This is one large, abstract and cold step beyond the other experimental ventures we have looked at that still retain some recognizable semblance

of content and message. While those texts like to think about themselves they do not make this cogitation their sole subject and preoccupation; the reflection is ancillary to other factors, like revolution for Tzara, the development of a language adequate to modernity for Joyce and Leiris, or the sheer tedium of existence for Beckett. Of the writers we have been concerned with Blanchot is certainly closest in mood and style to Sollers, and unquestionably Blanchot, at a certain point at least was an enormous influence on him, as he was for Sollers' generation; but nevertheless there is a humanism, a solitude, a density and concern in Blanchot's texts that are missing in Sollers. With Blanchot's texts we are left with something, if only, as in his important essays on Kafka,⁷ an image of the possibility of the proud isolation of an artist who is not of this world, nor of any other one; but here, in Drame, and in the other limit-texts of Sollers and his Tel Quel-and-after colleagues abstraction and cogitation have abolished all retreat and consolation, meditation has caught up to life; in these texts author, action, story, character, scene, insofar as they exist, are present only because they give the text something to chew on.

Drame then is a book that reflects ceaselessly upon itself and about its own possibility, feasibility and relevance as well as that of literature, art and "culture" in general. This is also a book that tells us how to read itself, that ultimately seems to read itself, or to be read somehow automatically, and that spends many metaphors searching for an always elusive adequate picture of itself. The real book is confronted at every

turning with the ideal book it is anticipating or recovering from, that first and last text that cannot be identified with any actual volume: "I dream of a book as vast as the sea." (115)

This is no book that we learn to write when we learn the alphabet. By the time the alphabet comes along we are already past masters at writing and reading, being read and written. If we agree with Deleuze, and I think we must, that the interpenetration of art and everyday life is a crucial moral-aesthetic dilemma of our time,⁸ then the direction of this book is toward the merging of reality with this text in particular and with all texts in general. Reading becomes synonymous with any other kind of contemplation or regard, whether it be toward our bodies, those of others, our cities, habitations, faces, pasts and futures -- all are subject to our reading, that is interpretation and modification.

III

The word, for Sollers, as we have shown for other moderns whose texts relate to his, has lost its ancient privileges; it is no longer the location of any absolute standard or value. As in Finnegans Wake or Beckett's Trilogy we no longer really know what words mean. The word has been fractured, dissolved, "disseminated," as Derrida observes about a slightly later book of Sollers, Nombres⁹ -- if anything, more coldly mathematical, rigorous and self-calculating than Drame. The word can no longer be located, admired or despised, followed or rejected -- but only looked for, surprised, and ultimately seen through and beyond.

The inevitable concomitant of Sollers', as well as other modernist discourses that move on and through the word, is a radical critique of separation that must approximate the 20th century text to revolutionary action -- and we have seen how tellingly Tzara and Blanchot make this connection: the modernist writer who "know nothing" (whose very words, as with Beckett, belong to someone else) is a functional equivalent of the proletarian who has nothing. An inherently elitist culture that masks its everyday brutality behind a facade of museums, libraries, galleries is deemphasized in favor of a culture that suffuses our every waking and sleeping moment and recognizes no separation of rank, title or even talent. We are all now, as the beats once announced in their inimitable, fervent and sincere way, "in the same soup together"; sports, politics, culture, city, workers, ads, soap-operas, our latest interests, infatuations, fantasies, schemes, trips on drugs or planes, amusement-park rides, outer-space ventures, recessions, philosophies -- all merge and melt into a homogenous mass of indefinable contours and infinite suggestibility and ramification; and Sollers' later magnificent and remorseless punctuationless text, H and Paradis are especially meant to convey this dynamic confusion of our all-levelling culture in throes of gestation, this primal ooze or sticky stew where, whatever our delusions of status, separation, accomplishment and value, we all simmer as one; and where is the word in all of this, where is that text, once graven in immortal stone, that we were all supposed to live by and for? For we now live in a world of limitless commandments that contradict and undermine each other incessantly, a world of which

Rousseau's schizoid ambivalence and Kierkegaard's existential anguish were among the first definite intimations, and Sollers' infinitely refracted style of thought and writing one of the most original modern concomitants.

In Drame therefore it would be presumptuous to define where exactly art ends and life begins. Honored formulas like "art is long, life short" would have no place here. Mordant interrogation of these words would commence at once, with obvious results -- the utter negation of the enunciation; and even that medieval slogan, so dear to Joyce: "let paradise perish, so that the book may live" would make no sense here. Sollers' art (neither is the ultimate Joyce's) is not that of the privileged moment or monument around which the rest of life crystalizes; like Finnegans Wake, it is probably closer to madness, or to a defense against it, than to a traditional event or personality centered aesthetics. If the madman is he who can and does find meaning everywhere (which is why he must be sequestered, since he doesn't know where to "go") then Sollers' narrator is perilously close to mad, or that is his pose and mask: "Mais en fait, n'importe quoi peut devenir limite, point critique. . . . Pas un coin de tableau qui ne puisse s'ouvrir." (36); as in this expression we can no longer maintain the posture of disinterested contemplation where the painting opens up to include us. This same perilous frontier of sanity, this side of which only we know who we are, is brushed by the narrator when he looks out of the window from what theoretically should be a privileged space of contemplation of the "other" only to recognize his own shadow. The writer no longer stands apart from that which he describes, as he

continues to do even in a minimal and ambiguous way in the earlier fictions of Sollers. For here the waking mind of the narrator is as subject to incursion and occupation as that of his dreams. Theories of intertextuality would understate the dimensions of this uncertainty and porosity, and perhaps constitute an academic recuperation of the anguish. The narrator's room, his mind, his writings are equally subject to the duress and challenge of constant interchange and inspection from whoever and whatever is out there.

Our text not only conveys these attitudes thematically, it also manifests them stylistically, as frontiers, limits, separations (writer/reader; me/he/you/us) are blurred, occluded, abolished. Finally we won't know what we're reading, if we're reading , or if we're reading; but we may very well wonder what reading is.

Our wonder won't get the chance to lapse into an attitude, or anything that resembles an idea or conclusion, as Sollers rather teases the reader with the exceptions that can be taken to any point of view rather than allows him to occupy any one of them. Furthermore, a book that is its own perpetual critique just about precludes criticism, disarming it and rendering it, in advance, nugatory and superogatory, since it methodically removes in advance the very basis on which thoughts about books are formed. It attacks and rectifies itself before it can be corrected and judged by others. This amounts to a continual dislocation of the reader from any position of security, knowledge and certainty. And more than one reader has expressed dissatisfaction, dismay and even reprobation

at this state of affairs.¹⁰ The reader has become just another figment of the imagination, another fictional character, someone of indeterminate contour, often interchangeable with the writer (invention of the reader), but no one whose independent position would give weight to the judgments he happens to pass.

The reader, demoted, as has been the writer, from any position of absolute authority, control or command thus enters into Sollers' strategy of total dislocation and discontinuity. This strategy is obviously meant to keep the author, his writer, woman friend, reader, book, story from ever really finishing a train of thought or arriving anywhere. It must be discrete individuals that complete thoughts, pictures, statues, buildings and books, although we shouldn't underestimate the role of compulsion in the process. The other side of the coin from completing the things we start is being obstructed from doing so. The interplay between the ongoing project and whatever is interrupting it is seen as having neither end nor resolution. The situation, unsatisfactory as it is, remains incapable of solution. The questions it poses are permanent and unanswerable. The book in the end has no result, or none that you could point to and name: ". . . il n'y a pas de résultat, peu importe ce qui arrive (on l'aura voulu). Somme nulle, volume détruit par le feu. . . ." (156); what is necessary, instead, is a perpetual state of expectation and tension, of receptiveness and suspension of prejudice and conditioning.

This is a self-consuming experience that erases itself in the very

process of enunciation and combustion , so absolutely is Sollers determined to give his reader/writer nothing to hold onto. We may remark on a molecular level, for example, the dissolution of "il faut" in the following:

"Il faut dépenser le plus possible, immédiatement. Ne rien garder pour soi, pour ailleurs. Arracher la suite. Oublier cet "il faut."
Se tenir simplement dans la vibration transparente qui permet de voir et d'entendre et de dire à la fois ce qui vient et précède en violence chaque histoire immobile, sous les yeux, ici." (147)

The erasure of the "il faut" above is an apt microcosm for this self-erasing text, as Drame spends itself entirely, impossible to remember really, to save as to store. It is like the classical "arts of memory" in reverse, an "art of forgetting" ; for Sollers has attacked those very mechanisms by which things are remembered, classified and kept for later use. His tendency to cancel out his enunciations by process of indefinite development, dialectic or reflection inhibits recall, as does his refusal to decide (for us) what is or is not important, that is, to assign priority to any single moment in the process. For the other moderns we have discussed much the same point could be made, in that they employ styles that inhibit our ability to grasp and retain the material. We have examined, for instance, Joyce's annihilation of the figure of the father by the selfsame process of endless amplification and adumbration that celebrates him, and we have shown also how Leiris' "life" becomes a problematic and shadowy entity that is difficult to locate beyond the

brilliantly expounded paradoxes that inhabit it. But with Sollers the devastation is more total and the landscape correspondingly more devoid of landmark, because here we are dealing with subjects and objects that never existed in the first place and therefore do not even leave us that consoling trace or two, evidence of their passage.

IV

Since nothing here is sure or certain the reader tends to lose track of things even before they have been properly acquired. What is this "problem," for instance, that is announced so frequently in this text and so enigmatically?:

Problème : pousser la reconnaissance le plus loin possible, supprimer le malaise qui ne cesse de l'envahir. Problème: avoir vu le piège mais perdu ses limites. . . ."Problème: pour être sans limites, ressembler à un mot" (12, 130).

Equally baffling is the recurrent notation "manqué" after the enunciation of the "problem." Without ever really coming to grips with what the problem is we are to assume that one has failed in solving it; yet we cannot rest easy even in failure, as it opens the way, equally obscurely to that perpetual further attempt. The problem, thus, without losing anything of its air of cogency and urgency, escapes articulation and totalization. We are told that the problem is always there, but never really in front of us, and a hint is dropped that somehow vested interests may be involved: "Jamais le problème en direct L'organisation générale fonctionne

pour nous empêcher de le poser" (53).

Soller's grammatical formulation for this kind of quasi-real but insistent thought is a conditional he may have learned from Blanchot, but is also massively present in Finnegans Wake.¹¹ The conditional is so well suited to the modern self-erasing works because, especially in its contrary-to-fact forms, it denies while affirming itself:

On dirait qu'une dramatisation s'est communiquée aux dessins du monde, légère d'abord, comme un geste à demi conscient des avant-pays du réveil, puis de plus en plus affirmée, précise (quoique dépourvue d'un sens explicable et unique), traçant ses figures elliptiques dans toutes les directions, écrivant, en somme, écrivant pour lui, l'écrivant lui-même en dehors du temps. . . . Si le plan général lui échappe comme acteur (à moins qu'il se laisse aller à mentir, à rejoindre des passages prévus d'avance, ce qui d'ailleurs le renseigne pour ainsi dire négativement), il sent bien, malgré tout, qu'il s'agit de la même histoire, et peut-être, d'une seule immense histoire qu'il pourrait contenir, veiller, réciter. . . . (72).

These lines, by their very nature escape definition or certainty. What do they say, indeed, that is not as soon retracted, qualified or conditioned? What do they announce that is a matter of fact, or even observation, rather than of conjecture and appearance? They belong to a text that is in effect one continuous condition and creates a suspense that is never lifted and a mystery that can never be solved.

The reader, who from the beginning has been deprived of the mechanisms and justifications he uses to order the raw flow of information, is forced back upon himself. The book he has under his eyes is a constant confession of a failure that can never even be regarded as definitive, a permanent auto-laceration and critique that undermines analogously the pretenses and illusions of art and culture in our bourgeois society for which, as Barthes points out so memorably, writing is merely decoration.¹²

The writer, no writer is to be trusted, and "good" writing, making the "beautiful" its object, maybe least of all. Sollers thus seems to be debunking even the best of fictional practices by the most accomplished masters. He aims his barbs at Proust, Simon, Faulkner and doubtless a few others as he considers and then eschews the temptation simply to "tell the story"; much like Blanchot's narrator's refusal to accommodate his interrogators that we discussed earlier in connection with La Folie du Jour, Drame will stand aloof from such "cooperation" :

Il pourrait évidemment résumer ou exagérer la situation: un homme, une ville, une femme -- ce qui arrive, ce qui se fait --, procéder à une narration elliptique qui aurait l'avantage de profiter de mille détails concrets en même temps que d'éléments personnels. Il pourrait recourir à une fable commode: présentation spectaculaire sur fond de légende, digression de plus en plus ambiguës, menées souterraines, démentis, détours. . . (C'est ainsi probablement qu'on écrit un livre. Mais il s'agit bien d'écrire un livre. . . .)

Ce n'est pas la fausse évidence des premières constations, ni

une invention privilégiée qui peut maintenir la question à
ses yeux. (60-61)

The process whereby masters even of unconventional fiction lend credence to their creations is thus laid bare, or at least stripped of its aura. Sollers' purpose here is evidently to discredit other fictional practices as severely as his own, and thereby to undermine even a temporary belief in what we read, and in the very possibilities of the medium.

The reader, unable to find authority in the written word, is forced to look for it elsewhere. It is not that Sollers is incapable of hypnotic, seductive, compelling prose that fascinates in a more traditional manner. His writings previous to Drame as well as his recent novels in the style of Celine (Femmes and Portrait du joueur) prove the contrary;¹³ and some of his effects and descriptions in Drame do involve the reader for a few paragraphs, pages or so in the kind of "spell" that art has traditionally aimed to exercise. But Sollers shows always, and in short order, that he has mined these structures with the explosive charge of mordant self-criticism; and he detonates these charges without hesitation or remorse:

Et ce langage: faux, borné par rapport à notre présence que je regarde au-delà des vitres se jouer en bas maintenant dans les reflets lumineux de l'eau sur la pierre, incessamment débordante, la même, renouvelée (27).

Nor will Sollers allow us the illusion that we are somehow better off for having struggled through the text, for this is a book that we don't get through, in the sense that we know what it's about and feel that

we've read it -- although we might feel that it's done something to us: "main ouverte, rien à saisir" (84). This is a book that denies itself to its reader as soon as offered. Instead we have been shown "Ce qui passe au fond dans les livres, et les porte, les rapproche, les ouvre comme malgré vous, les inquiète sans fin: voilà le sujet et le dernier acte." (157) This "what happens in all books" cannot be named, since what is named is not what happens. Therefore we find that "silence" is evoked very frequently in Drame, yet in keeping with his determination of depriving the reader of any orientation, even a negative one, Sollers submits both word and concept to the kind of interrogation it was not meant to survive:

". . . silence que rien, aucune violence, aucune négation ne sauraient atteindre puisque dans chaque cri il est à l'intérieur du cri, dans chaque refus ce qui se refuse. C'est en lui, par lui mais toujours apparemment sans lui que l'ensemble a lieu, le mot "silence" est à peine la trace de son reflet. . ." (65).

We are confronted, in Drame, not only with the complete illusoriness and unreality of the world of referents that we take so much for granted, but also with the futility and vanity of our attempts to lessen our confusion by resorting to the comforting fictions of words. Words, as signs, are always wide of the mark. They can never overtake a referent which, as in Zeno's paradox, is always ahead of them. Above all there is no longer any standard to judge when the goal has been hit; such decisions currently always involve the arbitrariness of manifest power and self-fulfilling prophecy. The junction of sign and world is at worst a typical

abuse of power and at best a temporary expedient; meaning therefore is always elusive and totality an illusion: ". . . On ne comprend pas ce qui a été dit, ceux qui parlaient ne comprenaient pas la totalité de ce qu'ils disaient. . ." (100). Drame's punctilious awareness of its own inadequacy is correspondingly consciousness of the failure of all language and all thought.

By reminding the reader so persistently of its own dubious claims to significance or relevance, of the futility of its own machinations and of its fortuitous, haphazard, accidental, finally unlikely and contingent existence as a consumed physical object, the book makes it less feasible for the reader to "lose" himself in the reading. The reader is reminded of and thrown back upon the ambiguity and precariousness of his own individual existence and the corresponding fragility of the cosmos in general. We are reminded of what it is in the interests of power to hide from us, namely that there is nothing natural or inevitable about the way we have organized our world, that we are only signs among signs¹⁴ that, together with their supposed referents, can so readily be changed: " (il vérifie en somme qu'il n'y a pas de 'sujet' -- pas plus que sur cette page) " (121).

This work that reads itself, that tells the reader literally how it is to be read, "neither too near, nor from too far away" (74), and that it is only a book, is showing us the mechanism of its functioning -- that which underlies the operation of all texts. The book itself functions to maintain our awareness of the problematic and arbitrary nature of its

existence at a peak level. In order to do this it has to remind us continually not to fall back into traditional and discredited modes of thinking and reading; for we can never be reminded often enough that the word is not the thing, since this is the kind of lesson that runs so counter to our social programming that we tend to forget it as soon as we learn it. Drame is a kind of school in a new kind of thinking, and what this school teaches, in myriad ways, is a more sensitive appreciation, use and reading of the world and the violence we work upon it in even our most casual gesture and word.

Drame never stops teaching us to be dissatisfied with the descriptive powers of our language and our manipulation of and by a reality that we can only pretend to be outside of:

. . .il voit par exemple des chevaux dans une prairie en pente,
et c'est un matin sec et bleu qui l'enfonce en pleine stupeur, lui,
l'herbe, les rafales de vent. . . .Il voit les chevaux, il ne peut
les penser (il ne sait plus penser, rien que des glissements
dans un glissement latéral). Les mots: "des chevaux courent
dans la prairie" ont beau s'appliquer à la scène, il reste en re-
trait, vide, vidé de paroles, et les mots ne sont plus qu'une
répétition inutile (cependant il les suit du regard en train de
courir, de s'arrêter -- signes vivants, trop vivants pour lui)
[103] .

Another style that Sollers uses to distance the reading from the text is the extensive introduction of the vocabulary of games and game theory.

The two most recurrent metaphors for this are chess and the Chinese divinatory device of the I Ching. The text of Drame is often referred to as "l'échequier," "damier" and the process of writing it as the "jeu." A game, by very definition, is that which can be crucially important one moment and a matter of indifference the next. Games can be adopted or dropped without scruple depending on changing circumstances. One owes nothing to the game. Games provide alternate and varying ways of deciphering and perceiving the world; and one game leads naturally into another, or changes in respect to rules, playing style and temperament of the player. Our involvement in a game is always somewhat of a fiction; we are never as seriously concerned as we look, aware as we are of the unreality of it all. Our societies revel in games because there they can parade unashamedly the lack of finality that inhabits them. For in the game, especially in its modern avatar of "spectator sports" the goallessness and irrationality implicit in our society is made manifest and even subject to celebration. The game is the very image, furthermore, of a system in which the sign refers only to other signs, and that transforms external reality into an adjunct of itself. Above all you don't have to believe in a game in order to play it, although one pictures all too easily a game that one is obliged to play whether one likes to or not: "On ne peut cesser de lire, même en retrait, ici, derrière le front et les yeux ("oublie, rappelle!"), on ne peut éviter le jeu. . .".(157).

The text mirrors also the impermanence of the game. The book that has been read, like the game that has been played, is not there anymore,

although inevitably one starts to play (read) all over again:

Il a perdu ce qu'il a écrit, sans recours. Ce qu'il a écrit est resté dans la mer. Au moment où il se décide à aller le rechercher, il s'éveille. C'est ici. Rien n'a commencé, à vrai dire. En face, le mur blanc est éclairé, comme chaque jour de soleil. . . .Il ouvre un autre livre." (143-144)

As the game of chess, where the game can be over with many or most of the pieces still on the board, the book can have accomplished its purpose without having (been) finished, without comprehensiveness. So too we find Sollers sardonically listing and apologizing for his omissions, indirectly mocking the realists and naturalists who are committed to include and account for everything:

. . .il s'aperçoit qu'il n'a rien dit de son passage le long des quais (un remorqueur devant lui traversait la rade). Rien, non plus, de cette suite déclenchée en marge: l'étang vert, les insectes, les herbes -- l'océan, la côte, le vent, les rochers -- les champs loin des routes -- l'obscurité des collines -- les chantiers -- les hélices dans l'eau, les reflets bougeant sur les coques rouillées -- le sable et l'accumulation de sel sur les bords -- la tempête et le ciel vertical comme poussant la mer dans le noir -- texte surchargé, bref -- (149-150).

Sollers' text-as-only-a-game works in well with a critique of our modern systems of pervasive power and total control. For Sollers evidently much of our malaise arises from our very seriousness, that is our

inability to release our ambitions of completeness and totality. We accordingly either say (and do) too much, in our efforts toward exhaustiveness, or not enough, because we have been satisfied that we have said it all. Sollers does not need to tell the "whole story" because for him there is no "whole story" to tell. Nor does there ever come a point when everything coheres, crystallizes, makes sense around any single aspect. There is no "message" here, at most an attitude he is trying to share, but nothing that can be reduced, clarified, communicated. Sollers' prose is, in the sense that Barthes meant it, profoundly and intransigently intransitive;¹⁵ and accordingly that moment when a hitherto difficult writer is finally understood marks not his success but his failure:¹⁶ all understanding is misunderstanding. There is nothing to say except that there is nothing to say, or that everything we can say is so infinitely beside the point.¹⁷ This is a kind of anti-lesson, or lesson to the effect that there is no lesson.¹⁸

V

Nevertheless the presence of the reader is duly noted, just as the dutiful students' assistance is noted by teachers who are at once reluctant and obliged to go on lecturing. Although communication is absent there is a certain kind of communion here, as barriers have been effaced and pretensions reduced. The writer, no longer having anything to say, can now just be with the reader, both caught between the covers of the same book: " ' . . . il est entendu que je n'ai rien à te "raconter,"

-- nous n'en avons pas le temps --, il nous suffit d'être ensemble, ici, maintenant. . . ' " (102). Lest we feel that we have reached some kind of plateau, or even achieved something, the image even of this minimal relationship, or communion between reader and writer does not survive the sentence that gave it birth. It turns out to be just another passing thought, soon to be fractured by the disintegrating power of the text as it continues to qualify, explain, modify, and in this case even sexualize the encounter:

" (et comment y être, en effet, sinon en silence ou encore sur un autre plan par l'appel brusqué de ce que tu sais: l'intérieure douceur de la peau et morsure en passant par la peau, contact réduit à un fil, point de rupture, visage obscurci, ta main et l'appel pour qu'on ne vienne pas, distance maintenue la même entre toi et ce que tu vois: d'une part cet égorgement bref d'animal surpris autrefois et de l'autre les deux face à face se touchant à peine et l'une se laissant tomber peu à peu et s'arrêtant ou plutôt arrêtant sa bouche là longuement et faisant apparaître comme sien l'autre visage de plus en plus défait et mal supporté sans crier --) dans l'air de nouveau présent, ouvert --"

In Sollers' prose there is no resting place, no point of view or perspective that we can attain or where we can stay. With Sollers we never get to finish what we start, but are always interrupted and carried on in a relentless motion, always "de nouveau" pushed back into the moving current of things. We grasp perhaps at a passing branch to slow things

down a bit, but another gust of wind and we are gone. Just as in cinema¹⁹ the rapid changes in perspective preclude and defy an audience's calm reflection, Sollers' text inhibits rational judgment. One is reminded of the existential imperative, the "leap" or interruption that Kierkegaard never ceased stressing against the futility of thought ever reaching a conclusion (merging into action) on its own premisses alone. Logic is inherently and discouragingly endless, as one thought rises indefinitely out of another. Against Hegel, apostle of logos, Kierkegaard urged the necessity of the irrational, the intrusion, the interruption that alone can help us descend from thought to life.²⁰ Sollers' strategy is very much in the nature of this Kierkegaardian leap; and one of the most important words that function in this manner is the "cependant," whose overwhelming exigency frequently concludes or opens the chants. This introjection and some others like it, "all the same" etc., characteristically do not wait until the thought, much less the sentence has been completed before the text is reformulated or reorganized on another tangent.

This "leap" into discontinuity and abrupt change of focus and perspective naturally alters with circumstance and subject. If "he" is sleeping, he suddenly wakes and we find he was dreaming and we with him. Or if "he" is awake he talks of sleep and dreams wherein we naturally expect that new rules will apply. The important point is not so much the nature of the hiatus as its suddenness and inevitability. We are reminded that, in the end (of which there is none), whatever we are seeing,

thinking, hearing, wondering, doesn't matter very much, that in the nature of things there is always something happening elsewhere that requires our more urgent attention.

The process that Sollers circumscribes is that of a perpetual attempt to come to grips with a world that is forever fugitive. The metaphor of the sea, which Sollers uses occasionally in Drame as an equivalent of the text, is singularly appropriate in this connection as a phenomenon that escapes all of man's attempts to codify, damn or arrest it:

Il pense à un livre qui ne s'arrêterait pas plus que la mer
 ("l'homme conçoit une pensée, elle passe là au souffle, le souffle le passe au vent. . .") -- et pendant qu'il la touche, en effet, tout continue et commence, recommence, respire et se respire en lui: ce qui est détaché, ici, en surface, ne peut rien enfermer, chaque phrase s'éteint dans une autre phrase qui la contient. . . (115).

This book that has been erasing itself as we read it, finally disappears altogether, because it has merged with a universal ebb-and-flow, a cosmic tempo that is ceaseless and unrelenting and useless to deny. The story here, as for Joyce of the final pages of Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, is reduced to the one affirmation we all utter whether we articulate it or not: the yes:

Précédant et acceptant ce qui vient et ne comptant plus, et saisis par notre vie depuis le début à travers son obscurité

voulue, et disant oui à ce qui surgit reparaît s'écoule -- lignes couleur -- et il y a cette joie qui se passe du mot joie et c'est de son histoire qu'il s'agit malgré la fatigue et l'horreur imprégnant serrant chaque scène sa racine invisible son sens -- Oui encore à cela? Oui. A cela encore? Oui. Il n'y a plus de fin si nous cessons d'être une fin." (138)

Drame thus incarnates a world of perpetual change, confrontation, mutability and incessant, irresoluble paradox. Whichever way we turn the book points us immediately in the opposite direction. It would be correct to say that it sends us in circles if we ever could know we had gotten back to our original starting point; but then we don't really begin this book, we plunge in, as into the sea, and then who can say when we started swimming; the essential is to stay afloat. Although we don't go in circles we don't advance either. Myriad are the ways in which Sollers evokes this impossibility to progress, from the figure of the reader who, whether he knows it or not, is still on the same page to that of the writer whose manuscript is gone, to that of a sign which would have to mean more than it can in order to relate to any referent:

(Le signe "etc." est d'ailleurs ici dérisoire; il faudrait inventer celui qui signifierait l'incessant, l'innombrable, quelque chose come l'abréviation du vertige insérée dans le dictionnaire général.) (98)

Whichever way we turn we are confronted endlessly with the same

situation: nothing we can say, write or do can change things in the slightest; but by hiding behind the illusions of traditional fiction (story, character, moral and/or historical progress etc.) we are not advancing things either, only postponing the recognition of our hopelessness. It is certainly not a question in Drame, as it may have been for the Nouveau Roman, of "seeing things as they are" but of realizing that we are incapable of seeing things at all, much less describing what we have not seen. All our precious words, our priceless art, our clever sciences do not amount to very much more than a perpetuation of an ultimately harmful illusion that we know more than we do and that we are less helpless than we are. Drame is an attempt to "break the habit" of such narcotic illusions by undermining the separations and hierarchies on which they are based. Without making exorbitant claims about its ability to affect or change a world necessarily beyond its reach, we may venture to say that the achievement of Sollers with Drame is to have written a novel whose end is not a foregone conclusion.

Notes

- ¹ Henri Peyre, French Novelists of Today (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 413.
- ² Stephan Heath, The Nouveau Roman: A Study in the Practice of Writing (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), p. 236; Katherine C. Kurk, Consummation of the Text: A Study of Philippe Sollers (University of Kentucky Dissertation, 1979), pp. 126-7; Philippe Sollers, "L'Écriture et Révolution," in Théorie d'Ensemble (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p. 72.
- ³ Sollers, Drame (Paris: Seuil, 1965), pp. 75-76, 139-140, 150-152.
- ⁴ Sollers, Drame, p. 111: " ". . . il y a . (Un point dans du blanc, c'est cela.)" " This is likely also to be some kind of allusion to the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas, where the "il y a" at a certain point represents the fundamental terror and opacity of existence. Possibly Blanchot is present here too, as "il y a" is one of the phrases that the narrator of Le Dernier Mot is bewildered by (see above, my page 166).
- ⁵ Quotation marks in indented citations, here and further, are Sollers', coming after an introductory "il écrit," but representing evidently also some kind of "assault on punctuation," since these quoted passages as the reader will see or has seen, are of identical provenance and significance (or lack thereof) as those unaccompanied by marks.
- ⁶ Gilles Deleuze, Différence et Répétition (Paris: PUF, 1968), pp. 94, 252; Umberto Eco, L'Oeuvre Ouverte ((Paris: Seuil, 1965), chapters 1, 4.
- ⁷ Maurice Blanchot, De Kafka à Kafka (Paris: Galimard/Idees, 1981).
- ⁸ Deleuze, Différence , p. 375.
- ⁹ Jacques Derrida, La Dissémination (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 351.
- ¹⁰ Henri Peyre, quoted above, is just one of many. Sartre's Les Temps Modernes has been particularly hostile to Tel Quel in general and

Sollers in particular; for example, Annie Leclerc, "Sollers, poète d'un certain drame," LTM (June, 1965), 2282-85.

11

For instance, "If you met on the binge a poor acheseyeld from Ailing, when the tune of his tremble shook shimmy on shin, while his countrary raged in the weak of his wailing. . ." (148). The "bubble" that is the Wake may be seen perhaps, like the dream some say it is, as an extended contrary-to-fact condition, a survival of the subjunctive in our modern age of indicative "certainty."

12

Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, trans. Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 38; see also above, my pages 14-15.

13

See bibliography. L'Intermédiaire (Paris: Seuil, 1962), for instance, a collection of earlier essays and stories, is a charming, accomplished, and, in places, even a wonderfully funny book. "Introduction aux Lieux d'Aisance" (pp. 31-44) it seems to me has no equal in any language for slyly scatological hilarity.

14

Philippe Sollers, Logiques (Paris: Seuil, 1968).

15

Barthes, Pleasure, p. 52.

16

Sollers, Drame, p. 112: " " . . . ce que j'aurais pu faire deviendrait lisible, traduisible . . . , c'est-à-dire vide, incomplet, manqué. . . . " "

17

Sollers, Drame , p. 86: " " Ce que je choisis ou ne choisis pas de t'écrire me paraîtra bientôt inutile. . . . Comme si écrire, c'était rendre faux. . . . " "

18

A little Zen or Tao may enter into the conjuncture here too. Sollers at this point is fascinated by the Orient; Tel Quel is soon going to take its notorious turn toward Maoism, and Nombres (1968), the text that attracted such passionate allegiance from Derrida and Kristeva, is going to go so far as to incorporate Chinese letters. In Drame Sollers exploits the ambiguity of the French "est" to demonstrate the direction of his interest: "Mais l'est? je vous demande comment aller lentement vers l'est? . . . " (131).

19

Sollers, Drame, p. 41: "Le plan tourne, se présente sous l'une

ou l'autre face."

20 Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans.
Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 105: "...re-
flection can be halted only by a leap. . . ."

7. A Deconstructed Epiphany: Des Forêts' Le Bavard

Tutto a causa del cosiddetto peccato originale che, salvo interventi contrari della grazia, porta l'uomo inelutabilmente al male e alla perfidia, anche se si tratta di un homo così altruista e moralmente elevato.

--Dino Buzzati

One does not write because one has something to say but because one wants to say something.

-- E.M. Cioran

Le Bavard (Paris: Gallimard, 1946) of Louis-Rene Des Forets, is a complex and subtle work, which poses, in crystalline and deceptive simplicity, some of the basic questions of our time about culture, art, the value of language, the possibility of truth and the increasingly equivocal if not culpable relations between author and character as well as author and reader. This work is quintessentially and teasingly post-Nietzschean -- in the sense that it confronts us with a world that has been deprived of its basic underpinning and structure, a world in which there are no absolutes and nothing solid to rely on and in which everything finally is in a state of perpetual movement.

On its most immediate and literal level, Le Bavard is the confession of an individual (nameless) who is suffering from a strange kind of malady. That is, he has been frequently seized by a paradoxical desire -- which first came upon him one day when, having the "cafard" (or "blues"), he decided to deal with his ennui by going to the beach. This malady significantly first attacked him after a brief period of calm and felicity by the water's edge; while lying on a cliff overlooking the ocean, he was suddenly seized by the desire to speak, or more precisely gab ("bavarder"). So strong and irresistible was this desire that he almost,

like Demosthenes, began addressing the ocean, although we shouldn't confuse this desire to speak with any concrete purpose, as of praise or elegy, such as in the famous "vieil océan" passages in Lautréamont's Chants de Maldoror. The reason why this desire is paradoxical is that, although our narrator is possessed and driven by the will to speak, during this first and the subsequent crises, the fact remains that he has nothing to say.

The second onset of this malady occurs while he is celebrating in a dancing bar one evening with some friends. He has been dragged reluctantly into this place -- as he has made a point of informing the reader -- since he is not the type of person who enjoys going into these "dens of iniquity." His reputation among his friends is even that of a somewhat taciturn, reserved and withdrawn character. His friends even prefer him to be quiet, because he has a tendency to moralize when he does speak. In addition, we the reader, who are frequently addressed directly -- whether in the modest singular (our hero once says that he requires only one reader, other than himself presumably) or the more ambitious plural -- we are informed that our narrator has a very low threshold of tolerance for alcohol -- and that on this particular occasion it was necessary for him to do some catching up with his companions. We are also informed that our narrator has a tendency to be rather a spectator of than a participant in life, being somewhat of a voyeur; so that it was perhaps because of his unusual and (for him) immoderate absorption of alcohol, as he was

watching the dancing from his table, that he felt powerfully attracted by a beautiful and statuesque young lady whose dancing partner at the time was a short and vulgar-looking man. With great difficulty the narrator succeeds in freeing the woman from her partner; and indeed there is almost a physical combat between the two men over the woman. Soon, however, he is dancing with her, entranced by her bodily charms and her mysterious and fascinating smile; a little later, after another altercation with the lady's escort, who at her insistence has been relegated to a corner table of the cabaret, they are sitting at a table engaged in a tête-a-tête conversation (strangely improbable and unilateral, since the lady, of Spanish origins, seems to know very little French). Our narrator is suddenly seized, almost involuntarily, with the desire to "tell all" to the lady. He was perhaps encouraged by the suspicion that the lady would be unlikely to understand much of what he was saying.

What comes bubbling out of our "normally taciturn" narrator now is an uninterrupted flow, a continuous and interminable confession of his most intimate secrets, fears, desires and shames. All the while he is talking he is encouraged to ever greater heights of self-revelation and deprecation by the mysterious but seemingly encouraging smile of the woman. His "performance" comes to dominate the evening and soon everyone in the place is listening to him, reacting first with amused disbelief, then with scorn and horror at his indiscretion and abysmal bad taste.

The narrator, although he remembers very well the circumstances of his long confession, even through the clouds of alcohol, -- although he

delineates carefully the effect his words have on what is now an audience of considerably more than one, is curiously silent on one obvious point: that is, what exactly it is he is supposed to have said. He claims not to remember a single word. Always anxious to anticipate his ever-present reader's objections and doubts, the narrator uses this seemingly inexplicable gap in his memory as a pretext for a long Tristram Shandy-style apology:

. . .Qu'on ne m'accuse pas de rester sciemment dans le vague quand il s'agit d'exposer la nature de mes aveux, et d'abord il n'est justement pas question de passer ceux-ci en revue; si vous brûlez d'en prendre connaissance, je vous préviens que vous préparez une fameuse déception, car n'en déplaise aux gens irréfléchis, prompts à croire qu'un autobiographe est doué d'une mémoire sans défaillance et qu'il est légitime qu'on attende de lui un compte exact de ses faits et gestes, si j'ai bien promis d'étudier consciencieusement et sans détours tout le mécanisme complexe de mes crises, je n'ai pas l'ambition de tout rapporter, y compris ce que je n'ai jamais su. Il ne dépend pas de moi que le plus important m'échappe, que dis-je, m'ait échappé quand il semblerait que j'aurais pu si facilement le saisir. J'ai déjà dit que je ne dénaturerais les faits à aucun prix; quand certains d'entre eux me feront défaut pour la compréhension de l'ensemble, je saurai renoncer au bénéfice que me vaudrait une impression plus forte produite par quelques faits inventés de toutes pièces

sur l'esprit du lecteur, je ne substituerai pas aux vide de l'oubli des mensonges plus vraisemblables. Tant pis si cela doit désobliger les curieux et les méticuleux. Je préfère m'exposer à l'accusation injustifiée de passer sous silence des confidences qui me compromettraient -- et j'ajoute que je veux bien être pendu s'il existe quelqu'un qui ait la naïveté de croire que j'en suis encore à éviter de me compromettre. Peu m'importe qu'une omission ou un véritable oubli jettent une ombre sur ce qui dans son ensemble ne saurait être sujet à caution. Mais j'entends qu'on me demande comment j'ai pu oublier ce qu précisément est le plus significatif ou en tout cas le plus piquant? Je n'ai rien à répondre à cela. Et pourtant il me serait peut-être possible d'en donner une explication propre à satisfaire les personnes de bonne foi. Si fâcheuse et si invraisemblable que puisse être à certains égards cette constatation, j'ai complètement oublié quels furent mes aveux pour la bonne raison que pendant que je les prononçais, je n'y prêtai aucune attention. Je m'explique. L'essentiel pour moi, c'était mon bavardage. (86-89, author's underlining)

Since the narrator frequently generalizes, in apologizing to his readers, that many people, if not most, suffer from this malady (the reader here, as in Tzara, Beckett and Sollers, lays claim to the uncomfortable "equality"¹ of Baudelaire's imprecation: "Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère"), Des Forêts seems to be making some type of statement by the attitude of indifference which he professes above to the

actual words he has uttered, about the culture we live in and our inevitably curious, ambiguous and insincere relation to the expressive means at our disposal. Des Forêts here mocks us (" . . .qu'on me demande comment j'ai pu oublier ce que précisément est le plus significatif ou en tout cas le plus piquant?") for the demand we inevitably make to know exactly what it is he said, the story (such as, for instance Blanchot and Sollers refuse to tell it). By emphasizing such nugatory, vain and interchangeable externals, we hide from and blind ourselves to the more germane, if threatening, notion that we speak not so much because we have something to say, since we are forced to speak anyway (as Blanchot says to his imaginary interlocutor of L'Entretien Infini, we must talk or destroy one another), but because we are, by the very structure of our situation, obliged to talk: we need to lecture for an hour, fill so many pages, make conversation over dinner or a drink. Here we need to know not how to tell a truth, but how to embellish one, that is, to lie. The fact is that we, at all events, can give the floor, microphone, printed page only to those who have mastered the arts of dissimulation and deceit. The word, therefore, is automatically compromised, "processed," suspect and cheapened in a culture where what is said is insignificant in comparison to the position, or station in our hierarchies of the speaker. Like a newspapers whose articles we already know before we look at them, a writer's words are already read before they are printed, in this world where there is nothing left to say that hasn't been said already by what we know about the speaker and the institutions he is forced to function

within and from. We say, in the end, what we are obliged to say, repeating our lines that we know so well we don't even have to commit them to memory.

Des Forêts' idea is that we tend to speak, not because we have something to say (that possibility, except for certain stubbornly residual "cries" and/or graffiti,² having been effectively foreclosed) but out of a need to be heard. We talk to a listener whom we ask not to respond:

. . .un bavard ne parle jamais dans le vide; il a besoin d'être stimulé qu'on l'écoute, fût-ce machinalement; il n'exige pas la repartie, c'est à peine s'il cherche à établir un rapport vital entre son interlocuteur et lui; s'il est vrai que sa loquacité grandit jusqu'à l'exaltation la plus folle devant l'assentiment ou la contradiction, elle se maintient en tout cas très honorablement devant l'indifférence et l'ennui. (199)

but to give us the illusion that we are talking and being heard. Language, in this perspective, loses much of its traditional prestige, function and "aura." It no longer enables prayer, comprises an art or literature, or facilitates communication between men. It is ready now for measurement and quantification; it becomes instrumental, its purpose sardonically reduced to that of physiological release -- anatomical, excretory, sexual and certainly, as in the ultimate Joyce, very pressing.³

Like monetary wealth, unjustly and divided among men, in unjustifiable ways, the only purpose of language is to distribute gratification. Significantly, and of course ironically, our narrator says in closing: "Je

me suis soulag  " (214). It is not necessary that the words we use mean something, only that we speak; although a referent must be offered, at least temporarily, as a pretext for further discourse, meaning, taken too seriously, would even interfere with what we now derive from words.

Sexual experience, that signifier that is its own signified, with its natural suppression and deflation of intellectual hierarchies, is as convenient a metaphor for Le Bavaud as it was in Finnegans Wake.⁴

Language takes on a quasi-sexual function. The narrator explicitly refers to his ranting speech-confession as "une  rection verbale" (94). Orgasm is presumably achieved when one has spoken enough, a condition of which only the speaker is qualified to judge, after which one is "tired": "Or maintenant, je suis las. Allons, Messieurs, puisque je vous dis que je ne retiens plus personne!" (124) are the last words of the book. The essential point seems to be to talk until one is all talked out; and the main disaster to avoid, as in sex, is being interrupted. It becomes clear, this being the case, that written expression, being unilateral, possesses clear advantages over the living verbal.⁵ The person (and eventually people), to whom the narrator unburdens himself, is free to come and go as she pleases -- as she has amply demonstrated by cutting herself loose from her first partner so as to "listen to" the narrator. The "fourire" with which she cuts off the narrator's speech is merely evidence of her liberty to reject a non-reciprocal relation. The narrator, who finds himself abruptly stumbling out of the bar, with the lady's laughter echoing in his ears, is at great pains to disguise to himself and to his

reader the true nature of his embarrassment (which, according to our logic, is that he has been stopped short of a kind of orgasm). He pretends, momentarily even to feelings of peaceful communion in the nighttime city, and mentions his relief at being away from a place where, because of the influence of the alcohol he had uncustomarily consumed, he had violated what he had assured the reader is one of his fundamental principles: to avoid talking about himself to others! That is, he despises, he tells us now, above all people those who confess their inmost secrets to others. The reader, however, has also been often invited to regard the narrator's statements as less than completely truthful; the narrator often claims proudly that he is prone to lying; and in the end even dismisses the entire story he has told as a pure fabrication, although coyly qualifying this retraction by wondering what his future reader will do with the problem of "did he lie when he said he lied."

The true reason for the narrator's unhappiness and frustration have to be read then "between the lines." He is by no means sad because he has been "false to himself" or to his real values (the typically romantic pose of Baudelaire, "enfin seul" at one in the morning),⁶ but because he has been interrupted in the middle of his sexual-verbal act by someone whom he believed to be a willing partner, if not an accomplice. The advantages of the printed word become obvious in this light. The reader is not able to demand a reciprocity that would seem a natural right for almost any listener. The pressure, urgency and demand of the situation are then subtly displaced from the character to the reader: our narrator

is manifestly concerned above all that the reader stay with him to the end; and the amount of time and space taken with pleading with the reader certainly occupies a considerable portion of the text. One could even go so far as to say that, as in Beckett's Trilogy and other modernist texts we have been discussing,⁷ that the story is progressively eliminated in favor of the author's address to a reader -- so that by the third and concluding chapter all pretense of the story having an independent, objective existence of its own has been abandoned; the story (whether true or not) concludes at the end of the second chapter with our narrator's ostensible suicide; the last chapter takes up immediately the reader's natural objection: "well what are you doing still alive?" -- to which the narrator replies, after having been annoyed at length that his reader has the nerve to bother him with such triviality, that the story wasn't really true; the story has merely been used as a tool so that the reader wouldn't interrupt the narrator (put the book down) while he was talking.

The story disappears like a rainbow in a puddle in the bright sun of the narrator's "confession" that he invented only so as to have something to say; and in fact he is only revealing this secret to us in order to have a pretext to keep on talking for a bit longer. For the laughter that our narrator says he fears even more than the woman's who interrupted him is his hypothetical reader's. He then admits he had misrepresented his mood in leaving the bar by claiming that his was a peaceful state of mind. The fact is he was as upset after hearing the

woman laugh as if someone had spat directly in his face (107). He anticipates naturally his precious reader's reaction to this sudden and flagrant contradiction of himself. These readers

seront bien surpris et qui sait? peut-être flattés si je leur révèle que j'ai cherché à les égarer en m'attribuant des pensées de tout repos moins par crainte de la honte que j'aurais pu éprouver à me remémorer ce rire déchirant comme un coup de couteau que parce que j'avais des raisons de redouter un autre rire, je veux dire leur rire précisément, oui, votre rire, messieurs! (108-109)

The narrator then goes on to deny that there is anything comic in this situation; and I think here he is as serious as he ever gets. The literary method becomes thus what just happens to be the chosen tool of the man who (like all of us) is obliged to speak, who is driven to speak, for physiological reasons, and for whom the content, and a fortiori the style, of what he says is secondary, if not insignificant compared to his crying need to talk, talk, talk.

The narrator is careful to point out that this method was not chosen out of love of literature, and he is careful equally to distance himself from "literary" ambition. The fact that the work is written in masterful prose and is in its way a masterpiece, or at least a consummate tour-de-force, should not obscure Des Forêts' subtle handling of "the problem of literature."

We are inevitably referred back to the Hegelian critique of art so central to the Surrealist iconoclasm we have seen at work in Tzara. We

have also shown how this "attack on the privileges of art" is explicitly and dramatically omnipresent in Blanchot, Leiris and Sollers, as well as implicit but perdurable in Beckett and the ultimate Joyce. The critique that Hegel made of art is that it no longer represents an absolute and that science and technology would inevitably take its place as man's most intense, authentic and representative expression of himself: in other words that art was already "chose passée." The well-known pessimistic view of Spengler that the engineer⁸ is the artist of our day, as well as the scandalous refusal by Rimbaud of the world of poetry in favor of the so-called "real world" are certainly corollaries to this position.

We do not mean to apply these generalities in a simplistic manner to the complex human issues that Des Forêts so uncannily elucidates, even if his narrator loses no opportunity to poke fun at mere "literature" and "literary gifts." We merely wish to suggest that his work constitutes the same kind of subversion, in its indirect subtle way, of Western culture and art, together with the hierarchies and privileges they protect and express, as we have seen at work in other more clearly radical writers. In this sense, although Des Forêts' iconoclasm is certainly less explicit than Tzara's, Blanchot's or Sollers', it is no less total, and in its secret, perhaps insidious way, equally sobering and provocative.

It is clear, furthermore, that Des Forêts carries his de-mystifying approach even further in the subsequent stories which comprise La Chambre des Enfants (Paris: Gallimard, 1960). These "récits" are

told in the ambiance of the institutions (military, scholastic, domestic) of an old world gone rotten, and with no hope for change or revival -- and whose inhabitants have no choice but to follow the paths already laid out for them, a path which by common agreement means nothing and leads nowhere. Thus, after the "project" of literature has been deprived of all function, whether expressive or representative, the narrator of "Dans le Miroir" sadly concludes about his single reader: "N'empêche qu'il me faudra lui soumettre la troisième version ce soir" (283). Human action is reduced in this "empty" world to obeying the letter of a law whose spirit has ceased to exist, a survival by momentum. The teacher-student relation, in particular, offers Des Forêts a perfect opportunity to describe, through the words of one of his characters, the melancholy "no-exit" quality of this world -- in which seeming choices, like rebellion and disobedience, only reinforce a structure of power that oppresses and shapes every instant of our lives:

-- Ne comprends-tu pas que les maîtres ont dramatisé le règlement en donnant à nos rapports avec eux qui se substituent à lui le caractère d'un conflit permanent? C'est aux maîtres qu'il faut obéir, c'est par eux qu'on se fait punir, c'est donc à eux qu'on sera tenté de désobéir pour leur permettre, selon la formule insolente de notre élève, de faire leur métier. Résister sournoisement à leurs ordres, tromper leur surveillance afin d'encourir une juste punition, c'est rompre sans cesse avec la docilité satisfaite où nous risquerions de nous endormir, mais c'est

aussi reconnaître la puissance invincible du règlement qui ne vit en nous que par la fréquence de nos délits. Et qui donc nous invite insidieusement à commettre ces délits, sinon les maîtres eux-mêmes par le rappel de nos devoirs comme par les sanctions dont ils nous menacent sans cesse. ("La Chambre des Enfants," p. 175).

The young writer who is the main character of "Une Mémoire Démentielle," in the same collection, has concluded that action, in his case literary, is sheer futility. His initial idea was to preserve or recall certain significant events of his youth, for instance a resentful and proud "silence" (natural pendant to the "noise" of Le Bavard) that was supposed to have lasted for an extended time and to have culminated in a dream of killing the principal of his school, after which he became a fugitive; but he judges, in conclusion, that dream and reality are so inextricably intertwined in the nevertheless vivid and convincing expression of these events, that what he is preserving for posterity is precisely and only the fiction of a memory; but he determines, nevertheless, that he must continue to write, even in the absence of any purpose that can withstand inspection, and with the added anguish that he will never know what it is exactly he is writing about or what his readers are reacting to. We are playing here with a Proustian equation, but we must be careful to subtract from it any pride or consolation in a redeeming, transforming, or transmogrifying power of art. Time past is there as an area to explore, recapture and remember, but this time no longer pertains to our present.

It is more escape, mockery and lure than a direction for authentic search. The past is there, waiting for us, for Des Forêts as for Proust; but for the former it is no longer worth anything. Des Forêts' writer, like similar self-projections of Beckett and Blanchot, has been sentenced rather than rewarded; although this story has been told entirely in the third person singular, Des Forêts switches shockingly to the first person singular in the last few sentences, thus banishing any pretense to authorial detachment from a condition that resembles more nearly a predicament:

. . .il rédigea une dernière version qu'il tint pour définitive, bien qu'elle ne fût pas moins caduque que les ébauches antérieures, mais lâchement, mais douloureusement il renonça cette fois à la détruire et rêva -- essaya de rêver -- qu'elle perpétuerait sa hantise. Préoccupé de lui assurer un prestige posthume, il connut les tourments comiques du littérateur. Je suis ce littérateur. Je suis ce maniaque. Mais je fus peut-être cet enfant. (222-3)

Des Forêts is obviously taking responsibility for these last lines, whether or not we want to identify him with the precocious and sensitive child of whom he has been speaking. The author thus assures us, and personally, that people will continue talking, writers writing, singers singing⁹ long after all content and meaning have been expunged from their lives. Man no longer believes in what he is doing, but the process must go on, even without a subject, purpose, origin or end.

Des Forêts' texts acquire, obliquely, a peculiarly political dimension, in the subtle and sudden ways they often "slip" from the existential conditions he depicts to include and embrace, while holding at a dignified distance, himself at the time of composition, or, alternatively, his interlocutor, neighbor, other and/or reader. The narrator of Le Bavard, who has invited us into his book by posing as a "special case" (p. 11 where he insists on his singularity), concludes by expanding the crisis, that is a mania to talk without having anything to say, to include all of humanity -- of which he is only a particularly frank and self-conscious example:

C'est entendu, je suis un bavard, un inoffensif et fâcheux bavard, comme vous l'êtes vous-mêmes, et par surcroît un menteur comme le sont tous les bavards, je veux dire les hommes. Mais en quoi cela vous autorise-t-il à me reprocher âprement le mal dont vous êtes vous-mêmes affectés? On ne peut me demander de rester dans mon coin, silencieux et modeste, à écouter se payer de mots des gens dont j'ai bien le droit de penser qu'ils n'ont ni plus d'expérience ni plus de réflexion que moi-même. Lequel d'entre vous me jettera la pierre?

Ce que moins que tout autre vous paraissent disposés à me passer, c'est une certaine mauvaise conscience. Quand on a honte d'être un bavard, dites-vous, on commence par se taire. J'en conviens. Mais ce besoin fâcheux qui nous est commun constitue-t-il une tare sur laquelle ceux qui n'en rougissent pas

ont le droit de me juger? J'ai la faiblesse de croire que mieux
vaut ma conscience, fût-elle mauvaise, que votre aveuglement.

(191-192)

That prestigious and consoling quasi-absolute, the work of art, of literature, worthy of the rapt devotions and ardent labors of a Proust, Flaubert or Henry James, becomes in the irreverent hands of our narrator a mere means to an end. The process whereby contingent man has been substituted for the absolute (the Nietzschean event par excellence) has resulted in this extreme abdication of any transcendent meaning or value, either for man or for his art. Not having a goal beyond himself to devote himself to man has been reduced to his bodily existence, and all the traditional absolutes and highest cultural "goods" have become mere grist for his mills. The work of art will liberate, justify or excuse nothing and no one.

That Symbolist retreat, excoriated by Tzara,¹⁰ of the artist into isolation, oneiric contemplation, memory (involuntary or not) no longer exists for our narrator. He flirts, at one point in our book, with the alleged consolations of these methods, even going so far as to wonder about the stupidity of those who complain they can never be happy -- when in fact happiness is available to anyone who wants it; all we have to do is close our eyes and dream, or find a peaceful place to open our lids upon that jogs a pleasant memory or two. Our narrator shows us delightedly how this is done when, shortly after his flight from the bar he becomes painfully aware that he is being followed (as we find out

later, by the Spanish lady's disgruntled partner). His fear leaves him when he enters a public garden, finds his favorite bench and reminisces about his past pleasures: one of his favorite occupations in this park was posing as a prospective customer for the prostitutes and then enjoying their discomfiture when they realized he wasn't really interested. The "past recaptured" that gives him such solace was thus merely an indulgence of voyeuristic and sadistic whim. His feelings of superiority to those not able to attain such calm regions of peace constitute some of purest effrontery in the text:

. . .contrairement à ce que voudraient faire croire certains gens qui cherchent le bonheur sans jamais le trouver, celui-ci éclate sous leurs yeux et retentit dans leurs oreilles à chaque heure du jour, qu'ils le prennent donc où il est, ne fût-ce qu'un instant, et qu'ils cessent de nous fatiguer de leurs inutiles plaintes, c'est ensuite pour montrer l'importance que j'attache au rapport entre la brusque disparition de ma peur et les souvenirs de calme félicité qu'évoquait irrésistiblement pour moi la vue de ce banc sur lequel je venais m'asseoir. Il est en effet très frappant que j'aie cessé de croire à la réalité du péril à partir du moment où je me suis introduit dans ce jardin. Ce phénomène me paraît dans la mesure où il est symptomatique de la répercussion que de tels souvenirs, pour peu qu'ils conservent leur violent parfum peuvent avoir sur le cours d'une pensée même dominée par la peur, comme c'est le cas ici. (132 - 133)

This "happiness" turns out to be fleeting and evanescent, however; the pain-killing power of this "music of memory" is not limitless -- and turns out to be quite weak indeed compared to the perdurability of his fear and a dormant masochism which now awakens and demands its punishment, fit preliminary to a spiritual regeneration:

. . .j'étais tout entier possédé par la musique fascinante des souvenirs, rien n'aurait pu altérer ma jouissance; à peine avais-je encore le souci du présent. Et cependant, cette musique elle-même, combien de temps subirais-je son pouvoir? N'allait-elle pas se dissiper à la longue et alors ne serais-je pas de nouveau exposé à expier par un cruel dégoût de moi-même la honte d'avoir parlé publiquement? Le fait est que tout se déroula suivant le processus que je viens d'indiquer, mais cette fois, si lourd était le sentiment de ma déchéance que, tenant la peur pour le remède le plus efficace, persuadé qu'elle seule me permettrait d'éprouver un certain allègement, sinon d'échapper complètement l'emprise du remords, j'en arrivais à la regretter ainsi qu'à souhaiter l'épreuve d'un châtement dont je ne doutais pas de sortir régénéré.

(134-135)

Another problem connected with the consolations offered by memory is that they frequently disappoint. The narrator makes great conscious efforts, for instance, to recall a certain feature of the lady's face which he found especially pleasant to contemplate, her smile; but, try as he

might, he cannot resuscitate this feature; instead he is invaded by the memory of her laughter, mocking and rejecting him, inhabiting his present and destroying his peace of mind:

. . .j'essayais désespérément de me rappeler comment cette femme avait souri pendant que nous dansions ensemble. . . même en faisant de très grands efforts, je ne trouvais plus la moindre trace de ce sourire dont j'ai dit pourtant quelle attraction il avait exercée sur moi. C'était très irritant: je voulais m'en souvenir, je le voulais plus encore que je n'étais disposé à me l'avouer et j'essayais d'abord de me rappeler sa chevelure, quelle sorte de pierres pendaient à ses oreilles et la façon curieuse qu'elle avait de plisser les yeux en me regardant, et son nez, comment était-il déjà? et ainsi peu à peu et comme négligemment je m'approchais de la région brûlante, mais au moment où je croyais déjà tenir ce sourire, c'était un atroce éclat de rire qui envahissait tout le champ de ma mémoire. J'en étais quitte pour recommencer mes travaux d'approche en redoublant de prudence et de ruse, jusqu'à ce que des échecs répétés m'y fassent définitivement renoncer. En revanche, ce rire, je le voyais parfaitement, je ne le voyais que trop, et je craignais même que le souvenir pût m'en rester par-delà la mort. (105-106)

Here Des Forêts is ransacking a "problem of memory" so prominent in the texts we have been exploring, from Tzara's strident denunciations of the faculty of recollection, to Beckett's ironic detachment from past

comfort and future hope alike, to the "impossibilities" evoked with such verve and candor in the autobiographies of Leiris, to the "slates" that Blanchot and Sollers seem to be cleaning anew with every unprecedented fragment of consciousness they isolate in words.¹¹

What seems to frustrate Des Forêts' narrator most is an inveterately Freudian lack of conscious control over our own minds, a weakness whose implication is to put our entire Western ideology of "making our own destinies" into question, if not disrepute. The problem with memories is that instead of choosing them, they choose us; our memories, like our dreams arise out of a deeper space within us than is subject to decision.

Just as our narrator experiences the time of memory as being a false dimension and an inherently deceptive one, he directs the same withering critique at many other of our cultural expectations and conventions. His attack on commonly believed notions about the explanatory potential of childhood, background and environment for adult behaviour is particularly telling in this connection. For instance, he describes in depth a certain state of mind or mood -- even going so far as to think out a coherent and even rigorous philosophy to explain it and ushering in data and evidence from his past life, reaching back into his childhood, telling what his friends always thought of him, what his attitude toward women was -- all to explain to, justify himself in the eyes of, or convince the reader of the reality and truth of his representations. Thus when he is trying to talk us into believing in his tranquil state of mind after he has "fled" from the laughter in the bar he describes himself as

having always alternated between society and isolation, and he implies that when he has had enough of the former he goes to the latter (103-104). Although he has established and solidly reinforced a certain image of himself as being the kind of mature individual who could contemplate the recent disturbing events in a spirit of philosophical detachment and calm, it soon becomes apparent that he has built this picture up only to tear it down; for he has to admit presently that the relief he experienced in the beautiful winter cityscape of nighttime street and garden, and from his intellectual rationalizations about "what he has always been like," was only a "represented" relief.¹² He is forced into this admission by the very strength of the thoughts and memories which he has not been able to control, and which do not have to be represented because they are there already and clearly in charge:

En voilà assez! Je mens! Je viens de mentir en épilquant gravement sur le sentiment de détente que j'aurais éprouvé à contempler ce paysage froid et silencieux; pour dire enfin la vérité, je ne m'en souciais pas plus que d'évoquer cette femme qui avait irrémédiablement perdu à mes yeux tout le charme et le prestige qu'elle tenait pour une grande part de son sourire énigmatique. J'ai menti, je regrette de dire que mes dispositions n'étaient guère à la sérénité et quand on venait de me faire subir dans les conditions que je viens de décrire une offense qui m'avait blessé plus que ne l'eût fait un crachat reçu en pleine face, comment aurais-je pu attacher la moindre importance à la pureté glaciale

de cette rue où je pressais le pas en rasant les murs comme un
être honteux? (106-107)

The effect of the above is to efface entirely the previous pages. What we are confronted with here is a prose that is written in a kind of "fading ink," for it seems to disappear shortly after pen has set it down on paper. This idea of the self-effacing work, self-erasing and autodestructive is of course a perfectly modern event, one that our own century, with its technologically-facilitated penchant for annihilation, has been particularly fond of. The work doesn't wait until time, history or even criticism have done their job, but indicts, judges, and passes sentence upon itself, refusing to plead innocence, or to hope for, desire, or even accept a verdict of "not guilty."

That the work is inevitably culpable, sly, deceitful we may now take for granted, while we are invited also very urgently to wonder about the motives of those that are obliged to reveal these things to us. As the events of this text, its postures, roles, settings have been denied as enunciated, so in conclusion, in a kind of mathematics of nihilistic infinity, as of mirrors¹³ reflecting each other, the work denies itself while incriminating this very denial:

Mais j'espère que vous allez me demander pourquoi je me suis employé avec une ardeur si étrange à mettre au jour mes supercheries et à supposer que vous n'avez nullement l'intention de me poser une telle question, j'ai quelque raison de penser que vous me la poserez quand je ne serai plus là pour répondre.

Je réponds donc séance tenante, ce qui aura du moins pour effet de me mettre à l'abri du soupçon injuste d'éluder ce qui m'embarrasse, tout en me donnant l'occasion de satisfaire le peu d'envie qu'il me reste de bavarder. Je pourrais répondre qu'un remords tardif m'a conduit à dévoiler ce que j'avais mis tant de soin à voiler, que mon horreur native du mensonge a eu enfin raison de ma honte, qu'il m'a soudain paru inacceptable d'entretenir dans l'erreur ceux de mes lecteurs qui avaient eu la courtoisie de me suivre jusqu'ici; je pourrais répondre aussi, en me prêtant alors des sentiments moins nobles, que je trouvais une sorte de jouissance perverse à détromper moi-même mes propres dupes, que j'ai le goût d'exhiber mes tares ou qu'il me plaisait d'être honni par ceux que j'avais aguichés avec de faux appâts, ou encore je pourrais évoquer le plaisir puéril que nous prenons souvent à détruire ce qu'au prix d'un labeur sans trêve nous avons réussi à bâtir de nos propres mains. Mais naturellement, ce serait encore mentir. La vérité, c'est qu' à court d'imagination et pourtant encore peu désireux de me taire, je n'ai rien trouvé de mieux que de révéler mon escroquerie à ceux qui en étaient les victimes, et vous avez vu que je n'étais guère disposé à vous faire grâce d'aucun détail. Je ne me suis jeté si avidement sur ce nouveau sujet que parce que je n'avais alors rien d'autre qui me permît d'alimenter ma sotte et malheureuse

passion. Le risible remplaçait le pathétique. Toujours est-il que je tenais bon, et c'était là l'essentiel: je parlais, je parlais, quelle jouissance! Et je parle encore. (207-209)

After having introduced the reader once more into the secrets of his soul and craft, the narrator, under the pretense of anticipating objection, has posed for himself the further embarrassing question -- why has he seen fit to take down, brick by brick, this so carefully constructed edifice, turned into a facade of a facade. The conditional, favored form of other self-refuting, de-realizing authors¹⁴ (Joyce, Blanchot and Sollers), sets us up for the subsequent "bursting of the bubble" of his reasoning, "Je pourrais dire," I could say. Uncannily we are given, in convincing depth, what could have been the reasons, or what we could have been told were the reasons were we dealing with a less honest narrator.

Not long before this our narrator had compared, in an extended, eloquent and persuasive figure, his action of unveiling the technique of illusion to the behavior of a bored magician, who, tired of always deceiving the audience in the same way, has decided to reveal to them, step by step, the method by which they were deceived. One must imagine Sisyphus happy, but not such an audience:¹⁵

Imaginez un prestidigitateur qui, las d'abuser de la crédulité de la foule qu'il a entretenue jusqu'ici dans une illusion monsonnière, se propose un beau jour de substituer à son plaisir d'enchanter celui de désenchanter, à rebours de tout ce qui fait

généralement l'objet de la vanité et quitte à perdre à jamais le bénéfice qu'il tirait de sa réputation de faiseur de miracles.

Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas, ce n'est pas par un tardif mais louable souci d'honnêteté qu'il lui vient la fantaisie de livrer ses recettes une à une avec la froide minutie d'un horloger qui démonte une horloge, il n'a pas de ces scrupules, c'est tout simplement par volupté de détruire ce qu'il a créé et de flétrir l'enthousiasme qu'il a soulevé, il étale donc ses pièces sur la table, donnant ainsi un air de vulgarité à ses tours les plus subtils, se délectant à décevoir ceux qu'il avait émerveillés, descendant de son propre gré du pinacle où ses dupes l'avaient porté, guettant avidement dans leurs yeux qu'agrandissait hier encore un étonnement d'enfant la première ombre de la désillusion, et pour peu que subsiste sur leur masque triste, pincé par un sourire vide la plus légère lueur de la foi, il se hâte de l'éteindre avec autant de soin qu'il avait pris la veille à l'entretenir. Suis-je cet homme cruel et fou?

This elegant comparison and explanation must likewise be rejected with all the others. We are going to have to attribute the magician's strange behavior not to these noble or ignoble motives that the narrator assigns to him for the reader's benefit (the narrator's fondness for such cold words as "bénéfice" and "duper," much as in Tzara's Mouchoir des Nuages ¹⁶ makes of literature a matter of exploitation and "getting over," just like any other business), but instead to the crushing fact that the

magician had run out of tricks, and decided to reveal his act just to have a pretext for staying that much longer on the stage, that is, continuing to talk: "Vous êtes condamné à monter sur les tréteaux, il faut vous résoudre à y faire le charlatan" (198).

The magician who shows his audience his tricks would be an appropriate symbol of the movement of art toward self-annihilation. That the light of reason is not always benign and altruistic is a commonplace in our time -- as was well recognized by our Romantic forerunners, for instance by Shelley who said "we murder to dissect." One thinks also of Nietzsche's uncomfortable antagonism to Socrates, whose universal application of a questioning attitude toward the totality of existence he thought of as setting a noxious precedent for Western culture. Our narrator, as he is quick to admit, is hiding behind reasons and explanations that do not stand up under further investigation (as they never do). It is as if he is caught in a system of infinite logical regress whose bottom he can never touch, because it is a system without any finality but the lack of finality.

The figure of the magician is an apt one to convey us as close as we can come to the nature of the narrator. There is certainly something "magic" about this story. Blanchot has suggested it is a "ghost story without a ghost."¹⁷ The text produces compelling illusions of reality which it then dissipates in a puff of rhetorical smoke, leaving its reader to wonder whether to believe his eyes or his ears. The sensual realism of the descriptions, the "true-to-life" details, as for instance, the

Spanish lady's holding of a cigarette between thumb and index finger (90-91), establish a veracity too indelible and attractive to be affected by any mere denial. Somehow our senses are prone to accept what our intellect is invited to deny. In our secular age we increasingly need this reassurance of the "real world" so we can venture all the more securely on other terrains. Edgar Morin has suggested that it is precisely our hunger for the fantastic that makes us require a foothold in so-called reality:

Realism, this refusal of falseness in the name of fiction, is the guarantee furnished to a conscience which is ashamed to engage in magic, and which can no longer dream freely in the waking state. A certain likeliness is necessary to the waking state so that it can let itself be captured by the dream. . . a certain guarantee of authenticity.¹⁸

Another aspect of narrative style that enters into the hypnotising quality of the work is the predominant use of long sentences. These may run on for as much as a page or two, as for instance in the lyrical and evocative descriptions of the garden, parts of which we have cited, or the sinuous, seemingly endless sentences with which the narrator involves us in the scene of the bar (72-78). As in Faulkner, Proust, Claude Simon and Michel Leiris, the reader is not given a chance to catch his breath, that is to think, but because there is no place to stop, is induced to be swept along irrecoverably into the mood and feeling. One may remark also the echos from other writers that permeate

the text. Dostoevsky is here, whether we think of the talky, drunkard Marmeladov, of Crime and Punishment, or the tortured confiding first person narrator of Notes from the Underground and Dream of a Ridiculous Man. Elements of the stream-of-consciousness technique are certainly present, as is the strange mixture of fantasy, ambivalent longing and concrete detail characteristic of Kafka. Blanchot also points out parallels between the "je" of Leiris' L'Age d'Homme and the "je" here, while noticing also that Camus probably borrowed from the concluding chapter of Le Bavard for La Chute.¹⁹

An abandoned cart pointing towards the heavens (122-123) has a distinctly symbolist resonance and the following treatment of it can remind one of Poe, whom *Des Forêts* resembles not only in stylistic rigor, but also in his obvious dedication to bringing off a predetermined effect whose nature has been concealed from the reader:

Il me serait à peu près impossible d'analyser l'effet lugubre que me produisit cette charette solitaire dont les brancards tendus vers un ciel invisible en une attitude suppliante évoquaient à mes yeux ma propre détresse, sans que j'eusse pourtant sur le moment conscience d'un tel rapport; toujours est-il que ce spectacle me frappa de terreur et m'inspira le désir panique de courir devant moi, de me ruer à travers l'obstacle mouvant des ténèbres. . . .

In any case these are deceptive comparisons, and they are meant to be.

Des Forêts' distance from these techniques is obviously as great as Tzara's from the "literature" he mocks in Mouchoir des Nuages or Sollers' from the pastiches he frequently performs in Drame. They are certainly part of his bag of tricks, his "dons littéraires," to which he refers more than once (14, 202); but their use amounts to a "détournement," a turning aside of these borrowed styles into the specially twisted meanings that the context of our author's cynicism gives them. Thus the confessing "I" of Dostoevsky, Leiris and Gide, although often an "unreliable narrator," still exists in some fashion, giving us the impression that there is a person behind the mask; whereas the "I" of Le Bavard remains thoroughly insubstantial, tending to evaporate as the story unfolds and disappearing behind a voice and mere words -- much like the "I" of such tracts of experimental prose as Beckett's Unnamable, or even the nonexistent "I" of Sollers' Drame. The special effect of such techniques is not to draw the reader into any particular ambiance but to create little scenes that convince for a while then vanish and are erased, like scientific hypotheses that have outlived their usefulness.

Des Forêts uses the traditional literary styles only to discredit them -- just as Baudelaire in his mock-devotional poem, "A Une Madonne" creates an image of great sanctity all the better to desecrate it.²⁰ Thus our narrator goes to great lengths, in the closing pages of his second chapter (159-186) to convince the reader of the reality of his spiritual epiphany. He begins by describing a feeling of great felicity that was produced by hearing some music, even before he was aware that

he was hearing it. Identifying the sound becomes the inspiration in our narrator's Proustian quest for its source (170) which he locates in his vanished childhood when at school he sung in a choir in chapel. A kind of "past recaptured" comes flooding back to the narrator, in great precision and depicted vividly and eloquently in all the richness, courage and strength of his youth. Like the young Rimbaud he loved only the rebel, the outcast and the criminal:

. . . celui qui, insoucieux du scandale et faisant fi d'une réprobation unanime, lutte crânement à un contre mille pour imposer ses vues, fussent-elles erronées; le révolté qui, n'entendant pas se conformer à un état de choses qu'il réprouve et que tous admettent par veulerie ou par intérêt, n'hésite pas à braver les autorités qui le maintiennent dans l'oppression, farouchement résolu à ne céder qu'après avoir remporté la victoire, fût-elle illusoire ou trop lointaine; l'accusé, coupable ou non, que traque dans son box une société pourrie d'honnêteté et de bon sens, bref tous les opprimés auxquels la lutte solitaire confère une auréole de pureté. (175)

There follows an extended rhetorical development in which the confidence and certainty of his youth are compared to the indifference and hopelessness of his recent years. Even if, as a youth, he felt unequal to the task of standing up to his enemies, he was confident that someday he would be able to do this; whereas in his adult life he complains that he has become indifferent to such struggle:

A mesure que j'avanc^{ais} dans la vie, mon indifférence allait s'accroissant, rien ne me semblait valoir la peine d'aucun effort, et il en résultait que mon avidité n'était plus dirigée comme autrefois vers des idées de revanche ou de conquête: elle aspirait au contraire à ce qui saurait m'en délivrer. C'est qu'aujourd'hui le fracas des combats me repugne et me lasse, et j'en veux à mort à qui m'arrache de force à mon indifférence. Ne rien entreprendre, veiller, attendre, veiller. . . (180).

We have been treated to an extended descriptive and narrative scene in a definite space and time, wherein our narrator ostensibly attains some fundamental understanding of the course of his life. Time past, present and future melts into the lyrical simplicity of the conclusion of pardon, self-reconciliation; and the narrator is so carried away that he is ready even to plunge into a nearby river where the choir of children's voices seems to be beckoning; for how to live past this moment, he asks himself, of utter self-surrender? To guarantee the reality of this epiphany our narrator is careful to specify that there is an actual choir practising nearby. He has spent the entire night in the garden, much of it obviously unconscious, after having submitted himself gladly to a terrible beating at the hands of the man he had wronged. It is now dawn, and he asks himself exultingly "J'étais prêt à obéir?" (184) as a merely rhetorical question whose triumphantly affirmative reply does not even have to be voiced. One is reminded of such classic moments as the "oh earth I will" lines of Rilke's Duino Elegies, the "Yes, I will Yes" of Molly

Bloom, or the magnificent affirmation which concludes George Herbert's 17th century religious poem, The Collar:

But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild

At every word

Methought I heard one calling, Child!

And I replied, My Lord.

All of these "mystical moments," and many others, are relevant, but with one slight modification: when we turn the page, this sumptuous epiphany has vanished into thin air.

Chapter III then commences with our now crabbed and cantankerous narrator anticipating a certain embarrassing question from the reader: "What are you doing still here?" We are then asked to cancel out in our minds the entire previous scene, as we are told that its only reason for being was to serve as pretext to our narrator's continuous need to talk. The scene has been only a mirage, or an illusion, produced by a master magician, who is only too happy now to reveal to the reader "how it was done" as well as a choice of motives from which to select. The reader, certainly convinced that an epiphany took place, having been exposed also to an evocation in depth of a particular person's childhood, with detailed descriptions of identifiable scenes, -- this same reader is now told that all of the preceeding was purest fabrication, and that it was meant deliberately to mislead.

We are now supposed to recognize, ruefully, the primordially of the need of the talker to talk over what he is saying, since that is what

he is saying. It is as if we have been listening to someone who has gone to great lengths to establish that he is a certain person with a specific past, projects, obsessions, and just when we think we've made a new friend we are suddenly informed by this same individual that he has totally misrepresented himself, and has done so only because he likes to hear himself talk; and what is more, if only you had the honesty to admit it, you are exactly like him: "J'ai la faiblesse de croire que mieux vaut ma conscience, fût-elle mauvaise, que votre aveuglement" (192). More to the point might be a declaration of love, or some other proposition that demanded participation, or rejection from a listener -- suddenly followed by a retraction, accompanied by some statement to the effect that the speaker just likes the way his voice sounds when he says "I love you" : cancel all the previous; the listener is thus treated like a passionless machine, a computer, as it were, that can be programmed "clear" and is then ready for a new computation. Such behavior, pathological certainly, would result in the speaker's being treated like a lunatic by the listener. Rare indeed would be the listener who would consent to listen, seriously at least, to such a speaker -- who had undermined the very basis on which human communication can take place. This is indeed what happens to our narrator as an outcome of the crisis in the bar. The Spanish lady refuses to hear him out. The "fou-rire" which accompanies him into his exile and which he will hear for the rest of his life (hypothetically, in view of the subsequent "retraction") is the merited and even just reward for his insane presumption.

We have been describing a situation that might be qualified as belonging to a kind of "bad faith." The endemic "bad faith" of writers in general and literature in particular, according to Sartre and others (certainly Leiris and Blanchot), is that in writing we have a tendency to evoke dangers and risks that don't really threaten us; to pretend that our lives and happiness are at stake when they are not. An answer to this Platonic charge of falsity (for Plato, the writer is automatically suspect), as preferred by the Surrealists, Bataille and some tormented others, is to prefer the kind of writer who "writes with his blood," as it were, that is the artist who shapes his work out of the very substance of his pain, his risk, and his effort -- such a figure as Creval, Daumal, Gilbert-Lecomte, Lautréamont, Artaud have cut in the field of literature -- in other words, a writer who is playing a dangerous game, whether taking mescaline, like Michaux, so as to be able to bring us some precious evidence back from the "other side," getting addicted to opium, like De-Quincey and Cocteau, to narrate their supposed cures -- or at the other end of a spectrum, becoming politically involved, on the left (Nizan, Eluard, Aragon) or to the right (Céline, Drieu la Rochelle) so that one's life is at stake or at least permanently marked by extra-literary scars.

Now it is clear that Des Forêts is responding also to this vulnerability of writing to the charge of falsity, escapism and cowardice -- bad faith,²¹ in short -- just by the subtlety and energy with which he grapples with these issues, both directly in La Chambre des Enfants (where the

problem of the relation of writing to reality is explicitly explored) and by strong implication in Le Bavard; not able to achieve satisfaction in the realm of the spoken, Des Forêts' narrator plays with the resources of the written word. The unilateral rapport, so necessary to the compulsive talker, is much more easily attainable in the written than the spoken form of the word. No one is going to interrupt the writer, whereas the live speaker risks the existential presence of a real interlocutor who at any moment might avail himself of an option to cut off the monologue or confession. The only real risk is that the reader will abandon the work before the writer is done talking -- but this risk can be obviated by a careful and clever use of the traditional (or experimental) prose techniques -- the purpose of which is not to express anything in particular, as is certainly the case with the authors from which they are borrowed, but only to keep this necessary reader at his listening post to the end; that is, until the talker is finished, has had the required satisfaction, orgasm -- until he is done with the reader.

Once this end is achieved there is no longer any need for pretence, as after a business deal or professional sexual act has been consummated, signed, sealed, or delivered, the initiator might feel free to reveal to the partner the devious means whereby the act might have been prepared and perpetrated. The writer, having no further motive for keeping his reader in a state of illusion, is free to deliver the secrets of his craft, and in fact can get a little extra attention in the process; and when he has

absolutely no further use for us, when he is tired -- as indeed he should be, if the analogy between his need to talk and the sexual act has any bearing -- then we are, without any further ceremony, adjourned:

. . .je suis arrivé à ce que je voulais obtenir. Je me suis soulagé, et qu'on ne me dise pas que ce n'était pas la peine. Or, maintenant, je suis las. Allons, Messieurs, puisque je vous dis que je ne retiens plus personne! (124)

It is too late for us to laugh now, or even to close the book. On the contrary, we probably tend to go right back to the beginning to at least see how it is that we, such clever and careful people as we think we are -- how we have been induced to read, and even enjoy, something which turns out to be nothing -- except a product of the need to talk.

Notes

¹ See above, pp. 64, 104, 251. Blanchot further characterizes the author-reader relation that Des Forêts creates as that of "étrangement" ["La Parole Vaine," in Amitié (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 143.] Each has the other "by the throat."

² See above, pp. 156-157.

³ See above, p. 201.

⁴ See above, pp. 210-219.

⁵ Blanchot, "La Parole Vaine," p. 142: "Le lecteur de tout livre est pour l'auteur le compagnon malheureux à qui il n'est demandé que de ne pas parler, mais d'être là. . . ."

⁶ Charles Baudelaire, "A Une Heure du Matin," in Spleen de Paris (Paris: Armand Colin, 1958), p. 16: "Enfin! seul! On n'entend plus que le roulement de quelques fiacres attardés et éreintés. Pendant quelques heures, nous posséderons le silence, sinon le repos. Enfin! la tyrannie de la face humaine a disparu, et je ne souffrirai plus que par moi-même."

⁷ See above, pp. 102-108.

⁸ Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, trans. Charles Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1928), II, p. 505: ". . .one figure is even more important than all the energy of enterprising master-men. . . the engineer, the priest of the machine, the man who knows it. Not merely the importance, but the very existence of industry depends upon the existence of the hundred thousand talented, rigorously schooled brains that command the technique and develop it onward and onward."

⁹ Louis-René Des Forêts, "Les Grands Moments d'Un Chanteur," in La Chambre des Enfants (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 101-154. In this Kafkaesque tale (owing perhaps to "Josephine the Singer. . .") it is a matter of an individual who is able to manufacture, seemingly out of nowhere, a musical talent that wins him the adulation of the public. His subsequent sabotage of this talent reveals the basically

exploitative, shallow and hollow nature of the rapport between audience and performer.

10 See above, pp. 44-47.

11 To this resumé we may add the onslaught on the faculty of memory that comprises Finnegans Wake, which has dissolved that cage of language which can, therefore, no longer even contain, much less "recapture."

12 E.M. Cioran, Précis de Décomposition (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 114: "Que la vie ne signifie rien, tout le monde le sait ou le pressent: qu'elle soit au moins sauvée par un tour verbal! Une phrase aux tournants de leur vie, -- voilà à peu près tout ce qu'on demande aux grands et aux petits. Manquent-ils à cette exigence, à cette obligation, ils sont à jamais perdus; car, on pardonne tout, jusqu'aux crimes, à condition qu'ils soient exquisement commentés. . . ."

13 Des Forêts' fascination with mirrors is undeniable, as is also our epoch's (Lacan's mirror phase). Le Bavard opens with "Je me regarde souvent dans la glace," and the story "Dans le Miroir," in La Chambre des Enfants, uses the mirror as a figure for the inevitably deceptive rapport between writer and reader: the writer, who must pretend he is holding the mirror up to the reader, is actually holding it up to himself. In another register, Cash, the character who goes mad in Faulkner's As I Lay Dying, has also been fond of looking into mirrors, as if to verify that he's still all there.

14 See above, p. 257.

15 The reader of modern text, like the modern proletarian in Camus' famous rendition of the myth, is Sisyphus because the labors, unlike those of Hercules, are incapable of termination. In contradistinction, however, to Camus' hero, the modern reader can not be imagined as particularly happy.

16 See above, pp. 51-52.

17 Blanchot, "La Parole Vaine," p. 138.

18 Edgar Morin, Le Cinéma ou L'homme Imaginaire (Paris: Denoël, 1958), p. 139; trans. mine, underlinings author's.

19 Blanchot, "La Parole Vaine," pp. 139, 142.

20 See above, pp. 124-126.

21 This (Platonic, Hegelian, Sartrean) idea of the "bad faith of writing," a point I circle around with Tzara, Leiris and in my conclusion, which comes down to a search for a risk to take (Revolution, Surrealism, Futurism -- or, more personally, Addiction and Adultery), so that the slave (scribe) would then equal the master (sublimely above literacy) . . . this conflict, bloodbath, struggle is perhaps our inevitably Western Way -- to which the magical, cabalistic, alchemical tradition has been all along offering an antidote (although perhaps an increasingly indigestible one). The Eastern traditions, at all events, seem kinder, less aggressive, more humane; and a thinker like Michel Serres may represent a rejection of the MASTER-SLAVE DIALECTIC. Enough blood has been spilled he says in a recent memoir, with the appropriately Eastern title of Détachement (Paris: Flammarion, 1983). Like Thoreau, he pretends to be quitting the game, or like the last John Lennon, "just watching the wheels go round." Some type of (absurd?) leap is required in all such postures of surrender, to keep them from falling back into passive although passably effective strategies for coming out ahead in the game.

8. Conclusion: Madness, Theatre, Text¹

J.A. MILLER: So who ultimately, in your view, are the subjects who oppose each other?

FOUCAULT: This is just a hypothesis, but I would say it's all against all. There aren't immediately given subjects of the struggle, one the proletariat, the other the bourgeoisie. Who fights against whom? We all fight each other. And there is always within each of us something that fights something else.

-- "The Confession of the Flesh" ²

I

We have been exploring a literature that suppresses story, plot, action and event, that refuses to create character, that elides author and reader, and that falls back upon language as a kind of last refuge or generating mechanism -- intolerable, but irrefutable and consummately necessary recourse to which some kind of unrecognizable subject has been reduced. This fundamentally nomadic literature, that refuses materiality as well as ideality, that is at home nowhere, not even in itself, declines equally to legitimize or endorse the social hierarchies in which, all the same, it has to admit reluctantly it occurs.

It is, of course, not so easy to be subversive, not simply a matter of deciding which of the discourses, styles, techniques, habits and institutions are subversive and then denying or opposing them. The negation becomes a discourse of power in its own right, that invites further opposition. The self-eliding author becomes a kind of author, the unreliable character assumes substance in its very lability, while the problematic reader accepts or even enjoys the new status the very uncertainty may confer. The very refusal to tell the story, as in Blanchot's Madness of the Day, becomes the story, or at least enough of

one to write. Whether it is a matter of Kierkegaard's anti-philosophy, Tzara's anti-poetry or Sollers' anti-novels, anarchic procedures must ultimately admit dependence on and continuity with the structures they ostensibly deny.

However iconoclastic, unprecedented and surprising our subject and language, when we play with literature we are playing the game of a power that will have the last word as it had the first. What characterizes an anti-literature is not so much its advertized refusal to employ the traditional illusions, deceptions and seductions -- to which, in any case, it must inevitably return, and which it never really left behind -- but instead a certain mood of detachment, aloofness and disdain from the means it sees itself as being obliged to deploy. The writer is no longer proud, masterful, and controlling but rather ashamed, culpable and controlled. He acknowledges, perhaps, that he must function within a certain vocabulary and order, say that of "book" and "work," but he no longer pretends to master these categories that he sees all-too-clearly that he is mastered by. Instead he sees himself more modestly as living within them for a time, because for now there is no other shelter. Our belief in the things we do and think, and in the structures in which we are obliged to perform is now evanescent, transitory and transitional.

No longer really authors and readers, professor and students, doctors and patients, sellers and buyers, we are now all consummately actors.³ We throw ourselves into whatever role is required,

promiscuously simulating involvement or unconcern, gratification or frustration, communication or incomprehensibility -- with all the trappings of reality, but no longer, as in the game of confidence, who we present ourselves to be, as rapidly arriving and equally convincing avatars of our next performance will bear out.

II

It is appropriate, then, that two of the figures for the human condition that modernist literature prefers are those of madness and the stage; for these are consummately temporary stations. Madness is quintessentially that absence of work, of book, of memory and continuity that is so anguishing today; and schizophrenia, restlessly seeking and spiralling ever outward, compelled by its own inner logic and necessity and endemic refusal of accountability, its incessant "and then . . . and then,"⁴ serves as apt symbol, once it has been demedicalized, of a model for desire, availability and functional endlessness in some of the telling and influential texts of modernity.⁵

The metaphor of the actor is equally perdurable and ubiquitous, as the direction of advanced theatrical theory and practice in our century has unquestionably been toward the elimination of barriers, frontiers and limits between public and audience and the increasingly undeniable mutability and contingency of their rapports. There has been correspondingly a devolution of the theatrical from a situation of rarity and exceptionality to its massively therapeutic, corrupting, disorganizing and/or

transmogrifying invasion (through media) of "everyday life."

Modernism in general is permeated by and preoccupied with questions of insanity and theatricality, as we have been witness to, since the Romantics, a rehabilitation of both of these formerly marginal and intrinsically culpable categories. Madness becomes crucial focus and center for a "medical gaze," increasingly sliding in a movement from physical to mental in a century-long development from autopsy and diagnosis to analysis and, most recently, conditioning. On another tangent, the Romantics, reviving a Platonic connection that a classical "age of reason" had occluded, used madness as inlet into Art, and as privilege, brand, fate and message of its perpetrators. The history of literature, from Blake to Baudelaire, Lautréamont, the Symbolists and Surrealists, to its improbably non-containing limit and extreme of Finnegans Wake, bears witness to the compelling power, flexibility and relevance of this dimension of experience: Madness moves from a position of externality to the text, perhaps inhabiting its author, his characters, or waiting for same -- to a position closer to the text and finally internal to it. We may follow this evolution from Blake to Whitman, who celebrate their own exuberant irrationality, to the corruption of the text through hints as to its inseparability from insanity, outright as with Nerval, or that of the abnormal states chemically induced, as if for the purpose of writing from them, by a Coleridge, DeQuincey, Rimbaud. Finally we arrive at the modern avatar of the text "gone mad," which may have begun with Mallarmé, through to Finnegans Wake and beyond to

Blanchot, Derrida, Sollers, Leiris and those moderns generally whose texts convey intentions, structures and wills of their own whose connection to authorial agency or even a reading public is problematic. This is the text that Barthes has called "intransitive," standing madly and stubbornly aloof from origin as well as destination and utility.

The idea of theatre has evolved in an equally remarkable way. Traditionally a barely tolerated, certainly a quarantined activity, its subversive energy and disorganizing potential is well acknowledged in a history of Catholic, then puritan containment or rejection; Rousseau's ironic warnings, in a strange letter to the citizens of Geneva, against a theatre that he obviously knows all-too-well, are based on the supposition of the corrupting influence of the art; likewise Diderot's lucubrations on the paradox of the comedian defines a kind of altered state where that actor is best who is acting a role which he does not feel. With the loosening of religious taboos as well as social proscriptions, as Church and State become problematic, transitory and mutable institutions, the sin of acting and actor, as of madness and madman, mutates into a mark of glory and cause for celebration. We also see, in our own century, a merging of madness and theatre, as madness becomes the consummate act, in the sense of Freudian masking symptom, or as with George Groddeck,⁶ as effort at communication or expression. Likewise theatre becomes inextricably intertwined with madness with Artaud and the subsequent living Theatre he inspires.

III

The popularity of these metaphors is probably owing also to the answers they are capable of supplying to the question of the culpability of art that we have seen occupies such a prominent place in the panoply of self-apologizing works we have been looking into. The artist's madness is guarantee of his removal from the ulterior motives of literary endeavour. On another level the drugged, the compulsively criminal, the author who spends himself in lost causes are all distanced from their works, consigned to a destiny that glory can very little inflect and where even royalties, when they arrive, may make very little difference.

Just as the mad author is distanced from the kind of charges that Tzara and the Surrealists levelled against art as merely a subtle form of investment, because he is beyond the pale of such benefits, so also is the mad text equally removed from an author who is mere agent of its production. The Wake, for instance, functions as machine that has been pre-coded to perform in a certain way, its only rule being a limitless lability shuttling in ever-returning spirals of complexity and simplicity; and we have seen how paradoxically a text so personal and unique as Leiris' propels its author nevertheless all the more surely into a limbo of non-recognition and nonexistence, -- there where even the avower of most intimate secrets cannot see himself today in the confessions of yesterday. The texts of Beckett are equally mad, denying exit if not entry, theatrical and evanescent, not so much authored as ushered into

their public -- as element of a rapport where futility assumes the cosmic dimension of a Kantian a priori, that is, where it is the irremovable basis of perception; likewise the books of Blanchot and Sollers obey structural imperatives that remove them from author and reader alike, as discrete entities, while erasing the very words in which they are written. Mad also is the text of Des Forêts, mere discourse that disallows itself and its narrator, while turning the reader into its uneasy, if amused, quasi-sexual accomplice, audience and dupe.

Above all these texts make one mad in the reading. Whatever pleasures of novelty, surprise, intellectual stimulation and colloquy they provide are more than paid for in the disequilibrium and restless insecurity they can't help but convey. These are, as Kafka and Nietzsche suggest all good writing should be, dangerous books. The reading of a text as threatening sexually, as indigestible morally, socially or intellectually as Bataille's little masterpiece, "Madame Edwarda," must be a confused and tormenting experience; for in that tale the mind shows itself no match for the super-or-all-too-human powers of a lust that dwarfs all human effort and flattens every pretention to harmony and flesh and world. Mind altering also is the mood of the Wake where thought and language, as we have ever known them, go their separate ways. These are texts that complicate rather than simplify our lives, books maybe that we read through but can never really put behind us, for the simple reason that when we look behind us they're not there.

We rather recover from than remember these books. Stories like those of Blanchot and a fortiori Sollers are functionally and structurally incapable of recall, since conspicuously absent from them are those assurances on which memory depends for its associations, or if some coordinates are supplied they are so utterly refracted, assaulted, denied and requalified that they serve more as lures than as guides. There is no alternative but to pass through these hells again and endlessly.

These are catalytic, insulting and arousing texts equally. Like Tzara's Seeds and Bran, with its Sadean visions of universal anarchy they awaken in the reader emotions of fascination, dismay and incredulity at once. Or as with Beckett's Unnamable testimony, Blanchot's pronominal projections, or Leiris' extensive but inconclusive avowals they'll leave us wondering what the author is really talking about, or if indeed there is anything (left) to really talk about. They leave us wondering, doubting, questioning rather than satisfied, informed and feeling enriched. As in Sollers' strategic fictions that refuse to be unreal or Des Forêts' canny innuendos that always find their mark, they mock, employ, delude, defy, forbid, seduce and offend a reader and reading at every turning.

IV

The theatrical metaphor has followed a career in relation to the text that may closely resemble that of madness. The idea of the world as theatre is a familiar derealizing device, present, for instance, in the

cabalist-chemical tradition and in the literature of the Renaissance;⁷ but theatre, like madness, has evolved from a position of externality, as subject matter, metaphor, or abstraction, -- to finally invade, occupy and corrupt the text itself. In a world where reality is dubious, because the instances that guarantee it are enfeebled, performance and simulation become the rule rather than the exception. Just as the mad text shatters, by refusing to recognize, any rapport of understanding, communication or utility between author and reader, so does the text-as-theatre, by abolishing the separations on which they are based, undermine a common ground of connection, ritual and socially redeeming catharsis between player and public, stage and audience. Theatre, like madness, moves from a position of rareness and relegated exception to one that is central, inescapable, necessary and unavoidable, therefore incapable of being defined as a distinct category or style. In this context, the actual stage, just as much as the real asylum, is supererogatory if not superfluous.

For the text-as-theatre⁸ there is no longer any sheltered domain where the spectacle does not penetrate. In the Wake the very language of sleep and the unconscious becomes act, myth and performance; and for Beckett's subject similarly there is no place apart from the public gaze, since his very poverty, homelessness, helplessness and abjection make escape from the "panopticon"⁹ impossible. In Leiris also we may witness a kind of culmination of an evolution that, from Rousseau to Freud and Gide, worked in this direction of placing in the public

domain all intimacy, secrecy and reserve; and the confessions of Leiris, however convincing, courageous and total, assume inevitably that same distance from their narrator that lines do from an actor who is merely voicing the words of another.

A text-as-theatre employs words necessarily not as communication, expression or representation but instead, intransitively, as threshold, simulation and decor. The words have no meaning, nor are they meant in any sense that points beyond themselves to some pre-existent purpose, design or message. As in the discourse of Des Forêts' bavard they say nothing beyond the fact that they are said, recited, performed -- and we in the end know nothing except that somehow we have been lured into listening to them. The texts of Blanchot and Sollers bring out even more explicitly and undeniably a disconnection of the word from any substance, identity or reality; for there identical verbal formulations float interchangeably between authors, characters, readers, as so many lines that anyone can say but can belong to no individual. The madness of the text, infinitely available, disposable, floating, insecure and mutable, is the theatricality of a word which can only echo indefinitely in an auditorium from which there is no exit.

V

A modernist discourse which denies, elides and abolishes all exclusions, privileges, separations, nevertheless constitutes an interdiction in itself; we have gone beyond the interdicted to come up against

the fact of interdiction itself. The judgments, opinions, ideas and pronouncements of language may all be negated by, for instance, playing them cunningly against each other; but there remains the fact that language, word, verbalization, text are interdictory, prescriptive and proscriptive in themselves. Our culture limits any significant access to discourse to a very tiny minority by a subtle but pervasive network of exclusions, inhibitions, and prohibitions. No domain of resources is guarded more heavily, or parcelled out more stingily than the right to speak. We go in terror, as Foucault has it,¹⁰ of the prospect of the unleashed, uncontrollable power of a liberated word which would dissolve our society in a flash flood of incoherence and noise. Our "disciplines" function then as tyrannical mechanisms whose fundamental purposes are relegatory and defensive.¹¹ Experiment, flexibility and invention while tolerated or even encouraged in the limited domain, of restricted access, that constitutes modernist writing, carry heavy penalties and enormous risks where they occur outside of quarantine -- as in the "crime" of graffiti.

Modernist discourse, then, doesn't so much liberate us from the "tyranny of the word" as reveal, or unmask this tyranny for what it is, as belonging, for all practical purposes to the exclusionist, segregated and segregating function of the word in our society. Rather than free us, this discourse reveals our situation as being intrinsically unfree, trapped and hopeless -- and the society in which such a predicament is inevitable is correspondingly negated, delegitimized and discredited.

The potential for subversion of this discourse, therefore, does not lie in its ability to liberate us from conventions, traditions and illusions, which it does not do except by replacing them by others that are ultimately equally stifling. What is most iconoclastic about this discourse, instead, is its ability to reveal, by experimenting with its realization, that freedom is a purely formal category in our culture,¹² where in fact it doesn't even have to be revoked since it is -- given the vested interests that prevail -- a pure impossibility, fiction and lure. What modernism does is call into question by calling this "bluff" of a power which must, in order to command the assent necessary for its hegemony, promise so much, but which is able to deliver so little.

VI

La conscience sort des ténèbres, en vit, s'en alimente, et enfin les régénère, et plus épaisses, par les questions mêmes qu'elle se pose, en vertu et en raison directe de sa lucidité.¹³

-- Valéry

A culture for which the unknowable is nonexistent is naturally incapable of accepting on its own terms, or taking seriously the modernist text's claim to proud uniqueness and intransitivity.¹⁴ The very anomaly and strangeness of the work cry out in social terms for commentary, normalization, criticism and entry into or exclusion from a canon. The difficult text spawns all the more surely an industry whose function it is to find some way for it to fit in, or some rationale for shutting it out. Just as madness, and other related nonconformity (crime, drugs, suicide, homelessness) invites the birth of a class of professionals

who act to rationalize, reduce, or, as a last resort, exclude the perpetrators, so equally there exists a thriving industry that lives off the attempt to deal with the anarchic in art. The problematical work invites commentary for its very refusal to communicate. Its very madness provides investment, games, livings, reputations, activity, careers, excuses, subsidies, educations, energy. Its very disorganization and disorganizing potential mobilize the resources of a society -- to channel, turn back, correct, and protect itself from its dangerous example and nerve, just as in other areas where the threat and/or promise of the unknown call forth the professionals whose function it is to "understand" such doings.

This critical, professional and normalizing function often occurs, of course, synchronically with the anarchic, creative and disruptive -- frequently in the same individual and work. Just as a marginal person may feel called upon to rationalize his behavior in terms of circumstances, categories and courses that may give him entry and some kind of status in the society that has excluded him, so the anomalous author of the incomprehensible text, within and/or without the work, may furnish a critical apology or justification that creates a framework necessary for artistic or even biological survival; and so we have the familiar modern figure of the writer who functions as his own first and worst critic and judge, in a kind of split of personality, role and identity, anticipating and responding to those elements that require interpretation and domestication. Writers whose works strain the limits of acceptability, like

the Surrealists -- Tzara, Breton, Gilbert-Lecomte, Daumal and others -- tend to provide an ideological superstructure (for Surrealism a compound of Freud, Marx and alchemy) to contain, channel and explain the anarchic rush of chance encounter and iconoclastic energy. Such a writer was also the Joyce of the Wake (and to a lesser extent before), so frequently apologizing, interpreting, instructing both within and without the work, organizing, orchestrating, and by pseudonym, even participating in a critical chorus that chants its hosanna of welcome even before the book is really born.¹⁵ First and most exhaustive and suspicious critic of himself is also such a writer as Leiris, fanatically, hypersensitively and neurotically anticipating all conceivable artistic, social, political or moral objections. In Leiris the critical function has become so automatic it is in fact inseparable from the creative since his text operates systematically as commentary on itself. For Blanchot these functions, on the other hand, whatever the penetration of theory and even philosophy into the text, are distinct -- as he sets up a formidable critical apparatus that, discretely avoiding self-commentary, nevertheless shelters, nourishes and celebrates specifically those fragmentary and problematic works whose relation to his own is close and cordial. Likewise Sollers' reviews, Tel Quel and now Infini, provide a critical arena where his works can be received, explained and justified. Self judging also is the text of Des Forêts, whose book is at once accusation, defense, and commentary on itself and whose public is synchronously present,

anticipated and constantly related to in the very act of narration.

Critical commentary and judgment, however, are not necessarily, at least in their eventual consequences, always normalizing and domesticating instances. Once the unknown seems to become known, the writer may be allowed, or allow himself, to return refreshed and reassured to his arsenal of anarchy and disruption. A movement may be described from the unknown to the known and back to the unknown. In this sense the commentary can be seen not so much as an end but as a phase.¹⁶ The commentary may also work to de-legitimize itself: the greater the display of critical acumen, brilliance and ingenuity, the more clearly its own futility and irrelevance may stand revealed -- and correspondingly the necessary failures of our society in its incapability of providing any real place for authentic artistic endeavor, or for individual expression in general. Works like the Wake, Sollers' anti-novels, Blanchot's or Des Forêts' forbidding tales, may emerge intact, at the end of the critical tunnels which have been mined for them to pass, as so many finally indigestible particles -- impossible for a social body either to absorb or eliminate and therefore continuing to pose a permanent threat to the equilibrium of the organism.

Critical commentary may also operate disruptively and radically by a sort of smuggling, ushering the anarchic writer into the innards of a system where his sabotage can be more effective, as may be the case in Sartre's rehabilitation of Genet.¹⁷ An effective critical intervention can

deprive the repressive social structure of the interdictory and exclusionary powers it needs to operate, at least insofar as this structure stands by means of consensual validation. Such a criticism may eliminate or render problematic, weak and porous the quarantined category of the freak, the mad, the socially useless, incorrigible or irreconcilable by making of these terms so many indictments of the institutions that profit and prevail in their formulation and application.

What commentary finally may reveal in relation to the modernist text are the very limits of knowledge, the inability of thought to cope with, judge, justify and control its processes and products; for commentary finds, blocking its progress, hegemony and path those works that are impossible to fit into any preexisting or conceivable scheme or category, that reject glory while at the same time refusing oblivion, that resist definition as well as defy exploitation. These works point us toward an unattainable freedom, a non-existent subject and desire, and away from any accommodation with a ruling ideology or prevailing political theory or practice. They suggest, without suggesting anything; they evoke the sense that something is happening somehow without trapping us into the modalities of definition and categorization as to what exactly it is. They rather carry out a dynamic strategy than express anything, pushing writer and reader into an indeterminate realm where everything is open to further exploration and doubt.

These works contest endlessly all roles, ideas, notions and

stabilities, including their own sufficiency and reliability. The formulations they make are all profoundly revocable, all exquisitely a matter of situation and condition, taking away the worlds they summon as fast as they appear. They are models, if anything, of the fact that there is no model or guide, and not even that.

Indefatigably preferring situations, quandaries, predicaments and problems that are incapable of explanation and rationalization these texts reveal the insufficiency and inadequacy of any conceivable cultural apparatus to deal with them and so work toward invalidation of the system of social control in which they occur. Denying all substance and reliable, stable identity to author, reader, text, story, character and critic alike they exist, if anywhere, in an intangible between -- where all is anticipation, movement and (dis) connection.

It is finally necessary to invent a critical discourse and vocabulary that, no longer hoping to account for these texts, can at least approach them in feeling, spirit and intention. Just as a Russian formalism attempts to respond to Rabelaisian or Dostoevskian polyphony, or a structuralist poetics to correspond to the aesthetic of Proust and Claudel, so the deconstructive and other allied poststructuralist approaches relate to these opaque and intransitive texts of modernity.

The very words, therefore, that inform deconstructive critical practice, are necessarily entities that shy away from solid statement, judgment and definition. They are terms, as in the Derridean thesaurus¹⁸ of

floating signifiers, of relay, hesitation, ambiguity and delay, that call attention rather to lines and vectors of energy and thought than to points where things arrive. This is a no man's land where all is vulnerability, hazard, and waiting to be, where all depends and nothing can be established except in relation to something else that refers us indefinitely in all directions except home. The signs here are entities like nexus, network, structure, pattern, system, design, process -- an array of profoundly interchangeable items, whose meanings, directions, goals and import vary with place, conjuncture and situation. In this sense deconstruction's role is to elide all meaning and fixity by directing attention toward aspects of the textual apparatus that forbid all security as they deny all knowledge and certainty. Deconstruction points us toward the humbling recognition and reversal that we must admit that we do not (and are not able to) know what we are really talking about, and when in fact we think we do it is because we have not examined the texts and contexts carefully enough.

Deconstruction pushes us from the stations, decisions and values where we have taken residence back into the arena of chance, risk, event and performance. Deconstruction's delight is to bring out the uncertainties, ambiguities, dualities and irresolvable quandaries in texts that our culture has most securely relied upon, chasing us always from positions that we occupy in relation to them, showing us how we have minimized the anarchic potential of these works and suppressed and channeled their

energy into supports for our complexes and vested interests. Where deconstruction deals, on the other hand, with works that directly inspired¹⁹ it (Heidegger, Artaud, Bataille, Blanchot, Valéry), therefore manifestly and undeniably projecting a withering critique upon all stability and also their own existence, then its role is rather to prevent any closure, conclusion, or certainty from forming around the work itself; deconstruction then aims to prevent the work from becoming established in any comfortable social or academic setting, rejecting hypostatization as well as codification and hierarchy, to maintain freshly provocative its subversive potential, defending it even, if necessary, against the "author" himself, who may sooner or later, subject to pressures of his own, be inclined to deny it.

The critical function, in this deconstructive mode, therefore, is to isolate the work from author and reader alike, to grasp what is at stake in the textual mechanism that has been unleashed, to protect the text against its originator as well as against its reader and the institutions that work to contain it. The fidelity that is deconstruction's is not to any reputation, work, accomplishment or achievement, but to the operation, process and event, of which the literary text is only passing, if crucially significant moment. It is in this sense that we may conceive of deconstruction as being as much an ethics as a critical theory. Deconstruction works then to keep the intrinsic "madness of art" from devolving into sanity and code. For deconstruction the interesting moments and elements in any system, work and structure are not those

connected with its utmost eloquence, pertinence, viability, power and control, but instead those points where these entities seem to be coming apart -- points of futility, ambiguity, contradiction and doubt.

Those works are profoundly deconstructive and deconstructions for which failure (to make any kind of total sense) is endemic, pointless and inevitable, works that functionally forbid and dismay understanding and comprehension, as they resist also the capturing and coopting potential of our memories and desires. With the literature of deconstruction it is a matter, therefore, of the perpetual and paradoxical between,²⁰ -- that necessary gap and absurd hiatus, connection and distance, which is to be neither accepted nor abrogated, but always instead contested. Ultimately deconstructive man can claim nothing but an inaptitude for complacency.

Notes

1

By madness and theatre I don't mean empirical entities, but more what Foucault calls "discursive formations," that is, concepts that are used as tools to deal with our circumstances. In conclusion generally I am trying to bypass and eschew what I see as the attendant dangers of reformism. Marx, for instance, in a renowned passage from the "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," locates the injustice that the proletariat must deal with not in any condition or error that it is possible to change or rectify (by e.g. shorter hours and better pay) but in the appalling inhumanity and sheer inacceptability of the proletariat's existence as a class whose only reason for being is to be exploited. For this (early) Marx the proletariat is "a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, and which does not claim a particular redress because the wrong which is done to it is not a particular wrong but wrong in general." [Early Writings, trans. T.B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), p. 58.] A fascinating and unfinished chapter in intellectual history leads directly from this statement through Trotsky, Luxembourg and Liebnicht to the provocative conclusions drawn from it, inspired by the French May '68, in Debord's influential La Société du Spectacle (Paris: Champs Libres, 1971), p. 77: "No qualitative amelioration of its poverty, no illusion of integration into the hierarchy can be a lasting remedy for its dissatisfaction; for the proletariat cannot recognize itself truly in a particular wrong which has been inflicted upon it or, therefore, in the reparation of a particular wrong, nor in a great number of these wrongs, but only in the absolute wrong of having been rejected into marginality by the masters of this world. . . ." (my translation) The proletariat thereby is that class which is called into being in order to abolish itself as a class at the same time as all other classes. This is known popularly as the generic theory of revolution, and I believe it goes a long way toward accounting for the otherwise incomprehensible "irrationalities" of such episodes as the Paris Commune of 1870, the May '68, and in another sense, those of the Kmer Rouge of Cambodia. My point of view then is, by analogy, that the modernist writer who "knows nothing" is the functional equivalent of the proletarian who "has nothing." The natural affinity of the modernist writer for Revolution is based on the attempt by the latter to realize an ontological vacancy, that is to accomplish in actuality what the former tries to do in words -- to sweep away all pre-existing prejudices, hierarchies, vested interests and constraints. Blanchot and Tzara, for instance, are particularly articulate and insistent on this idea and in drawing the appropriate conclusions in the practice of their art and the way they see the art of others (see above, pp. 184-5, notes 22, 24). The direction then of the "limit-text" is not toward any expansion, or

reform of the cultural apparatus (such indeed may be the attitude of Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet, or even, recently of Sollers, -- proud of the "freedoms" that writers now enjoy because of their pioneering efforts) which, in tune with Deleuze and Guattari's analyses in Capitalism and Schizophrenia, is always ready to develop another corollary to include another "exception." These texts rather refuse permanently any accommodation with the social structures in which they are obliged to operate, like that proletariat of Marx, Trotsky, Luxembourg and Debord that generically must aim not toward amelioration but toward abolition of the social order. . . .I have selected therefore the ideas of madness and theatre, and parenthetically that of text, as occasions to demonstrate the fundamental derealizing antagonism toward and distance from our world that these works inevitably assume; for the statement they make is radical, uncompromising, unacceptable. Like a proletariat, "with nothing to lose but its chains," they seek not to make us over and better but to destroy what or the way we are.

2 Colin Gordon, ed. and trans. Power/Knowledge. Interviews and Other Writings of Michel Foucault, 1972-77 (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 208.

3 Blanchot remarks, in a recent essay, that, in view of the changes he has been through, he rather thinks of himself as an actor who has had many roles to play rather than as author who is responsible for maintaining consistency of identity or purpose: "Ainsi, avant l'oeuvre, l'écrivain n'existe pas encore; après l'oeuvre, il ne subsiste plus: autant dire que son existence est sujette à caution, et on l'appelle "auteur"! Plus justement, il serait "acteur"; ce personnage éphémère qui naît et meurt chaque soir pour s'être donné, exagérément à voir, tué par le spectacle qui le rend ostensible, c'est-à-dire sans rien qui lui soit propre ou caché dans quelque intimité." [Après Coup (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 87.] This essay serves as afterword to the re-issue of an older work, Le Ressassement Éternel, from which Blanchot wishes to take his distance, while all the same accepting a kind of responsibility for it. Also relevant is the figure of the theatrical that Sollers projects in his most recent novel, where the interplay between pseudonym and civil status takes on a rococo, bizarre, possibly paranoid complexity, as Sollers, whose real name is Joyaux, represents himself as Diamant. Finally, the actor, on such a stage, would have the last word, if there was one: "Qui sommes-nous à ce moment-là? Des acteurs? De simples acteurs? Ou bien plutôt, sous nos masques de fantômes grimaçants, des fantômes enfin réels, enfin chacun soi-même en plein cœur de la comédie? Au cœur, oui, car il n'y a pas plus loin. Ni sa vie, ni la mienne, ni celle d'un des millions de figurants en train d'accomplir les mêmes gestes, plus "normalement" si l'on veut. Comme si la vieille machine avait

sauté, celle de l'ancienne fascination ou terreur. Plus rien. Des fonctions. Des positions provisoires sur un échiquier fou." [Portrait du joueur (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 151-2.]

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Capitalisme et Schizophrénie, L'Anti-Oedipe (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1975), p. 11.

⁵ R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience (New York: Random House, 1967) and Deleuze and Guattari's Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Hurley, Robert, et. al (New York: Viking 1977).

⁶ Georg Groddeck, The Book of the It (New York: International University Press, 1976).

⁷ The theatre of the Renaissance and the Alchemical-Cabalist tradition cancels reality in favor of another (Platonic) world. The modern avatar dissolves the world in favor of no other.

⁸ Philippe Sollers, Logiques (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p. 115: "IL NOUS FAUT DONC RÉALISER LA POSSIBILITÉ DU TEXTE COMME THÉÂTRE EN MÊME TEMPS QUE DU THÉÂTRE ET DE LA VIE COMME TEXTE," Sollers is commenting Mallarmé, capitals his own.

⁹ A central _____ in Foucault's Surveiller et Punir (Paris: Gallimard, (1975), this is Bentham's 18th century invention of a centrally located watchtower from which just a few guards could visually control the doings of a vast number of prisoners in the encircling, tiered and uncurtained cells.

¹⁰ L'Ordre du Discours (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) p. 10.

¹¹ L'Ordre du Discours, pp. 31-38.

¹² Thus an improbably if not statistically impossible freedom for the few (in art, stimulating professional activity, winning the lottery, etc.) legitimizes the stifling oppression and manipulation of the vast majority, who are led to acquiesce to a system that makes success a theoretical, if farfetched, possibility. Our societies must claim the ability to deliver a freedom that they cannot extend without undermining the deeper, mostly hidden structures of hierarchy and privilege that

constitute them. The real risks of freedom, impossible to grant, live or apply, except formally, that is rhetorically, become spectacle, circus, exception and diversion; this is indeed a central theme of Debord's insurrectionary text, La Société du Spectacle, indispensable theoretical resource for May '68 and its aftermath -- and this strategy or remedy is one that power has been applying to the body politic since Ancient Rome, at least. As the uncanny and insightful Poe commented in a random note more than a century ago, the pain that security (bread) won't heal, distraction (circus) will dull: "It is by no means clear, as regards the present revolutionary spirit of Europe, that it is a spirit which 'moveth altogether if it move at all.' In Great Britain it may be kept quiet for half a century yet, by placing at the head of affairs an experienced medical man. He should keep his forefinger constantly on the pulse of the patient and exhibit panem in gentle doses, with as much circenses as the stomach can be made to retain." Edgar Allan Poe, "Fifty Suggestions," in The Works of Poe, Vol. 7 (New York: Harper, n.d.), p. 216, suggestion #25!

13 Paul Valéry, Tel Quel I (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), p. 62.

14 Even Blanchot, "intransitive writer" as any, stresses emphatically in the Après Coup referred to above (note 3) this same inevitability of explanation: "Même Mallarmé, le plus secret et le plus discret des poètes, donne des indications sur la manière dont il faut lire le Coup de Dés." (p. 89) There is of course the familiar figure of the writer who refuses explanation, in a take-me-or-leave-me attitude, as in the sovereignty of Bataille: "Se conduire en maître signifie ne jamais rendre de comptes; je repugne à l'explication de ma conduite. La souveraineté est silencieuse ou déchue." [Le Coupable (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), p. 51.] Bataille, however, is explaining, and well, his very failure to explain. This same paradox inhabits his theories of sex as transgression: in the afterword to the provocative L'Érotisme (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1957), Bataille mentions that Jean Wahl had objected that the moment of awareness of the transgression (which Bataille's project cannot elude without ceasing to be in the public domain as text) constitutes a recuperation and normalization of its violence and disruption. To this Bataille had no other answer than to admit both the cogency of the objection and the contradiction inherent in his own position (a weakness that Sartre also exploited by calling Bataille a "nouveau mystique" -- see above p. 39. note 15.)

15 Samuel Beckett, W.C. Williams and others, Our Examination Round His Factification For Incamination of Work in Progress (Paris: Shakespeare and Co., 1929).

Paul Ricoeur, for instance, sees Freud's (and also Hegel's , Husserl's and Nietzsche's) unsettling and irrefutable (what Derrida calls 'incontournable ') assaults on the subject as being no cause to end in pessimism , despair , fatalism and resignation , but instead as a catalyst , stimulation and challenge to attain to a more comprehensive , reliable and relevant human theory and practice : " . . . Freudian realism is the necessary stage to bring the failure of reflective consciousness to its completion . . . this failure is neither fruitless nor utterly negative . For aside from its pedagogical or didactic value and its potentiality for preparing us to understand the lessons of Freudianism , this failure begins a process of converting consciousness in such a way as to understand the necessity of letting go all avarice with regard to itself , including that subtle self-concupiscence which may be what is narcissistic in the immediate consciousness of life . Through this failure , consciousness discovers that its immediate self-certainty was mere presumption and thus gains access to thought , which is no longer the attention that consciousness pays to itself so much as to saying , or rather to what is said in the saying . " The Conflict of Interpretations (Evanston : Northwestern UP , 1974) , p. 103 . For Ricoeur's comparable reaction to Derrida see above , pp. 37-38 , end of note 8 . Remarkably similar is the way in which another major religious (it should be admitted !) phenomenologist (whose intrication with Blanchot we have commented on , p. 186 , note 27) insists on the primordially and irrefutability of the ethical rapport with the other . The explosions that modernity has detonated , the doubts , insecurities , vagaries , existential quandaries , do not , for Emmanuel Lévinas , abolish responsibility and associated moral action but on the contrary make the ethical all the more urgent , " naked " (disinterested , since unsupported now by any earthly or heavenly system of rewards-and-punishments) and undeniable : " The suspicions engendered by psychoanalysis , sociology and politics weigh on human identity such that we never know to whom we are speaking and what we are dealing with when we build our ideas on the basis of human facts . But we do not need this knowledge in the relationship in which the other is a neighbor , and in which before being an individuation of the genus man , a rational animal , a free will , or any essence whatever , he is the persecuted one for whom I am responsible to the point of being a hostage for him , and in which my responsibility , instead of disclosing me in my " essence " as a transcendental ego , divests me without stop of all that can be common to me and another man . I am then called upon in my uniqueness as someone for whom no one else can substitute himself Thus it is not as a freedom , impossible in a will that is inflated and altered , sold or mad , that subjectivity is imposed as an absolute . It is sacred in its alterity with respect to which , in an unexceptionable responsibility , I posit myself deposed of my sovereignty . Paradoxically , it is qua alienus -- foreigner and other -- that man

is not alienated." [Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p. 59.] We don't mean to conflate, of course, two thinkers as different as Ricoeur and Lévinas -- except in the fact that both attempt to transcend or bypass, by accepting what they see as the challenge of, modernity. Even in the passages cited above we may notice, however, that the two diverge clearly. Ricoeur's recourse to "consciousness" is social-objective-Platonic-Hegelian, whereas Lévinas' appeal to "uniqueness" is Kierkegaardian, existential and subjective. Lévinas obviously also is much closer to Derrida and Blanchot (having written about them both, and been written about by both -- all in very approving terms. . .) and to the mad, theatrical, unapologetic literature it is a question of here.

17 "Apotheosis" is probably a more accurate word than "rehabilitation" (even so radical a writer as Bataille has been suspicious of Genet) for what Sartre does so appallingly well in Saint Genet, Comédien et Martyr (Paris: Gallimard, 1952).

18 See above, p. 37, note 8. It is relevant also that Foucault's very influential structuralist vocabulary is composed of terms of passage, liaison and momentary connection rather than of finality, firm ties, or substance: "L'écart, la distance, l'intermédiaire (a Sollers' title), la dispersion, la différence ne sont pas les thèmes de la littérature d'aujourd'hui, mais ce en quoi le langage maintenant nous est donné. . . ("Le Langage de l'Espace," in Critique 203, 1964, pp. 378-9.)

19 See above, p. 37, note 5.

20 The paradox lies in the fact that there is nothing between us (connection, tie) unless there is something between us (barrier, obstacle). It is interesting to note the importance that Heidegger attributes, in a lecture of the mid-twenties that was part of the program that Being and Time would later articulate with such pervasive effect, to this idea of the "between" -- that he says very slyly would be the very place of Dasein, if indeed there were such a thing as a subject and a world for it to be between! Heidegger's strictures against hypostasis of this useful notion is most salutary, in the sense that it is a caution that in these times we are at home nowhere, not even in no man's land: ". . . the being of Dasein is not the mode of being of the world, it is neither the being-handy nor the being-in-hand of something. It is just as little the being of a 'subject,' whose being would repeatedly, in a formally unexpressed way have to be taken as being on hand. Should we be permitted to maintain the orientation to a world and a 'subject,'

however, we could then say that the being Dasein is precisely the being of 'between' which of course does not first arise by having a subject meet with the world, is the Dasein itself, but once again not as a property of a subject. This is the very reason why, strictly speaking, Dasein cannot be taken as a 'between,' since the talk of a 'between' subject and world already presupposes that two entities are given between which there is supposed to be relation." [History of the Concept of Time, Prolegomena, trans. T. Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985) pp. 251-52.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Introduction

- Artaud-Bataille. Colloques de Cerisy. 2 vol. Paris: UGE, 1973.
- Atkins, G. Douglas. Reading Deconstruction. Deconstructive Reading.
Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1983.
- Barthes, Roland. The Pleasure of the Text. Trans. Richard Miller. New
York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- Beckett, Samuel. Three Novels. New York: Grove Press, 1955.
- Blanchot, Maurice. L'Amitié. Paris: Gallimard, 1971
- . L'Attente L'Oubli. Paris: Gallimard, 1962.
- . L'Entretien Infini. Paris: Gallimard, 1955.
- . L'Espace Littéraire. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.
- . La Part du Feu. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.
- . Thomas L'Obscur. Paris: Gallimard, 1941, 1950 (2nd edition, re-
vised).
- Cain, William E. The Crisis in Criticism. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
University Press, 1984.
- Carroll, David. The Subject in Question: The Languages of Theory and
the Strategies of Fiction. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1982.
- Culler, Jonathan. On Deconstruction. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University
Press, 1982.

---. The Pursuit of Signs. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Debord, Guy. La Société du Spectacle. Paris: Champs Libres, 1971

Deconstruction and Criticism. eds. Bloom et al. New York: Seabury Press, 1979.

De Man, Paul. Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.

---. Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism. New York: Oxford UP, 1971.

Derrida, Jacques. Glas. 2 vol. Paris: Denoël, 1981.

---. Marges -- de la Philosophie. Paris: Editions du Minuit, 1972.

---. Positions. trans. by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

---. Writing and Difference. trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Des Forêts, Louis-Rene. Le Bavard. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.

---. La Chambre des Enfants. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

Eco, Umberto. Opera Aperta. Milan: Bompiano, 1962.

Faye, Jean-Pierre. Le Récit Hunique. Paris: Seuil, 1967.

Les Fins de l'Homme, à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida. Colloque de Cerisy, 23 juillet-2 août, 1980. eds. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-luc Nancy. Paris: Galilée, 1981.

Fitch, B.T. Dimensions, Structure et Textualité dans la Trilogie Romanesque de Beckett. Paris: Minard, 1977.

- Flores, Ralph. The Rhetoric of Doubtful Authority. Deconstructive Readings of Self-Questioning Narratives, St. Augustine to Faulkner. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1984.
- Franklin, Jean. Le Discours du Pouvoir. Paris: UGE, 1976.
- Hartman, Geoffrey. Criticism in the Wilderness. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980.
- . Saving the Text. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1981.
- Joyce, James. Finnegans Wake. New York: The Viking Press, 1958.
- Leiris, Michel. L'Age d'Homme. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.
- . La Règle du Jeu, I - IV. Paris: Gallimard, 1948, 1955, 1966, 1976.
- . Le Ruban au Cou d'Olympe. Paris: Gallimard, 1981.
- Leitch, Vincent B. Deconstructive Criticism. New York: Columbia UP, 1983.
- Norris, Christopher. Deconstruction: Theory and Practice. London: Methuen, 1982.
- Norris, Margaret. The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974.
- Poétique 26 (1976). Special issue on Book 1, Chapter 6 of Finnegans Wake, ed. Hélène Cixous.
- Rousset, Jean. Forme et Signification. Paris: Corti, 1963.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. Situations I. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.
- Sollers, Philippe. Drame. Paris: Seuil, 1965.
- . H. Paris: Seuil, 1973.
- . Femmes. Paris: Gallimard, 1982.

---. Logiques. Paris: Seuil, 1965.

---. Lois. Paris: Seuil, 1972.

---. Paradis. Paris: Seuil, 1981.

---. Writing and the Experience of Limits. Edited by David Hayman,
translated by Philip Barnard with David Hayman. New York:
Columbia UP, 1983.

Théorie D'Ensemble. Paris: Seuil, 1968.

Tison-Braun, Micheline. Tristan Tzara, L'Inventeur de l'homme nouveau.
Paris: Nizet, 1977.

Tzara, Tristan. Oeuvres Complètes. Vol. 1 & 3. Edited by H. Béhar.
Paris: Flammarion, 1975, 1979.

The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America. Edited by Wallace Martin
et al., Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1983.

Tristan Tzara

- Artaud, Antonin. Oeuvres Complètes, t. 1. Paris: Gallimard, 1956.
- Ball, Hugo. Flight out of Time, a Dada Diary. New York: Viking, 1974.
- Baudrillard, Jean. La Société de Consommation. Paris: Gallimard, 1970.
- . L'Échange Symbolique et la Mort. Paris: Gallimard, 1976.
- Bigsby, C.W.E. Dada and Surrealism. London: Methuen, 1972.
- Blanchot, Maurice. "Réflexions Sur le Surréalisme," in La Part du Feu. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.
- Breton, André. L'Amour Fou. Paris: Gallimard, 1937.
- . Manifestes du Surréalisme. Paris: Gallimard, 1963.
- Caws, Mary Ann. The Inner Theatre of Recent French Poetry. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970.
- . The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970.
- Coomaraswamy, A.K. The Dance of Shiva. New York: Noonday, 1957.
- Daumal, René. L'Évidence Absurde. Essais et Notes, 1 (1926-1934).
- . Les Pouvoirs de la Parole. Essais et Notes, 2 (1935-1943). Paris: Gallimard, 1972.
- . Mount Analogue. Trans. Roger Shattuck. New York: Penguin, 1974.
- Gilbert-Lecomte, Roger. Oeuvres Complètes. 2 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1974.
- Habermas, Jurgen. Theory and Practice. Boston: Beacon, 1973.
- Lacote, René and Haldas, Georges, Tristan Tzara. Paris: Seghers, 1952.

- LeClézio, J.M.G. The Book of Flights. Trans. S.W. Taylor. New York: Atheneum. 1972.
- Marcus, Grail. "Lilliput at the Cabaret Voltaire." TriQuarterly 52 (1981), pp. 265-276.
- Merejkowski, Dmitri. Atlantis/Europe: The Secret of the West. Blauvelt, N.Y.: Steinerbooks, 1971.
- Peterson, Elmer. Tristan Tzara, Dada and Surreational Theorist. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1971.
- Peyre, Henri. Qu'est-ce qu le symbolisme? Paris: PUF, 1974.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. Duino Elegies. Trans. Stephen Spender and J.B. Leishman. New York: Norton, 1939.
- Tison-Braun, Micheline. Tristan Tzara, L'Inventeur de l'homme nouveau. Paris: Nizet, 1977.
- Tzara, Tristan. Approximate Man and Other Writings. Trans. Mary Ann Caws. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973.
- . La Fuite. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.
- . Oeuvres Complètes. 5 vols. Ed. Henri Béhar. Paris: Flammarion, 1977-1982.
- Virilio, Paul. Vitesse et Politique. Paris: Galilée, 1977.
- Woolf, Virginia. The Waves. New York : Harcourt Brace, 1931.

Samuel Beckett

Albérès, R.M. Métamorphoses du Roman. Paris: Albin-Michel, 1966.

Barthes, Roland. LeÇon. Paris: Seuil, 1978.

Bataille, Georges. Oeuvres Complètes. Vol. VI. Paris: Gallimard, 1974.

Baudrillard, Jean. L'Échange Symbolique et la Mort. Paris: Gallimard, 1976.

Beckett, Samuel. Three Novels. New York: Grove Press, 1955.

Bernal, Olga. Langage et Fiction dans le Roman de Beckett. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.

Blanchot, Maurice. L'Attente L'Oubli. Paris: Gallimard, 1951.

---. L'Espace Littéraire. Paris: Gallimard, 1955.

---. L'Entretien Infini. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.

Cioran, E.M. The Trouble with Being Born. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Viking, 1976.

Cohn Dorrit. Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978.

Debord, Guy. La Société du Spectacle. Paris: Champs Libres, 1971.

Demarcy, Richard. Éléments d'une Sociologie du Spectacle. Paris: UGE, 1973.

Derrida, Jacques. Writing and Difference. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Des Forêts, Louis-Rene. Le Bavard. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.

Esslin, Martin, ed. Samuel Beckett, A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice Hall, 1965.

Fitch, B.T. Dimensions, Structure et Textualité dans la Trilogie Roman-
esque de Beckett. Paris: Minard, 1977.

James, Henry. "The Art of Fiction." Literary Criticism from Pope to
Croce. Ed. Allen and Clark. New York: American Book Company,
1941, pp. 538-561.

O'Hara, J.D., ed. Twentieth Century Interpretations of Beckett's
Trilogy. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1970.

Peignôt, Jérôme. Les Jeux de L'Amour et du Langage. Paris: UGE, 1974.

Weber, Max. From Max Weber. Trans. C. Wright Mills. Oxford:
Oxford UP, 1958.

Michel Leiris

Blanchot, Maurice. La Part du Feu. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.

---. Amitié. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

Leiris, Michel. L'Âge d'Homme. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.

---. La Règle du Jeu, Biffures. Paris: Gallimard, 1948.

---. La Règle du Jeu, Fourbis. Paris: Gallimard, 1955.

---. La Règle du Jeu, Fibrilles. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

---. La Règle du Jeu, Frêle Bruit. Paris: Gallimard, 1976.

---. Le Ruban au Cou d'Olympe. Paris: Gallimard, 1981.

Mehlman, Jeffrey. A Structural Study of Autobiography. Ithaca: Cornell
UP, 1974.

Maurice Blanchot

Bataille, Georges. "Le Monde ou Nous Mourrons." Critique 13 (1957).
675-684.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Beaubourg Effect: Implosion and Deterrence."
October 20 (1982), 3-13.

Blanchot, Maurice. La Part du Feu. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.

---. Thomas l'Obscur. Paris: Gallimard, 1941, 1950 (2nd ed.).

---. Le Ressassement Eternel. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1951.

---. Le Livre à Venir. Paris: Gallimard, 1959.

---. L'Attente L'Oubli. Paris: Gallimard, 1962.

---. L'Entretien Infini. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.

---. La Folie du Jour. Paris: Fata Morgana, 1973.

---. L'Écriture du Désastre. Paris: Gallimard, 1980.

---. The Gaze of Orpheus. Trans. Lydia Davis. Barrytown, N.Y.:
Station Hill Press, 1981.

Butor, Michel. "L'Usage des Pronoms Personnels dans le Roman."

Repertoire II. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1964.

Collin, Françoise. Maurice Blanchot et la Question de l'Écriture. Paris:
Gallimard, 1971.

De Man, Paul. "La Circularité de l'Interpretation dans l'œuvre critique
de Maurice Blanchot." Critique 229, (1966), 547-568.

Derrida Jacques. "Living On." Deconstruction and Criticism. New York:
Seabury Press, 1976, 75-176.

- . Writing and Difference. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Douglas, Kenneth. "Blanchot and Sartre." Yale French Studies (Summer-Spring 1949), 85-95.
- Foucault, Michel. "La Pensée du Dehors." Critique 229 (1966), 523-546.
- Klossowski, Pierre. "Sur Maurice Blanchot." Les Temps Modernes 4 (1949), 298-314.
- Laporte, Roger. "Le Oui, Le Non, Le Neutre." Critique 229 (juin, 1966), 588-90.
- . Deux Lectures de Maurice Blanchot. Paris: Fata Morgana, 1973.
- Lawall, Sarah N. "The Negative Consciousness: Maurice Blanchot." Critics of Consciousness: The Existential Structure of Literature. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1968, 221-265.
- Lévinas, E. "Maurice Blanchot et le Regard du Poète." Monde Nouveau (1956), 6-19.
- Libertson, Joseph. Proximity: Lévinas, Blanchot, Bataille, and Communication. Le Hague: Nijhoff, 1982.
- Londyn, Evelyn. Maurice Blanchot, Romancier. Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1976.
- Oxenhandler, Neal. "Paradox and Negation in the Criticism of Maurice Blanchot." Symposium 16 (1962), 36-44.
- Peckham, Morse. "Toward a Theory of Romanticism." PMLA LXI (1951) 5-23.
- Pfeiffer, Jean. "La Passion de l'Imaginaire." Critique 229.

- Preli, Georges. La Force du Dehors; exteriorité, limite et non-pouvoir à partir de Maurice Blanchot. Paris: Encres-Recherches, 1977.
- Wilhem, Daniel. Maurice Blanchot et la Voix Narrative. Paris: UGE, 1974.

James Joyce

- Atherton, James. The Books in the Wake. New York: Viking, 1960.
- Beausang, Michael. "Vivre en Marge." Poétique 26 (1976) 221-231.
- Becket, Samuel; Williams, W.C. and others. Our Examination Round His Factification For Incamination of Works in Progress. New York: New Directions, 1929, 1952.
- Begnal, Michael H.; Senn, Fritz, eds. A Conceptual Guide to Finnegans Wake. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State UP, 1974.
- . "The Dreamers at the Wake." Narrator and Character in Finnegans Wake. Ed. Begnal and G. Eckley. London: Associated Universities Press, 1975, 19-123.
- Benstock, Bernard. Joyce-Again's Wake. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965.
- Boldereff, Frances Metz. Reading Finnegans Wake. Woodward, Pa.: Classic Nonfiction Library, 1956.
- Brown, Norman. Closing Time. New York: Random House, 1973.
- Campbell, Joseph & Robinson, Henry Morton. A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake. New York: Viking, 1966.
- Cixous, Hélène. The Exile of James Joyce. Trans. S.A. Purcell. New York: David Lewis, 1972.
- . "La Missexualité." Poétique 26 (1976), 241-179.
- Condou, Claude. "Le Corps à Lettre." Poétique 26 (1976), 173-179.
- Cross, Richard. Flaubert and Joyce. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971.

- Deleuze, Gilles. Différence et Répétition. Paris: PUF, 1968.
- Derrida, Jacques. La Carte Postale, De Socrate à Freud et Au-Dela.
Paris: Flammarion, 1980.
- Eco, Umberto. Le Poétique di Joyce. Milan: Bompiano, 1966.
- . L'Oeuvre Ouvert. Paris: Seuil, 1965.
- Ellman, Richard. James Joyce. New York: Oxford UP, 1982.
- Epstein, E.L. "The Turning Point." A Conceptual Guide to Finnegans Wake. Ed. M. Begnal and F. Senn. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State UP, 1974, 56-70.
- Ferrer, Daniel. "Hisstheory." Poétique 26 (1976), 232-239.
- Foucault, Michel. "Le Langage de l'Espace." Critique 203 (1964),
378-385.
- Giovannangeli, D. Écriture et Répétition, Approche de Derrida. Paris:
UGE, 1979.
- Hassan, Ihab. "Finnegans Wake et L'Imagination Postmoderne." Europe
657-8 (janv.-fév. 1984), 127-233.
- Hawthorn, Jeremy. "Ulysses in History." James Joyce and Modern Literature. Ed. McCormack and Stead. London: Routledge,
1982, 126-142.
- Hayman, David. Joyce et Mallarmé, 2 vol. Paris: Lettres Modernes,
1956.
- . A First Draft Version of Finnegans Wake. Austin: University of
Texas Press, 1963.

---. "Réseaux Infrastructurels dans Finnegans Wake." Poétique 26 (1976), 207-220.

---. "Some Writers in the Wake of the Wake." TRI-QUARTERLY 38 (1977), 122-141.

Heath, Stephen. The Nouveau Roman, A Study in the Practice of Writing. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1972.

---. "Ambiviolences, Notes pour une Lecture de Joyce." Tel Quel, 50, 51 (1972), 22-43; 64-76.

Houdebine, Jean-Louis. "La Signature de Joyce." "Joyce et Jung." Tel Quel 81 (1979), 52-62; 63-65.

---. "Joyce: Littérature et Religion." Tel Quel 89 (1981), 41-73.

---. et Sollers, Philippe. "La Trinité de Joyce." Tel Quel 83 (1980), 36-88.

Husserl, Edmund. L'Origine de la Géométrie. Introduction and trans. J. Derrida. Paris: PUF, 1962.

Joyce, James. Ulysses. London: The Bodley Head, 1937.

---. Finnegans Wake. New York: Viking, 1958.

---. Finnegans Wake. Trans. into French Philippe Lavergne. Paris: Gallimard, 1982.

---. Exiles. New York: Viking, 1961.

---. Stephen Hero. Ed. T. Spencer. New York: New Directions, 1963.

---. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. New York: Viking, 1965.

---. A Shorter Finnegans Wake. Ed. A. Burgess. New York: Viking, 1966.

---. Critical Writings. Ed. Mason and Ellman. New York: Viking, 1968.

- Kristeva, Julia. "Bataille, Experience et Pratique." Bataille, Colloque de Cerisy. Paris: UGE, 1973.
- Levin, Harry. James Joyce. New York: New Directions, 1960.
- Lewis, Wyndham. Time and Western Man. London: Chatto and Windus, 1927.
- Martin, Jean-Paul. "La Condensation." Poétique 26 (1976), 180-206.
- Minière, Claude. "La Musique des Iles." Europe 657-8 (janv.-fev., 1984), 140-149.
- Norris, Margaret. The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.
- Paris, Jean. "Du Monologue et ses Precurseurs." Europe 657-8 (janv.-fev. 1984), 52-64.
- Rabaté, Jean-Michel. "Lapsus ex Machina." Poétique 26 (1976), 152-172.
- . "Qu'il Faut La Chute." Europe 657-8 (janv. - fev. 1984), 133-139.
- Schlossman, Beryl. "Joyce et le Don des Langues." Tel Quel 92 (1982), 9 - 30.
- Sollers, Philippe and Hayman, David. Vision à New York. Paris: Grasset, 1981.
- Sollers, Philippe. "Joyce & Co." TRI-QUARTERLY 38 (1977), 107-121.
- Solomon, Margaret C. Eternal Geometer, The Sexual Universe of Finnegans Wake. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969.

Stephane, Nelly. "L'Homme Fiction." Europe 657-8 (janv. - fev. 1984), 5-12.

Tindall, William York. A Reader's Guide to Finnegans Wake. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1969.

Topin, André. "La Cassure et le Flux." Poétique 26 (1976), 132-151.

White, David A. Reflections on Joyce and Metaphysics. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983.

Philippe Sollers

- Barthes, Roland. Sollers Écrivain. Paris: Seuil, 1979.
- Baudry, Jean-Louis. "Linguistique et Production Textuelles." Théorie d'Ensemble. Paris: Seuil, 1968, 351-364.
- . La "Création" premier état: l'année. Paris: Seuil, 1970.
- Berman, Morris. The Reenchantment of the World. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981.
- Caws, Mary Ann. "Text and Revolution." Diacritics (Spring, 1976), 208.
- Champagne, Roland A. "Un Déclenchement: The Revolutionary Implications of Philippe Sollers' Nombres for a Logocentric Western Culture." Substance 7 (Fall, 1973).
- . The Texts and the Readers of P. Sollers Creative Works from 1957 to 1973. Ohio State University Dissertation, 1974.
- Day, Tarsis. "Portrait du Jouer." NRF 387 (avril 1985) 84-88.
- Deleuze, Gilles. Différence et Répétition. Paris: PUF, 1968.
- De Man, Paul. Blindness and Insight. New York: Oxford UP, 1971.
- Derrida, Jacques. De La Grammatologie. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967.
- . Speech and Phenomenon. Trans. D. Allison. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1972.
- . Dissemination. Trans. B. Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- . La Vérité en Peinture. Paris: Flammarion, 1978.

Faye, Jean-Pierre. Battement. Paris: Seuil, 1962.

---. Le Récit Hunique. Paris: Seuil, 1967.

---. L'Ovale. Paris: Laffont, 1975.

---. Les Portes Des Villes du Monde. Paris: Belfond, 1977.

Les Fins de L'Homme, à partir du travail de J. Derrida. Directed

Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe and J.L. Nancy. Colloquim Cerisy.

Paris: Galilee, 1981.

Foucault, Michel. "Distance, Aspect, Origins." Théorie d'Ensemble,

Paris: Seuil, 1968, 11-24.

Giovannangeli, D. Écriture et Répétition, Approche de Derrida, Paris: UGE, 1979.

Hartman, Geoffrey. Saving the Text. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1981.

Hayman, David and Sollers, Philippe. Vision à New York. Paris: Grasset, 1981.

Heath, Stephen. The Nouveau Roman: A Study in the Practice of Writing. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1972.

---. "La Déversée." Tel Quel 57 (1974), 117-126.

Kristeva, Julia. Semiotikè. Paris: Seuil, 1969.

---. "Une poétique Ruinée." Introduction to M. Bakhtine's La Poétique de Dostoevski. Trans. Kolitcheff. Paris: Seuil, 1970.

---. La Révolution Dans La Langue Poétique du dix-neuvième siècle. Paris: Seuil, 1974.

---. "Novel as Polylogue." Desire in Language. Trans. L. Roudiez. New York: Columbia, 1980.

- Kurk, Katherine Chenault. Consummation of the Text: A Study of Philippe Sollers. University of Kentucky Dissertation, 1979.
- Lotringer, Sylvère. "Artaud/Bataille et le Matérialisme Dialectique." SubStance 5-6 (1974), 207-225.
- Lynes, Carlos. "Production et Théorie Romanesque chez Philippe Sollers: Lecture du Parc." Kentucky Romance Quarterly 19: 99-121.
- Miguet, Marie. "Sentiments Filiaux d'un Pretendu Parricide: Perec." Poétique 54 (1983), 135-147.
- Pierssens, Michel. La Tour du Babel: La Fiction du Signe. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1976.
- Pleynet, Marcelin. "La Poésie Doit Avoir Pour But." Théorie d'Ensemble. Paris: Seuil, 1968, 94-115.
- Pollman, Leo. Der Franzosische Roman in 20 Jahrhundert. Stuttgart: Kohlmann. 1970.
- Ribettes, Jean-Michel. "Real-Lacan." Infini 3 (1983), 87-106.
- Ricardou, Jean. Le Théâtre des Metamorphoses. Paris: Seuil, 1982.
- Rifaterre, Michael. "Le Formalisme Francais." Essais de Stylistique Structurale. Paris: Flammarion, 1971.
- Shushi, Kao. "Paradise Lost, an interview with Philippe Sollers." SubStance 30 (1979), 31-51.
- Sollers, Philippe. Le Parc. Paris: Seuil, 1963.
- . L'Intermédiaire. Paris: Seuil, 1963.
- . Drame. Paris: Seuil, 1965.

- . Logiques. Paris: Seuil, 1968.
 - . Nombres. Paris: Seuil, 19
 - . Lois. Paris: Seuil, 1972
 - . H. Paris: Seuil, 1973.
 - . Sur le Matérialisme. Paris: Seuil, 1974.
 - . Paradis. Paris: Seuil, 1981.
 - . Femmes. Paris: Gallimard, 1982.
 - . Portrait du Joueur. Paris: Gallimard, 1984.
- Thibaudeau, Jean. Ouverture. Paris: Seuil, 1966.

Louis-René Des Forêts

Blanchot, Maurice. "La Parole Vaine." L'Amitié. Paris: Gallimard, 1971, 137-149.

Des Forets, Louis-Rene. Le Bavard. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.

---. La Chambre des Enfants. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

Leiris, Michel. L'Âge d'Homme. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.

Morin, Edgar. Le Cinéma, ou L'Homme Imaginaire. Paris: Denoel, 1958.

Nadeau, Maurice. The French Novel Since the War. Trans. A.M. Sheridan-Smith. New York: Grove Press, 1969.

Rilke, Ranier Maria. The Duino Elegies. Trans. J.G. Leishman and Stephen Spender. New York: Norton, 1939.

Serres, Michel. Détachement. Paris: Flammarion, 1983.

Spengler, Oswald. The Decline of the West. Trans. C. Atkinson. 2 Vol. New York: Knopf, 1928.

Conclusion

- Bataille, George. Le Coupable. Paris: Gallimard, 1944.
- . L'Érotisme. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1957.
- . "Madame Edwarda." Trans. Austryn Wainhouse. Evergreen Review Reader. Vol. II, 1962-1967. New York: Grove Press, 1980, 221-226.
- Blanchot, Maurice. Après Coup, précédé par Le Ressassement Éternel. Paris: Gallimard, 1983.
- Debord, Guy. La Société du Spectacle. Paris: Champs Libres, 1969.
- Foucault, Michel. L'Ordre du Discours. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.
- . Language, Counter-Memory and Practice, Selected Essays and Interviews. Ed. D.F. Bouchard. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977.
- . Power/Knowledge. Interviews and other Writings, 1972 - 1977. Ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- Heidegger, Martin. History of the Concept of Time, Prolegomena. Trans. T. Kisiel. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985.
- Kofman, Sarah. Lectures de Derrida. Paris: Galilée, 1984.
- Lemert, Charles G. and Gillen, Garth. Michel Foucault, Social Theory as Transgression. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Marx, Karl. Early Writings. Trans. T.B. Bottomore. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963.
- Ricoeur, Paul. The Conflict of Interpretations, Essays in Hermeneutics. Ed. Don Ihde. Evanston: Northern Illinois UP, 1974.

Sollers, Philippe. Portrait du Joueur. Paris: Gallimard, 1984.

Valéry, Paul. Tel Quel. Vol. I. Paris: Gallimard, 1941.

renvoi

Who is this "person" who wrote all the above? If there is someone to answer "Yes I am he," does that make it so?

Or is the mask now saying, the voice behind the mask

I am the mask on the mask

Do you wear the mask of who you want to be (loved)?

And what do masks feel in their turn? We know masks pretend to feel.

It's only a demon who would say there is nothing behind but another one (devil = inventor of infinity, of never as of ever)

Glas doesn't end but is cutoff

Glas means end

We never stop ending

Or you could sign it with your tear