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PAIN AND FORGIVENESS: STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN *WILD STRAWBERRIES* AND *AUTUMN SONATA*

Since it appeared almost thirty years ago, *Wild Strawberries* has occupied a special place in Ingmar Bergman's canon. Hailed often as a masterpiece, less frequently declared a failure, its lyrical tone and its central character's achievement of peace of mind make it the most beloved of Bergman's works.[1] The film comprises a psychological journey undertaken through a series of dreams by an aged doctor, Isak Borg, as he travels by car with his daughter-in-law, Marianne, and a group of teenaged hitchhikers from Stockholm to Lund to receive academic honors. Through both the dreams and the events of the trip, we learn many things about Borg, including that although he is superficially charming, he is distant and unsympathetic in his intimate relationships, and that he is in deep psychological distress and suffering from nightmares. By the end of the film, he has become more able to reach out to others, and his final dream is serene and comforting.

Most commentators have argued that the central issue in the film is Borg's dawning awareness of the real meaning of life; some have argued that with his newly acquired wisdom, he learns to accept his own impending death, while others have focused on his opportunities for regeneration during whatever remains of his life. Some have credited Borg with the ability to repair his damaged relationships in light of his new understanding, while others have pointed out that those around him remain unreceptive to his approaches.[2] A number of critics have written about the family issues in the film.[3] Of these, the most provocative is a psychoanalytic reading by physician Harvey Greenberg which focuses on Borg's relationship with his parents as we see it in his dreams and his life, and which argues that Borg's mother's hostility toward him is the root of his difficulties in interacting in a warm and loving way with those closest to him.[4] Greenberg's perspective is the most useful from which to solve some of the problems presented by *Wild Strawberries;* Borg's relationship with his parents is indeed at the heart of his psychological and interpersonal difficulties. However, I will argue that rather than condemning the mother, Bergman's primary interest in this film is in the healing powers of forgiveness, which the film defines as a process involving first the acknowledgement of injury at another's hands, and then acceptance of the other complete with the very limitations that caused the injury.

Through his dreams, we learn that Borg's behavior patterns are generated from an underlying personality structure created in response to his mother's insufficient warmth, and maintained in later life for fear of the devastating judgment

[1]See Bruce Kawin, *Mindscreen* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 96, and Philip Mosley, *Ingmar Bergman* (London and Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981), p. 68 for recent very positive assessments. Robin Wood and Peter Cowie suggest that although the film appeared to be a masterpiece on its release, it has lost some of its power over time and in relation to subsequent Bergman films. See Wood, *Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Praeger, 1969) p. 80, and Cowie, *Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Scribner's, 1982) p. 165. In *Film Comment,* 19, No. 3 (May-June 1983), novelist Scott Spenser is reported to have declared the film a "guilty pleasure"; although Vernon Young declared the film to be a failure, he concedes that his response is contrary to the general flood of admiration the film engendered. See *Cinema Borealis* (New York: Avon, 1971) p. 169.

[2]For references to the film's focus on Borg's impending death, see Marsha Kinder, *"From the Life of the Marionettes* to *The Devil's Wanton:* Bergman's Creative Transformation of a Recurring Nightmare," *Film Quarterly,* 34, No. 3 (Spring 1981), pp. 26-37, and Bruce Kawin, *Mindscreen;* for readings that focus on Borg's regeneration in life, see Peter Cowie, *Swedish Cinema* (London and New York: A. Zwemmer and A. S. Barnes, 1966), and Philip Mosley, *Ingmar Bergman;* see Harvey A. Greenberg, "The Rags of Time," in *Ingmar Bergman: Essays in Criticism,* ed. Stuart M. Kaminsky (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 179-194, for a discussion of the changes that take place in Borg's relationships.

[3]See Wood and Birgitta Steene, *Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Twayne, 1968).

[4]Greenberg, "The Rags of Time."

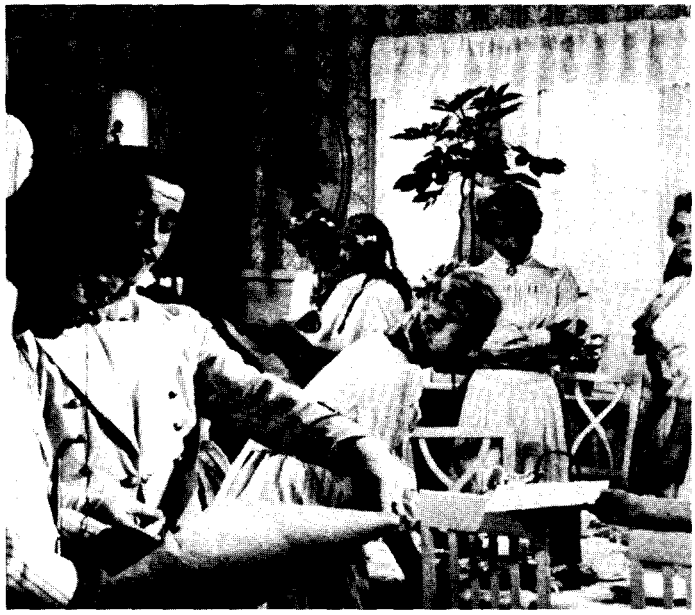
that he would have leveled against his parents if he had permitted himself to enter into his own emotional life. Only after allowing himself to feel in dream the pain, humiliation and rage his childhood engendered, and after realizing that he has survived, is he able to see and accept his parents as the limited human beings they were. Only then does he experience the grace of self acceptance that we generally call the achievement of maturity or adulthood.

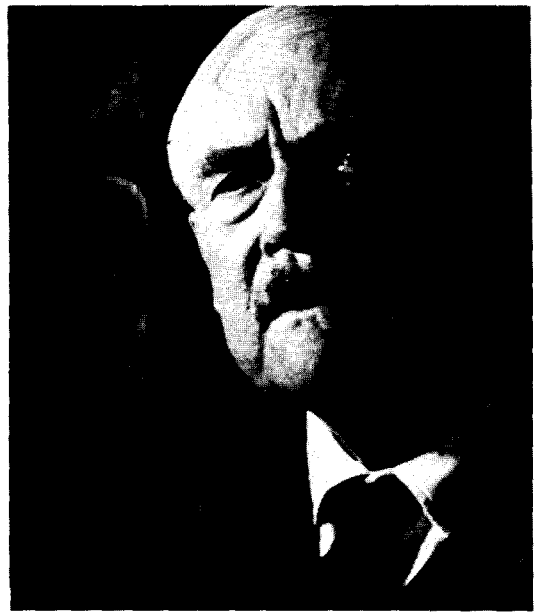
Wild Strawberries marks the end of one phase of Bergman's career. His interest in the concerns expressed in *Wild Strawberries,* however, remained unexhausted. Like his company of actors, Bergman's subjects and iconography appear and reappear throughout his canon, each film a transformation on a rich and seamless underlying structure. *Wild Strawberries* certainly grew out of elements transformed from *The Seventh Seal,* which deals on a metaphysical level with the same themes, and which provided the imagery for *Wild Strawberries'* title. Twenty years later, returning to the same ground with a vision tempered by experience, Bergman made *Autumn Sonata,* also about abandonment and reconciliation between mother and child. Although the film comprises many of the same elements as *Wild Strawberries, Autumn Sonata* ends not in serenity, but in tension, mother and daughter able to experience the solace of forgiveness only across great distances, never face to face.

Although a contemporary artist's corpus comes to us chronologically so that our understanding of later works is informed by our awareness of those that came before, it is instructive to reverse the process and allow later works to comment on their predecessors. By reading in *Autumn Sonata* a modulation of elements found also in *Wild Strawberries,* we can see loose threads in the neat solution to the former film's dilemma. It is not with his 96-year-old living mother that Borg achieves peace, but with her 30-year-old dream image. Nor is he able to break through with his son Evald who will soon have a child of his own. While the last dream in *Wild Strawberries* is unambiguously serene, the resolution to the problem presented in the film is limited since it substitutes a process confined to Borg's solitary consciousness for reconciliation between living individuals.

Few critics have addressed the irony of Bergman's selection of Victor Sjöstrom, whom Bergman admired enormously and whose extraordinary personal charm radiates on the screen, to play a character who seems to be indicted by the film as utterly devoid of human warmth.[5] The apparent irony is instructive, since it implicitly asks us to hold in abeyance our judgment of the character. Bergman has made it clear that his selection of actor is intimately and organically bound up with the creation of character. "I'm actually unable to begin writing until I've made up my mind which actor is going to play the part," he told John Simon. "Then I suddenly see

[5]Peter Cowie noted the irony, but listed it without explanation with the film's strengths in *Ingmar Bergman,* p. 165. Vernon Young, whose *Cinema Borealis* is a study in a critic's lack of sympathy and warmth for his subject, argued that the film is a failure precisely because of Bergman's apparent casting error. See p. 162.





the actor masked in the part. The part takes on his skin, his muscles, the intonation of his voice, and above all his rhythm, the way he is."[6] The choice of Sjöstrom for *Wild Strawberries* was, as usual, coincident with the beginning of the script; and in the diary that he kept during the shooting of the film, Bergman recorded observations about Sjöstrom the actor that are fundamental to Borg the character:

> I can't rid myself of the notion that this old man is a child who has aged in some extraordinary way, having at birth been deprived of both parents and brothers and sisters; a child who is endlessly searching for a security that is just as endlessly denied him.[7]

Not literally, of course, an orphan, Borg was the neglected middle child of a large and unnurturing family; through his dreams we learn (although he does not in any conscious way) that his interpersonal incompetence is the result of the disaster of his first relationships.

The second dream in the film, the first populated with individuals out of Borg's childhood, represents a preliminary, limited attempt by the old man's unconscious to come to terms with this buried misery. Greenberg has demonstrated that while the scene seems to be a warm, even nostalgic portrait of Borg's family, it is suffused with repressed alienation. Most obviously, both the young Borg and his parents are missing from the scene, implying that the dream cannot be an actual memory, but must be a projection of a psychological reality too painful to image directly. As Greenberg points out, by suggesting that the young Borg is with his father elsewhere, "the dream attempts to ameliorate the desolation that apparently informed his alienated adolescence and young manhood."[8] But images of abandonment leak into the dream through the actions of Sara, Borg's adolescent love, who opens the dream kissing his brother Sigfrid in the wild strawberry patch and closes it disappearing behind an arbor.

The dreamer's feeling of emptiness and sadness as the dream fades is emblematic of, but not identical with, the real contents of Borg's repressed emotions. While young Sara's desertion to marry Borg's brother, prefigured in the stolen kiss, was no doubt painful, it is not this pain that is deeply buried and festering. We see the symbolic kiss not as through the eyes of a devastated adolescent suitor, but through the mind's eye of a nostalgic 76-year-old to whom both Sigfrid and Sara appear to be children playing at love rather than truly guilty adulterers. A comparison between their lighthearted banter and stolen kiss on the one hand, and Borg's wife's literal violent adultery later in the film highlights the indulgent affection the old man feels for these phantoms from his youth. Furthermore, Borg is readily able

[6]In *Ingmar Bergman Directs* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), p. 20.

[7]"Bergman on Victor Sjöstrom," *Sight and Sound* (Spring 1960), p. 98.

[8]Greenberg, p. 183.

to tell the young hitchhiker Sara that her namesake was his first love, and that she married his brother. At this point in the journey, Borg's dreams contain imagery that is not terribly threatening along with some sadness and emptiness that point in the direction of his repressed emotions. His lost love Sara's importance in his unconscious psychological landscape is as a safe vehicle onto which to project his feelings about a desertion that will remain too painful and frightening to image directly: the loss of his mother's protection.

Greenberg has argued that Borg suffered from "an inadequate, frankly hostile mothering" and a "distant and unsupportive" father. To deal with this, asserts Greenberg, an identity transfer has taken place between the mother and Sara, as well as her successors in Borg's adult life.[9] It is interesting to note that in Bergman's own family, his mother was, in his opinion, guilty of Sara's sin. He told Peter Cowie that his feelings for his mother were ambivalent because "when I was young I felt that she loved my brother more than me, and I was jealous."[10] Greenberg writes:

> Borg deals with the real Sara as if she were the mother, to whom intimacy was anathema. By his unyielding, guilt provoking and distancing behavior, he exacted talion vengeance against his mother, displacing on to all innocent women in his life.[11]

Sara complains in the dream that all Borg wants to do is read poetry, talk about the afterlife, play duets, kiss in the dark, and talk about sin, and it is this behavior that drives her to the more fun-loving and sensual Sigfrid. It is difficult, however, to see Borg's behavior as "talion vengeance." Rather, it seems to suggest that he simply does not know how to interact properly in an intimate relationship.

Surely Borg's relationship with his wife is an example of this inability to form an adequate bond, and the particular nature of this relationship is a useful index to the protective transformations that have taken place in Borg's psyche. Both Borg himself and his son Evald verify that the Borgs' marriage was "a nice imitation of hell." What has gone unremarked is the anomaly between two descriptions that Borg gives us of the marriage. To Marianne, he claims that it was very much like that of the Almans, a couple to whom they offer a ride after a car accident incapacitates the Almans' car. The couple is so abusive to each other both verbally and physically that Marianne puts them out of the car! But Borg's unconscious gives us quite a different, and perhaps even more pathological description of the actual interaction between himself and his wife. In his dream, he watches her commit adultery and afterwards, hears her tell her lover what will ensue:

> Now I will go home and tell this to Isak and I know exactly what he'll say: Poor little girl, how I pity you. As if he were God himself. And then I'll cry and say: Do you really feel pity for me? And he'll say: I feel infinitely sorry for you, and then I'll cry some more and ask him if he can forgive me. And then he'll say: You shouldn't ask forgiveness from me. I have nothing to forgive. But he doesn't mean a word of it, because he's completely cold. And then he'll suddenly be very tender and I'll yell at him that he's not really sane and that such hypocritical nobility is sickening. And then he'll say he'll bring me a sedative and that he understands everything. And then I'll say that it's his fault that I am the way I am, and then he'll look very sad and will say that he is to blame. But he doesn't care about anything because he's completely cold.[12]

While both marriages are infernal, and while Borg surely recognized the underlying structure of his union in the Almans' verbal assaults and physical abuse, his actual behavior is nothing like theirs. To describe what he offers his wife as "condescending self-righteous forgiveness" as some critics have done is to misread both the words in the scene and the contours of Borg's pathology throughout the film of which this interaction with his wife is a vivid exemplifier.[13]

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[9]Greenberg, p. 189.

[10]Cowie (1982), p. 239.

[11]Greenberg, p. 188.

[12]*Four Screenplays of Ingmar Bergman*, trans. Lars Malmstrom and David Kushner (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), pp. 266-267. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

[13]See Mosley, p. 77 and Wood, p. 78.

Forgiveness is a different thing from the pity that Borg offers his wife, since forgiveness implies the acknowledgement of contact — one's pain at the other's hands — while pity acknowledges no contact, but only that the other suffers. By withholding the blame that she is clearly asking for, he withholds contact. This failure of interaction with Karin is a paradigm for all of Borg's intimate relationships, all of which are built on the model of his relationship with his mother. But it is not the desire for vengeance that keeps Borg from establishing contact; rather, it is fear of his own judgments.

The film opens with a voice-over narration in which Borg begins the retelling of events that comprise the film. In describing his solitary life, he discusses his attitude toward judgment:

> . . . if for some reason I would have to evaluate myself, I am sure that I would do so without shame or concern for my reputation. But if I should be asked to express an opinion about someone else, I would be considerably more cautious. *There is the greatest danger in passing such judgments. In all probability one is guilty of errors, exaggerations, even tremendous lies. Rather than commit such follies, I remain silent. As a result, I have of my own free will withdrawn almost completely from society, because one's relationship with other people consists mainly of discussing and evaluating one's neighbor's conduct. Therefore I have found myself rather alone in my old age* [emphasis added].
>
> (p. 215)

The dream examiner who accompanies Borg during his third dream states that although Borg is guilty of the serious offenses of indifference, selfishness, and lack of consideration, these are the smaller offenses. The major sins are those of incompetence and guilt (pp. 263-264). In his interaction with his wife, as well as elsewhere in the film, Borg's incompetence is expressed behaviorally as unwillingness to acknowledge, which he understands as unwillingness to render a dangerously exaggerated hostile judgment. In all of his relationships with women, he repeats the structure he learned as a child: the woman abandons him — by marrying his brother or by taking a lover or, in the case of his mother, by withholding sufficient love — and for fear of the magnitude of his condemnation, he withdraws rather than render judgment that would both certify the enormity of the crime committed against him, and equally unacceptable, would unleash rage on the person he loves. In order to avoid the cataclysmic expression of his rage — which would indeed resemble the Almans' behavior — he believes that he must remain outside of intimate human community. And this, of course, is the beginning of a vicious cycle since the refusal of intimacy actually causes subsequent abandonments which raise new occasions for judgment, reinforcing his fear and guilt.

In Bergman's universe, the decision to avoid causing or suffering pain through the refusal to interact is always a grave error. As Paisley Livingston has noted, "perhaps Bergman's most fundamental assumption [is that] identity is never established in isolation, but is the product of a basic, inescapable reciprocity."[14] If, as the second dream suggests, Borg has no sense of interaction with his family, then he has been deprived of his ability to form a true core of personal identity. His failure to enter into his relationships in later life is less the product of a conscious or even subconscious decision than it is the result of his incompetence, of his underdeveloped sense of self which in turn exaggerates his lack of confidence in the validity of his judgments.

At the beginning of the third dream, during which Borg faces his repressed pain most directly, Sara holds a mirror up to his face, forcing him to confront himself. Livingston points out that "whenever Bergman sends one of his characters to a mirror, he includes in the scene those who mediate the vision of self."[15] In this dream, Sara represents a composite which includes herself, but of which the primary persona is Borg's mother, the first significant other to whom he might have looked for self definition. Greenberg has noted:

> In the second dream, Borg depicted [Sara] as she probably existed: a simple, vital girl confused and angry with his adolescent puritanism. But now the pitiless face she shows is that of the mother, monumentally self-absorbed, and glacially aloof.[16]

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[16]Greenberg, p. 187.

[15]Livingston, p. 51.

[14]In *Ingmar Bergman and the Rituals of Art* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 51. See also Diane Borden, "Bergman's Style and the Facial Gem," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 2, No. 1 (1977), p. 43, for a discussion of this aspect of Bergman's vision.

Sara, in the mother's persona, tells Borg of her intention to marry Sigfrid, which is an echo of the original abandonment, and for the first time, he admits pain. As in the second dream, he is more willing to acknowledge the pain of Sara's abandonment than of his mother's. The next image, the next step toward mental health, comes much closer to the more significant wound. Sara runs to Sigbritt's baby, and the lines she delivers are archetypically those that express a mother's desire to shield her child:

> My poor little one, you shall sleep quietly now. Don't be afraid of the wind. Don't be afraid of the birds, the jackdaws and the seagulls. Don't be afraid of the waves from the sea. I'm with you. I'm holding you tight. Don't be afraid little one. Soon it will be another day. No one can hurt you; I am with you; I am holding you.
>
> (p. 260)

Those things from which the girl promises to shield the infant are precisely those images which, in both *Wild Strawberries* and *The Seventh Seal*, symbolize all dreadful, uncontrollable forces from which no mother can, in fact, shield her child. The screenplay and the film treat Isak's reaction in different ways befitting the differences between a linguistic and a visual medium. In the screenplay, Borg narrates:

> But her voice was sorrowful and tears ran down her cheeks without end. The child became silent, as if it were listening, and I wanted to scream until my lungs were bloody.
>
> (p. 260)

In the film, Isak's devastation is rendered first by his forlorn expression as he stands between the empty baby cradle and an ominous dead branch; later it is more fully expressed by a physical wound. The dream-mother's promise to shield her baby from all that threatens is one that no flesh and blood mother can possibly keep. The infant who responds to her soothing promise grows quiet while Isak, who knows better, wants to scream until his lungs are bloody. The wound to Isak's hand that comes soon after is perhaps the most disturbing moment in the scene; the decision to change the injuring instrument from a shard of glass, as specified in the screenplay, to a nail adds a symbolic dimension to Borg's experience in place of the purely emotional agony of the scream. Like Christ, and like many of Bergman's protagonists, Borg here faces the horror of human existence, the horror of separation from the source of solace and protection in the face of all the trials a human being must face, not the least of which is death. This, then, is the root of the psychological damage, and without an adequate ego, Borg had remained unable to cope until, through the agency of his dream, he faced and acknowledged the injury.

Bergman has explained that the final dream of the film, in which the old man finds his parents, was

> meant only to say that we go away from our parents and then back to our parents. Suddenly one understands them, recognizes them as human beings, and in that moment one has grown up.[17]

The last dream sequence is a more mature, as well as a more honest, version of the first family dream. In the final dream, as in the earlier one, Isak's parents are absent, but here, he creates no fiction that he is with them. Instead, with the help of Sara who has already functioned as the identity-defining significant other, he finds them, but he is not reunited with them. In fact, it is only in this dream that the dreamer specifically faces not only his isolation but also the identity of the injuring parties; the screenplay clarifies the film's silent imagery:

> I looked for a long time at the pair [his mother and father] on the other side of the water. I tried to shout to them but not a word came from my mouth . . . In the prow [of the old yacht] stood Uncle Aron, . . . and I saw my brothers and sisters and aunt and Sara, who lifted up Sigbritt's little boy. I shouted to them, but they didn't hear me. I dreamed that I stood by the water and shouted toward the bay, but the warm summer breeze carried away my cries and they did not reach their destination. Yet I wasn't sorry about that; I felt, on the contrary, rather lighthearted.
>
> (p. 285)

Nothing has changed in Borg's situation except that he has laid to rest the demons in his subconscious through the acceptance of his own experi-

[17]In Hollis Alpert, "Style is the Director," *Saturday Review* (December 23, 1961), p. 40.

ence. His warmth toward Marianne at the end of the film is not the product of any sudden awareness of the importance of personal relationships, but rather shows his ability to feel and act appropriately on the affection that he expressed for her earlier in the film. Nowhere does the film suggest a change in conscious values. The voice-over narration which begins the film, in fact, states explicitly that Borg is still misanthropic, still hates emotional outburts, and is still unaware of what he has been hiding from himself (p. 216).

In Bergman's canon, it is not unusual to find that a film reverses or responds to the premise of the film immediately preceding it. *Winter Light*, for example, reverses the comforting ending of *Through a Glass Darkly*, making explicit the relationship between earthly parents and children on the one hand and God the father and his human children on the other.[18] A similar but inverse relationship obtains between *Wild Strawberries* and *The Seventh Seal* which immediately preceded it. In *The Seventh Seal*, the existential Christian bewails his abandonment by God the father to the ravages of death. Although the film ends on the regenerative note — the salvation of Mia and Jof and their infant son — the knight himself, whose struggle has been the primary focus of the film, finds little consolation. The memory of sharing milk and wild strawberries with Mia and Jof, which he had said would be an adequate sign, has clearly not been adequate to convince him of God's existence and mercy since he faces death still uncertain of anything except his own fear and ignorance. In *Wild Strawberries*, Bergman gives us a portrait of a man who, because of a different kind of abandonment and suffering, has never developed a capacity for intimacy and human warmth, but in this film, the central character experiences reconciliation if not regeneration. A more subtle and ironic reversal also takes place between the young families that occupy secondary roles. Although Marianne's warmth and understanding will be one of her unborn child's enormous advantages in the struggle for a healthy emotional life, the child is far from safe. His father Evald has yet to achieve his own maturity, to forgive his own father, and that burden will fall on his child in the form of inadequate interaction. This child, too, will probably suffer the family illness.[19] Paradoxically, only Evald's solution — abortion — would have assured the child's safety; only the absence of life insures the absence of pain. If he is born, the child's hope resides in his own struggle to achieve maturity by facing and suffering the life-trials from which his parents will be unable to shield him. *Wild Strawberries* is more tender and lyrical in tone than most of Bergman's work, but it is consistent with the notion expressed more grimly elsewhere that to live is to risk and suffer, and that salvation and grace are obtainable only through the acceptance of pain.

Twenty years later, in September 1977 Bergman began to shoot *Autumn Sonata*. In this film,

[18]Bergman himself pointed this out to Charles Samuels in a 1971 interview. See Samuels' *Encountering Directors* (New York: Putnam's, 1972), p. 185.

[19]Bergman seems to have intended the cycle to be broken through Marianne's intervention, but he admits that "all this business about Evald and his father is so tremendously personal, I can't sort it out. Nor can I sort out the relationship between Isak Borg and his old mother." See Stig Bjorkman, Torsten Manns, Jonas Sima, *Bergman on Bergman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 148.

Charlotte, a successful concert pianist, visits the home of her older daughter, Eva, after the death of the mother's long-time companion. The visit is the first meeting between mother and daughter in seven years. Almost immediately upon her arrival, Charlotte is surprised and horrified to learn that her younger daughter, Helena, who is suffering from a degenerative disease and whom she had put in an institution many years earlier, is now living with Eva and her husband, a minister. Late one night after a nightmare awakens Charlotte, the two women confront each other under the influence of wine. In the morning, Charlotte flees.

The two films resemble each other in a number of ways. In both cases, the mother is presented as the actively injuring party while the father's crime is passivity. In *Autumn Sonata,* the father and daughters stay at home quietly, almost silently suffering while Charlotte pursues her career and at least one love affair. Both deal with the subsequent personality deformities suffered by the children, including the failure to develop adequate egos. Specific imagery from the earlier film also appears in the later film. In both, nightmares include a horrifying meeting of the dreamer's hand with a hand belonging to a terrifying extension of the self; in Isak's case, an image of his own dead person tries to pull him into a coffin, while in Charlotte's an ambiguous other who might represent Helena terrifies her with a caress, first of her hand and then of her face. The earlier film's solipsistic embrace is the mirror image of Charlotte's horror of affection, particularly Helena's affection since, as Peter Cowie has noted, "[t] he imperfection of Helena would have marred the studied perfection of Charlotte's career image," to say nothing of her private self image.[20] In both films, the mothers suffer physical ailments in the middle of their bodies that are related to their roles as mothers; Charlotte's lower back problem is the remains of a serious injury that sent her home temporarily to mother her daughters, thus associating motherhood with injury, while Mrs. Borg's cold abdomen is a metaphor for her style of mothering. Neither Charlotte nor Borg can picture their parents (although Borg finally achieves the ability to do so), and both are described as superficially charming but fundamentally cold.

It is useful for deepening our understanding of both films to take note of the transformations that have taken place in the structuring of elements between the two. In the first place, *Autumn Sonata* is far more explicit than the earlier film, bringing to the surface and to the literal level of the text much that is stated figuratively and available only through a hermeneutic reading of Borg's dreams in *Wild Strawberries.* Most obviously, Charlotte has literally abandoned her daughters while Borg's experience was not literal but figurative. Helena's literal illness is clearly a bringing to the surface of the text what was figuratively implied as Isak Borg's spiritual illness.[21] The modes of expression employed in the two films are related in similar ways. At the opposite end of the spectrum from the explicit dialogue in *Autumn Sonata,* Borg's family experience is encoded in symbolic, often inchoate, dream imagery or in the *absence* of expected images. Similarly, whereas Borg's inadequate ego must be inferred from his dreams and from other works in Bergman's canon, Victor reads from Eva's first book at the beginning of *Autumn Sonata:*

> People have to learn how to live and then practice every day. The difficulty lies in that I haven't found my identity. And so I grope blindly. If someone could love me as I am, I feel quite certain I might look at myself. Yet the mere likelihood of my having that experience seems so very distant.[22]

Later, Eva's speech to her mother resembles what commentators have suggested about the inherited nature of the Borg's family illness:

> Mother's injuries are carried over to the daughter. Mother's deepest frustrations are to be paid for by the daughter. Mother's unhappiness is to be the daughter's unhappiness. It's as though the umbilical cord had never been cut. Mama, is it so? Is the daughter's tragedy the mother's triumph? Mama? Is my grief your secret pleasure?

Finally, the question of forgiveness, which must be approached through interpretive analysis of *Wild Strawberries,* is clearly in the foreground of

[20]Cowie (1982), pp. 321-322.

[21]Cowie suggests that in *Autumn Sonata,* Helena is "a mere living symbol of Eva's incoherency and emotional paralysis" (p. 326).

[22]Dialogue from *Autumn Sonata* is quoted from the film itself.

Autumn Sonata. After accusing Charlotte of having caused Helena's illness, Eva condemns and Charlotte pleads:

> Eva: There can be no excuses. There can only be a single truth and a single lie. There can be no forgiveness.
> Charlotte: Can you find it in your heart to show forgiveness? I'll change myself. You'll teach me. Help me. I can't go on any longer. Your hatred is so terrible. Childish. Touch me at least. Help me.

In the letter she sends after her mother flees the parsonage, Eva asks to be forgiven for the attack and for her demands in general. The film ends on this request.

These changes, which highlight Bergman's increased clarity about the issues, are related to the transformations that have occurred in the director's personal stance in relation to elements in the film. In *Wild Strawberries,* Isak Borg, the abandoned child, is clearly related to his creator in a number of ways including his family experience and his dreaming of Bergman's dream.[23] *Autumn Sonata* takes the more complex position of investigating the experience of both parent and child, Charlotte and Eva, who, in Peter Cowie's vividly descriptive phrase "bestride the film."[24] Eva resembles Borg in a number of ways. She is the abandoned child with an insufficient sense of self who is therefore unable to love. The film focuses mainly on her confrontation first with her anger and then with her refusal and subsequent attempt to establish a relationship with her mother through forgiveness. Similarly, Charlotte resembles Borg's mother in her physical ailment and in her failure to provide adequately for her children. However, as an artist who pours into her work emotional sensitivity that might be better expended in life, Charlotte is at least as much an alter-ego for Bergman as is Eva, and she shares specific characteristics with Isak Borg. Neither Eva nor Evald appear to have developed charm like their parents' nor to have achieved their parents' worldly success. It is Charlotte, not Eva, who shares Borg's inability to picture his parents' faces. Like Borg, Charlotte engages our sympathy because we are brought into direct contact with the forces that have shaped her. We are privy to her own painful confession of her fears and inadequacies as a parent while we must infer almost everything about the elder Borgs. It is apparent, then, that in *Autumn Sonata,* Bergman returned to the structural foundation of *Wild Strawberries* with a vision clarified and modulated by twenty years of experience.

The most significant modulation has to do with the nature of the resolutions to which the two films bring their conflicts. The psychological center of *Autumn Sonata,* the confrontation between Charlotte and Eva under the influence of wine, is analogous to Borg's deepest penetration into his psyche through his third dream in which he confronts his pain. Both Borg and Charlotte are forced to face harsh accusations, and both interludes end in sorrow and abandonment, but in *Wild Strawberries,* the final dream is unambiguously serene. The analogous sections of *Autumn Sonata* are far more difficult to read.

Visually, this film is based on two-shots and parallel editing between Eva and Charlotte, which express the dilemma of their relationship. An outstanding example of the two-shot includes Eva's emotional experience of listening to her mother's interpretation of the Chopin prelude, their faces at right angles; while the contents of Eva's mind remain obscure, what is apparent is the intensity of the event, as her face reflects a series of strong emotions. Later, during the confrontation between the two women, their faces come together bathed in shadows, Eva's behind her mother's as if growing out of her mother's in a merging of identities more than reminiscent of similar shots between Liv Ullman and Bibi Andersson in *Persona.* These shots brilliantly suggest the strife between the women while highlighting their essential connection. Parallel editing is used in a related way, highlighting their emotional distance while exhibiting their similarity. In an amusing series of cuts, Eva at the dinner table and Charlotte in her room say almost identical words:

> Charlotte: What did I expect: What was it I so longed for?
> Eva: Why did she come I'd like to know. What was she looking for? And what did I expect?

Their minds are remarkably alike, and at the same time, both are completely wrong. Charlotte

[23]Bergman told Stig Bjorkman, et. al., that the first dream in *Wild Strawberries* in which Borg sees a coffin fall out of its carriage and break open at his feet was one of Bergman's own compulsive dreams. See p. 146.

[24]Cowie (1982), p. 319.

finds, in an almost slapstick sequence, that the shower does indeed work, contrary to her petulant speculations, and Eva's prediction about her mother's dinner costume and image is 180 degrees off target. These two techniques, the two-shot and parallel editing, come into play at the end of the film, and the expression of paradox to which they have been devoted underlies the ambiguity of the film's ending.

The *Persona*-like two-shot described above is the last use of that technique in the film, and it is conspicuous in its absence; from that point on, parallel editing and one-shots predominate as the distance between the two women increases. Throughout the film, Eva's face has been simpering and submissive, but when Charlotte turns to her and asks for forgiveness, it is suddenly firm and clear and hard, silently and emphatically condemning her vanquished opponent in alternating reverse-angle shots. Suddenly, Eva's cruelty is fully exposed, and Charlotte appears old, weak and pitiful — except that a third entity has been cut into the montage; Helena has crawled to the edge of the stairs, and her garbled cries, "Mama! Come!" counterpoint Charlotte's plea and Eva's stony refusal. In a perfect circle, Eva can only see Helena's need, Charlotte yearns for Eva, and Helena moans for Charlotte. Were each to turn, contact could be made; in that impossible perfect world, Charlotte would turn from Eva's hatred to embrace Helena, and Eva could then forgive her mother and take Charlotte into her arms, each giving rather than demanding, each loving rather than hating. What complicates the film's ending is not this scene itself with its characters locked into separate frames, but rather the final stark parallel images of Eva and Charlotte as Eva's letter is read.

The letter says that Eva can't forgive herself, that she has wronged Charlotte with her demands and her hatred, and that although it might be too late for a reconciliation, she will never let go of Charlotte, but will keep on trying to make contact. The words are all we could ask, and were we to read only the words, we might see the same kind of ending here that we saw in *Wild Strawberries*, the achievement of clarity and reconciliation. But throughout the film, words have been labeled as suspect. Eva says of Victor's love words that they have no meaning for her, and more to the point, Eva has told her mother that her greatest childhood agony involved hearing words of love that didn't match her mother's eyes. Before the reading of the letter we are re-

minded of the film's beginning with a shot almost identical to the one which opened it, a long shot of Eva at the window, accompanied by Victor's voice-over explanation to the viewer. While Victor and then Eva read the letter, Eva's face has once again become simpering and weak, the same face that she has shown throughout the film except during the confrontation. Her sincerity is not in doubt here, but her self-awareness is.

Throughout the film, distance has given Eva the illusion of maturity and strength. Before her mother's arrival, she had told Victor that she looked forward to playing the piano for Charlotte, but it is she who forces her mother to humiliate her with a lesson that highlights Charlotte's far greater skill. Even during the visit, when Eva is alone with Victor, she seems to gain in adult stature and self-confidence which Charlotte's overpowering presence demolishes. There is little reason to suspect, therefore, that another visit, another confrontation, would result in anything different.

The midnight confrontation and this letter are separated in the film by another instructive set of parallel sequences. Eva sits alone in a graveyard, communicating with her dead son Eric while Charlotte flees by train with her agent Paul. Eva had tried to explain to her mother earlier in the film that she could feel Eric's presence, his breath on her cheek, as he reached out to her from a different reality. In trying to make Charlotte understand, Eva says that she believes in

> an infinite and limitless number of realities, not simply the reality we always can perceive with our limited senses, but such myriad realities that stream and flow over all around, inside us, and outside us.

Here in the graveyard, she speaks to the dead child about her mother and about her sadness, and asks him if he's stroking her cheek. But to her mother, she has said, "There can be only one truth and one lie. There can be no forgiveness." It is only in relation to the dead that Eva can open herself to the notion of realities beyond her understanding. The presence of her living mother seems to shut her into the single-windowed room of her resentment; meanwhile, on the train, Paul smiles and caresses Charlotte, but he is absolutely and quite unnaturally silent, a fact which the scene is specifically constructed to highlight since he is given a number of opportunities to respond to Charlotte verbally. Intercutting between these two sequences forces us to compare them; what is strikingly similar is that both women feel warmth and love in the presence of others who take no active part in the interaction. For these damaged women, the perfect other is almost contentless — egoless. While Eva's letter to Charlotte is being read, both women's faces appear on the screen utterly naked against a white, flat background. In other words, each is imaged completely, absolutely alone.

In reflecting backwards from *Autumn Sonata* to *Wild Strawberries,* then, we might legitimately question the stability of Isak Borg's peace of mind. With the exception of his relationship with Marianne, Borg's reconciliations have only been across enormous gulfs: with his parents, he has made peace across decades rather than face to face, and with his father, the gulf spans death. Of the two Saras who have figured prominently in his experience, his former love never enters into his present existence, and the young hitchhiker's promise to love him always is obviously merely sentimental nonsense. Even his request that the young people keep in touch is delivered to himself, too softly for them to hear even if they *would* have taken him seriously.

Bergman has said that after *Wild Strawberries,* he needed to work with someone else's material "for professional reasons. That is I had to get away for a while from what I, personally, was thinking, feeling, and making."[25] His next film, *Brink of Life,* is therefore based on a story by Ulla Isaksson. If beneath its surface *Wild Strawberries* implies, as does *Autumn Sonata,* that forgiveness is only possible at a distance, then it is not surprising that Bergman felt he had reached an impasse. Distance between individuals and between human beings and their God is the source of agony. If it then becomes the only possible condition for forgiveness, then the solution is at best suspect.[26] □

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[25]Alpert, p. 40.

[26]I would like to express my gratitude to my colleague, Professor Martin Doudna, for his editorial assistance in the preparation of this essay.

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Walter McDonald

ON A SATURDAY AFTERNOON IN THE COUNTRY

Not once in the canyon west of here
had we ever killed a thing. And so
the afternoon we saw the buzzards
swirling like a whirlwind,
we knew they had found what they needed

without us. We sat on the screened-in porch
picking them off with our fingers,
eyes squinted against the sun
they soared across, dull black against
the light, the blackest we'd ever seen,

and on a day when nothing
was happening to us, rocking,
one of us thinking of something
to say to break the silence,
shelling our black-eyed peas for supper,

when down in the canyon something
came into our minds, something stiff
and final, teeth bared and grinning,
something that made it that far
up the canyon, this time.

Georges Bataille

SACRIFICES

Translated by Cecile Lindsay

I exist — suspended in a realized void, suspended from my own anguish — different from any other being and such that the diverse events that may affect any other and not *myself* cruelly expel this *self* from a total existence.[1] But at the same time, I think about my advent in the world, which depended upon the birth and the conjunction of a certain man and woman, and then upon the moment of their conjunction: indeed, there exists a unique moment in connection with the possibility of me. Thus there arises the infinite improbability of this advent in the world, for if the slightest difference had occurred in the course of the successive events of which I am the conclusion, in the place of this *me* wholly avid of being *me*, there would have been *"an other."*

The imperative existence that I am plays across the immense realized void that is constituted by this infinite improbability. A simple presence suspended above such an immensity is comparable to the exercise of an empire, as if the very void in the middle of which I exist demanded that I exist: *I* and the anguish of this *I*. The immediate demand of nothingness would thus imply not undifferentiated being, but rather the painful improbability of the unique *self*.

Empirical knowledge of the communal structure of this *self* and other *selves* becomes a nonsense because, in this void where I exercise my empire, the very essence of the *I* that I am lies in the fact that no conceivable existence can replace it: the total improbability of my advent in the world makes imperative my absolute heterogeneity.

An historical representation of the formation of the *self* (considered as part of all that is an object of knowledge) and of its imperative or impersonal modes vanishes *a fortiori*, leaving only the violence and avidity of the empire of the *self* over the void where it is suspended. At will, even in a prison, the *self* that I am realizes all that preceded it or that surrounds it — be it life or simple being — as a void submitted to its own anxious empire.

The act of supposing the existence of a possible and even necessary point of view requiring the imprecision of such a revelation (this supposition is implied by the recourse to expression) in no way invalidates the immediate reality of the experience lived by the imperative presence of the *self* in the world. This lived experience *also* constitutes an inevitable point of view, a direction in which the being is impelled by the avidity of its own movement.

II

A choice between contrary representations would have to be linked to the inconceivable solution to the problem of *what exists: what exists* as fundamental existence liberated from the forms of appearance? The hasty and unreflective answer is most often made as if the question had been *what is imperative* (what is of moral value) rather than *what exists*. In other instances — when philosophy is deprived of its object — the no less hasty answer is the perfect and uncomprehending evasion (and not the destruction) of the problem: when it is matter that is represented as fundamental existence.

From that point on, however, it is possible to perceive — in the given and relatively clear limits beyond which doubt itself disappears along with the other possibilities — that, since the meaning of any positive judgment about fundamental existence is indistinguishable from a judgment on fundamental value, consciousness remains free to constitute the *self* as the basis of all value without confusing this *self* as value with fundamental existence, and even without inscribing

[1]The *moi* forms a litany repeated throughout Bataille's text, and is a word that frustrates translation, as it has in English no single equivalent. I have chosen to translate it primarily as "self," but also as "myself," "I," and "me." Almost invariably italicized in the version of "Sacrifices" appearing in the *Oeuvres complètes*, the *moi* in my translation is similarly signaled. -tr.

this value within the confines of a reality that is manifest but incapable of proof.

Since the *self* is potentially any other by virtue of its constitutive improbability, it has, in the course of normal research, been expelled from "what exists" as the arbitrary but eminent image of non-existence: it is as an *illusion* that the self answers life's extreme demand. In other words, as an impasse exterior to "what exists," an impasse in which all the extreme values of life merge with no other possible conclusion, the self in no way belongs to the reality that it transcends, although it is constituted in the presence of this reality. The *self* is neutralized (ceases to be *any other*) to the extent that it ceases to be conscious of the accomplished improbability of its advent in the world, a consciousness which took as its point of departure the fundamental lack of connection between the self and the world. For in as much as it is explicitly known — represented as the interdependence and chronological development of objects — the world, as the integral development of "what exists," must indeed appear necessary and probable.

In an arbitrary order where each element of the consciousness of self is separated from the world (which is absorbed in the convulsive projection of the *self*), and to the extent that philosophy, abandoning any hope of logical construction, reaches, as if it were a conclusion, a representation of relations defined as improbable (and which are only the middle terms of the ultimate improbability) — to that extent it is possible to represent this *self* as anxious or tearful. The *self* could equally be cast back, in the case of a painful erotic choice, toward a *self* which is other than itself yet other than any other, and thus its painful consciousness of its separation from the world could increase *ad infinitum*. But it is only at the frontier of death that the rending which constitutes the very nature of the *self* — a *self* immensely free and transcending "what exists" — is violently revealed.

In death's approach, there appears a structure of the *self* that is entirely different from the "abstract self," which is discovered not by an active reflection reacting to imposed limits, but by a logical investigation taking in advance the form of its object.[2] This other specific structure of the *self* is also distinct from moments of personal existence which are encapsulated by reason of their practical activity and are neutralized into the logical appearance of "what exists." The self only attains its specificity and its integral transcendence in the form of the "*self* that dies."

But this revelation of the *self* that dies is not given each time that the simple fact of death is anguishingly revealed. This revelation supposes the imperative completion and the sovereignty of the being at the moment that this being is projected into the unreal time of death. It supposes both the demand and the boundless failure of imperative life, as the consequence of the pure seduction and heroic form of the *self:* this revelation thus attains the wrenching subversion of the *god* who dies.

The god's death is produced not as metaphysical deterioration (dealing with the common measure of being), but as the absorption of a life avid of imperative joy into the heavy animality of death. The stained appearance of the torn body guarantees the integrality of the disgust into which life subsides.

In this revelation of the self's free divine nature, the obstinate direction of life's avidity for death (as it is given in every form of game or dream) no longer appears as a need for annihilation, but as the pure avidity of being *me,* with death or the void constituting only the domain where, by its very collapse, an empire of the *self* rises up to infinity, an empire which must be represented as vertigo. This *self* and this empire attain the purity of their hopeless nature, and thus fulfill the pure hope of the *self* that dies: the hope of a drunken man, pushing the boundaries of dream beyond all conceivable limits.

There disappears at the same time — not exactly as an empty appearance, but rather as the corollary of a negated world, a world founded on the mutual contingency of its parts — the beloved shadow of the divine person.

It was the will to purify love of all preliminary conditions that postulated the unconditional existence of God as the supreme object of self-abandoning ecstasy. But the conditional counterpoint of divine majesty as a principle of political authority involves affective movement in the connection of oppressed existences with moral imperatives: the counterpoint returns that affective movement to the banality of an applied life where the *self* perishes as *self.*

When the man-god appears and dies both as

[2]In the *Oeuvres complètes* version of "Sacrifices," the editor notes that the text reading "réagissant toute limite opposée" (reacting every proposed limit) should probably be corrected to read "réagissant à toute limite opposée" (reacting to every proposed limits), a suggestion I have adopted in my translation. -tr.

the decay and the redemption of the supreme person, revealing that life will reply to avidity only on the condition that it be lived in the mode of the *self* that dies, he nevertheless evades the pure imperative of this *self:* he submits it to the applied (moral) imperative of God, and, so doing, constitutes the *self* as existence *for others,* for God, and moral value alone as existence *for itself.*

In an infinity ideally bright and empty, and so chaotic that it hides the very absence of chaos, there begins the anxious loss of life. But life is only lost — at the limit of the last breath — *precisely for this infinite void.* With the self rising to a pure imperative, living-dying (for the sake of) a boundless, bottomless abyss, this imperative is formulated as "die like a dog" in the strangest part of the being; it turns away from any application to the world.

In this fact that life and death are passionately devoted to the subsidence of the void, the subordination of slave to master is no longer revealed, but life and void [*vie et vide*] merge like lovers in the final convulsive moments. Nor is burning passion the acceptance and realization of nothingness: what is called nothingness is still a corpse; what is called brightness is blood that flows and coagulates.

And just as the obscene (liberated) nature of their organs links the embraced lovers more passionately to each other, the impending horror of the corpse and the present horror of blood more obscurely link the *self* that dies to an empty infinitude which is itself projected as corpse and as blood.

III

In this hasty and still obscure revelation of an ultimate region of being which philosophy, like any general human determination, achieves only in spite of itself (like a mistreated corpse), the fundamental problem of being was suspended while the aggressive subversion of the *self* accepted "illusion" as an adequate description of its nature. Any possible mysticism — that is, any specific revelation to which reverence may have given form — was thereby rejected. In the same way, the imperative avidity of life, ceasing to accept as its domain the narrow circle of logically ordered appearances, had at the summit of its avid elevation only an unknown death and the reflection of that death in the arid night as its object.

Christian meditation before the cross was no longer rejected as in simple hostility, but was, rather, assumed in a total hostility demanding a bodily struggle and embrace with the cross. And thus this meditation can and must be lived as the death of the *self,* not as respectful adoration, but with the avidity of sadistic ecstasy, the transport of a *blind* madness which alone attains the passion of pure imperative.

In the course of the ecstatic vision, at the limit of the blindly lived death on the cross and the *lamma sabachtani,* the object is finally revealed, in a chaos of light and shadow, as *catastrophe.* But this catastrophic object is neither God nor nothingness; it is the object that love, incapable of freeing itself other than outside itself, requires in order to utter the cry of a rent existence.

In this postulation of the object as *catastrophe,* consciousness lives the annihilation which constitutes it as a vertiginous and infinite fall; thus consciousness hasn't *catastrophe* merely as its object: its very structure is *catastrophe;* it is itself absorption in the nothingness which supports it while at the same time slipping away. Something immense is liberated on all sides with the amplitude of a cataract; it surges from the unreal regions of infinity and yet subsides there in a movement of inconceivable force. The glass which suddenly slits the throat in the shattering of telescoped trains is the expression of this imperative, implacable — and yet already annihilated — advent.

In ordinary circumstances, time appears to be enclosed — for practical purposes annulled — in each permanence of form and in each succession that can be perceived as a permanence. Each movement capable of inscription within an order abolishes the time absorbed in a system of measure and equivalence: thus time, having become virtually reversible, perishes — and with time, all existence.

However, burning love — consuming an existence loudly exhaled — has no horizon other than a catastrophe, a scene of terror that delivers time from its bonds.

Catastrophe — lived time — must be represented ecstatically not as an old man, but as a skeleton armed with a scythe: a glacial and gleaming skeleton to whose teeth cling the lips of a severed head. As a skeleton, it is accomplished destruction, but it is an armed destruction rising to the level of imperative purity.

Destruction corrodes deeply, and thus purifies sovereignty itself. The imperative purity of time is opposed to God, whose skeleton hides behind

golden robes, beneath a crown and a mask; the divine mask and sweetness express the application of an imperative form (one presenting itself as providence) in the management of political oppression. But within divine love there is infinitely revealed the chilling gleam of a sadistic skeleton.

Revolt — its face distorted by amorous ecstasy — tears away God's naive mask, and oppression falls to pieces in the shattering of time. Catastrophe is that by which a nocturnal horizon is set ablaze, that for which rent existence enters into terror. Catastrophe is Revolution; it is time delivered from all chains; it is pure change; it is the skeleton come forth from the corpse as from a cocoon and sadistically living the unreal existence of death.

IV

Thus it is that the nature of time as the object of an ecstasy is revealed as consonant with the ecstatic nature of the *self* that dies. For both are pure change and both take place in the realm of an illusory existence.

But if the avid, obstinate question "what exists?" still traverses the immense disorder of living thought, in the mode of the *self* that dies or of the catastrophe of time, what will be the meaning, at this moment, of the answer: "Time is but an empty infinity"? — or of any other answer refusing time a being?

Or what will be the meaning of the opposite answer: "Being is time"?

More clearly than in a system limited to the narrow materializations of order, the problem of the being of time can be elucidated in a disorder embracing the whole of conceivable forms. First of all, the attempt at a dialectical construction of the contradictory answers is rejected as opting to avoid the rending implications of any problem.

Time is not the synthesis of being and nothingness if being and nothingness are found only in time and are only arbitrarily separated notions. Indeed, there is neither isolated being nor isolated nothingness; there is time. But to affirm the existence of time is an empty affirmation in the sense that this affirmation gives less the vague attribute of existence to time than the nature of time to existence; that is, the affirmation empties the notion of existence of its vague and limitless content, while at the same time infinitely emptying it of any content whatsoever.

Time's existence does not even demand the objective postulation of time as such: this existence posited in ecstasy means only the flight and collapse of any object that understanding sought to give itself both as a value and as a stable object. Time's existence projected arbitrarily into an objective domain is only the ecstatic vision of a catastrophe destroying that which founds that very domain. Not that the domain of objects is necessarily, like the *self*, infinitely destroyed by time itself, but because existence grounded in the *self* rises up there destroyed, and because the existence of things is only an impoverished one compared to the existence of the *self*.

The existence of things, such as it takes on for the *self* the character (and projects the absurd shadow) of preparations for capital punishment, cannot contain the death it brings, but is itself projected in this death that contains it.

To affirm the illusory existence of the *self* and of time (which is not only the structure of the self but the object of its erotic fantasy) does not, therefore, mean that the illusion must be submitted to the judgment of things whose existence is fundamental, but that fundamental existence must be projected within the illusion that contains it.

The being that in human terms is *myself* and whose advent in the world — across a space peopled by stars — had been infinitely improbable, nevertheless contains the world of the totality of things, by the very fact of its fundamental improbability (opposed to the structure of the real offering itself as such). The death that delivers me from the world that kills me *has* enclosed this real world within the irreality of the *self* that dies.[3] □

[3] A date (summer 1933) is indicated in the original manuscript of "Sacrifices."

Cecile Lindsay

BATAILLE TODAY: THE BATTLE FOR HISTORY

Nous devons à Bataille une grand part du moment où nous sommes . . .

—Michel Foucault

It is widely acknowledged that Georges Bataille's work in the first half of our century has been a powerful force and source in respect to the philosophy, literature, and critical theory of the century's second half. In his introduction to *Saving the Text*, Geoffrey Hartman lists Bataille among an intellectual "peer group" that includes Blanchot, Levinas, Lacan, Althusser, Barthes, Sollers, Deleuze, and Foucault, and to which, Hartman claims, Jacques Derrida has joined himself. The connection between Derrida and Bataille lies, according to Hartman, in a common analysis of the idea of power, as well as a way of thinking about textuality as an "antidote" to power, presence, and representation.[1] Yet Bataille today is certainly not associated, at least not immediately or spontaneously, with questions of power or politics. And, despite a good deal of spirited argument to the contrary, critics of Derrida's work tend commonly to see in it a certain a-historicity, a lack of attention to the political implications of history, or a refusal to deal at any length with Marxism.[2] Recent criticisms leveled at American "deconstructionists" such as Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, or Geoffrey Hartman similarly point to a culpable neglect of historical concerns, and, implicitly, of relations of power in the treatment of literature. Indeed, the word "history" becomes almost a battle cry shouted at what are seen as the forces of repression and forgetfulness. Derivative cries of "ideology" have more recently been launched on the American critical scene, as this or that theory, author, or work is labeled "fascistic." It is not at all my intent here to discredit ideological critique or to dismiss questions of history as they apply to every facet of culture, or to defend *en masse* those at whom these charges have been leveled. Rather, I would like to examine the case of Bataille and Derrida in their treatment of power, politics, and history as exemplary of the way in which contemporary polemics tend to forget origins and sources, falling prey at times to the very fault they discern in the work of others. In a little-read text from 1936 entitled "Sacrifices," Bataille's strategies and his lexicon anticipate not only a certain approach to textuality which, with Derrida, will come to be formulated and enunciated as *deconstructive*, but also anticipate and answer current polemics concerning the loss of history or the a-historicity in Derrida's work.

"Sacrifices" was first published by Editions G.L.M. in December, 1936. It accompanied a series of five etchings by Bataille's close friend André Masson; entitled "Mithra," "Minotaure," "Le Crucifié," "Osiris," and "Orphée," the etchings were organized around the theme of "gods who die," and presented scenes of ritual sacrifice or frenetic dismemberment. As Denis Hollier points out, Bataille would later claim that "man" was born with the advent of painting. In *Lascaux, or the Birth of Art: Prehistoric Painting*, Bataille proposed that the first signs of art are also the first signs of man. While the tools they left behind prove that ancient humans had intelligence and worked, it is only with the cave paintings that we glimpse the existence of an interior life to which art alone points. These paintings, like almost all prehistoric art, overwhelmingly depict animals rather than humans. And while these animals are represented naturalistically with great virtuosity on the cave walls of Lascaux,

[1]Geoffrey Hartman, *Saving the Text* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. xxv.

[2]As early as 1978 in "History and Writing," *Clio* I., no. 7, pp. 443-61, David Carroll argued that *Of Grammatology* comprises a history, while as recently as the 1980 colloquium that was held at Cerisy on Derrida's work, and whose results were published in *Les Fins de l'homme* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1981), Christopher Fynsk and Jacob Rogozinski, among others, pointed out the far-reaching political implications of Derrida's work.

the few human figures depicted there are, according to Bataille, ill-made, careless, grotesque, and semi-animal: "These Lascaux men forcefully transmitted to us the fact that, being men, they resembled us, but as a means for telling us so they left us innumerable pictures of the animality they were shedding — as though they had felt obliged to clothe a nascent marvel with the animal grace they had lost."[3] Bataille discusses in particular a figure called "The God of the Trois Frères," which presides over a huge tangle of animal engravings in the Trois Frères cave. The only painted figure in the cave, this "god" is composed of a human face, stag's ears, flowing beard, erect penis, and horse's tail. For Bataille, this figure depicts a pivotal point in the history of man as man: it presents the moment when man balanced between affirming the human work-order of reason or the "divine, impersonal element associated with the animal that neither works nor reasons" (*Lascaux,* p.121). It is when man began to define himself as man the producer and the reasoner that he could retrieve a lost divinity only in magic rituals where he temporarily donned the animality he was in the process of shedding.

Thus, as Hollier notes, painting comprises man's refusal to recognize himself in the reproduction of his own human form; man defines and produces himself as man at that point where no other existing thing can replace or reproduce his particular identity:

> This is a way of saying that man defines himself through this refusal of self in which he also produces himself: man begins at the point in which he refuses himself. He begins by refusing himself. Thus, from the beginning: a refusal to be reproduced, to allow oneself to be reproduced.[4]

The refusal to be replaced or reproduced thus inaugurates the birth of the notion of man, a notion whose demise has been predicted or at least considered by a philosophical genealogy extending from Nietzsche through Bataille to, most recently, Foucault and Derrida. With the album "Sacrifices," we return to just such inaugural moments from the perspective of the demise of the conception of man. The mythic scenes depicted in Masson's etchings present, along with the death of gods, the beginnings of man, of society, or of new epochs of prosperity, hope, holiness, or salvation for mankind. Bataille's text provides, in a sense, a lexical gloss of these inaugural sacrifices, as it considers that other advent, the birth of the unique, irreplaceable self in our metaphysical-political system.

Masson's five etchings link, through the theme of sacrifice, a variety of myths and religions which lie at the foundation of Western civilization and which ground that civilization in moments when gods die and men produce themselves. Mithra was the principal diety of a widespread Persian religion which lasted from the sixth century B.C. to the second century A.D. The fundamental aspect of Mithraic religion was the dualistic struggle it posited between the forces of good and evil; its followers were offered, in place of the anguish of finite existence, the hope of immortal life. Masson's etching depicts Mithra's inaugural sacrifice of a bull, from which sprang all good things on earth. The story of the man-bull, the Minotaur, similarly features a sacrifice beneficial to all mankind, as does the redemptive Christian sacrifice portrayed in "Le Crucifié." The legends of Orpheus and Osiris both attribute a type of immortality that survives the dismemberment and the dispersal of the individual god or man: even though the Thracian women tore his body to pieces, Orpheus's head continued to sing, and when it drifted to the island of Lesbos, an oracle was established there. In much the same way, the Egyptian god of the underworld, Osiris, came to represent the imperishability of life when the fragments of his rent and scattered body survived that catastrophe to become a sacred place. Each scene of sacrifice ostensibly presents an inaugural moment, a beginning of civilization, of prosperity, of immortality. In the context of Bataille's text, however, each scene of sacrifice also conjures a sovereign moment where victim and executioner communicate through death, and where the integrality of the sacrificer's self is no less rent than that of the sacrificed. Anguish, rending (déchirement), communication, catastrophe, sovereignty: Bataille's lexicon of the sacrifice in "Sacrifices" provides a means of access to the problem of the advent of the unique individual self in the world and its relation to otherness: both the radical

[3]Georges Bataille, *Lascaux, or the Birth of Art: Prehistoric Painting,* tr. Austryn Wainhouse (Lausanne: Skira, 1955), p. 115. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

[4]Denis Hollier, *La Prise de la Concorde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 140-41. Subsequent references will be cited in the text; all translations are mine.

otherness of all existence that is not the self, and the political, historical other of constituted society.

> Rien n'est tragique pour l'animal, qui ne tombe pas dans le piège du *moi*.
>
> —Bataille

"Sacrifices" proposes three versions of the *moi*, of the self. The text begins by contemplating the "painful improbability of the unique self": had the slightest change taken place in the series of circumstances and events culminating in the intercourse of a given man and woman, an *other* would have replaced this person that I am. The extreme fragility of my advent in the world is equalled only by my avidity for being precisely the improbable and irreplaceable being that I am. The immense improbability of my existence becomes a *realized*, or materialized void: it is represented by the infinite sum of all that I am not. My existence is thus like the anxious exercise of an empire, the empire that is comprised of all otherness. This "abstract self" is arrived at through a conscious, logical investigation; the abstract self is the consciousness of its own separation from and accomplished improbability in respect to all other existence.

Opposed to the anguished abstract self which conceives of itself as an impasse exterior to "what exists" is a "neutralized" self which is caught up in practical activity and in the logical forms of "what exists," i.e., the world of objects and phenomena. This self is neutralized because it is no longer aware of its constitutive precariousness; it ceases to feel its own radical improbability. Its world, too, must then necessarily appear necessary or at least extremely probable and plausible. This neutralized self is also termed the "applied self" in "Sacrifices," and is linked to the issue of authority and oppression in religious and political economies. The applied self is enrolled in the service of a naturalizing vision of existing social and political forms as well as philosophical systems and religious doctrines. The necessity of the self derives from an ideology of the naturalness of existence. This naturalness, Bataille maintains, is founded upon the postulation of "the unconditional existence of God as the supreme object of self-abandoning ecstasy."[5] It is God who ultimately founds the world, all of whose parts, including the self, are mutually contingent: "But the conditional counterpoint of divine majesty as a principle of political authority involves affective movement in the connection of oppressed existences with moral imperatives: the counterpoint returns that affective moment to the banality of an applied life where the *self* perishes as *self*" (II., p. 92). In the neutralized, naturalized closure of a political economy grounded ultimately in religious authority, the applied self exists solely in its hierarchical relations to others and to God, while only moral value (law, authority, power) comprises existence *for itself* (pour soi).

In an unpublished text entitled "Le Sacrifice," Bataille explains at greater length the connection between sacrifice, religion, and political economy.[6] In this essay, Bataille proposes that it is sacrifice which defines the human: while the warrior braves death with the simplicity of an unreasoning animal, it is the religious sacrificer who acknowledges and wills death by invariably visiting it upon a victim. Only through sacrifice can the sacrificer comprehend the tragic nature of human existence: "It was the brazier of sacrifice rather than the animality of war that produced these paradoxical beings who are men, these beings elevated by terrors that captivate them but which they nonetheless dominate" (II., p. 239). Through their recognition of sacrifice as a violence demanding that there be death, the earliest priests thus represented, for Bataille, the "only entirely virile attitude toward death" (II., p. 240). Bataille's existentialist vocabulary of authenticity is then turned against Christianity, where this "virile attitude" of early men of religion becomes hypocrisy and bad faith. The Christian priest no longer sees himself as the veritable sacrificer of his god, spilling the blood of Christ anew each morning. Instead, this sacrifice is now viewed as the result of human sin, and represents a turning away from the courageous affirmation of death toward hopes of immortality: "Thus the sacrificers, the priests, no longer linked to sacrifice the virtue of destruction, but rather a guarantee against destruction to come" (II., p. 240).

Bataille explains that the inevitability of this unfortunate direction taken by Western man lies in the profound connection between religion and economy, between religious practice and the

[5]Georges Bataille, "Sacrifices," *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. II. (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 93. Subsequent quotations from the *Oeuvres Complètes* will be cited in the text with volume and page number; all translations are mine.

[6]*Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. II., pp. 238-243. This text is part of a dossier compiled by Bataille and entitled *Essais de sociologie*.

means of production in a given society. Bataille links capitalism and market economies with a religious "economy of salvation," which offers mankind the hope of a beatific immortality. Favoring accumulation, these societies endorse as virtues leading to salvation all those practices which prevent waste: sobriety, continence; modesty, charity. Everything in an economy of salvation must be materially or spiritually useful. An "economy of sacrifice," on the other hand, would require that a major part of the society's production be wasted in prodigality: in feasts, orgies, or games. Even exchange would take the form of an aggressive destruction, or sacrifice, of wealth: the ritual of the potlatch.[7] In "Sacrifices," Bataille claims that social organization and systems of authority in the Western economy of salvation are ultimately grounded in God, "whose skeleton hides behind golden robes, beneath a crown and a mask; the divine mask and sweetness express the application of an imperative form (one presenting itself as providence) in the management of political oppression" (II., p. 95). The hypocrisy of Christian economy and its corollaries is opposed to the economy of sacrifice or, more broadly, to a "general economy" of *dépense* (expenditure) which informs all of Bataille's work.[8]

With economies of salvation and their ensuing social and political structures, the anguished "abstract self" is covered over by a neutralized "applied self" which sees the existent order, as well as its own existence, as natural and necessary. It is only in an economy of sacrifice that we can uncover what the "self" was before both the abstracting forces of logical investigation and the naturalizing forces of market economy shrouded its most fundamental impulses. Thus the economy of sacrifice, like figural art, returns us to the inaugural moment in history in which the human defines itself as human. Masson's scenes of sacrifice take us back to this primitive moment, but the economy of sacrifice they depict returns us at the same time to yet another inaugural instance: in the confrontation with death it purveys, sacrifice reveals to us what the self *is* in the moment when it sheds the trappings of civilization and reason, for "sacrifice is *par excellence* an attitude toward death" (II., p. 240).

Both Masson's etchings and Bataille's text play between these various inaugural moments: the birth of "man" in his own eyes, the dawn of a certain age in the history of Western society, and the revelatory instance when the self's deepest nature is uncovered for it through the vertiginous proximity of death. With death's approach, we read in "Sacrifices," a third structure of the self appears: the "moi qui meurt," the self that dies. This self is neither inserted unquestioningly into the "logical appearances of what exists," nor is it in painfully conscious separation from "what exists." Rather, the self that dies experiences an ecstatic freedom and transcendence of "what exists" when it is projected into the "unreal time of death" (II., p. 92). In a later essay entitled "Death is in Some Sense an Imposture," Bataille reworked many of the concerns, as well as much of the lexicon, of "Sacrifices."[9] Here Bataille returns to the moment of death's approach as that moment in which the *self* learns its true nature:

> It is only in dying, when no flight is possible, that I perceive the rending that constitutes my nature, and in which I have transcended "what exists." As long as I am alive, I settle for the daily routine, for compromise. I know myself to be a member of a given species, and I live more or less in agreement with a common reality; I take part in what necessarily exists, in what cannot be altered. But the self-that-dies abandons this agreement; it is this self that truly perceives what surrounds it as a void, and itself as defiance in the face of the void . . . .
> (V., pp. 85-6)

The moment of sacrifice provides, according to Bataille, the most essential paradigm of the constitution of the self in its relation to otherness.

[7]The potlatch is a ceremonial feast of the Indians of the Northwest coast of North America which entailed the public distribution of property. The lavishness displayed by the host toward his guests was intended to inspire even greater prodigality on the part of the guests, and was sometimes used to destitute a disliked person.

[8]See in particular Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserves," *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 251-277, and Michèle H. Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille, Beyond the Gift* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

[9]Much of "Sacrifices" reappeared in altered form in an essay entitled "l'Expérience intérieure," Vol. II., pp. 7-189. The editors of the *Oeuvres Complètes* felt that the re-working was substantial enough to warrant including "Sacrifices" in its own right.

That constitution is characterized as a rending, as *déchirement*. The same violence that sunders the victim's body also rends the integrality of the sacrificer's self and paradoxically allows him to observe his own death:

> In order for man to finally reveal himself to himself, he will have to die, but he will have to do it while living — by watching himself cease to be. In sacrifice, the sacrificer identifies himself with the sacrificed animal. Thus he dies in seeing himself die. He is even, in a sense, by his own will at one with the sacrificial weapon.[10]

The separation or distinction between sacrificer and sacrificed is paradoxically abolished in a violence that, rending both, returns them to the originary communication or continuum of being that Bataille speaks of throughout his work, from "Sacrifices" to *Eroticism*, in which he again posits sacrifice as the religious act *par excellence:* "The discontinuous beings that are men attempt to persevere in their discontinuity. But death, or at least the contemplation of death, returns them to the experience of continuity."[11] In *La Prise de la Concorde*, Hollier explains that, for Bataille, sacrifice puts differences into play only in order to erase them in just such a communion:

> Sacrifice implies a distance between the conscious subject and the being that dies. But this distance is implied only to be erased or sacrificed in its turn. This distance, which is constitutive of sacrifice, is thus destroyed by it. That which is sacrificed in a sacrifice is precisely what constitutes the sacrifice. There is no transcendental sacrificial victim. Sacrifice can only be self-destruction and self-mutilation.
>
> (p. 293)

Here again, art and sacrifice coincide as significant moments in the constitution of the self; in his essay "Sacrificial Mutilation and Van Gogh's Severed Ear," Bataille links the artistic impulse with the (self)sacrificial drive, since both refuse, through distortion and mutilation, to present the human body as integral or reproducible: both point to the rending that constitutes the self's most profound nature. This rending of the self creates repercussions throughout the body politic of society as well as its collective philosophical tradition. For Derrida, what is rent is the closure of Western metaphysics, which is grounded in a self that is integral and wholly present to itself by right of its reason; what is sacrificed in Bataille's "general economy" is meaning, presence, identity, and constituted order. Bataille sees discursive language as the means by which man is inserted into the world of work and reason. All of Bataille's thought, Derrida claims, is an immense effort to achieve an other, "major" writing which would exceed the "economy of reason," permitting a slippage into the realm which provides reason with its surrounding element, its boundless borders of non-sense:

> *This* — major — writing will be called *writing* because it *exceeds* the *logos* (of meaning, lordship, presence, etc.). Within this writing — the one sought by Bataille — the *same* concepts, apparently unchanged in themselves, will be subject to a mutation of meaning, or rather will be struck by (even though they are apparently indifferent) the loss of sense toward which they slide, thereby ruining themselves immeasurably. To blind oneself to this rigorous precipitation, this pitiless sacrifice of philosophical concepts, and to continue to read, interrogate, and judge Bataille's text *from within* "significative discourse" is, perhaps, to hear something within it, but it is assuredly not to read it.[12]

In the final rending of its existence, the self that dies achieves what Bataille calls sovereignty. This term designates that realm of experience which trancends both the anguish of the improbable abstract self and the limitations of the neutralized applied self, thereby attaining the specificity of the self that dies, willing its death as the completion of its own avid existence: "Sovereignty is nothing other than this useless, senseless loss" (V., p. 216). Derrida follows Ba-

[10]Georges Bataille, "Hegel, la mort, et le sacrifice," *Deucalion* 5 (Oct. 1955), pp. 32-33. Subsequent references will be cited in the text; all translations are mine.

[11]Georges Bataille, *l'Erotisme* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957), p. 93. Subsequent references will be cited in the text; all translations are mine.

[12]Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy," p. 267. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

taille in opposing "sovereignty" to Hegelian "lordship" or "mastery," which is also an attitude toward death, but a very different one. While the master risks his life in his struggle with the slave, he does so in order to keep the life he risks and be recognized as himself. His is, for Bataille, a servile "economy of life" to which the economy of sacrifice characterizing sovereignty stands in direct opposition. While Hegel's "mastery" promotes the circulation and reproduction of the self, as of meaning, Bataille's "sovereignty" renounces any recognition of the self, any consciousness of self, along with any interiority of the self.

With the transcendence of the self in the revelation of death, we read in "Sacrifices," the shadow of the divine person disappears: ". . . this revelation thus attains the wrenching subversion of the *god* who dies" (II., p. 92). For the self that dies, the crucifixion is no longer an object of meditation and respectful adoration, but is itself lived, "with the avidity of sadistic ecstasy," as the death of the self. Thus the sacrifice of Christ regains its place among the catalogue of genuine sacrificial rites sadistically celebrating the animality of death into which all life subsides: "The god's death is produced not as metaphysical deterioration . . . but as the absorption of a life avid of imperative joy into the heavy animality of death" (II., p. 92). All of the victims who figure in Masson's etchings on the theme of "gods who die" are either animals or men who occupy the position of animals in the ritual of sacrifice. Death links man to an animality that is paradoxically also divine. We recall that Bataille also makes this connection between the animal and the divine in his remarks on the cave paintings: in distinguishing himself from the "divine, impersonal element associated with the animal that neither works nor reasons" (*Lascaux*, p. 121), early man signals his new conception of self. His will henceforth be a self that is unique and irreplaceable, a self which is neither divine nor animalistic, but which works, reasons, and hopes to earn immortality for its unreproducible self. With death's approach, however, an imperative structure of the self is revealed which refutes man's self-definition and lays to rest his human hopes: "This imperative is formulated as 'die like a dog' in the strangest part of the being; it turns away from any application to the world" (II., p. 93). In the final, sovereign moments, man's self-imposed distance from the animal/divine is itself sacrificed: self and otherness collapse.

This collapse is presented, in "Sacrifices," as *catastrophe*. The image Bataille invokes is that of a telescoping train: "The glass which suddenly slits the throat in the shattering of telescoped trains is the expression of this imperative, implacable — and yet already annihilated — advent" (II., p. 94). Just as the individual cars of the train collapse into one entity with a shattering of glass, of compartments, of bodies, so the annihilation of the self is an immense collapse of the self into the empire of all otherness: ". . . life and death (vie et vide) merge like lovers in the final convulsive moments" (II., p. 93). Thus eroticism provides perhaps the most accessible paradigm for the collapse of subject and object in the contemplation of (one's own) death purveyed by sacrifice. For the self's own existence is no less catastrophic than the death it contemplates: ". . . consciousness hasn't *catastrophe* merely as its object: its very structure is *catastrophe* . . ." (II., p. 94). In the contemplation of death, the self envisions the totality of its existence as a vertiginous collapse into the void that is its object, as an implacable advent that is paradoxically annihilated from the outset: as a catastrophe. Thus Bataille liked to quote Kojeve, who defined man as "la mort qui vit une vie humaine" — "death living a human life" ("Hegel, la mort, et le sacrifice," p. 31).

The term catastrophe can be understood here in the sense given it by Rene Thom, whose controversial "catastrophe theory" provides a revolutionary way of looking at change.[13] Specifically, catastrophe theory proposes to describe radical, sudden changes like a bridge collapsing, a political revolution, or a bubble bursting: changes that the traditional science of the calculus (which governs gradual, incremental change) has generally placed outside its domain. Similarly, for Bataille, the *catastrophic* structure of the self is pure change, and conveys a sense of lived time directly opposed to the daily, neutralized appearance of time: "In ordinary circumstances, time appears to be enclosed — for practical purposes annulled — in each permanence of form and in each succession that can be perceived as a permanence" (II., p. 94). Traditional, "normal" time is the corollary of a political, religious, and social order grounded in divine authority. Catastrophic or lived time characterizes the domain

[13]René Thom, *Structural Stability and Morphogenesis: An Outline of a General Theory of Models*, tr. D. H. Fowler (Reading: Benjamin, 1975).

of the sovereign self. Bataille thus opposes to each other two visions of time: in one vision, God's golden robes, his crown, and his mask of sweetness shroud a chilling, gleaming skeleton. Catastrophe (or death, or lived time) "must be represented ecstatically not as an old man, but as a skeleton to whose teeth cling the lips of a severed head" (II., p. 95). When the mask is ripped from the face of falsified time, of time applied to the management of political oppression in the name of authority and order, there appears the imperative, accomplished destruction that is lived time, that is, death. The image of the severed head is central to Bataille's work, for it moves toward undoing the vision of man as a reasoning, working, servile being:[14] "Human existence is tired of serving as the head and the reason of the universe. To the extent that human existence becomes this head and this reason, to the extent that it becomes *necessary* for the universe, it accepts servitude" ("Hegel . . . ," p. 33).

The revelation of the sovereign self that dies attains "the wrenching subversion of the *god* who dies." As the corollary of a world grounded in the mutual contingency of all its parts, the shadow of God disappears when that world is negated or transcended by catastrophe. The catastrophic, ecstatic collapse of self and object accomplishes a subversion taking the form of revolt and destruction:

> Revolt — its face distorted by amorous ecstasy — tears away God's naive mask, and oppression falls to pieces in the shattering of time. Catastrophe is that by which a nocturnal horizon is set ablaze, that for which rent existence enters into terror. Catastrophe is Revolution: it is time delivered from all chains . . . .
>
> (II., p. 95)

As Michèle Richman notes, the unmasking of God simultaneously overthrows the social, political, and philosophical systems grounded in his authority: "God is dead, the reality created through discursive language is dissolved, and the philosophical subject has been sacrificed."[15]

[14]In 1936, Bataille founded a journal entitled *Acéphale*. Masson's drawing of the headless figure appeared on the first three issues, which were devoted, respectively, to "La Conjuration sacrée," "Nietzsche et les fascistes, une réparation," and "Dionysos."

Another realm of existence has been opened up; this realm provides the surrounding element, the infinite matrix within which is situated the established order of "what exists," and the measured forms of ordinary time. This infinite realm of existence situates the self in respect to the demands of eroticism, ecstasy, passion, and *dépense* rather than those of authority, reason, economy, and order: ". . . this purity of 'die like a dog' answers passion's demands — but not the passion of the slave for the master. Life devoting itself to death is, rather, the passion of a lover for his beloved; the beloved's jealousy plays a role, but in no way does 'authority'" (V., p. 87). Eroticism thus provides the ultimate paradigm for the region of being attained by the sovereign self when it is projected into the "unreal time of death"; this ultimate region of being inscribes within itself the applied world of reason, economy, work, order, and measured time.

> Le non-savoir atteint, le savoir absolu n'est plus qu'une connaissance entre autres.
>
> —Bataille

Having affirmed that *time* is the catastrophe which gives its shape to both the subject and the object in the revelation of the self that dies, the last section of "Sacrifices" then addresses the question of time. Like Heidegger, Bataille grants time a radical privilege over space. The revolt against and subversion of existing orders which Bataille proposes in "Sacrifices" has to do in a fundamental way with time — with the way in which time is conceived — and thus with visions of what history is. In his essay "From Restricted to General Economy," Derrida uses the term "epoch of meaning" to characterize the Hegelian notion of history that dominates Western thought. Derrida points out that in Hegelianism, history is always the history of meaning, and always depends upon the confrontation of master and slave:

> Lordship has a meaning. The putting at stake of life is a moment in the constitution of meaning, in the presentation of essence and truth. It is an obligatory stage in the history of self-consciousness and phenomenality, that is to say, in the presentation of meaning. For history — that is, meaning — to form a continuous chain, to be woven, the master must *experience his truth*.
>
> (p. 254)

[15]Michèle H. Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille*, p. 75.

Since for Hegel the real truth of the master resides in the slave's consciousness, the absolute privilege and triumph ultimately go to the slave and to the vision of work, time, death, and history which Derrida, reading Bataille, discerns in Hegelianism and its legacy: "To stay alive, to maintain oneself in life, to work, to defer pleasure, to limit the stakes, to have *respect* for death at the very moment when one looks *directly* at it — such is the servile condition of mastery and of the entire history it makes possible" (p. 255). Bataille's conception of a sovereign operation in which the subject embraces death with sadistic, riotous ecstasy opens up, through revolt and subversion, the closure of Hegelianism, of philosophy, and of the vision of history they convey.

What Bataille does to Hegelianism can thus be seen as a prototype of the deconstruction of the Western metaphysical closure operated by Derrida, who describes Bataille's project in these terms:

> Since no logic governs, henceforth, the meaning of interpretation, because logic is an interpretation, Hegel's own interpretation can be reinterpreted — against him. This is what Bataille does. Reinterpretation is a simulated repetition of Hegelian discourse. In the course of this repetition a barely perceptible displacement disjoints all the articulations and penetrates all the points welded together by the imitated discourse. A trembling spreads out which makes the entire old shell crack.
>
> (p. 260)

Here Derrida cites a portion of "Hegel, Death, and Sacrifice" which discusses Hegel's attitude toward something which Bataille places between quotation marks: the "moment" of sacrifice. Throughout the entire movement of the *Phenomenology*, Bataille explains, the "moment" of sacrifice is implied or included in the Negativity of death which, when man assumes it, transforms the human animal into man. Thus, Bataille claims, Hegel cannot be said to have misconstrued the "moment" of sacrifice; he simply did not see that sacrifice in itself bore witness to the *entire* movement of death (and life), that the final experience was also an initial and universal one. Hegel was not wrong about sacrifice; he simply did not see the scope of his own exactitude, the extent to which he was right. The *moment* of sacrifice paradoxically becomes the entire *movement* of death, the entire movement of a vision of time and history based on a Negativity that must be sublated. Derrida continues by showing that the "trembling" brought about in the old shell of Hegel's dialectic by the sovereign operation opens it up to an initial, universal milieu which sketches for the economy of reason its own boundaries:

> In *doubling* lordship, sovereignty does not *escape* dialectics. It could not be said that it extracts itself from dialectics like a morsel of dialectics which has suddenly become independent through a process of decision and tearing away. Cut off from dialectics in this way, sovereignty would be made into an abstract negation and would consolidate ontologics. Far from interrupting dialectics, history, and the movement of meaning, sovereignty provides the economy of reason with its element, its milieu, its unlimiting boundaries of non-sense. Far from suppressing the dialectical synthesis, it inscribes this synthesis and makes it function within the sacrifice of meaning.
>
> (pp. 260-61)

Seen in this light, the general economy of sacrifice inscribes within itself the epoch of meaning.

The barely perceptible disjointing operated by sacrifice is not a cataclysmic catastrophe, not an apocalypse, but rather a tiny "movement" that paradoxically dislodges a whole system of thought. Sacrifice is a "moment" that paradoxically situates within itself a whole vision of a slowly advancing, ponderous, and inexorable history. In "Sacrifices," Bataille presents these paradoxical movements and moments in terms of the improbable and irreplaceable *self*, whose death inscribes the totality of the objective realm: "The existence of things, such as it takes on for the *self* the character (and projects the absurd shadow) of preparations for capital punishment, cannot contain the death it brings, but is itself projected in this death that contains it" (II., p. 96). The optical illusion of inscription functions here to project the supposedly contained within the presumed container, and places Hegelian *savoir absolu*, just another form of knowledge now, within the limitless matrix of *non-savoir*. In the last sentence of "Sacrifices," a single word — a verb in the present tense — is italicized along

with the *self*: "The death that delivers me from the world that kills me *has* enclosed this real world within the irreality of the *self* that dies" (La mort qui me délivre du monde qui me tue *a* enfermé ce monde réel dans l'irréalité du *moi* qui meurt) (II., p. 96). What Bataille singles out for special emphasis here is the present tense of the auxiliary verb which in French forms, along with the past participle, the past tense called the *passé composé*. The peculiar accentuation of a present tense that enables pastness to be communicated — a present that somehow precedes and conditions the past — mirrors the paradoxical play of inscription Bataille describes. The present "moment" of the present-tense verb already encloses the domain of time measured into past, present, and future, the domain of objective entities, discursive logic, advancing history, and economies of salvation, just as the irreality of the self that dies already includes the objective reality which collapses with it upon death's approach. Bataille's emphasis in this passage communicates a paradoxical "already" that already anticipates the "always already" of a "future" deconstruction which seeks to point out the inscription of Western metaphysics within a limitless ground of play and of non-sense.

Both Masson's etchings and Bataille's texts take us "back" to certain inaugural "moments": the mythological beginnings of society, of prosperity, of spiritual immortality; the dawn of a certain conception of man rooted in work and reason, and opposed to both the animal and the divine extremes of existence; the birth of man as (self-conscious) man in all forms of figurative art and (self) sacrifice. Yet we encounter in Bataille's text for the album "Sacrifices" certain *final* moments as well: the final convulsive moment of the lovers' embrace, which provides the paradigm for the sovereign moment when the sacrificer's self merges with that of the victim, when the structure of the self is rent by the revelation of death. But these inaugural-final moments are not temporal moments in the sense given the term by the vision of history which still dominates our discourse. Rather, they are *inscriptive* moments which paradoxically hold within themselves a vision of history that dictates the necessity of origins, progress, and finalities; like the catastrophic structures of the self telescoping into the other, they collapse the constructed oppositions between inaugural and final moments.

Bataille recognized the necessity for continuing to use discursive language despite its collusion with logic and reason and the political order they seek to maintain; this recognition manifests itself in his suspension of certain terms — "moment," "what exists" — between quotation marks. This same discontent leads Bataille to adopt, throughout his writings, a lexicon of terms that succeed and supplement each other: anguish, rending, communication, catastrophe, sovereignty, interior experience, eroticism. We have witnessed this lexical slippage in "Sacrifices," whose process of supplementarity illustrates Derrida's notion of the *supplément*, a term which takes its own place in a lexicon of slippage — la trace, la différance, l'écriture, le pharmakon, etc. — and which points to the play of inscription as well as the virtue of destruction at work in Bataille's writing: ". . . the destruction of discourse is not simply an erasing neutralization. It multiplies words, precipitates them one against the other, engulfs them, too, in an endless and baseless substitution whose only rule is the sovereign affirmation of the play outside meaning" ("From Restricted to General Economy," p. 274). Bataille's slipping lexicon of the sacrifice seeks to use the given language of meaningful discourse in such a way that it opens up onto that which "plays" outside meaning. The "moments" of which Bataille speaks provide, like the *self*, the access to this ultimate "region of being."

It is in this sense that we must read Foucault when he says that we owe to Bataille a great part of our own present moment — "le moment où nous sommes." Ours is a moment in which a battle over history is still being fought, even as the notion of history which subtends that battle has already been inscribed, along with its corollaries, in the larger conditioning ground whose recognition also forms a part of our "moment." Far from precluding the study of political and social orders, Bataille's inscriptive moment situates that study, and opens up the closure of existing orders to a contemplation of their grounding conditions. Time and history themselves must be re-thought in terms of this moment. The slow triumph of the slave through work which provides Marxism with its model for class struggle is replaced by the momentary catastrophe of revolt against given order: the momentary revelation *already* includes the vision of history it inscribes and paradoxically exceeds. What might be termed Bataille's history of the moment contains and situates Hegelianism, in the same way that Derrida's deconstructive op-

eration situates those who operate according to a restrictive notion of historicism.[16]

Rereading Bataille today thus clarifies and situates the ongoing battle over history in contemporary critical thought. With Nietzsche and Blanchot, Bataille prepares what we now term deconstruction. In "Sacrifices," Bataille's slipping lexicon of the sacrifice anticipates the union of a deconstructive approach to the Western metaphysical/ontological tradition with what has more recently been precisely opposed to that deconstructive moment: an attention to political economy and ideological critique. We have only to look "back" to Bataille to see the sacrifice of this opposition, to see that this attention toward political economy is already part of the present "moment" of metaphysical deconstruction. □

[16]In *Positions* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972), p. 89, Derrida acknowledges the connections between his own work and that of Bataille, pointing to some of his most seminal early essays as readings of Bataille. This connection is made precisely in respect to a question about Marxism, a-historicism, and inscription.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH KRZYSZTOF ZANUSSI

Conducted by Jacek Fuksiewicz

INTRODUCTION

Krzysztof Zanussi, the internationally acclaimed Polish filmmaker, winner of numerous festival awards (including Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Moscow, Chicago, and others), was interviewed in Paris where he lives dividing his time between there and Warsaw — when he is not on the set in West Germany, Italy, or Switzerland. His very personal, "auteur" films (he is always his own scriptwriter), deeply committed to reflect upon the moral and spiritual anxieties and dilemmas of men in modern society, rank among the best achievements of the Polish cinema of the past two decades and serve as an inspiration to the whole generation of young Polish filmmakers.

Most of Zanussi's films, such as *Camouflage* and *Constant Factor,* have been shown in this country at film festivals and in art theatres and film societies. His Italo-British production about the life of Pope John Paul II *(From a Far Country)* was broadcast on NBC, and his German feature *Ways in the Night* was premiered last fall in New York.

Have your scientific background, studies of philosophy, physics, and mathematics, shaped your way of thinking and of filmmaking?

Probably, yes, though I am not always conscious of it, as I was initiated to scientific methods at an age when I was very open. I was sixteen when I undertook my university studies. Very often I find in my way of thinking analogies with physics and mathematics. Obviously it is very different in comparison to people who write their scripts and make their films based on literary or narrative patterns. However, I am not sure I can prove what I have just said, and furthermore, I do not know whether it is good or bad. Anyway, I do not try to assail the viewers with the scientific knowledge I accumulated — it is just a question of good taste. As philosophy is not a common science in Poland, I always remember to explain everything to the audiences. You cannot ask the viewers to look into the encyclopedia after coming back home from the cinema; that would be very snobbish. In *Illumination* I explained all the philosophical concepts to be used in the film. Mathematics, in which I am most fascinated, is present in my films: the game played with infinity, with destiny, and a reflection about this game. You can find this roulette game in *Constant Factor* and *Imperative.*

You seem to be fascinated by scientists as much as by science itself.

Scientists are people dealing with problems not yet present at the popular level. At the popular level one still thinks in concepts dating from the nineteenth century. For instance, the incompatibility between science and religion, or even a conflict, a concept outdated already in the twenties, still remains for many people an elementary contradiction. The ideas of Copernicus needed three hundred years to descend to the popular level, and those of Einstein have not made it yet. The people still tend to think in stiff, absolute categories. That is why I think it is interesting to locate the action in the scientific milieu. First, because it is a milieu that we are permitted to approach. (In Poland, I cannot make a film about the politicians; someone who occupies a position within the Communist Party cannot be seriously criticised in a film. Professors are practically the only ones that can be seriously criticised because they are generous and broadminded enough not to protest.) Secondly, because it is indeed a fascinating milieu, one that is very privileged and esteemed in our country — much more than in the West where you have other elites. In Poland it is, along with artists, the only elite. The public is curious, wants to know them. One can attribute to them a higher level of consciousness and responsibility than to ordinary people; which in turn does not mean that the common people are deaf or immune to metaphysical feelings and that the scientific community is the only social group that can deal with these problems. Not at

all, simply the way in which they express them is very close to mine.

Most scientific interpretations of a human being and both his biological and social conditions, like Hegelism, Marxism, Freudism — new discoveries in bio-neurological science — tend to convince us that we are helpless particles moved in different directions by mighty, hardly controllable forces: history, society, economy, sub-consciousness, electric impulses in our nervous system. You, nevertheless, seem to believe, in spite of that evidence, that ethics are not obsolete, that moral criteria are not purely relative and that there exists an objective value system. On what is it founded?

I believe it does exist, though I am not quite certain. That's why in my films you can find a meditation on that subject, rather than a doctrine or a teaching — more a search than knowledge. Generally speaking, I have an impression — which is a result of my philosophical predilections — that our century, which is characterized by rapid accelerations and abrupt changes, conveys a false impression of a general relativity of things. However, change is but one particular aspect of the existence, the other one being stability. Therefore, I am inclined to be interested in what is stable and unchanging, and I trace it in the flaw of accelerated changes; I look for a confirmation that it does exist. I believe that even when we accept all the inarguable discoveries of modern science that we are conditioned biologically, socially, and economically, we should not do so in an absolute dimension. That is, we should not believe that those determinations are everything there is about a human being and his choices. Beyond these determinations there is a sphere of free choice, and it is to this sphere that the absolute values relate. However, to what extent these absolute values are at the same time *objective* (because it is by no means impled!), is quite another question. I wish I could go so far as to believe that they are, but I have no certainty that it is true.

In all your films, but especially in the recent ones, there appears another limit to human freedom: the accidental. Accident, fate, destiny enter the human life, limit the freedom of choice, ruin every order that man built, or had the illusion of having built. The Spiral, *and* Constant Factor *are built around that, but the motives of an accidental death in the mountains or a fatal illness come repeatedly in your films.*

That is true. However, the very existence of the accidental factor is something objective; what I am interested in is its interpretation — an interpretation that covers a large area, beginning with the deterministic concept that an accident is only a facet of a hidden reality, a hidden unavoidable consequence of objectively existing factors. I showed that in *Hypothesis* and *Constant Factor.*

A winning number in a roulette game is a purely accidental phenomenon. And yet it can change the whole human life . . .

From the point of view of physics one could easily and accurately compute all the mechanical factors, like resistance and so on, that precisely determined that particular result in roulette and not another one. So it can be reduced to that deterministic model. But of course the real interesting problem is: what does it mean to a human being linked to that "accident"? And the ultimate question: is it or is it not a manifestation, an expression, an appearance of another reality? That is a mystical reality existing beyond our daily reality. In such a case the accident becomes even more mysterious and appealing. As I've already said, I am fascinated by that game the man plays with infinity, with chance.

What are the odds that he wins?

As an artist I am interested in a recognition of the fact that chance as a category exists, that it relates to us, and we — in whole our euphoria, our conceit — are submitted to it. Furthermore, I try to observe how we do experience our destiny: is it as a manifestation of a blind chaotic accident that fell upon us, and not upon somebody else, or is it as a manifestation of a different, but profound logic. A logic that we may try to detect — at moments we arrive to understand it, and at moments it disappears — becomes a darkness. I am interested in how man experiences his existence: does he recognize as such his encounters with destiny, does he see the signs that trace his fate, or does he obstinately argue that destiny is nothing else but a mechanical sequence of external coincidences, void of any deeper meaning, and that his are completely free and conscious choices? You can easily trace those two attitudes in the characters in my films. I am fascinated by games, though I do not play myself; but my life itself is sufficiently reminiscent of roulette, the

stakes being much higher, however, than in Las Vegas, like taking an airplane, meeting a producer, or going to my country and being permitted to go abroad again (as an exit permit may be refused at any time). The outcome of any or all of those events makes stakes at Las Vegas only minor and innocent thrills.

I am fascinated by man's encounter with destiny: a commander-in-chief who knows that this moment, this decision, this particular word, this command determines the result of the battle, hence the future of a whole nation; a scientist who knows that this experiment will determine whether a certain truth will be found; a politician who feels that this particular day, this moment, a particular wording in his speech will be crucial in determining whether he will accede to power and be able to carry out his vision of society. I am fascinated by moments in which something very important occurs that will shape the future in a definite way. Our life is full of such moments, though we do not notice them, cannot decipher or understand them — and that is what appeals to me, attracts me. What is the cause that today I am here and not somewhere else, and what are the consequences; thanks to whom we met and why, and what will result in the future; at what moment our children, and the children of our children are a direct consequence of a minor delay that made us miss a rendezvous . . .

The characters in your films seem to experience that metaphysical feeling of the presence of a logical order beyond the external and accidental aspect of reality. Yet it is not something very common in real life.

Such a feeling is rather rare indeed, yet there exists a need to transcend, a need to step beyond the limits of one's existence. I think that North America is a good example of a country far from being decadent, and of a people feeling the need for sacrifice, to do something for the sake of a cause greater than personal, egoistic existence. In this sense I am an optimist when I assert that this desire to transcend lies in human nature. If people are deprived of it — and the Western world with its consumer civilization has indeed deprived them — then they tend to be disenchanted and disappointed, because they long to be a part of something greater than themselves. Whether they engage in revolutionary activities to bring about a better, more just social system, or sacrifice their lives to scientific work in order to get closer to an objective truth, or search for religious transcendence, it is always the result of the same desire that animates them.

In this sense, do you see a difference between Western civilization and that of Central and Eastern Europe?

I think that because the systems in Central and Eastern Europe do not offer any fulfillments in the material sphere of life, not even as far as some very basic needs are concerned, nor permit us to believe in any such fulfillment in a foreseeable future, the desires of the people tend to be sublimated, more easily transferred from real into spiritual life. During the Cannes Film Festival this year, Soviet film director Andrei Tarkovsky spoke in such a simple yet convincing way about the discrepancy between the technological development of the West and its spiritual life. For someone coming from the East, it is striking that the technological development and all its consequences like man's accumulated wealth, his security, his extraordinary might resulting from his access to an enormous amount of energy, the fact that he is so mobile, that such a lot of work has been spared him — all those material developments are not matched by a spiritual development. All this, in spite of the fact that one would assume that being liberated from elementary toils man would use all his energy to rise above his given existence. However, we do not observe it. The human kind willingly enjoys the privileges of material development, yet only in a very small degree tries to take advantage of it for the sake of self-improvement.

Do you think that artists from Central and Eastern Europe have a better understanding of it and that they can convey it in a better way to Western audiences?

Artists from the part of Central and Eastern Europe that culturally belongs to the West have a great advantage: they can articulate Eastern experiences in Western language and Western categories. That is interesting. I believe that in the midst of its deep spiritual crisis the West needs everyone else's experiences. And the tradition of Byzantine origin has a great originality and strength; it is at least worth as much as the Western experience. Only through the union of these two branches of the ancient tree of European culture can today's Europe achieve its strength. This experience can in turn be conveyed to the other parts of the world: the particular European harmony of the forces. The civilizations of the Far East had a great spiritual poten-

tial but never achieved a material strength by themselves. Among them were very materialistic civilizations, like the Tartar or Turkish, but they did not have spiritual backgrounds, so they produced mighty but ephemeral civilizations. Whereas Europe, which for three thousand years continues to be a guiding force for the world, has found a certain balance between sprituality and material progress. Even though today this balance is disappearing, it may yet be restored.

Are the experiences of other civilizations, such as the Far East, transferable?

Transferable they are not, and most people see them in a very superficial way. They put on Buddhist attire or Indian clothing and they think they have penetrated a culture that has existed for thousands of years. I have no illusions about the fact that the manoeuvring margin that your own culture leaves you is a very narrow one. Descending from one tradition, one cannot just buy an air ticket, go somewhere else and gain admission to another civilization. I talked about this in *Constant Factor,* and I said it there in a very plain way. However, Europe is a particular case: Europe is the common root of our civilization, and the discrepancy between the Eastern and Western parts of it is not so complete as between Europe and the Far East. Certain truths can penetrate from one civilization to another — and whether they actually do is a question of luck, or of whether we are talented, or of certain objective circumstances that we do not know completely. Only real experience will demonstrate whether having common roots gives us a guarantee that we will finally meet; or whether those two paths, those two great branches are so far from one another, that they will never meet again.

The problem of impenetrability of cultures was present in many films in Cannes this year: the British and the Indians in Heat and Dust *of James Ivory, of the British and Japanese in* Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence *of Nagisa Oshima, and of the Russians and the Westerners in Tarkovsky's* Nostalghia. *All those films conveyed skepticism concerning the possibilities of conveying or enriching the understanding.*

It only seems so; however, the very existence of those films, the fact that they were made in the West, that so many people admired them, proves that they were not vain experiences.

What role does religion play in your life and in your creative work?

One has to be precise and differentiate between religion and transcendence, for faith and religious revelation are very precise concepts as compared to certain intuitions contained in my films. I personally am cautious of all labels concerning professions of faith because they seem to me very improper. I come from a part of the world in which all such labels were abused. People were declaring themselves Marxists in order to have certain privileges and participate with full rights in the life of societies in which Marxism is a privileged, dominant ideology. In a similar way acted those people who declared themselves Catholic in countries where Catholicism was similarly privileged, like in Franquist Spain. That is what makes one skeptical or even reluctant toward all professions of faith and everything that relates to an institutionalized religion in works of art. Whereas, what is and always has been present in my films, which even in the most unfavorable circumstances I did not try to hide, is an interest for or an openness to that sphere in human life that deals with questions to which religion — or religions — try to find an answer. Even today, after having made a film about the Pope and being close to the Church, I try not to be directly connected with them, I try to keep my distance, which is something necessary for every artist in order to remain intellectually independent. That is why when I deal with religious problems in my films — for instance, lately in *Imperative* — I introduce the Orthodox persuasion, which interests and attracts me, but is not my persuasion. In my other films I tried to avoid direct declarations of a given religious persuasion in order to be able to deal with the essence of religious anxieties or feelings and not with different forms it could take.

How do you experience this religious feeling?

It is the awareness of the existence of a mystery, an awareness that beyond the surface of the world which seems absurd, through an act of choice and creed one can detect a sense, usually mysterious — or totally exclude such a sense. An agnostic, who for me is already a believer, will say that there is no proof that such a supreme sense, usually called Divinity, or God, or something like that, does not exist. Whereas an atheist, whom certainly I am not, will say with complete

certainty, that there is not any supreme sense beyond logic of matter appearing in one form or another. This certainty makes of an atheist a negative-believer, whereas a religious person, a professed believer, will have a positive creed. And between them is located that great majority of people, who may even belong to different persuasions and churches: they are looking for proof that this supreme sense does exist, but have no certainty of it, as there has been no proof for thousands of years.

In accordance with Kant's view, I want to underline that the category of time is the category that limits the lucidity of our perception, because the perception itself takes place in time. In reference to religion this phenomenon equals the fact that certitude itself is not based on an invariable foundation. The certitude of an evening is not the certitude of the morning. The creed is an eternal process of finding the sense and of losing it. Therefore, I feel the most profound admiration for people who have that certitude, but I neither share nor understand their attitude.

You have a very scientific spirit in dealing with morals: there is more doubt and ambiguity than certainty and assurance in your films.

The ambiguity is the attitude that seems to me the most proper, the most cautious one. It is better to be cautious than to "know" false things. It is the same with morals. I am not a moralist sure of himself. □

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Edited by Sarah E. Spain

Stuart Peterfreund

THE OLD DIRT

This is in praise
of the presence of the old dirt:
it begins to rise
from beneath the ballast
and the train-oil,
the tears and the lies,
as the world once again thaws,
and a long, westbound freight
that carries all versions
of the animate, like an ark,
wails suddenly articulate,
sings as it passes
deeply over rails,
casting fast, dark shadows
over ancient, aching soil gone green,
and once-green wood now become shredding ties.

Ron Tanner

TEAMWORK

We know nothing about the jungle except that it is hot and steamy and dark with weeds. There are monkeys in the trees and birds of every color. We imagine there are also moths the size of sparrows and snakes big enough to swallow our dog Scotty, a wire-haired terrier. But we are not sure, for none of us has been in the jungle. We keep to the beach, where we are camped. My daughter Betty says she can think of better places to spend a vacation. "There's no ice here," she says. "No ice at all." She is always complaining. She waives a packet of daiquiri mix at her mother. "Nobody can drink this stuff without ice." Her mother tries to humor her. She tells Betty to pretend she is at her own private beach. "It's not the beach that bothers me," says Betty. "It's the absence of ice." "Pretend the jungle is a hotel," says Bob, her brother. "And room service is late in arriving." Betty bursts into tears, thinking Bob is making fun of her. Betty is seven months pregnant and very touchy. That is, she *says* she is seven months pregnant. It looks like more to us. She will not tell us who fathered the child, but we have a pretty good idea it was a young man named Mickey, our next door neighbor's son back home. Mickey joined the Navy recently and is now somewhere in the North Atlantic. Betty could have done better — she is actually a bright girl — but we try not to criticize her now that she's with child, as they say.

Sometimes the jungle noises overwhelm her. She closes her hands over her ears and shouts to drown out the chatter of birds and monkeys. Bob and I have tried to spook the animals by firing our guns into the bush, but it seems not to make a difference. Gunfire quiets some animals while exciting others. So now we conserve ammunition. We fire the cannon, for example, only once a day. The cannon helps us establish an unspoken understanding with the natives, who have been pilfering our supplies. So far they have stolen all of our desserts (foil packets of freeze-dried vanilla pudding and tins of fruit cocktail) as well as two cartons of cocktail mix. But you can't blame them, really. They live on a diet of roots and grubs and maybe an occasional toad or salamander. My son Bob tells me their most prized delicacy is a bowl of monkey's blood, but I don't believe him. The natives are diminutive, timid people with shaved heads and large, callused feet. They don't look like blood drinkers. We see them sometimes peering cautiously from behind coco palms at the jungle's edge. They never come out into the open. Bob says it is just a matter of time before they attack and kill us and ravish our women. Bob talks like that. He's a real problem.

Bob startles us with a sudden volley of gunfire. I drop to the sand and reach for my pistol, a thirty-eight caliber with a mahogany grip. Bob is squinting at the trees. "I thought I saw a big ape," he says. After I get to my feet I rap him hard on the knuckles with the butt of my pistol. "Jesus, pop, that hurts!" He drops his rifle and cradles his hand, blowing on it and examining it for signs of damage. "We don't waste ammunition on monkeys," I tell him. "You want to scare us all to death, firing without warning like that? What's the matter with you?" Bob shrugs and smiles sheepishly. You never know what's out there, he says. You just never know. Maybe not, I tell him, but I know what we have here — a trigger happy nineteen year old. He apologizes. Then he asks about the cannon. Isn't it time to fire the cannon? He picks through the ammo box, an aluminum footlocker. I slap his hands with a stick and he jumps back. First you *clean* the cannon, I tell him. Then you load it. Right right right, he says, nodding agreeably, happy that I allow him to continue. He cleans the cannon barrel with a plunger fashioned from a branch with a wadded rag at one end. I supervise, making sure he is careful. The cannon has wheels, the kind you find on small lawn tractors. The barrel is thirty-two inches long, four inches in diameter, and it takes shells about the size of a cigarette pack. We borrowed it from our neighbors back home.

My wife Belle tells me to get out of the sun. It makes me irritable, she says. "Sit here with me under the umbrella." She pats the sand next to her. I ignore the invitation and sit instead on a log next to the ashes of last night's fire. Belle

smiles as though I have done exactly what she wanted. Belle and I have been married for twenty-one years. She is still an attractive woman, slim and neat, with hands as small as tea cups. She wears her sailor's outfit today with white deck shoes, everything spotless. I don't know how she keeps her clothes so clean under these conditions.

Betty is sitting in a sling chair and cleaning her fingernails with a toothpick. Unlike the rest of us, she is an avid sunbather. She wears her bikini most of the time, despite her corpulence, and has grown almost as dark as the natives. Belle says all that sun cannot be good for the baby, and I agree, but there is no arguing with Betty, she is so hard-headed. Belle says Betty got her stubbornness from me. It's true, I am very set in my ways, but stubborn for a reason. If I didn't put my foot down once in a while the whole family would fall apart.

Take exercise as an example. Nobody in this family wants to exercise. But I make sure we have twenty minutes of calisthenics every morning. They do not take to it eagerly, but at least I get them moving. I also paddle Bob and Betty into the lagoon every other day for a lesson in rowing. We have a twelve foot row boat made of fiberglass. Bob and Betty complain that it is too small. I tell them that the natives hereabouts have navigated the whole of the Pacific in their tiny outriggers; the least we can do is learn to row across the lagoon.

Betty sits in the bow of the boat while Bob and I shove off, Scotty nipping at our heels. Scotty likes the water (it is very warm) and he swims alongside. I tell Bob and Betty to watch for sharks so we can rescue Scotty, but they don't take me seriously. They rely on me for everything — food, shelter, protection — and still they don't believe half the things I tell them. Teamwork, I tell them. That's what it takes for two people to row a boat. It's like choreography, each person regarding the other's pace. Bob pretends he is gagging. He says he does not want Betty on *his* team. Betty gives him the finger. You'd think they were ten years old. Bob digs in with his oar, forcing us in circles, while Betty skips her oar over the surface. She drops the oar finally and says she cannot go on. Scotty swims after the oar, but Bob pulls it away. Scotty yelps, paddling his frantic dog paddle, his tongue lolling. Betty says her hands were not made for boating. It's true, her hands are delicate like her mother's. In fact, they are Betty's finest feature.

Bob takes up both oars and begins to row a sluggish zigzag. We stay in the shallows where we can see schools of bright blue fish darting here and there and stretches of white sand and beds of pale coral some twenty feet below. But, as we near the drop-off, the fish disappear and the sand falls away into the blue-black depths of two hundred feet or more, and the water temperature drops dramatically, making Scotty whine. I lift Scotty into the boat. He shakes himself dry, spraying us with odorous sea water, then he paces from one end of the boat to the other, stepping over us and growling at reflections in the water, then barking finally at Belle, who waves to us from the beach.

Belle wears a straw sunhat and carries a small pail and steps gingerly over coral rocks on the exposed reef, stooping now and then to pick up some shiny object. She has decorated our camp with strings of colorful shells and mats of woven grass and flowers. She is handy that way. Back home she makes her own greeting cards and sometimes paints cheery scenes on the picture window in our living room. She is musical too. She has a light trilling voice, and every night after dinner she encourages us to sing along with her to old standards like "Oh, Susannah," or "Yankee Doodle." We are sitting around the fire watching the flames weave and flare and Belle breaks into song: "I've been working on the railroad, all the live-long daaay . . ." I join in and Bob hums along, unable to hold back. Betty just sighs and stares at us sourly.

The sing-along stirs Bob to do his impersonation of a rock guitarist, and he jumps up suddenly, flailing at an imaginary instrument. "Boom, Baby. Yow yow yow!" Scotty barks at him. Bob shakes the imaginary guitar in front of an imaginary amplifier. "Eeeeeeyooooo!" This, Betty tells us, is the sound of amplifier feedback. "It's the best part," she says. "He's making the guitar freak out." Bob is wearing a long sleeve striped t-shirt and jeans cut off raggedly at the knees. His legs are sunburnt. He does not look like a rock guitarist. I tell him to stop acting foolish, otherwise Scotty is going to bite him. Betty protests; she wants to see the entire performance. I pick up a whip-like branch. "Stop this nonsense, Bob." Bob takes the hint and hops away into the dark, still yelling and carrying on, Scotty barking after him and snapping at his sneakers. Bob's racket soon fades beyond the woosh and swell of nearby waves.

"He's so theatrical," says Betty.

Belle throws a handful of twigs into the fire. "It wouldn't be so bad if he had a real guitar."

"He should be in school," I tell them. "When I was Bob's age I was in college and working part time at a gas station."

Like Betty, who is seventeen, Bob lives at home. He failed his first year at Cape May Junior College. He has always been a poor student. He lacks concentration. Nothing holds his attention for very long, except yardwork. Bob loves yardwork. We bought him a lawnmower for his birthday. Nothing fancy — a gas powered push mower — but enough to get him started around the neighborhood. He hopes one day to own a tractor and mow fairways and football fields.

I try to teach Bob some responsibility. We alternate shifts keeping watch over camp. Bob eats sugar cubes to stay awake, he falls asleep so easily. When he sees something suspicious — a shadow shifting at the jungle's edge — he lets out a war cry, "Yip yip yoo!" and opens fire. I have taken to loading his rifle with blanks lately. I don't want him to shoot anyone. I want only to keep the natives from our supplies. But Bob does not grasp this. He is convinced that we are in mortal danger.

I have no trouble staying awake for my watch. It is scary out there alone on the beach, the black expanse of water on one side and the gloomy jungle on the other and odd noises all around. A pistol is hardly enough to make a man secure under such conditions. Sometimes Scotty keeps me company, but he is unreliable, running mindlessly from the jungle to the beach, always looking for something to dig up. My only consolation is that he may inadvertently scare away an intruder.

I watch the sky to pass the time. I know very little astronomy, so I invent my own constellations. It is a consuming game, I find so many pictures in the stars. Still, time passes slowly and I grow more anxious as the night wears on. I keep glancing to the east for a hint of the sun's arrival. Daylight never comes fast enough. Even the jungle seems to sigh relief at dawn: small clouds of birds break from the bush, monkeys chatter high in the palms, and leaves as big as throw rugs sway with unseen activity, their flowers bobbing like party favors. That's when I feel the joy of camping.

This morning, however, is not so joyous. We find the cannon missing and the ammo box emptied. Light fingered natives! Bob admits to falling asleep during his watch but he blames Scotty for not waking him. "All he had to do was bark," says Bob. "That's not asking for much." He wants to punish Scotty for not being a good watchdog, but Belle intercedes. She says we do not know what methods the natives used in stealing the cannon. They could have drugged Scotty. Or hypnotized him. Scotty senses something wrong and he whines, yawning. We are not altogether certain the natives know how to work the cannon, but the prospect of being without its protection leaves us all stunned. Bob scans the jungle with his binoculars. The natives are nowhere to be seen. "Bad vibes," he says. "Real bad vibes." It clouds over at noon and we hear thunder in the distance. Belle thinks it is cannonfire. Betty complains of a stomach ache.

Bob walks up and down the beach with a bullhorn announcing his desire to meet with the natives. "Let's talk," he says, the bullhorn crackling. "You got stuff we want, we got stuff you want. Let's not beat around the bush." Scotty follows close behind, sniffing left and right. It starts to sprinkle in the late afternoon and Bob returns to camp wearing the bullhorn as a hat. Scotty frolics near the waves, pausing now and then to snap at raindrops. I secure a tarp over camp and arrange a barricade of coconuts and half-rotted logs facing the jungle. "Is that in case of an attack?" says Betty. She sits sleepily in her chair, her tiny feet propped on a pile of unhusked coconuts. "Why would they attack?" I ask her. "These natives are paid to stay away from campers." She opens a bag of pretzels and starts eating. "It's their home," she says. "They can do what they want." I am not going to argue with her.

The rain starts with drops as big as quail eggs, then a torrent, the sky roaring, palms drooping under the assault, rivulets washing down the beach. It is our first tropical storm and we are not prepared for its severity. We huddle around the embers of last night's blaze. We made no provisions for firewood. If the rain continues we will be in for a long wet night. The black tarp snaps and stutters in the wind, rain whipping through on all sides. Bob steps over to dig a drainage ditch around the fire but trips on a guy line, releasing one corner of the tarp from its mooring. Before we can secure it, the tarp takes off suddenly like a pterodactyl, heaving and flapping towards the jungle, its dark wings glistening. We are soaked instantly. Belle screams, covering herself with a chair. Betty remains seated; she is too heavy to scramble for cover. Bob and I chase

after the tarp, and Scotty follows, thinking it is a game. He dashes up and back, outpacing us yards at a time. The tarp entangles itself high in a breadfruit tree. Bob shinnies up to get it, Scotty barking at his feet. The clouds break abruptly and the rain is gone. Just like that. The sun reappears behind a patchwork of clouds, creating half a rainbow in the distance where another thunderhead is working its madness. Within mintues the jungle is steaming dry and we are hot already from too much sun.

When we return to camp with the tarp, Belle is packing our belongings, preparing for a hasty exodus. Betty is drying her hair with a beach towel. She looks ill. "We're moving to a hotel," she says. "We've had enough of camping out."

I tell her there are no hotels around here.

"We'll call a taxi," she says. "We'll go to Marji." She means a water taxi which will take us to Marji Island, some sixty miles north by sea. "We have signal flares and a transmission pack. Either way, we will call a taxi."

"Surely one thunderstorm can't be as bad as all that," I tell her. "Besides, the flares are only for emergencies. We are not supposed to be picked up until next week."

"I want a grilled steak," she says. "I want ice in my drinks. I deserve that much, especially in my condition."

Bob nods in agreement. "I could use a milkshake."

Belle joins in. "It's so hard keeping clothes clean out here."

It is a mutiny.

"What about the cannon?" I ask. "We can't just leave it."

"We'll buy a new cannon," says Betty.

"Who will buy a new cannon?" I want to know. "Whose money are we talking about?"

No one answers.

We pack everything into clumsy bundles and shoot flares over the lagoon for a taxi, then sit around the fire and wait. I prepare our last dinner of rehydrated chicken stroganoff, but no one is eating. Everybody is thinking of grilled steaks and ice cream and whatnot. Betty takes one bite of chicken and throws up. She has stomach cramps. Belle is afraid Betty may be having labor pains. Betty moans and Scotty yowls in response. "That does it," says Bob. "She's in labor. Dogs can sense these things." I tell them it is too early for labor pains. Belle shrugs, her face pale in the firelight. "What can we do about that?"

Belle makes Betty lie down on two air mattresses (Betty is that big) and covers her with plastic sheets and clothing. I walk down to the water and fire another flare. It explodes high above the lagoon and drifts down slowly, illuminating the compacted waves, the rills of froth, and the sand stretching into darkness on either side. Scotty comes up behind me as the flare hits the water with a loud hiss. We sit together and listen for the drone of taxi engines but hear only the constant wash of waves. The tide is going out and the lagoon is calm, but thunderheads billow and loom all around us and thunder grumbles in the distance. It sounds like cannonfire.

I saw a movie once — I forget the name — where an airliner crashed in the Amazon and could only escape if two people were left behind, to lighten the load of the damaged craft. So the two oldest passengers sacrificed their lives for the others. That's how the movie ends: two old folks huddled in the clearing while the jungle drums (and the approach of head-hunters) grow nearer. The point is, would I do the same for Bob and Betty? Do I owe them that much after bringing them this far? Belle would say yes. She would jump right in and sacrifice everything without question. But I have questions.

Bob has questions too. He wants to know what we are going to do. I tell him we are going to wait for a taxi. But what about the baby? he says. The baby will wait too, I tell him. Even if Betty is in labor she may not deliver for another day, or another week. We hear suddenly what sounds like a shot from the cannon. Bob quickly checks to make sure his rifle is loaded. He is still unaware that he carries blanks. Regardless, he has no concept of the odds. We would not stand a chance if the natives decided to attack. Bob peers into the darkness with his binoculars, as if he could see something. "I think they are hunting wild pigs with that cannon." He leans forward and focuses. "That's when natives hunt pigs, you know, at night." I fire another flare. Someone is bound to see it. Bob has a transmitting pack on his belt, but it is not working. He broke it while climbing after the tarp.

Belle calls us back to camp because Betty is in severe pain. "Bad vibes," says Bob. "Real bad vibes." I ask Belle what we should do. She says we should let the baby come, if indeed it is coming. Betty is in tears. I can hardly look at her, I feel so guilty for bringing her out here. I tell her not to worry. Mom and Dad will take care of everything. "Wonderful," she says. "I feel better already." I am grateful for her sarcasm.

Belle heats a pot of water. It comforts me somehow to see her kneeling near the fire like that. I kiss the nape of her neck and she shrugs, as if it itched. She tells me to wash my hands. Betty is chewing on a towel to keep from biting herself. Belle reaches under the covers and pulls off Betty's bikini bottoms, which are damp with blood and mucous. Bob lets out a girlish cry when he sees them.

Labor is short, but Betty fights it. Bob and I have to hold her down. She is half delirious with fear. Belle has some trouble pulling the baby out, but she manages finally, her hands messy with blood and fluids. Bob gets sick at the sight of it, and Scotty howls as if it were the end of the world. I turn my head away until Belle cleans up. The baby is a girl, a tiny hairless creature with a dime-sized birthmark on her forehead. She breathes noisily through her mouth like a landed fish. Bob wants to know why she is not crying. Belle tells him that some babies don't cry, but Bob cannot accept such an easy answer. In the old days, he says, all babies cried. While Belle washes the child, Bob makes a point of counting toes and fingers. "Everything appears to be in place," he announces. He thinks we should name the baby something special. Like Managua or Sheba, he says. Belle reminds him that the choice is up to Betty, who is now sleeping. Bob talks high-pitched nonsense to the baby. Scotty leaps up in an effort to join the fun. He is barking and being a nuisance. Belle tells me to take him for a walk, but I am reluctant to go. The arrival of our newest family member has left me confused. This is the first time in two weeks I have not felt like the leader. Belle is in control now and I am unsure as to what I should be doing. "What about the baby?" I ask her. Go on, she tells me, everything is well in hand.

Once we get away from the firelight and the smells of camp, Scotty forgets all that has just passed. The fishy odors of low tide lure him down the beach, where he is eager to investigate the exposed stretches of reef and sand. I let him lead the way and we zigzag, alternately starting and stopping as he scrutinizes debris every other step. He finds a half-buried log and sniffs at it, then lifts his leg and leaves his mark. He has discovered not a log, I realize, but the cannon! It is almost completely sunk in the sand, just ten yards from shore. I become excited, like a treasure hunter, and I yank on the barrel. But try as I might, I cannot pull the weapon loose. Sand sucks at my feet as if to swallow me. I am gasping from effort. I manage to move the barrel back and forth finally, but the wheels remain anchored deep in the muck. I don't suppose I will ever find out how the cannon got here, but it should be easy for Bob and me to retrieve. I turn around to steer Scotty towards camp, but Scotty will not go. He is frightened. This sudden change in his behavior encourages me to change my mind about the cannon — I will let it sink. It is not worth the trouble, particularly in light of our present circumstances, for I realize, as Scotty has, that we are not alone. There are natives all around, standing at a distance up and down the beach and on rocks near the water. I see them only as silhouettes and shadows, but I am quite sure they mean us no harm. They are simply watching, like sentries, as if to guard us from the dangers of the jungle. □

Hugo Lindo

ON POETRY

Translated by Elizabeth Gamble Miller

So: it is as we were saying.
A lighting of lamps without apparent reason.
Raising glasses of mellowed wine
and drinking the colors of snow
as one who sips wings of the dove
or offers a toast with angels.

Certainly: as we were saying.
Why detain within words
what will slip through them and
at the very moment of the spell
revert into its tenuous silence?
Why define what may be
conveyed in hieroglyphics?

Precisely: we were just saying so.
Not to name the things or
any quality that constricts them
but rather their shadow,
the miraculous
resonance of their aromas,
so the words themselves
will travel toward the miracle,
alone,
along the airways of the leaves.

Michael Fischer

WILLIAM BLAKE'S QUARREL WITH INDETERMINACY

Contemporary literary critics often argue that the meaning of a literary work is indeterminate or undecidable. There are no right or wrong interpretations, in this view; as Robert Crosman has recently contended, "a poem really means whatever any reader seriously believes it to mean."[1] Some critics base the indecipherability of literary meaning on the subjectivity of perception, the construal of meaning exemplifying for them the principle that all acts of perception reflect the interpretive community, discursive formation, or "identity theme" (Norman Holland) of the perceiver, not some independent object. Other critics appeal to the force of language, which endlessly ramifies or disseminates meaning, twisting even seemingly clear and unequivocal statements into tangled knots that forever defy unraveling. Still other critics argue from the political uses to which standards in interpretation have been put. Correctness in their view is an invention like Standard English, designed to rationalize the oppression and squelch the creativity of people who see things differently.

Whatever the merits of these arguments, William Blake did not agree with them. He insisted that poems can be "definite and determinate," "organized and minutely articulated," with "every word and every letter" "studied and put into its fit place."[2] Instead of finding irony, humor, or arrogance in these claims, I propose taking them at face value and finding in Blake a challenge to the skepticism some recent critics think he anticipates.

At first glance, Blake seems an obvious precursor of those critics who argue for the indeterminacy of meaning. Taken out of context, some of his best known statements on the arts, politics, and perception appear to sanction the right, even the duty, of readers to do as they like with texts. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* Isaiah agrees with the narrator that for "all poets," "a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make[s] it so," suggesting that a statement is true when an individual feels strongly about it, not when it corresponds to anything external (E 38). Similarly, when Reynolds counsels "recourse to nature herself, who is always at hand," Blake replies, "Nonsense: Every eye sees differently. As the eye, such the object" (E 634), anticipating a point he makes in *Jerusalem*: "What seems to Be: Is: To those to whom / It seems to Be . . ." (E 177). Reality apparently lies in the imagination of its creators, who see differently, not better or worse. It follows that "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression" (E 43). There are no pre-existent norms or objective truths to which individuals are accountable.

As a reader, Blake seems to act on these relativistic assumptions. His annotations question, attack, and revise texts, seemingly abandoning any attempt to report what they say. Similarly, when he illustrates the work of others, he tends to recreate it rather than translate it into visual terms. Departing from the mimetic premises of eighteenth-century literary painting, his designs function more like political cartoons than conventional illustrations. Most authors would be understandably nervous about asking Blake to "illustrate" their work.

Finally, Blake's own poems seem to encourage the liberties that he takes with Dante and Milton. Even among sophisticated readers, Blake's works still seem an obscure mix of idiosyncratic symbols, fuzzy plots, and bizarre illustrations that can be made to say anything. Nearly everyone agrees that Blake is famous (or infamous) for turning the meaning of his works over to his readers and demanding of them considerable ingenuity, negative capability, and patience. As W. J. T. Mitchell has shown, Blake's genius lay in "designing pictures as vortices which draw

[1]Robert Crosman, "Do Readers Make Meaning?," in *The Reader in the Text,* ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 154.

[2]William Blake, "Annotations to the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds," *A Descriptive Catalogue,* and *Jersualem,* in *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 635, 532, 144. All references to Blake are to this edition (subsequently cited in text as E).

the reader inward into a dialectic of ironies, ambiguities, paradoxes, and concentric unfoldings . . . ."[3] Still more vividly, David Erdman has called the illuminated poem a "prompt book" which encourages us to make "an imaginative leap in the dark, a leap *beyond* the dark" to "Visions, Expanses, New Songs, and Thunderous Dramatic Forms."[4]

Judging from Blake's relativistic pronouncements on knowledge, his aggressiveness as a reader and illustrator, and the open-endedness of his own works, Blake, in short, would seem an ideal champion of unlimited creativity and freedom in interpretation. Yet there is another side to him, best seen in his explicit denunciations of the shortsightedness of other artists and readers and his unequivocal defense of the clarity, organization, and precision of his own work. When Blake calls Reynolds a liar, idiot, blockhead, fool, and knave, I hear him saying that Reynolds is wrong, not simply different, in his view of reality and art. When not denouncing "error," "ignorance," and "stupidity," Blake is deploring the "unorganized Blots & Blurs of Rubens and Titian" and insisting that

> The Infinite alone resides in Definite and Determinate Identity
> Establishment of Truth depends on destruction of Falsehood continually . . . .
> (E 203)

After seeming to dispense with standards of correctness, he insists on them at every turn.

It is tempting to say that Blake is inconsistent: his recognition of the subjectivity of perception and taste undermines these self-confident judgments. Or ought to have undermined them: one recent commentator on Romanticism, Tilottama Rajan in *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism,* observes that the early Romantics, including Blake,

> are characterized by a more unbending commitment to a transcendental poetics, by a reluctance to follow through on their own insights, and most significantly, by the absence of that radical irony which makes it impossible to turn back to illusion.[5]

In speaking as if Reynolds were wrong, Blake, in this view, failed to follow through on his own insight that "every eye sees differently." His appeals to truth and clarity lacked that "radical irony" which would have made it impossible for him to turn back to such "illusions."

Rajan calls her approach a "deconstruction" of Romanticism, but arguing that the skeptical premises of the Romantics subvert their seemingly traditional conclusions has been a common move in twentieth-century criticism, especially in the work of such hostile readers as Irving Babbitt, Yvor Winters, and some Marxists. Gerald Graff, whom no one would confuse with a deconstructionist, offers a version of this argument in *Literature Against Itself:*

> The logic of romantic transcendental philosophy led to a relativism that was certainly antithetical to what most romantic thinkers intended, yet which furthered the loss of community they were seeking to redress . . . . Those who see romanticism as positive and optimistic (notably, M. H. Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism* and René Wellek in "Romanticism Reconsidered") base their view largely on what the romantics themselves consciously intended — to respect common truth and the artist's responsibility to his community. Those who by contrast see romanticism as nihilistic (critics such as J. Hillis Miller, Morse Peckham, and Harold Bloom), base their views on the logical consequence of romantic ideas, independent of intentions.[6]

To apply Graff's argument to Blake, even if he thought Reynolds an idiot, he had no right to, given his premise that "as the eye, such the object" and his consequent disbelief in objective tests of idiocy.

Far from being incompatible, the arguments of the deconstructionist and the anti-Romantic feed off each other. While the one embraces the confusion and uncertainty that nettle the other, both assume that a valid statement must be conclu-

[3]W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 209.

[4]Quoted in *Blake's Composite Art,* p. 53.

[5]Tilottama Rajan, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 265.

[6]Gerald Graff, *Literature Against Itself* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 39.

sively proven. Disdaining subjectivism, the anti-Romantic argues that we must prove aesthetic and interpretive judgments (without ever quite showing that we can), or acquiesce in the further weakening of the authority and effectiveness of criticism. The deconstructionist — here Tilottama Rajan — supposes that we cannot prove such judgments, but she, too, implies that we must, if we are to avoid terminal indecision and self-doubt. To return to Blake, both critics would agree that while he may have been sure in his critique of Reynolds, he should not have been, because he questioned the objective demonstration of error.

I do not think that the logic of Blake's position commits him to the ineffectual equivocation with which both of these critical positions want to afflict him. As Blake wrote in his copy of Reynolds' *Discourses*, "God forbid that Truth should be Confined to Mathematical Demonstration" (E 648). He explained why in his reply to the "reasoning historian" in *A Descriptive Catalogue*:

> . . . I will not be fooled by you into opinions, that you please to impose, to disbelieve what you think improbable or impossible. His opinions, who does not see spiritual agency, is not worth any man's reading; he who rejects a fact because it is improbable, must reject all history and retain doubts only.
>
> (E 534)

I take "rational" or "Mathematical Demonstration" to mean absolute proof, each step of which is secured by quantitative means such as weighing or measuring. In such proof the eye functions as a neutral space or blank slate, passively recording external data like a thermometer registering the temperature. An "impossible" or "improbable" statement resists demonstration. Instead of illuminating the object, the eye colors it, generating "impossible" or "improbable" assertions that reflect the biases of the observer.

According to Blake, abiding by demonstration paradoxically multiplies the doubts that demonstration is meant to eliminate. Commenting on Reynolds' advocacy of "real science" as an antidote to "prejudice," Blake says, "Here is a great deal to do to Prove that All Truth is Prejudice for All that is Valuable in Knowledge[s] is Superior to Demonstrative Science such as is Weighed or Measured" (E 648). The truths most worth knowing, the ethical, political, and interpretive judgments that we cannot discard, resist demonstration and consequently seem "indefinite." In these areas, the eye is always constituting its object: instead of unadorned facts, we find witnesses, shifting opinions, "firm perswasions." Looking for a solid foundation, we end up with an infinite regress of false bottoms. "All Truth" turns out to be "Prejudice." Blake consequently refers to the "crucifying cruelties of Demonstration," its "[blindness] to all the simple rules of life" (E 168, 214).

In refusing to confine truth to "Mathematical Demonstration," Blake, then, is refusing to "retain doubts only." There are still facts, but the imagination of the beholder, not demonstration, determines them. When Blake speaks of the intelligibility and "perfect unity" of his poems (or, for that matter, of the obtuseness of Reynolds), he is consequently referring to qualities somewhere between "a cloudy vapour, or a nothing" and clear signs that speak for themselves. The active imagination of the reader uncovers these qualities, yet they are still there, in the text, or, more exactly, in the text that the imagination of the reader helps create. As Keats would say, the meaning and structure of a poem by Blake are "things semireal such as Love, the Clouds &c which require a greeting of the Spirit [cf. Blake's 'spiritual agency'] to make them wholly exist."[7] The dependency of interpretation on the reader's imagination admittedly puts interpretation beyond "mathematical demonstration" but does not make it arbitrary or indeterminate.

W. J. T. Mitchell puts this theory into practice in *Blake's Composite Art*. As Morris Eaves says in his review of this book, Mitchell's "nervous" vocabulary makes him sound "like a post-structuralist who would however admit to having spent some unforgettable moments with the New Critics."[8] Blake's poetry, as Mitchell describes it, complicates, frustrates, and defers our search for its meaning without, however, making such a search futile. Commenting on an illustration to *The Book of Urizen* that Mitchell thinks might depict one of the Eternals, Urizen, Orc, Fuzon, all, or any combination of the above, Mitchell concedes that

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[7]To Benjamin Bailey, March 13, 1818, in *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), p. 1212.

[8]Eaves' review appeared in *The Wordsworth Circle*, 10 (Summer, 1979), p. 278.

there is something maddening about this sort of omni-directional ambiguity. We may be tempted to think Blake provides too little and asks too much, and that the design is more like a Rorschach test than a pictorial statement. At the risk of sounding like a true believer I would suggest that this is precisely what Blake intends. We might prefer that he tell us exactly who the figure is, where he is going, and whether those flames can singe a sleeve, but that would remove us from the action and give us a Urizenic illusion of an objective, nonparticipatory standpoint. This does not mean that any random association may be imposed on the picture and it does not mean that every reading is equally compelling: Fuzon and Orc are significant parallels to the figure in the picture, but they are probably not what Blake had primarily in mind when he designed it. What he certainly did have in mind was the tension between contrary feelings and interpretations in his composition, and a search for ways of making the viewer participate in that tension.[9]

The difficulty with such a statement obviously lies in pinning down its distinctions. In the absence of "an objective, nonparticipatory standpoint," what makes one reading more "compelling" or less "random" than another? How can we determine what Blake "primarily" or "certainly" had in mind? Lacking any independent textual objects, how can we test critical vision? Mitchell's implicit answer to these questions seems to me quite close to Blake's. Quoting Blake's request in *Jerusalem* that his reader "forgive what you do not approve, & love me for this energetic exertion of my talent," Mitchell admits

> It may well be impossible to "approve" every word and image in *Jerusalem*, not just in the sense of commending its truth or beauty but in the more fundamental sense of "proving" or demonstrating the meaning of every particular in a practical way. Blake asks us, in other words, to read in a spirit of faith and forgiveness as well as demonstration, and not to repeat the error of Albion by making these two into antithetical habits of mind.[10]

In entangling his reading of *Jerusalem* with "faith and forgiveness," Mitchell is not dispensing with evidence but indicating its limits. In *Blake's Composite Art* he quotes from Blake's works, cites the opinions of other scholars, acknowledges Blake's own theory of art, respects what we know of the composition of Blake's poems, and, in short, tries to make his readings as responsible as he can. As I read Mitchell, he is not cynically appeasing what he sees as the pointless standards of our interpretive community (in order, say, to get his book published), or delivering the conclusive interpretation of the meaning of Blake's poems. By his own admission, nothing is concluded in *Blake's Composite Art*, yet, I would say, much is discovered about the meaning and organization of Blake's works.

If we accept what Blake says about interpretation, then we cannot demonstrate the truth of the compliment I have paid Mitchell. It remains to be seen whether the unverifiable status of such a tribute makes it a purely personal sentiment. There is ample precedent in Blake for suspecting that my praise of Mitchell might be dictated by self-interest rather than by the facts. Blake was especially adept at detecting the political and psychological motives beneath seemingly innocent statements. He could suggest that Reynolds, for example, discussed the arts in such a way as to placate the "Rich Men of England" who "Hired" him (E 625). Similarly, Bacon's "Primum Mobile" was King James (E 622) and Dante was an "Emperors Man" (E 624). Along similar lines, out of timidity, say, or friendship, I could be reading Mitchell in order to flatter him.

Among contemporary critics influenced by Blake, Harold Bloom has done the most to perpetuate the suspicion reflected in Blake's deflating comments on Reynolds and Bacon. In "The Breaking of Form" (one of the essays in *Deconstruction and Criticism*), Bloom recalls

> a small meeting of distinguished professors, which had gathered to consider the qualifications of an individual whom they might ask to join their enterprise. Before meditating upon this person's merits, they spontaneously performed a little ritual of faith. One by one, in turn, they confessed their belief in the real presence of the literary text. It had an existence independent of their devotion to it. It had priority over them, would be there after they were gone, and above all it had a meaning or meanings

[9] *Blake's Composite Art*, pp. 145-46.

[10] *Blake's Composite Art*, p. 215.

> quite apart from their interpretive activity. The literary text was *there*. Where? Why, in editions, definitive editions, upon which responsible commentaries might be written. Responsible commentaries. For "responsible," substitute what word you will, whatever anxious word might match the social pieties and professional civilities that inform the spirituality of such occasions.[11]

Bloom pictures the insecure professors reassuring each other of their correctness and excluding threatening outsiders in the name of bogus norms. Like most of us in such situations, I suppose, Bloom sees himself as a rebel exposing his colleagues' objectivity for the charade it really is.

Bloom, I think, rightly deplores the self-deception of these "distinguished professors." But when he goes on to say that in interpretation "there is *always and only* bias, inclination, prejudgment, swerve [my emphasis]," his argument becomes less persuasive. Critics of diverse biases and inclinations have agreed on complex interpretive questions: I cannot think of anyone, for example, who thinks that Shakespeare applauds Macbeth's brutality. Bloom cannot explain why critics who are otherwise so different in their biases have come to share this one. In my view, the "bias" in question resembles an infant's "bias" for breast milk: it is a preference that cuts across other differences because it is more clearly right. If this opinion about *Macbeth* is "biased," it is so only in the sense that it cannot be proved. Still, the agreement of such varied critics suggests that it is a statement about Shakespeare's play, the meaning of which is determinate to the extent that we know that while Shakespeare may be doing many things in *Macbeth*, celebrating Macbeth's reign of terror is not one of them.

For students of Blake, a more appropriate example of an interpretive judgment comes from Stanley Fish, who proposes to read Blake's "The Tyger" as "an allegory of the digestive processes,"

> a first-person lament of someone who had violated a dietary prohibition against eating tiger meat, and finds that forbidden food burning brightly in his stomach, making its fiery way through the forests of the intestinal tract, beating and hammering like some devil-wielded anvil. In his distress he can do nothing but rail at the tiger and at the mischance that led him to mistake its meat for the meat of some purified animal: "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" The poem ends as it began, with the speaker still paying the price of his sin and wondering at the inscrutable purpose of a diety that would lead his creatures into digestive temptation.

Fish pounces on the reply that he hopes to provoke, namely, that the facts prove his reading wrong. Interpretations, he argues, constitute the facts that they ostensibly rely on for support. Because "canons of acceptability" change, moreover, what is ridiculous today may be "respectable and even orthodox" tomorrow. In the case of Blake, virtually anything goes "because according to the critical consensus there is no belief so bizarre that Blake could not have been committed to it and it would be no trick at all to find some elaborate system of alimentary significances (Pythagorean? Swedenborgian? Cabbalistic?) which he could be presumed to have known." Fish challenges any reader who thinks he has gone too far "to consult some recent numbers of *Blake Studies*."[12]

As Fish admits, to gain a hearing his reading has to build on the critical consensus it wants to extend or subvert. He cannot, for example, impose on Blake any "elaborate system of alimentary significances": because of what critics already presume to know about Blake, only something like a Swedenborgian system will do. When we examine our presumptions about Blake, however, we find that some have endured longer or have won the assent of a broader range of critics than others. Fish does not want to say that the persistence of those assumptions is in their favor — that they have lasted, in other words, because they work as interpretations of Blake. But he is at a loss to improve on the cognitive explanation he wants to discard. Inertia, prejudice, and institutional fiat will not explain the durability of these interpretations (even if prejudice were the answer, for instance, we would still need to know why these "prejudices"

[11]Harold Bloom, "The Breaking of Form," in Harold Bloom, et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), p. 8. For a critique of Bloom's attack on the "social pieties and professional civilities" of academic criticism, see my "Deconstruction: The Revolt against Gentility," *democracy*, 1 (October, 1981), pp. 77-86.

[12]Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 348-49.

about Blake have survived while so many others have disappeared or have excited vigorous opposition). I would suggest that some presumptions about Blake endure because they satisfy our sense of what he says. The fact that everyone (including, of course, Stanley Fish) rejects a gastrointestinal approach to "The Tyger," that no one has found an appropriate system of dietary restrictions to which Blake could be presumed to have subscribed, makes Fish's reading unlikely, if not, to be sure, impossible.

To return to my comment on the validity of Mitchell's reading: such a statement is not purely personal to the extent that others agree with it. In going on to explain the broad appeal of some interpretations on cognitive grounds (in the absence of any better explanation), I have not been suggesting that a critical statement is proven only when different critics or interpretive communities endorse it. Blake wisely never waited for the agreement of others before making up his mind about a literary work. Instead of deferring to established opinion like a "Passive & Polite & a Virtuous Ass" (E 632), he questioned it, observing that "since the French Revolution Englishmen are all Intermeasurable One by Another Certainly a happy state of Agreement to which I for One do not Agree" (E 707). The final test of an interpretation is the imagination, not the public support that an interpretation can gather.

Still, although Blake refused to suppose that the majority is infallible, he held out the hope that a community could be right. His alternative to the tyrannical subordination of intermeasurable parts to a pre-existent code was not anarchy but love and friendship, forged of individuals freely expressing their imagination. Neither Bloom nor Fish persuades me that Blake was wrong in thinking that people can agree out of well founded convictions as well as habit and fear.

Uneasy with the view of interpretation that I have been attributing here to Blake, contemporary criticism seems to me in danger of splitting into two factions or tendencies, one calling for strict demonstration and fixed rules in interpretation, the other sadly or joyfully answering that because such proof is unavailable, interpretation is therefore arbitrary, a game we play "without security," as Jacques Derrida puts it in an often cited passage. This polarization reflects many developments, one of which may be the widespread feeling that academic criticism is losing whatever audience it may once have had, as enrollment and interest plummet in undergraduate and graduate literature courses. In a semi-literate, forgetful society, moreover, even the few still taking these courses may no longer be fit. Like hand-loom weaving in the early nineteenth century, our profession, in short, seems to be dying, unable to reproduce itself and perpetuate its expertise. Like lecturers who have gone on too long, we address an audience that is shrinking to a handful of distracted stragglers and personal friends.

I am not arguing for the accuracy of these pessimistic observations, only for their influence on the split in criticism that I have described. Critics who insist on black-and-white demonstration in interpretation typically argue that we have contributed to our own isolation (in most versions of this argument, "we" includes postmodernist novelists and symbolist and/or confessional poets as well as academic critics). Through self-indulgent wordplay, recondite allusiveness, slipshod reasoning, and opaque jargon, we have lost our constituency. We can recover it — or prevent its further erosion — only by adhering to rigid norms of objectivity, clarity, and logic. When we have something reasonable to say, people will once again listen.

Instead of trying to reverse the atrophy of public interest in criticism, some revisionist critics seek to embrace or redeem their isolation by assigning interpretation private goals, like personal pleasure or the "strength" that comes from misreading an author in order to appear to have something distinctive to say. No longer a means of communication or discovery, interpretation becomes in these theories what it may already be in fact: solely a means of individual entertainment or advancement, of salvaging a place for oneself in critical discourse at someone else's expense. Criticism still matters, but only to the morale and reputation of the dwindling number of individuals still engaged in it.

Blake helps us turn these contraries into a progression, or at least into a more complete theory of interpretation, by encouraging us to see that each is partly right: the one in supposing that the best critics have always defied narrow canons of objectivity and proof, the other in assuming that interpretation is not reducible to a wrestling match among more or less strong misreadings. I have been suggesting that Blake arrived at this view by casting off, in the words of *Milton*, the

skepticism that contemporary critics think he ought to have accepted and by putting on "Faith in the Saviour," imagination. While his work does not solve the problems that criticism faces today, he does encourage us to look for solutions rather than resign ourselves to seeing interpretation as a power struggle waged "to gratify ravenous Envy" (again to quote *Milton*). Instead of corroborating our despair, Blake, in other words, dares us to hope that criticism can be the dialogue of love, forgiveness, and friendship that today it seldom is.[13] □

[13]I presented an early version of this paper at the 1982 Blake and Criticism Conference, University of California, Santa Cruz, and wish to thank Nelson Hilton and Thomas Vogler, the Conference organizers.

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Octavio Armand

TOUCH

Translated by Carol Maier

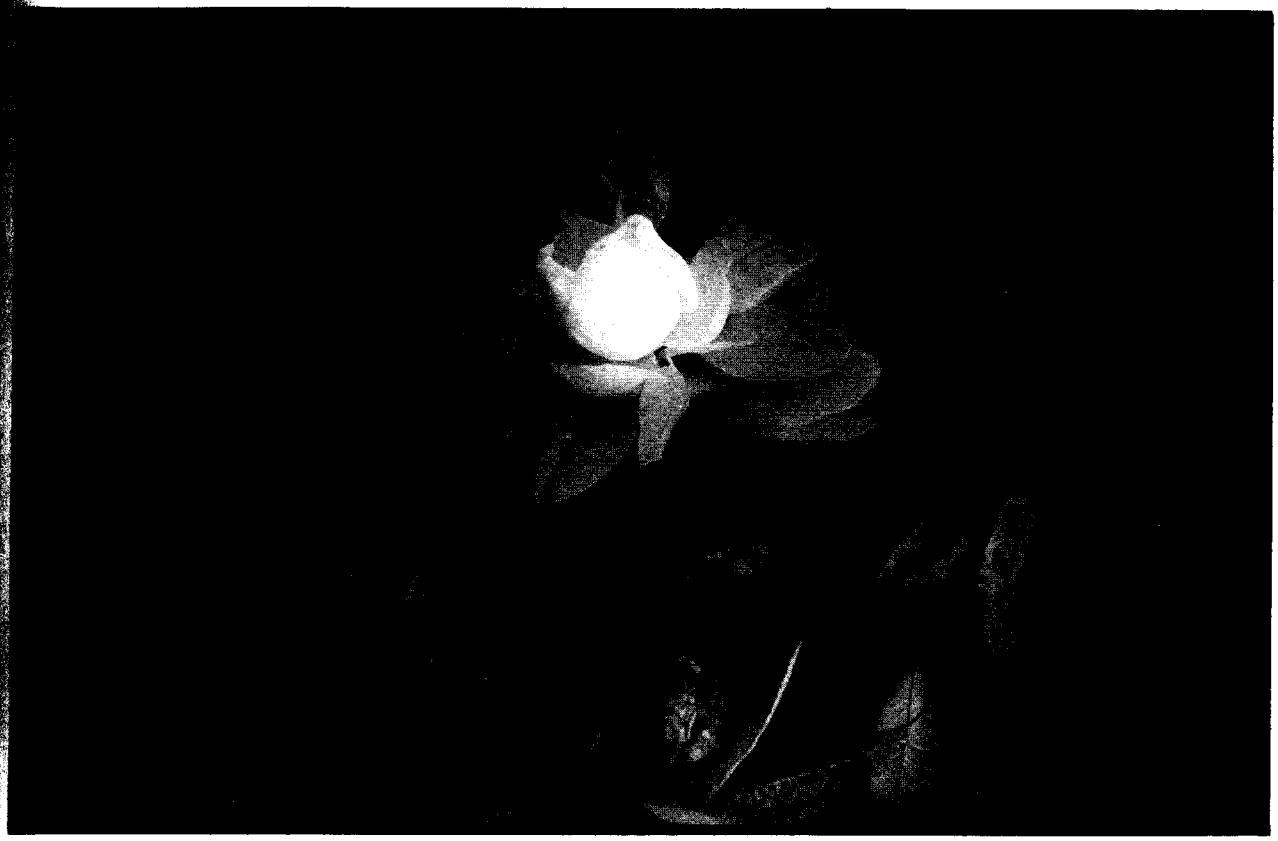
On the other side
of the lines
a shared fate
confirms the plan.

Everything is clear,
dark words
read
through
a page.

In my open
hand,
the fists,
still curved;
I open them
until I touch
—from within—
the hand that touches
scattering
bones in my blood,
erasing lines, erasing.

Sandra Russell Clark

PORTFOLIO



Magnolia, New Orleans

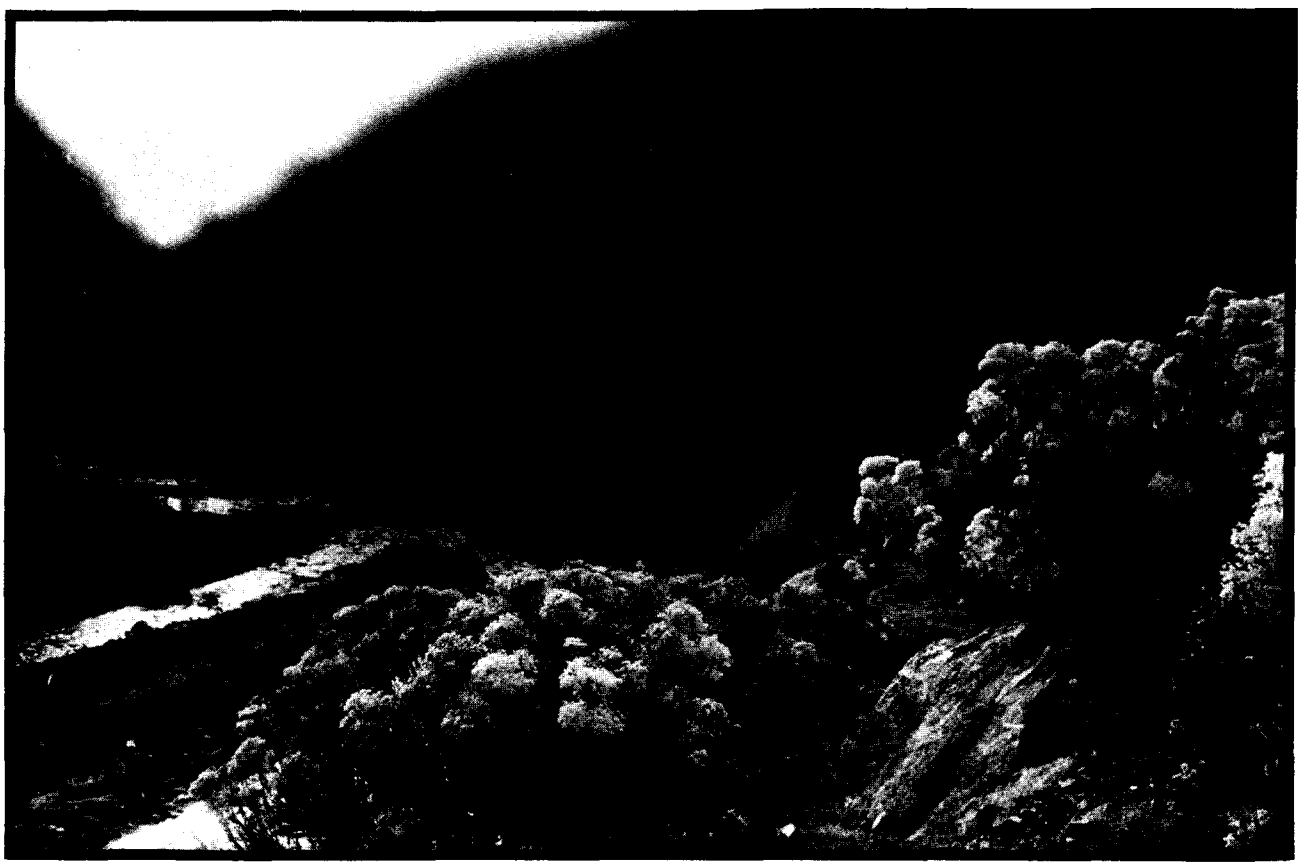
Louisiana Dreamscape

Louisiana Dreamscape

Louisiana Dreamscape

Memories Revisited, New Mexico

Memories Revisited, New Mexico



Memories Revisited, New Mexico

Silver Slipper, New York

Tony Cartano

THE HOWLING MONKEY

Translated by Lee Fahnestock

My name is Marco Polo and I am a killer. My name is Marco Polo, or rather that is the name I have used since the circus man, Dizzy Venuti, discovered me in the Bogota zoo, and particularly since the American newspapers ran headlines a few years back about the New York arrival of the "globetrotting monkey."

My name is Marco Polo. Who remembers that these days except for me? I am very fond of this man name. It is the only one I could ever manage to bear, or bear to manage — laughter, toothy grins! Show them, sour, unhealthy, dingy teeth. . . An anonymous sign on the bars of my cage gives out with "*Mycetes ursinus*, com. howling monkey, nat. South America."

I no longer exist. The howl is stuck in my throat. Blank stares, gawking there, across the ditch, and timorous hands toss me dried-up peanuts.

Another sign, this one larger, advises: "Dangerous animal. Beware of bites." In scarlet letters.

Soon I am going to die. No one will hear me. Each passing day I gnaw away at it, this story I have to tell, at the tips of my ragged fingernails — a dead end fable, gutless as the skin of a flea. I never howl anymore. I barely purr, rehashing all the memories my head came close to losing on the scaffold, on the block, or else by strangulation — I confuse all those ways men have at their disposal for changing me over from life to death. I have killed and one thing is certain, that they have sentenced me to death. And they have found an even more terrible means in pardoning me. But I go too fast, I am anticipating on my simian thoughts which have always tended to slip off to the languid orbits of dream.

Patience, all of my story will out. But first we will need to go back to the source, penetrate the jungle of instinct, fray a path however tortuous through the forest of feelings, plunge back into the past that was, perhaps, my one and only truth. From then on my destiny was manufactured by man. Be that as it may, I will tell all, recount everything. For the thrice-turned tale. I am nothing but a sick old monkey, however I know what I owe to my last public, to those still willing to hear me out, this one last time. Step this way, right this way, ladies and gents, young and old, the great show is about to begin and no matter what, it must go on. On the flying trapeze of the final agony that I feel, not without a certain pleasure, trickling into my veins, I offer you my life . . . without a net. Marco Polo, the howling monkey of the Amazon! Not recommended for the fainthearted! Just the way it used to be, in the good old days of circus and music-hall posters...

Drop by drop, the essences took root in the earth drenched through several nights of downpour. The sap pushed toward the treetops with the tranquil exuberance of untrammeled life that nothing would impede. And the leaves took up a rustling — silvery thunder — while the shrill paws of insect carnivores rasped away on pelts of moss and lichen. Packs alert, mounting an attack on the astonished greenery, tenderly disclosed to the tapping of the rain, completely open to pleasure, awaiting the deadly sting that would return it to the silence of the tropical greenhouse. Through the nocturnal thickets, lunar shafts filtered deep into the intimate part of the lianas where the wind whispered a love song. The rutting of the jungle beasts. Everywhere in the darkness bursts of fervid voices flared up, age-old yet clumsy gestures. Bodies swayed. Haunches uncoiled, arms extended, bellies rounded, reddened members. Tongues jabbered, perched at the peak of screaming panic. Suddenly a deeper bellowing, more vital too, disrupted the harmony of that delightful cacophony. Venom hardened in the ganglia. Heads raised up, raptured, seeking an ecstasy that kept them waiting. And always, the water's bosom lapped shut again across the fevered marshes. Then the primal clay drew back to make way for the essences of life. The miasmas gave birth, rump spread to the new day that swaddled in its blood-rose cloths the luminous babble of the nests, the dens and burrows.

Roll of drums, no, the flutes are silenced and the chant has gone out like a neglected brazier, dull roll of giant caterpillars, all devouring. The trees resound with repeated blows, degenerate tom-tom, inaudible message, hammering of demented axes, rifts that plunge nature into darkness and the eyes of animals glimmer, frightened. A midget tempest seems to skim the treetops, cyclones of a metallic typhoon, the clatter of a thousand dangling pots and pans. The spirits have gathered for an unseasonal dance; the lianas quiver and bodies tumble, crash to the ground, while even the predators flee, tails between their legs, yowling like propitiatory victims against disaster. The roar advances and the herd runs to the shelter of trunks still left standing. Whimpers of agony. Gathers of squeals. Cries of genocide. The earth howls. And across the wrinkled skin of lifeless branches flow tears of fire. The large apes battle, as if their fratricidal struggle could stave off the danger that threatens them all. The feeblest hurtle after their hereditary enemies, toward the cascades of metal that crush them. The mothers conceal their faces, hiding beneath their torn bellies the little ones whose still-unopened eyes are unaware of the furor that surrounds them, but whose ears ring from an uproar that shakes them to the core. The blind outcries are not enough, despite their power magnified by terror, to reassemble members of the tribe. They disperse as if wishing to hasten an inexorable end. When unknown whirlwinds descend on the people of desire, it is best to succumb, united in a willingness to give up rather than resist the pincers of hell that disembowel the warm sources of life.

Death came to that garden.

That is how the species of the great white monkey disappeared; I am probably one of the last survivors. When the final tears have dried on my rheumy eyes, humane flames can bear off the vestiges of my body to the dust of the void, where I will find my brothers once more, asleep for all eternity alongside the giant carbonized trees.

That is how Marco Polo was born, at the cold breast of an Amazon razed by men. I knew neither mother nor father, and concerning orphans I am master of the whole sad story. But to tell it would again be "aping" — words, words . . . yes, aping those who impose it on me, and I'll preserve what little use of reason and language still left me to relive *otherwise,* and after my own fashion, the apprenticeship of solitude.

And first the howl . . .

. . . beneath the baby-fur, disheveled, the minute impulse shivered to the caress of the winter wind that bore down through the stands of gigantic trees. The flesh wanted to return to the maternal womb but the eyes had too much trouble staying open in the uproar of artificial night into which the destruction had plunged the entire forest. Sun, luxuriant greenery, had been followed by turmoil of the earth opening up, turning over on itself as if it had to heave up everything to its deepest entrails, its very roots, to its antipodes, beyond the cold.

A ridiculous thin cry sprang from the obstructed throat, instantly drowned out by the rustle of falling trees, instantly pinned to earth by the shock that reverberated beyond the mountains, to the source of the great river.

Very soon the water had risen and the monotonous lentor had turned to torrent and deluge. With paws clutching to a tree trunk, he had ridden the rapids, shot through a tunnel of mud at whose extremity — his fragile little being had this foreboding — lay death. His futile appeals sank beneath an avalanche of foam. Murmurs rose from his chest and knocked desperately against the glottis. For all that the neck puffed out, the stomach strained, the muscles contracted, the little bone failed to vent a single note.

The *mycetes ursinus* had been given the time to learn the rudiments of his language. But the message went far beyond the narrow confines of his clan, and toward a test for which he had not been prepared. The adult males had never imagined an initiation of this sort, so the sounds remained empty, lacking all resonance, for they had been released on another planet.

The spoken word had been lost. Nothing was left but to die.

But I am still here to tell that death. The baby monkey who drifted on his Amazonian tree trunk was indeed me, Marco Polo. But my dying was not on that day before yesterday, during the apocalypse of origins, nor even yesterday when, playing man, I concealed my identity under cover of pompous cries. No, my dying, which exists beyond reach of words, is today. □

Michael Vannoy Adams

WHALING AND DIFFERENCE: *MOBY-DICK* DECONSTRUCTED

From the Transparent Eyeball to the Pasteboard Mask

For a transcendentalist like Emerson, there is nothing arbitrary, "nothing lucky or capricious," in the relation between signifier and signified. The relation is, as Emerson says, "constant."[1] It is invariant: necessary and not contingent. The relation between signifier and signified "is not fancied by some poet," Emerson says. It does not depend, subjectively, on the whimsy of man "but stands in the will of God, and so is free to be known by all men," that is, to be discovered by them, objectively.[2] To the transcendentalist, nature is an appearance, behind or beyond which is reality — God, or the Over-Soul. Because signification is motivated by God, vision is, for Emerson, unmediated. As he says, "I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing. I see all."[3] Thus the ground of meaning for the transcendentalist is the ground of being, the ultimate transcendental signified, which is to say, the Over-Soul, or God, who wills it to be so. If nature is a sign that means something, what it means is designed by God, not assigned, arbitrarily, by man. In short, Emerson valorizes what Jonathan Culler calls a "theocritical" position.[4]

There are not seven but two types, or definitions, of ambiguity. That is, ambiguity may mean to be susceptible of multiple interpretation, or it may mean to be unamenable to any conclusive interpretation whatsoever. In this respect, Emerson says that "the highest minds of the world have never ceased to explore the double meaning, or shall I say the quadruple or the centuple or much more manifold meaning, of every sensuous fact."[5] According to Emerson, signification is polysemous. Every signifier — or sensuous fact — has not just one but many signifieds. The signifier is related to numerous, it may be to innumerable, signifieds. But this multiplicity is, for Emerson, grounded in what he calls "that Unity, that Over-Soul."[6] Hence what seems to be plurivocal signification is, finally, univocal signification — inasmuch as it is motivated, or willed, by God. In contrast, Melville defines ambiguity not as multiplicity of meaning but as indeterminacy of meaning. For Melville, signification is radically equivocal.

It is by means of Ahab that Melville expresses what is, to say the least, an ambivalent attitude toward transcendentalism. Ahab entertains seriously the possibility that nature is merely an appearance, or persona. "'All visible objects, man'" he says, "'are but as pasteboard masks.'" He declares that "'some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask.'" Insofar as Ahab insists that there is something behind or beyond the mask, he seems to be a transcendentalist. But to the extent that he has doubts and expresses them, he tends to be a deconstructor. "'Sometimes,'" he confesses, "'I think there's naught beyond.'"[7] Whether there is anything or nothing at all behind the mask, whether nature — in this case, the white whale — is appearance or reality, effect or cause, agent or principal, is a moot point. Ultimately, it matters not to Ahab whether the signifier is motivated by a transcendental signified. For if the

[1] *Nature, Collected Works*, ed. Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), I, p. 19.

[2] *Nature*, p. 22.

[3] *Nature*, p. 10.

[4] *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 161.

[5] "The Poet," *Complete Works*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside, 1903), III, p. 4.

[6] "The Over-Soul," *Collected Works*, ed. Joseph Slater, Alfred R. Ferguson, and Jean Ferguson Carr (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), II, p. 160.

[7] *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), p. 144; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

white whale is finally caught by Ahab, if the floating signifier is harpooned, killed, dismembered, nature will, in effect, be grounded in a signified — an arbitrary one, it is true, but a signified nonetheless.

The relation between signifier and signified will depend on the whimsy of man; it will stand in the will, not of God, but of Ahab. What is at issue, of course, is the arbitrariness — or the willfulness — of signification. When all is said and done, Melville implies that signification is imputation. If anything means anything, it means what it means only because man endows it with what Derrida calls "the ideality of the sense."[8] Thus Ahab exercises the will and arbitrarily relates signifier to signified — which is to say, he realizes that signification is entirely at the discretion of man. In the end, the difference between the transparent eyeball and the pasteboard mask tends to be the difference between the transcendentalist and the deconstructor.

The Doubloon or the Double(Loon)

Consider the doubloon that is nailed to the mast. Is it not the very epitome of ambiguity as double meaning, an exemplary instance of it, for does not "doubloon" mean, quite literally, "double"? The doubloon is a gold coin with a value of eight escudos, or sixteen dollars. But as Saussure says, value — either monetary or linguistic — is not strictly synonymous with significance.[9] What, then, is the significance of the doubloon? Ahab is obsessed by "the strange figures and inscriptions stamped on it," and he is determined "to interpret for himself in some monomaniac way whatever significance might lurk in them." The doubloon is strangely figured and inscribed, and what is minted, or written, must be read. Ishmael assumes that meaning is lurking in the doubloon and that what is concealed will be revealed by a reading of the writing. He says that "some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world but an empty cipher" (p. 358). If everything is worth little, or worthless, if everything has little or no value, then what purpose does it serve to try to interpret anything, to attempt to decipher what is, after all, only a cipher, a nothing, a zero, an absence?

The doubloon, Ahab says, "'to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self'" (p. 359). To Ahab, interpretation is simply a solipsistic exercise, or fixation. It matters not what may be stamped on the doubloon, for whatever happens to be written will be read one way by one man, another way by another man. In effect, there is no double meaning (or for that matter, single meaning) either presented or represented by the doubloon. What is *inscribed on* the doubloon is *writing; meaning* is *ascribed to* the doubloon by *reading*. As Ahab says, the doubloon is a mirror, and signification is a self-reflective (or self-reflexive) activity. Thus those who look at the doubloon see in it only themselves. It is not the text itself but the self itself that matters. Signification is decentered precisely because it is self-centered. The text itself, the doubloon itself, is simply a point of departure, a convenient excuse for an egotistical imputation. The result, as John T. Irwin says, is "a study in multiple perspectivism." The doubloon "is indefinite in itself, and in its indefiniteness it allows the individual subject to project onto it the structure of a self as undecipherable as the world."[10]

Thus one sailor who tries to read "'a meaning out of these queer curvicues'" (p. 360) and then observes the attempts of the other sailors to read the doubloon says, "'There's another rendering now; but still one text'" (p. 362) — another reading but still one writing. Finally, Pip, who also "'has been watching all of these interpreters,'" approaches the doubloon. Pip is a grammatologist who conjugates the verb "to look" and in so doing reduces the ideality of the sense to utter nonsense. "'I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look,'" he repeats derisively (p. 362). The doubloon, he says, is "'the ship's

[8]*Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 63.

[9]*Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 114-115.

[10]*American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 288. I regret not having had the pleasure of reading *American Hieroglyphics* before writing this essay in deconstruction. I should like to thank Bruce Henricksen for finally alerting me to the relevance of the book, so that I might take into account what Irwin has to say about Melville and *Moby-Dick*. One passage that Irwin cites from *Pierre* is especially pertinent to the difference of opinion between Emerson and Melville in regard to the interpretation of signs. In what is surely a reference to Emerson, Melville says that "nature is not so much her own ever-sweet interpreter, as the mere supplier of that cunning alphabet, whereby selecting and combining as he pleases, each man reads his own peculiar lesson according to his own peculiar mind and mood."

navel,'" and in looking at it, the interpreters are not only contemplating their own navels but also, in their own screwy ways, attempting to unscrew them. "'But,'" Pip riddles as he ridicules, "'unscrew your navel, and what's the consequence?'" The consequence is that your backside may fall off, which is to say, you may lose your ass. And that, of course, is exactly what happens to all the sailors with the sole exception of Ishmael, whose ass just happens to be saved.[11]

Pip says that "'when aught's nailed to the mast it's a sign that things grow desperate'" (p. 363). If the doubloon is the aught that is nailed to the mast, it may mean — as Ahab says in reference to the white whale — naught. It may be only a zero, an absence. It may mean nothing, or at least nothing more than Ahab and the other sailors arbitrarily attribute to it.[12] (In this regard, Theodore Thass-Thienemann remarks that aught, which derives from "Old English *ā-wiht*, 'ever-wight,'" is "the goblin of mathematics, the cipher zero." He notes that "*aught* means the same as *naught*" and that naught, which derives from "Old English *ne-ā-wiht*, 'not-ever-wight,'" means the same as "*nought*, 'a nothing,'" which results in "*not*, the grammatical function of which is to negate.")[13] If so, Pip is the real doubloon, a double(loon) or double lunatic who supplements writing degree zero with reading degree zero, practices the metaphysics of absence, and employs double talk in order to deconstruct the assumption that meaning lurks in the object and exists independently of the observer, who, look as he may, sees only what he will: a mirror image or double self, the mere reflection of a projection.[14]

The Egyptian Connotation: Hieroglyphic and Pyramid

Ahab is sure that the felicities of life have "a certain unsignifying pettiness lurking in them" (just as Ishmael is sure that all things have a certain significance lurking in them, else all things have little or no value), while the miseries of life have "a mystic significance" (p. 386). There is no felicity to Ahab, only misery, for he is not a demystifier, or deconstructor. He is a constructor of significance. He is a mystifier — and not the sort that Ishmael is when he says that the spoutings and sprinklings of the white whale are mere "mistifyings" (p. 310) — that is, "nothing but mist" (p. 313). Ahab is in search of the white whale, which is to say, in pursuit of signs. The chase is a quest after a quarry that is both allusive (suggestive of significance) and elusive. It is an attempt to construe a significance, a futile effort to catch the one — in other words, the truth — that got away and always will get away.

Ahab offers the doubloon as a reward to the first sailor to sight the white whale. To set a sight on the white whale as it breaches the surface of the sea is, for Ahab, to catch a glimpse of the sign as it broaches the truth. In this respect, Derrida says that those who practice the metaphysics of presence assume that "the sign is maintained only *in sight of* truth" — in this case, in sight of the white whale. Why is the sign thus related to truth? Why, indeed? "This 'why,'" Derrida contends, "can no longer be understood as a 'What does this mean?'" He asserts that the questions "'What does signification signify?' — 'What does meaning mean?'" are impertinent, or irrelevant. "Hence," he says, "we must posit our questions both at the point and in the form in which signifi-

[11]For more on the joke, see John D. Seelye, "The Golden Navel: The Cabalism of Ahab's Doubloon," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 14 (1960), pp. 350-355, and Paul Brodtkorb, Jr., *Ishmael's White World: A Phenomenological Reading of Moby-Dick* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 164n. Brodtkorb says that a modern version of the joke "involves an extremely long, dead-pan build-up that stresses the sanctity and sincerity of a Hindu holy man on a high mountaintop who after years of contemplating his navel decides that it ought to be possible to unscrew it, and that if he were to do so he would at last have all the final answers. In some versions of the story a golden screwdriver descends from the sky to the mountaintop (the story is full of archetypes); the mystic grasps it and unscrews his navel, only to have his ass fall off."

[12]Other things besides the doubloon are finally nailed to the mast. Tashtego is in the process of nailing a new flag to the mast when the white whale staves the *Pequod*. As the ship sinks and all the sailors but Ishmael drown, Tashtego continues to nail, even after his head is under water and all that remains above is his arm and hammer, "backwardly uplifted in the open air, in the act of nailing the flag faster and yet faster." At that instant, a sea-hawk (presumably the very one that earlier snatched Ahab's hat off his head), happens to fly "between the hammer and the wood" and is also nailed, or at least hammered, to the mast (p. 469).

[13]*The Symbolic Language* (New York: Washington Square, 1967), pp. 67-68.

[14]I am not equating deconstruction and the metaphysics of absence. What I am suggesting is that the very possibility of an absent meaning, of a meaning that may well mean nothing, is the negation that makes Pip capable of the deconstructive reading that he performs on the doubloon. For more on the doubloon, see Michael Vannoy Adams, "Ahab's Jonah-and-the-Whale Complex: The Fish Archetype in *Moby-Dick*," *ESQ*, 28 (1982), pp. 167-182.

cation no longer signifies, meaning means nothing." This is the point at which and the form in which deconstruction is not only possible but also necessary. "'Why?' then no longer marks, here," Derrida says, "a question about the 'sight-set-on-what' (for what reason?), about the *telos* or *eskhaton* of the movement of signification; nor a question about an origin, a 'why?' as a 'because of what?' 'on the basis of what?' etc."[15]

In other words, the "why?" no longer poses a question about the sight-set-on-the-white-whale (for what reason, or purpose, does Ahab pursue the white whale?). It does not pose a question about how the process of signification ends, teleologically or eschatologically. Nor does it pose a question about how the process of signification begins (because of what, or on the basis of what, etc., does Ahab pursue the white whale?). No longer does the "why?" mark the answer "Ahab pursues the white whale in order to exact revenge" or, for that matter, the answer "Ahab pursues the white whale because it dismembered him," for these answers merely impose an arbitrary closure on the movement of signification. According to Derrida, such answers "would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign."[16] In the name of meaning — that is, in the name of the truth of the sign — such answers, he says, "would arrest the concatenation of writing."[17] They would terminate a process that is interminable, which is to say, indeterminable. To explain what the white whale is, or signifies, "would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go" (p. 162). The significance of the white whale is, finally, unfathomable.

Like the doubloon, the white whale is a text. It, too, is inscribed with signs — or, more specifically, engraved with hieroglyphics. Ishmael says that "if you call those mysterious cyphers on the walls of pyramids hieroglyphics, then that is the proper word to use in the present connexion." The white whale is a sign, a hieroglyphic, or a cipher that "remains undecipherable" (p. 260). It is a text that resists or defies interpretation. There is no Rosetta Stone to translate the significance of the white whale. "Champollion deciphered the wrinkled granite hieroglyphics," Ishmael says. "But there is no Champollion to decipher the Egypt of every man's and every being's face." How, then, can Ishmael hope to interpret the white whale's face? "Read it if you can," he dares the reader of *Moby-Dick* (pp. 292-293).

As a sign, the white whale is a hieroglyphic; as a text, it is a pyramid. (In *Pierre* Melville employs the pyramid to signify absolute absence: "By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid — and no body is there! — appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man!")[18] *Moby-Dick* is an Egyptian book of the dead, or cryptogram, and the white whale is a crypt that is cryptic indeed. The white whale is a necrological enigma that, as Derrida says, "*warns* the soul of possible death, warns (of) death of the soul, turns away (from) death." In this respect, Ishmael relates the signifiers coffin, hearse, and tomb to the signified life-in-death, death-in-life. To be "coffined, hearsed, and tombed in the secret inner chamber and sanctum sanctorum of the whale" (p. 290) is for the body proper to be embalmed, for the soul to be, as Derrida says, "enclosed, preserved, maintained," that is, to be "signified" — even if the body happens to be, as with Ahab, only a leg, enclosed, preserved, maintained in a white whale. "The sign — the monument-of-life-in-death, the monument-of-death-in-life, the sepulcher of a soul or of an embalmed proper body," is, according to Derrida, the pyramid. "The pyramid becomes," he says, "the semaphor of the sign, the signifier of signification." That the pyramid is the very sign of the sign "is not an indifferent fact," Derrida says, especially as regards "the Egyptian connotation," for which the hieroglyphic serves as the example. To situate the pyramid in such a way is to establish "several essential characteristics of the sign." Perhaps the most important of these is "the *arbitrariness* of the sign, the absence of any natural relation of resemblance, participation, or analogy between the signified and the signifier," Derrida says.[19] (In contrast, Irwin observes that

[15]*Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 80-81.

[16]*Of Grammatology,* p. 49.

[17]*Dissemination,* trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 5.

[18]*Pierre; or, The Ambiguities, Writings,* ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1971), VII, p. 285. Melville visited Egypt in 1857. He described the pyramids as "something vast, undefiled, incomprehensible, and awful." See *Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant: October 11, 1856-May 6, 1857,* ed. Howard C. Horsford (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 117-119.

[19]*Margins of Philosophy,* pp. 82-84.

in the hieroglyphic "a necessary though obscure correspondence" obtains between signifier and signified to the extent that "the shape of the sign" coincides with "the physical shape of the object it represents.")[20] There is no necessary, only a contingent, relation between the signifier white whale and the signified life-in-death, death-in-life. It is only the willfulness, or arbitrariness, of Ahab that establishes a relation in which to construe a significance is to commit suicide. Thus the white whale — as coffin, hearse, and tomb — warns Ahab of possible death, warns him of death of the soul, turns him away from death. But he obstinately refuses to heed the warning. He will kill the white whale even if it kills him.

From Hermeneutic Polysemy to Erotic Dissemination

Susan Sontag defines interpretation as "the revenge of the intellect upon the world," in this case, the revenge of the intellect upon nature — upon a whale, a white one. "In place of a hermeneutics," she says, "we need an erotics of art."[21] Or, as Derrida says, in place of interpretation (even, or especially, interpretation that purports to be polysemous) we need dissemination:

> If there is thus no thematic unity or overall meaning to reappropriate beyond the textual instances, no total message located in some imaginary order, intentionality, or lived experience, then the text is no longer the expression or representation (felicitous or otherwise) of any *truth* that would come to diffract or assemble itself in the polysemy of literature. It is this hermeneutic concept of polysemy that must be replaced by dissemination.[22]

That is, the hermeneutic concept of polysemy must be replaced by the erotic concept of dissemination.

Ahab, however, is utterly incapable of dissemination. He has been dismembered, deprived of a leg, emasculated, as it were. For Ahab, amputation is tantamount to castration. The leg that the white whale devoured and swallowed assumes — in the monomaniac imagination of Ahab — the significance of a phallus, or symbolic penis. Ahab has replaced the natural leg with an artificial leg that is not only impotent but also perverse, for it is not simply a whalebone but specifically a jawbone — the very bone of the jaw of a whale like the one that rendered him incapable of dissemination in the first place. This prosthetic device has added insult to injury, for it, too, has inflicted a grievous injury to the "groin" of Ahab (p. 385).

For Ahab, interpretation is phallocentric penetration of appearances. The megalomaniac will to power is a monomaniac will to knowledge — not an erotic, a deconstructive, or even a semiotic, but a hermeneutic volition. Ahab wants to know the white whale intimately well, to the extent that he dares to wield not only a harpoon but also a knife, "a six inch blade to reach the fathom-deep life of the whale" (p. 159); he wants desperately to probe what Whitman calls "the real reality" that is "behind the mask," which is to say, the persona of nature, and to pierce, once and for all, "this entire show of appearance."[23] He wants to dismember the white whale, to kill nature. In short, Ahab wants to penetrate the form in order to interpret the content of the white whale, to discover the truth behind the sign, whatever that may seem, be, or mean.

The white whale is a sperm whale, "the only creature from which that valuable substance, spermaceti, is obtained." Spermaceti, Ishmael says, was once believed to be the "quickening humor" that "the first syllable of the word literally expresses" (p. 120). What the white whale contains is, in the words of Derrida, "SPERM, the burning lava, milk, spume, froth, or dribble of the seminal liquor."[24] In dissemination, the *sēmeion*, or sign, is the *sēmen*. The white whale is a pun, a sperma(ce)tic signifier floating on the seminal (or semiotic) fluid of the sea.

In the end, it is Ishmael, not Ahab, who is finally capable of dissemination. After the sperm is extracted from a whale, it is collected in tubs, where it is "cooled and crystallized" and "strangely concreted into lumps, here and there rolling about in the liquid part." Ishmael is obliged "to squeeze these lumps back into fluid."

[20] *American Hieroglyphics*, p. 61. Irwin does say, however, that for Melville "indeterminacy is the essential characteristic" of the hieroglyphic (p. 286).

[21] *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), pp. 7 & 14.

[22] *Dissemination*, p. 262.

[23] *Leaves of Grass, Collected Writings*, ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York: New York University Press, 1965), IX, p. 115.

[24] *Dissemination*, p. 266.

It is such a "sweet and unctuous duty" that Ishmael forgets the vow of vengeance that he and the other sailors have sworn against the white whale: "I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it." As he squeezes the sperm, he feels no "ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort whatsoever," only an orgasmic insanity:

> Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say, — Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come, let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.
>
> (pp. 348-249)

If for Ahab interpretation is penetration, for Ishmael dissemination is masturbation: a squeeze of the hand, a squeeze of the sperm, in which he forgets the revenge of the intellect upon the world, upon nature, upon the white whale. Ishmael no longer cares what the white whale may, or may not, signify to Ahab. Ultimately, all that matters to Ishmael is the sperm of dissemination, the significance of which is inexpressibly erotic.[25] □

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[25]A version of this essay was presented at the Northeast Modern Language Association Convention at Erie, Pennsylvania, 16 April 1983. I should like to thank Joseph N. Riddel and William Sharpe for (de) constructive criticism of the manuscript.

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H. E. Francis

EVOLVING

At the beach he was careful to keep the towel close about his neck. He did not want to give way his secret. Besides, he was not used to them yet, and before he realized it his hand would slip up under the towel and lightly chafe his neck to see if the slits — though it had been nine days now — were really there. Yes. His fingers counted — on either side four parallel openings. But the instinctive attraction to his hand came from more than wonder; it was a probing, for each day since the initial tingling (as of a wound's healing) the slits were a little wider, firmer, deeper. Even with his first studying in the mirror, the fine lines — too perfect for the grip Rhetta had suggested ("You and your buddies sure do play rough," which he'd laughed off with a "yeah, you'll never know") — were etches more perfect than a scalpel could make. Though red, as if feeding on air, they did not bleed; yet they were vaguely sore with an irritation that was not only relieved, but became a sensation of pure joy when he eased underwater into the Sound, no longer needing his diving equipment — goggles, tubes, tank, fin-feet — since the day he had simply plunged with no thought of equipment and followed the sea bottom, his feet with unusual precision blending into one and giving an impetus to his motion never achieved before. What was more: though he had always loved the water to near madness, each day, no sooner home, he felt an undeviable urge to return to the water.

Always he left his towel under a rock at the edge of the water so that, coming up, he could glide to the sand, wrap it around his neck, and walk along the beach, nonchalant.

He came up now — surely to the right place? — but the towel was gone. He thrust himself up, nearly flopping back, but his feet separated and he stilled an instant for his lungs filled too abruptly. There were only a few people along the beach, but at the cliff a boy was whipping his towel at his playmate. He leaped after, shouting, "Hey, you kids!" His voice smeared, water breathed down both sides of his neck, his lungs gasped, but he shouted again, "Hey, you! That's my towel!" The kids halted, nonplussed. The one cried out, "Gee whiz! We didn't know you were in the water," dropped the towel, and both shot off toward the umbrellas beyond the breakwater. He shook the sand free, conscious of an unusual wrenching of his chest with each deep breath. He felt apprehensive: he could see his house above. If he didn't hurry up the slope home, his parents would be back from Jersey before he could get into some clothes.

ii.

"Ed, look at you!" his mother said. "You've absolutely hated turtlenecks!"

"Because my head's too narrow. But these were a bargain — and real cotton." He sported one with bravado. He felt nervous quivers. Beyond her, in the mirror, sun blazed down into still crystalline deeps. Darkened, the furniture stood still as strange rocks, the kitchen passage a long cavern beyond, its far windows beckoning into invisible distances: something in him yearned to enter it. He felt his neck swell and his breath caught.

"You're not getting a cold in *this* weather!" his mother said.

"Water in my nose is all."

"Less swimming and more concentration on business and we'd all be better off," his father said.

Always he could smell his father: he came in from New York City reeking of carbon monoxide, cigars, new car upholstery. And he jingled: it's his teeth and eyes, Ed thought, but he saw his father's hands playing with the silver pieces in his pocket.

"Come September, you're driving in every day with me, young man, for one solid year — give you a dose of real life, making money. Then you can go off to Cornell, work with me summers in business, and when you graduate you'll have it made for life."

His father blotted out the mirror; he towered, very tall, slim — much too youthful — perfectly cut in his summer blue, diamond tie clasp, gold cuff links. His mother came up beside, complementary in aqua. "You look like a king in that

suit, darling." Her hands and neck glittered in sun. Ed's own eyes longed for soft green.

"And you—" she said to his father, "you've just time to change into something relaxing before the Braddocks and Waldrons arrive for cocktails. I'd got Laurie Reynolds to make the hors d'oeuvres — everybody knows she's the best in town, worth every penny. The terrace is all set up. Ed, you mix the drinks, will you? Ella Braddock's wild for you — always wanted a son like you, poor darling. Wouldn't adopt. More the fool, she."

"A great saving in life and money. Why pity that?" his father said.

Now the sun struck the mirror, bold. Its blinding gold eye took his vision. He wanted to strike out and blind *it*. Was there another sun on the other side? His vision cleared and settled. His father's replaced it.

"And stop that snorting," his father said.

"What snorting?"

"Breathing with your mouth wide open like that — Who'd you ever get that habit from? Not from me."

His back went, lithe, in shorts and polo shirt. Time gleamed in gold on his wrist. Abruptly still, almost Ed seemed elsewhere: he settled into familiar stillness far down, where the sun touched, glittered over a dark corner, and vanished.

But outside, gleaming metal backs eased into the driveway, stilled; their doors flung open: gay, out leaped Rhetta, "Ed! Eddie!" disrupting his muteness. And "*Edward* — not Eddie!" 'poor darling' herself corrected. All four, Braddocks and Waldrons, a current of fresh scents, called out hellos. "Ah, such a view!" "Not but a smidgen different from yours!" "Canapés! You *are* clever, Myra. *I've* no patience." "*You've* been to Lord and Taylors again. Look at you!" "Ed, for heaven's sake, do ask who's drinking what." "And I'll help," Rhetta said.

The six withdrew to the terrace, their voices sinking, dispersed into space below as he readied the drinks. His hands loved the water. "Stop playing," Rhetta said, splashing him devilishly. It slicked off his skin. Aquiver, he laughed with joy. "You take the drinks out," he said. She cocked: "Is your voice changing *again*? I thought a man's did that only *once*." "Yours would too if your throat was as dry as mine." "Well, douse it then!" she cried, disappearing.

He dared not, though his throat yearned.

She came back. "Let my mother get her licks in with you, and then let's beat it down for a swim."

"Not swim. I just did."

"You saying no to the water? Come onnnnn, Ed." She drew him to. "Lord, your hands are cold."

"That's to challenge you."

And her mother said, "Be up to him now, Rhetta. He's not to be let out of this group — *are* you, Ed? Keep it all in the family, Les?" She flirted with his father. "I do believe you get taller and more lithely graceful — Do you mind me saying that, Ed? — everyday."

"Here's your suit — in case," Rhetta said.

"And the towels?"

Down the cliff slope, they rounded the promontory. The tide was nearly in, the great boulders hunched out of the waves, green and barnacles, strips of rusty seaweed afloat. His nose tingled at the strong salt smell. His insides flexed, muscled; he felt taller; his eyes felt toward the moisture in the air. Something veered his body toward water.

"Ed, I'll race you!" Sand sprayed behind her. She soared into distance, he after. But his lungs gave, a furious scrape and wheezing, and his limbs would not yield to each other the way they had.

"You!" she cried.

He tried to laugh. "I can't keep up." But the words made a single grunt, he could not resist the leftward pull toward the Sound, and his muscles tightened, his neck pained — the ridges fanned up, thinned, elongating. Quick, behind a rock, but painfully slow — for his arms boned up in angles, his legs would not flex so easily — he had to force the suit up his legs. "Hey, Ed! Ed— dieeeee?" He stood. "There you are! You cheater!" But before she could get a start toward, he turned — his body leaped, a long smooth arc, and slit the water: light splayed, soft and easeful in his eye, and he dropped over successive ledges down — white stones, pebbles, sand, silt — past the base of great boulders, his arms angled, his feet together, flat, flexing.

The familiar sounds receded far. Now he began to hear others, myriad fine sounds — Schools arrowed past, minnows; a skate fluttered deeper and settled; a sand shark shimmied into silt. And, suspended an instant on the verge of a darker deep, through the sun-thin green, brown, rusty, dark masses vaguely moving, he felt a sound, unknown but familiar, and he swam toward it. Something deeper than under — he knew it was a long way off — called from

the darkness. Water pouring into his mouth, through his gills, made his body sing with a motion so clean and rapid and beautiful that it maddened his desire, and down down, darkness came around his eyes until he saw dark itself move into farther dark, the music finer, thin, so thin, calling. His body settled deeper. And deeper he seemed to hear sounds of others coming into him — for surely he was not the only one — yet beckoning and going on ahead, down: the darkness took on shapes he wanted to know; one rose after the other, shifted, grew, fell away; and far, at incredible heights, he was sure they were towers, pinnacles, domes, spires of soft black that would pour through him as he strived toward that cold dark light, an unending sea, and dared to strike that darkest deep and leap beyond all seeing.

But — he struggled down — *not yet.* No dark was visible here, his body wrenched for air, his gills fought. *Not yet.* Something kept him back. But better to die than *not* struggle down! Yet his efforts carried him up, over ledge after ledge, toward light, surface, sand. Despairing, he saw them come down, saw the great sea of light — he did not *want* it, dreaded it. Denied! Denied! But his body burst into it, ejected above the water, and fell back. He swam up to the sand edge, his eyes still under, staring at endless sky; raised his head up again, sucking air voluminously, water flushing his gills; but he lay a while: he could not draw his arms up or separate his legs, his body lilted with the waves. From far a sound came, "*Ed*—die!" and there was an interval before he knew form, shape, and the dark shadow driven down the sand before her: "Rhetta?" His voice glugged. His arms broke free, he thrust himself up, tottering in imbalance, and thought *Towel, shirt!* They were held down by a rock nearby. He lunged, snatched them up, slipped the shirt down.

"Where've you been? You had me nearly crazy. I never heard of anybody staying under so long. I thought you'd drowned."

"Fat chance of that. I was behind the rock most of the time." He leaned against the boulder, clogged. His legs trembled, his skin broke into a quick sticky sweat, his eyes smarted with air, and his lungs burned.

iii.

In dark he felt the dark flow and his eyes grow into darkness. Night — he did not know which when how long, only dark. Objects, clear, stood — deep in dark, strange each one, rocks dark and still and no motion. And all his body — eyes, gills, mouth, limbs — rose to water: but no water, only dark, flowed. And he felt tied to himself, yearning to leap free into dark. But no water. All was mute, but his lungs scraping dry, drying, gills calling out, sucking, opening — no water. And all his body wriggled, shimmied, flapped; he rocked and swayed in violent effort; metal springs, mattress, wood creaked under him. Then sound struck struck struck, a rapping, and that voice, "You, Eddie! What's going on in there? That's enough noise. Don't you know what time it is?" No, not time — he did not know — but dark, no water. The voice stilled, far off sighings came, and he lay with a hard choking in him and despite sound, voice, raised up his extremity toward vague light coming in from high over trees and flopped over the edge of the bed and bent up, poised on the edge, and forced himself to stand — he could not take the step — and there was the window, all liquid darkness, and he wanted to plunge through it: all of him yearned to wriggle through that hole up up up — but no water. Yet so great was his desire he did move, caught the door, crying out against even taking that step toward water which would allow him to leap but which kept him here, made him depend to stay, depend to go. Which?

And he flopped onto the bathroom floor, an enormous thud — cool, cool, ahhh — and with terrible wrenching turned, turned: and Ah-SweetHolySeaMotherCool it poured down his head neck body, filling the tub, and breathing he breathed could breathe, flopped, turned, but wanting wanting — Where could he — how? — get to? — the other end, where the water came from, where all water was; and he flopped, flapped, thrust and flipped, *joy*, but wanting to go where all joy water was —

and he stilled a while, his eyes peering up — at least under, he was under — and the sky settled over his eyes, a surface of water, and for long he did not not move — at least this, *this* —

breathing

until light opened the vault of dark, and light stood in it, all white and flowing, and then a dark thing came to him and bent over, a great shadow under the light, darking him; and then its sound shattered and violated the water, screamed, screamed, her hands jammed to her head; she fell away and then the darker, the man, "Jesus Christ! O my God! Get out, Myra. Go back to

your room," still her screaming, and "lock your door — and the hall door too. I'll lock the son of a bitch in."

Light stayed, but changed. Sun burned the dark out of the square above. From time to time water flowed somewhere in narrow places; it was going through, sucked down, trickled — his whole body quivered with desire, wanting to go after, down, down the faucet the tub the pipes vibrating against him: and an ecstasy of vision of vast sea without end filled him, but the pipes clinked clanked far off, deadening the vision — something not remembered clearly but *clink, jangle,* clinked teeth, eyes, silver, man, father — and worsening when sounds came and the door opened, heads and torsos peered at him, cautioning each other, and he felt himself shrink away *Ah, where that sea?* and fearfully worsening when the man said this, "*My* son, I can do what I want with him" and "A million in him" and "Nothing in the world ever like this before" and "My God, think of what we could do — retire in no time with never a worry." *Jingle* he could hear, *jingle* and the city of gold New York, all the buildings, *clink jangle* in his father's pockets, settled over him to take his breath forever, and he flopped violently. "Jesus Christ, he's soaked me, the bastard! What do you say? Is it a deal?"

The door closed, returning a serenity of air. But a black shadow in his head remained. Something in him stood: stood against. He had to get over — to water. Below the window now, the muted tinny voice again went, "Okay, then. First thing in the morning you can take him away." And something rose to escape jinglejinglejingle ringing in him fearfully with the tink of key, zoom of engine, rattle of metal muted and clear in his tub.

The black shadow, even in dark, would not go — stood still, suspended over, in the way — too familiar even to know or name, though in him flowed a reaching to remember, to know and name. *You,* he said to it, like knowing it forever, before he had even come into light — it stood in his light now. He wanted to go over. *You,* he said to it, waiting for its substance in the morning.

Morning: never so bright, all light dawned, gleaming the walls, burning into his water so that he palpitated up to the whole sea of it: and did rise, his head straight; and beyond the window the sea silver leaped whole into his right eye with such ecstasy that he flipped up onto the edge — ah, a long way down, a long way, but *Go.* The dark shadow impelled him: just there, all water, and life, free. He could not contain it, all life leaped; and as if over that dark shadow he leaped, such joy in the leap that the thud on the roof, the slide down, the free clear lunge through space, and even the great flop onto the flagstones did not hinder, though for a moment dryness made him flip-flop, his gills went and stopped, his mouth wide. The patio edge was not far — a long roll down the steep cliff, then over a width of white stones, pebbles, sand, then — He wriggled to the edge, flapped, and lunged: rolled over and over with incredible speed, landed on the beach, whacked against stones, and lay almost lifeless, letting the lids clear his sanded vision. But so strongly called the water, so close, everything in him vibrated, all his muscles cried out:

But it was not their voice. For a voice did shout, "You! Come back here, you!" Down the steps in the cliff streaked the voice, a dark shadow, enormously long, doubled, racing toward him. *No.* He wriggled violently. His motion made the shadow run faster. "Don't you dare!" the voice shouted, too loud. He shimmied, thrust. His eye was almost to the water, his gills raised toward it. But the shadow leaped over him, a foot booted him. "Oh, no you don't, not just when we're about to make a killing." He stood dark between him and the water, tried to press, roll him back with his feet, and he did move him, turned him over on his right eye, away from water. *No no no!* He heaved his tail — it struck the man, landing him face down on the sand. "You son of a bitch!" the man — already up, kicking at him, pressing — cried, and the force of his fury rolled him back. Almost he could not breathe now, gills and fins coated, jaws caked with sand; and the sea loomed at a terrible angle but would not come down over him, *would* not — and he wanted that more than more than — "Ha!" the man said. "Thought you'd get out of it! I'm your father. You'll do as I say. I know what's best for you. You were given to me — understand?" Given to him! At the thought everything in him deflated as the man exercised his propriety by booting, shoving him yet farther from water: gasps came from him, the sea swirled in his vision, but water beckoned — darkness remembered, black with spires and towers, domes, and that black pure light never yet seen beyond them. And he saw himself go down, streak with such ease, such ecstasy, that imagining it he thrust his fins, he dug his tail into the sand, and with all his might he strove — and,

with great heaving, stood. The man, awed, raised his arms against the dark shadow cast over him, petrified to silence. And for one brief instant he towered over the man, incredibly tall, filled with an enormous power, king to space, alive with the hope of water. But the man suddenly latched arms around him — "Mine. You'll never get away" — but when his hands slid over the viscid scales, they caught at the fins, trying to keep him back. He flipped, jerked; the fins cut; the man's hands tore and bled. Still between him and the water, the man sought a hold; and at his words, "I'm your father, don't you hear me, your father!" his arms thrown out to keep from falling, he opened his jaws and with a fierce grip clamped the man's throat between, feeling the crush and break, but more — the wet flow of blood — and with it breath and such an exultant flow through him that he let go the throat and with a vital thrust of his tailfin leaped, struck water, and pitched in a smooth easeful glide down ledges past rock and into forests of seaweed toward mountains of dark, striving with a motion for the first time fully his own. □

Carlos Edmundo de Ory

WEARINESS OF PLEASURE

Translated by Will Kirkland

The air I am breathing is only fire
I am not speaking only I am going I am raving
I am listening to the surf's illogic
to the inhuman wind the nondescript angel
from the space without sin
Hunger born body thirst stricken heart
Finite pleasures leave you with their scars
Go your way may weariness fill you with feathers
I call no one's name I smash on the wall
of a shadow like iron

Dan Latimer

A YALE PRIMER, OR: PAUL DE MAN IN OTHER WORDS

Current reactions to the subject of Paul de Man range from simple incomprehension mixed with curiosity (what is he saying and how does this differ from what *we* say?) to condemnation of the insurrectionist sort (de Man represents the repression of history via the *aporia*, the appeal of which is "religious," finally, in that it is a point beyond which the mind is powerless to advance) to complaints that de Man is the wanton destroyer of the great monuments of our culture, that he manages by various ruses to convince us that texts are saying the opposite of what we thought they were saying. Each of these reactions provokes useful thought, and my remarks here are intended to respond eventually to all three.

Before I say what de Man is saying and how this differs from what we say, I should refer to the horizon of thought against which de Man appears. The problem is to sketch this in and still be brief. One place to begin would be Nietzsche's essay "Über Wahrheit and Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn" (1873), a text which comes as close as any to being the sacred text of Deconstruction.[1] Its subject is the epistemological entrapment of man in his own metaphors. Even while we are congratulating ourselves, Nietzsche says, on having the truth, the thing itself, the object in its uniqueness, we are really several stages removed from what we say we have. We are reading translations of immediacy. The percept is a translation into other terms of the nerve stimulus. The sound (or word) is a translation into other terms of the percept. The nerve stimulus itself is conditioned by our being what we are, is a result of the human perspective on things, on our seeing things as they impinge on our survival or on the inviolability of our self-love. If we were birds or gnats our nerve perspective on the thing would be entirely different. "A painter who had no hands and wanted to express the picture distinctly present to his mind by the agency of song, would still reveal much more with this permutation of spheres, than the empiric world reveals about the essence of things." Some will recognize that Nietzsche's subject is a more trenchant going over of territory already covered by Hegel early on in the *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807). There is a similar attack on the certainty of sense experience there. "They (misguided people) speak of the 'existence' of external objects . . . they 'mean' this bit of paper I am writing on, or rather *have* written on: but they do not say what they 'mean.' If they really wanted to *say* this bit of paper which they 'mean,' and they wanted to *say* so, that is impossible, because the This of sense, which is 'meant,' cannot be reached by language."[2] One of the things to be noticed here, besides the exile in language again, is how time has carried us away from the immediacy we meant, even in the moment we take note of it.

If the ideology of Deconstruction presupposes Nietzsche and Hegel, it certainly presupposes Heidegger. What is of interest here is Heidegger's analysis of Western Thought as variations on a single theme, namely the ever widening separation of Being and beings. When Heidegger talks about the "ontological difference," this is what he is referring to.[3] At one, rather late point in his career, he began to see this difference in a tragic light, as a kind of exile, as a loss of a relationship of belonging together between Earth (Being) and World (human beings). The implication at times seems to be that such a relationship

[1]The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, edited by Oscar Levy (London and New York, 1909-13). "On Truth and Falsity" appears in Volume 2, *Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 173-192.

[2]G. F. W. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. by George Lichtheim (New York, 1967), p. 159.

[3]See *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. by R. Manheim (New Haven and London, 1959), pp. 1-51. *Identity and Difference*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (New York, Evanston, and London, 1969), "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics." In J. Derrida's analysis of Heidegger, "Difference," in *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. by David Allison (Evanston, 1973), p. 155. See also *Of Grammatology*, trans. by G. Spivak (Baltimore and London, 1976), pp. 22 ff. J. Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" in *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. by R. Macksey and E. Donato (Baltimore and London, 1970), pp. 249-50.

is possible. The sensation of not having it is rootlessness. The loss begins already in ancient times, with the preference for permanence over appearance in the Greek world. It continues in the triumph of the thinking ego over sense experience in Descartes. It is implicit in the soul-body dualism in Christianity. Its latest phase is the "frame" (*Ge-Stell*) of technology in which we have reduced Earth to our uses of it and forgotten Being, thereby losing the sense of the holy. There will be more on Heidegger later in this paper. At the moment the point is that Derrida has taken for his own a part of this Heideggerian theme — the part about Western Thought being variations on a single theme. Heidegger calls this theme of Western Thought "metaphysics" or "humanism," and Derrida calls it "ontotheology."[4] It is everything that makes us look for origins (the *arche*), ends (the *telos*), reconciliation of opposites, harmonies after dissonance, presence instead of absence, centers, and foundations of all kinds, unity in dispersion, and the "real" meaning in everything. It is what makes us long for home, physically and spiritually, because this presence (in the bosom of the *arche*, for instance) would end our alienation forever. Timelessness would replace our exile in time. Heidegger wants to reevoke this foundation, this ground, not to give it content, but to evoke it in its absence, as if to say still "the gods" in the phrase "the gods are gone." This is a back door version, for Derrida, of the same thing from which Heidegger has sought escape. Negative theology is still theology. To say "Derrida" is to say the possibility of living without this nostalgia for the center, for the ground, and to think through what this means on every level from psychiatry to literary criticism.

Also of essential interest to the ideology of Deconstruction is the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, whose characterization of language in his *Course of General Linguistics* (1916) as a system of signs operating on the principle of difference is so much a part of French thought as to be practically invisible.[5] Sign ideology (as opposed to Anglo-Saxon symbol ideology) entails a merely conventional connection between the mental imprint of an object in the world and the acoustic impulse used to designate that imprint; the word used to conjure the image is an arbitrary one, a point made also by Nietzsche in "Über Wahrheit and Lüge." The related principle of "difference" implies that within this textualized "reality" language relationships are "lateral," sounds acquiring value by differing from each other and not by being what they themselves are in some independent way. Linguistic emphasis in Saussure falls on a sign to sign relationship and not on a sign to thing relationship, so that the flight from sign to sign is necessarily to another sign and not to the world. In this system, language does not have unproblematic access to the world. Language is merely parallel (or analogous) to the world and does not interpenetrate with it in some magical way. One ought not to expect, says de Man, to grow grapes by the luminosity of the word "sun."[6] The slippage between words and things is at times so radical as to lead, in Blanchot and Derrida, to the notion that language implies the absence of things. Speech warns us that "death is loose in the world," says Blanchot.[7] Language is "deferred assassination." As we shall see, this is a motif that both Derrida and de Man will elaborate and extend in their own writings. The difficulties posed by language as sign system to Marxist thought in France can well be imagined, since the relationship of theory and action in such a system will necessarily be difficult to formulate. One of the results of the Saussure-Marx encounter is Louis Althusser, for whom the world of concrete reality (powered by materialism) remains independent of and unassimilated by the ideational world of theory which has its own system of production, its factories of ideas, chugging along in the "sealed chamber of the mind."[8]

Saussure's concept of language seems perverse at first and flies in the face of Anglo-Saxon ways of thinking. Perhaps the 43-year gap in the reception of Saussure into English is explainable this way, as is without question our difficulty in understanding the force of "sign." We have been thinking about things in a different way, it

[4]*Of Grammatology*, p. 82.

[5]Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. by Wade Baskin (New York, Toronto, London, 1959). See Fredric Jameson's very helpful analyses in *The Prison House of Language* (Princeton, 1972) and Jonathan Culler, *Saussure* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1976), pp. 19-20.

[6]Paul de Man, *Yale French Studies* 63 (New Haven, 1982), p. 11.

[7]Maurice Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus* (Barrytown, N.Y., 1981), p. 43. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, pp. 96-7.

[8]Jameson, p. 106.

seems. Anglo-Saxon linguistics (Jameson's example is Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 1922) tends to see language as a symbol system rather than as a sign system. A symbol system does not see the connection between words and their referents in the real world as arbitrary at all, but imbued with a basic fitness. So linguistic investigations become a search for referents. Any purely verbal constructs which have no referentiality have no business being in sentences. This is an empirical habit of mind. ". . . all our simple ideas . . . are derived from simple impressions . . . which they *exactly* represent," says Hume.[9] Here seems to be unclouded faith in a path without obstructions running from the world to the mind, from experience to ideas. (Nietzsche, using the same material, shows that sense experience, far from providing us with things, radically subjectifies knowledge.) Language as symbol system encourages the idea that language can reach into the numinal heart of things. Consider Philip Wheelwright's distinctions between steno-language and depth language in *The Burning Fountain* (1968) and between epi-phor and dia-phor in *Metaphor and Reality* (1962), in which the job of diaphor, for example, is to "create presence." The supposed capabilities of diaphoric language dovetail nicely with myth criticism (Carl Jung, Northrop Frye, Murray Krieger), and map out a certain strategy for the creation of a theory of English Romanticism (Meyer Abrams, Earl Wasserman), the trademark of which is a magical "flowing-into-one-another and disappearing-into-one-another of distinctions," to quote Murray Krieger on mythic-poetic experience. De Man's task in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (1969) was to introduce the notion of sign into myth criticism — to devastating effect.[10]

One way of talking about Derrida's version of the signifier-signified issue is to say that traditionally one has devalued written language over spoken as the inferior, external, corporeal signifier of the more interior, incorporeal signified of voice.[11] Plato did this in the *Phaedrus* (277e) where writing is an infantile version (*paidia*) of the serious and adult voice. The same is true of Rousseau, who inveighs against the monstrosity of writing, of Saussure for whom writing is a pathological influence, a contamination of the purely phonic, and of Husserl, for whom writing is the empty husk of speech which has to be always reanimated by the intentionality of a new speaker. For tradition, writing is an unpleasantly heterogeneous thing, substituting for something not there — a thought, an object. It is the inert externalization of something that was once alive, thought alienated from itself in a place where the "completely other is announced as such — without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity — in that which is not it."[12] Is there a point, then, at which intuition and expression coincide, signifier and signified are one; a point where the subjective self is anchored by way of language most securely in the world of objects, so that word and thought, word and thing are one? This point for tradition is the phonic sign, speech, the plenitude and absolute presence of the self's communication with itself. This is the position on language attributed to Husserl in Derrida's book *Speech and Phenomena* (1967). What Derrida does in this book is reverse the valorization, or rather, he wants to show that this sign-signified asymmetry is as characteristic of written as of spoken language, so that spoken language has also the character of script. He does this basically by showing that a sentence such as "I see a particular person by the window" uttered, let's say, by me as I am actually having this experience, is also understandable to someone who is not having the experience, so that the meaning of the sentence is not tied to the intuition but is in the sentence itself somehow. The "intimately blended unity" supposed by Husserl of speech and intuition is mistaken. "The absence of intuition . . . is not only tolerated by speech; it is *required* by the general structure of signification, when considered in itself."[13] Even when I say "I am" the intuitive self-presence is absent as soon as I speak. The "I" in language testifies to the "I"'s absence. We have no trouble understanding an author's "I" even when he is radically absent in death, or in fact never existed at all, as in the case of fictional narrators: ". . . whether or not life as self-presence accom-

[9]Ernest Gellner, "What is Structuralism?" in *Times Literary Supplement* (July 31, 1981), p. 881, from David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature.*

[10]Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in Charles Singleton, *Interpretation: Theory and Practice* (Baltimore, 1969), p. 179 ff. See Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago, 1980), p. 242.

[11]*Of Grammatology*, p. 96.

[12]*Speech and Phenomena*, pp. 92-7. See also Dāvid Hoy, *The Critical Circle* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1978), p. 81.

[13]*Speech and Phenomena*, p. 93.

panies the uttering of the 'I' is quite indifferent with regard to the functioning of meaning. My death is structurally necessary to the pronouncing of the 'I.'" Language then, as we said earlier, has the character of announcing the completely other as such in something that is not it. The alienation is clear. And it is permanent. (David Hoy has pointed out the similarities in this analysis to Hegel's analysis of sense perception.) The sign is a structure of difference, the trace of something that is not there, something "always already" absent. This asymmetry or difference is what Derrida calls difference with an "a" since it combines differing and deferring, putting off the attainment of what is announced in the sign.

One could see *differance* as a version of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, the process of cancelling and yet preserving by raising to a higher order, if one remembered at the same time that the totalization we can look forward to at the end of the dialectic, the ultimate meaning, the complete self-realization of the Absolute Spirit, the identity of signifier and signified, will never take place in Derrida. This is why Derrida can say that *differance* is "the limit, the interruption, the destruction of the Hegelian sublation everywhere it is operative."[14] The process of differing and deferring is endless. There is nothing to stop the sublating from spiralling on forever. Or to use a different metaphor, the track, the trace, will never lead to the lair of anything. "The trace is not only the disappearance of origin — within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin."[15] But this must be why there is nothing outside the text. It is not that an author's life is of no interest to us. It is not just that texts are more about texts than "reality." It is not just that the reality of a period or of an author's life is not available to us except in texts. It is simply that the author is produced by the text, not the other way around, constituted reciprocally by what he is not. Matters of ontological priority become very alarming at this point. But if it is helpful to recall precedents, one might cite the Hegelian characterization of Nature as "self-alienated Spirit," or the point that in Hegel the essence of Spirit, namely freedom, is announced in the sphere of *necessity*, Nature. One might recall the whole debate as to whether Spirit is to be understood theistically or not, that is, whether Spirit exists independently of Nature and is temporally prior to it, or whether, as seems more likely, Nature is a precondition for Spirit.[16] Theologically, the implications of Derrida's analysis do not, to say the least, constitute part of what we term the Hegelian right wing. Moreover, the analysis reverses the priority given in the late Heidegger to Being in which Heidegger wants us to see things as anchored. In Derrida it seems Being has to be seen as anchored in beings, or as simply a shadow cast by Heideggerian hope.

II

In art-critical terms the implication of *differance* seems to be that the meaning of a text is not attainable.[17] There is only an endless process of interpretation by mutually-generating texts. Derrida quotes C. S. Pierce. "The self-identity of the signified conceals itself unceasingly and is always on the move."[18] And we chase after "it," creating ever-new tendrils, to adapt Richard Rorty, on the kudzu vine of literature. As for whether a reading is good or bad, accurate or inaccurate in the Derridian scheme of things, one would, I think, have to begin by admitting that everybody is wrong. Whether some people are more wrong than others is a question which might inhabit the Deconstructors' ability to locate equivocation in a text. De Man can discover equivocation in the apparently most unequivocal places. Despite appearances it was always already there. The text always did "double back on itself." We just didn't want it to, so we ignored that part of it, the contradictory part. But it was never self-deluded as we were when we wanted it to tell us how to live or to give us truth, things it admits in so many words that it is powerless to do. One of Sidney's apologies for poetry had been that "the poet . . . nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth."[19] When we insist on stop-

[14]J. Derrida, "Positions" in *Diacritics* 2 (Fall 1972), pp. 35-43; and *Diacritics* (Spring 1973), pp. 33-46.

[15]*Of Grammatology*, pp. 61 & 158.

[16]See the *Jubiläums-ausgabe*, IX, pp. 51-54.

[17]Jameson, p. 176.

[18]*Of Grammatology*, p. 49.

[19]Quoted in Hoy, p. 137. See Sidney, "The Defense of Poesy."

ping the endless flat spiral of differance, insist on finding the unequivocal meaning, locating the lost center, insist on coming home, on listening to the chime of stillness, we align ourselves not only with theocentricism but with the bourgeoisie, authoritarianism in politics, and neurosis. Meaning is not something to be discovered or uncovered, not something before which one abases oneself. It is something to be produced. Rejection of this unrequited pursuit of the signified, of the endless production of texts, derives from neurotic fear — of time, of process, of becoming, of infinite regression, of the open-ended, of the old Sartrean asymmetry between existence and essence. Acceptance would mean, as with acceptance of Nietzsche's doctrine of Eternal Return, being very well-disposed toward life and toward oneself (*The Gay Science,* Essay 341).

There are many forms that the nostalgia for the signified can take besides machismo, religious conversions, ego analysis, fascism, and saying in the classroom that only one interpretation, namely one's own, is the correct one. Atheists succumb to it. It has a way of slipping back at the very moment one thinks one has banished it forever. There is the case of myth criticism of the Carl Jung or Northrop Frye variety which evokes a substratum on numinal material in which the various formations of myth are embedded and out of which they draw their power. And there is the case of Heidegger, another thinker who appeals to those of us with a logocentric nostalgia, particularly if we are lapsed Christians fumbling among Greek etymologies for a respectable substitute for lost ecclesiastical fellowship. It is in part this longing to belong on the part of Heideggerians that causes de Man to characterize (in 1955) the thought of Heidegger as "vegetal" in its ambitions.[20] That this was less cruel caricature than remarkable prescience is clear from reading Heidegger's late *Satz vom Grund* (1957). He is a thinker who aspires to be — in some mysterious sense — a plant. Similarly, if one is alarmed by the Saussurian or Derridian exile in language and longs to open up paths to Being, Heidegger's late writings on poetry (that of Hölderlin, Trakl, and Rilke) are an almost irresistible sirens' song.[21] The poem is the place where truth happens, where Earth (Heidegger's chthonic powers, mysterious, inhuman) turns its previously averted face toward World (our safe, interpreted human realm) and deigns to share a common center, meet us halfway, so to say.[22] Not that we ever get to know Earth very well. It remains strange and sublime, ultimately uncanny and alien, which is why Heidegger can say truth involves untruth, revelation involves hiding. Heidegger insists that when we measure ourselves against the gods, which we have to do to escape mere humanism (the presumptuous interpretation in Christianity and technology of Being on our own terms), we measure ourselves against something that is not there. But the fact that Being is not a thing (nothing, the Ab-grund) or that the place occupied by the gods is empty now, doesn't mean we can turn away from these empty spaces, since the thinker's authentic position is still to be *between* — between the gods and other men, between the time when the gods were there and when they will be there again, the time of the double-not, the no-longer and the not-yet. It doesn't seem unreasonable to think de Man might feel an affinity for at least part of this position, the tension, the homelessness, the exposure, the danger to sanity of giving names to empty spaces, "naming the void" he calls it in *Blindness and Insight* (1971). But part of it he would find intolerable, the part that imagines things ever were or ever could be different for us. Even more intolerable than the nostalgia for the Parmenidean identity of self and other would be the real thing. We get some idea of what the identity of self and other would be like from Heidegger's lectures on the principle of sufficient reason published as *Der Satz vom Grund,* in which Heidegger contrasts our restless questioning for reasons or grounds — a spirit he associates with technology and science — with the blissful nestling in Being of the rose of Angelus Silesius which blooms without caring for itself, and thus is essentially without the why which torments us and finally turns Being into nothingness, instead of what it should be for us, the other part of the belonging-together of Heideggerian "appropriation" (*das Zusammengehören vom Mensch und Sein in das Wesenslicht des Ereignisses*).[23] Heidegger is explicitly calling for us to abandon the why, to be

[20]Paul de Man, "La Tentation de la Permanence," *Monde Nouveau* 93 (October 1955), p. 60.

[21]Martin Heidegger, *On The Way To Language* (New York, 1971) and *Existence and Being* (South Bend, Indiana, 1949).

[22]Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, and Thought,* trans. by A. Hofstadter (New York, 1971), p. 63 ff.

[23]Heidegger, *Identity and Difference,* p. 92.

in our way like the Silesian rose. It is a terrifying moment in Heidegger, not a pretty, aesthetic one, because we are asked to cast ourselves into an abyss, an existence without ground, or at least without a human ground. The ground, as far as we are concerned, is not there. Being is without the principle of sufficient reason, which itself is no more than the answer to a why-for-*us*? Heidegger wants us to think from what would be the point of view of Being, if it had one, not from the point of view of man. If we did so, philosophy as we have known it would come to an end. Thought would grind to a halt. The exploitation of the earth for the ends of man would no longer be possible. We have accused the poststructuralists of smashing humanism to pieces, but this surely is the surpassing of humanism properly speaking, Derrida's protests notwithstanding.[24] From de Man's point of view it would be the abandonment of everything human for something less, an abdication of reason for the clammy embrace of Earth. Self-abandonment would be something like death.

De Man's rigor before any form of natural "appropriation" extends to culture as well. Already in 1955 he had expressed a preference for the "immense, empty skies of America" where there is no refuge for the mind alone with itself, "where man finds himself deprived of all support save that of thought"; where there is no history, no great houses of polished wood glowing with the patina of the ages and surrounded by "fields marked by ancestral labor."[25] For a European such things reduce man to a caretaker, if not of dead or dying things, at least of things past. Such a job Rilke, and Malraux with his museums, were all too willing to take on. Heidegger too *wants* to belong, wants this appropriation. For de Man, though, if living in America means having to make a case for technology, he is even willing to do that, provided that he can thereby escape from a smothering culture to freedom.

It is no wonder, then, that the word "ascetic" is so often used to describe his work. But to this "ascetic" one should add a qualified "humane" because there is nothing so impressive in him as the refusal to be absorbed by larger entities or to abdicate his commitment to thought despite the fact that nothing ever makes complete sense, none of the puzzles ever form a recognizable totality, or when they seem to, it is never without some pieces naggingly left over; despite the fact that language never leads to anything but cryptic explanations of how language works. The only story turns out to be that of trope formation. When we think we have the luminous "truth," we have "only" the trope. And tropes lead nowhere to the truth. But not to have the truth is not to have nothing, not even for Nietzsche. The trope is not nothing, not nihil. It is the truth which is the nothing, the ghost projected by the forgotten trope, the illusion of origin simulated by the trace. Truth is the illusion. Truth is the lie. The formation of tropes on the other hand is the quintessential human activity. To devote oneself to tropes is to devote oneself to man, to the consciousness of man as "the artistically creating subject," as Nietzsche said. One can quote de Man, as Said does, and make him sound like a nihilist. De Man does allow Rousseau to say that fictions fill voids in the self and takes note himself of how the human mind performs great feats of distortion to avoid facing the "nothingness of human matters."[26] But even this last phrase is a quotation — from Julie in the *New Heloise*, left untranslated in de Man's "Criticism and Crisis." Why wasn't this passage translated when all others nearby in the same essay were? Perhaps he hoped we wouldn't read it. Did Said leave it unread? It is startlingly upbeat for a passage claiming the "nothingness of human matters." "The country of shadows is in this world the only one worthy of being lived in, and such is the nothingness of human matters that, outside of God existing in himself, there is nothing so beautiful as what is not." The world of shadows which is the only world worth living in, is for de Man, I take it, Nietzsche's world of tropes, the only world to which we have access. For Rousseau's Julie to say this world *is not* is a gesture, surely, of self-effacing piety toward God who has the satisfaction of full self-presence and plenitude. On the other hand, to say this — that the human world is beautiful, but it is not — is merely to avoid saying that only this world of shadows *is*. De Man is not a Buddhist. He is not

[24]Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 155 ff. "The Ends of Man," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 30 (September 1969), pp. 31-57.

[25]Paul de Man, "La Tentation de la Permanence," pp. 4-5.

[26]Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 17. See Edward Said, "Reflections on Recent American 'Left' Literary Criticism," *Boundary 2* Vol. VIII (Fall 1979), no. 1, pp. 31-56. See also Said, *The World, The Text, The Critic* (1983).

Schopenhauer. He is not even Mallarmé. He likes the world of tropes, finds it quite pleasant being there, has no apparent nostalgia for plenitude, no "temptation for permanence" or desire for nothingness. He is not a nihilist, but instead, a kind of humanist, without the cloying, torch-passing associations of that word. In fact, he gives the word a new dimension, redefines what it means to be human, so that the word is not so embarrassing any more, not so smug, so self-congratulating — in short, becomes almost respectable again. If the answers we get from him don't please us, we can turn to the late Heidegger or to someone similar. But de Man might say that we thereby risk trading insecurity for annihilation, becoming something like Rilke's horrifying image of Eurydice.

> Sie war schon aufgelöst wie langes Haar
> und hingegeben wie gefallner Regen
> und ausgeteilt wie hundertfacher Vorrat.
>
> Sie war schon Wurzel.
>
> She was undone already like long hair
> and given away like fallen rain
> and distributed like hundredfold
> provisions.
>
> She was already root.

It is more human to be a function of discourse, never being able to say we know *das Seiende* or to say we do not know it.

III

"The Purloined Ribbon" (1977) is an essay which gives some indication both of the difficulties one encounters in reading the later de Man and of the rather severe, initially frightening, rewards of getting to the bottom of what he is saying.[27] He seems to be working in the genre of criticism, but this genre's comfortable familiarity doesn't prevent us from being spirited away far from cloister and library to non-Euclidian realms where causes and effects are reversed and things lose their familiar meaning. At times one wonders even what "meaning" would mean under such peculiar circumstances as we find there. The point of departure is familiar enough. It is an episode from Rousseau's *Confessions*, a most important one if we can believe Rousseau, who says his memoirs were written primarily so that this story might be told. He wants to do several things by telling it. One is to explain why he has such a horror of lies. A peripheral benefit of telling it, one thinks, is that his *Confessions* will take on added credibility if he convinces us this one wicked moment was never again repeated. Also the memory of it is such a burden to him that he can't bear it any longer alone. He has to tell it now, he says, for the first time. There was a ribbon that belonged to a Mlle. de Pontal, for whose family Rousseau worked as a servant. The ribbon was not valuable in itself, particularly, but it tempted him and he stole it. Because he didn't bother to conceal it, it was found. When he was accused, he shifted the blame on to a sweet little servant named Marion, who had had nothing to do with the theft and had never done him a bit of harm. He claimed to her face before the others that she had given it to him. She denied this with surprise, but he persisted. She burst into tears, claimed she had always liked him, and begged him not to disgrace her, whereupon he grew even more brazen. Since neither would confess, the Comte de la Roque fired them both. It is not just that the girl lost her job, but that she would have been followed forever by the suspicion that she was licentious as well as a liar and a thief. Why else would she have taken the ribbon except to seduce him? Rousseau's act had sentenced her to a life of prostitution, for who would hire such a monster as he had portrayed her to be? To tell the story makes him die of shame, he says. He fears to tell it because he fears by telling it to excuse himself, and he is inexcusable. May he never have to mention it again. He does mention it again, however, in the fourth of his *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

Why did Rousseau take the ribbon if it was without value and among things that were? Why did this alone tempt him? Why did he accuse Marion of giving it to him? On this last question Rousseau has something to say. He accused her not out of malice but because she was on his mind. She was on his mind because he was attracted to her. He took the ribbon to give to her, presumably to make her well-disposed toward him. So he accuses her of doing what he intended to do. The ribbon is a free signifier, valueless in itself, which in this system acquires the value of desire, namely Rousseau's desire for

[27] Paul de Man, "The Purloined Ribbon," in *Glyph I*. Also printed as the last essay in the *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, 1979).

Marion. His giving her the ribbon would lead to her possession of the ribbon and his possession of her. What he does when he is accused is simply reverse this play of desire. This explanation seems neat and, if not comforting exactly, is rational in a perverse kind of way. De Man calls the system of Rousseau's explanation a "specular figure," a metaphor. He might have stopped here. But this is only the first stage of his argument. That it is neatly rational should be, I suppose, suspicious.

Why did Rousseau really take the ribbon? Consider the relish with which he dwells on the horrors awaiting poor Marion, the shame, the poverty, the wandering. He doesn't know all this happened to her, but he brings it up anyway — to make his crime seem even more heinous, to call down more punishment upon himself from the justices above. And if any crime was ever avenged, his against Marion was. His whole life has been one relentless series of sufferings — sometimes connected to his crime against Marion (his pangs of conscience which never leave him), sometimes not (the endless blows rained on him by life from every conceivable direction). Consider also the fact that he never bothered to conceal the theft of the ribbon. Did he want to be caught and exposed to shame? Did he possibly want even to intensify and perpetuate the shame that was already there in the theft by committing an even greater crime? Yes, to both questions. What Rousseau wanted was the shameful exposure which he got, says de Man. To admit this is what he wanted would get too close to uprooting the need for it, so he blamed Marion and made the shame even worse, prolonged it to the end of his life. This is really why he fears to excuse himself in the telling of his story. He doesn't want to end the shame he feels in it, because feeling shame is pleasurable, and telling about it is pleasurable. But because telling about it is pleasurable, the telling is shameful. So the shame never ends. It chases its tail endlessly. He has to tell it again in the *Reveries*. This intricate explanation is even better than the first, one feels. It is nicely psychoanalytical and fits perfectly with everything else we know about Rousseau's masochism — revealed in spades in the very next chapter, when he takes to the streets as a flasher. He wanted apparently to return to the days of Mlle. Lambercier's spankings, which had ceased, painfully, the moment she realized her efforts were not having the desired effect. Here, again, we think de Man has ironed out the strangeness of the episode of the ribbon. We could stop here with satisfaction and edification. But de Man is still unsatisfied. He has barely started with this scene, and he is not finished with us either. We are not yet into the characteristic de-Manic realm of rhetoric, but we are on the threshold. How do we get in? Through the next question he asks. For this we need the French. Consider again why Rousseau accused Marion. *"Je m'excusai sur le premier objet qui s'offrit."* He excused himself on the first object that offered itself, on the first thing that entered his mind. *We* would say that the object of Marion offered itself for the quite comforting, heartwarming and rational reasons we saw before — the poor fellow was in love with her, and so on. We would helpfully fill in the abyss that opens up here in the sense of the scene. But not de Man. For him the passage becomes unreadable, incomprehensible, disrupted by the radical contingency, the arbitrariness of the idiom. The excuses we have thought of to this point no longer hold. A disjunction opens up "between Rousseau's desires and interests and the selection of this particular name." The sound "Marion" is without significance, a totally random noise. The sentence quoted in French is an "anacoluthon" which brings back what we had thought to banish by the first and second stages of the analysis. How are we to understand this?

To do so we have to move to the fourth *Reverie,* which is where Marion reappears. In what context? The reverie deals with whether Rousseau is a liar or not and why he is not. He had been accused of getting things wrong in the *Confessions,* and he had been the object of a cruel bit of irony in the Abbé Rozier's journal where his famous motto — "to devote one's life to the truth" — had been parodied. Rousseau gets involved in a rather difficult and tortured analysis of how to tell the difference between truth and lie, resulting eventually in the claim that little embellishments of the truth of the sort found in the *Confessions* were not done to put him in a better light or to put anyone else at a disadvantage. They were completely innocent. "To lie without advantage or disadvantage to oneself or others is not to lie; it is not falsehood but fiction." And a short paragraph on fables ("fictions which have a moral end in view") follows. The strange introduction of the term "fiction" here itself follows an analysis of truth as possession, as property in which Rousseau establishes that "prop-

erty" can't be spoken of unless there is "use" involved. If the piece of land is barren and useless then it can't be something owed to someone, that is, property. The same happens when we are dealing with "useless facts" (or later "invented facts") which because of their uselessness cannot partake of truth or falsity. Fiction consists of "free-floating" elements completely outside "the polarity of fact and representation," de Man says, elements lacking any link between utterance and referent. But the utterance "Marion" in the episode of the ribbon was also without such a link, a purely metonymic moment. And the harm was done there in not seeing the utterance as free-floating like Rousseau's other fictions and "invented facts." That is, the harm was done not by the fiction itself but by the falsely referential reading of it. It was misunderstood (also by us in the first two interpretations) as a sound that had some connection, however mysterious, to the nature of things in the Comte de la Roque's household. We make such a mistake, we read referentially, whenever we say of a fiction, "Well, this is the way it is. This teaches me finally how I should live, what I should think about the meaning of my life." But fiction has never said this is how we should read. It has always been radically irresponsible. And we persist in thinking it is not. We persist in taking it for "being" or "reality."

Another example of this sort of thing appears in the fourth reverie. Rousseau is at a dinner party. He is asked by a pregnant woman whether he had ever had children. The question Rousseau represents as malicious, since we have been told elsewhere — *Confessions* IX — that he *has* had children by Therese Levasseur, all of whom were given away to a foundling home for various reasons. In any case, Rousseau lies to the girl — he sees she has expected the lie. He blushes and is in great discomfort. She glares knowingly at the rest of the guests. Was this a lie, properly speaking? No, "it was the automatic effect (*l'effet machinal*) of my embarrassment." The purely machine-like effect of this lie raises again the necessity of seeing the excuse as lacking a referential *attachment*, as a "gratuitous improvisation, as the implacable repetition of a preordained pattern," says de Man. This excuse-generating machine is free with regard to the content it produces. It can take a *random* error and transform it into lots of different *rational* things and is restricted only by the rules of grammar, the laws of the machine itself. If we have read the fourth reverie we know there is an interesting machine in it in which Rousseau loses parts of his fingers. Could this be where de Man is headed? Indeed it is.

There are several peculiar moments in the reverie which seem to relate to lie and truth, again, and which we haven't talked about. Rousseau mentions Montesquieu's preface to *Le Temple de Gnide*, a bawdy little narrative which Montesquieu claims to have translated rather than actually written himself. On the surface of it, the moment is here in the text to provide us with another example of a harmless lie, to reproach oneself for which one would need a more delicate conscience than his, Rousseau says. But as we know from the preface to *The New Heloise*, a preface is the place where the paternity, the author's mastery of the material in the book, is decided. Montesquieu sunders himself from *Le Temple de Gnide*, and Rousseau's paternity in the case of his narrative is "undecidable." We are not talking here about the metaphors of cuckoldry, but of something more threatening and awful from the point of view of the author. Behind the question posed by the preface convention is the question of the "gratuitous and irresponsible" text again — metaphorically the castration, dismemberment, or decapitation of the author, a moment always contained in the process of writing: head is to author as body is to text. Dismemberment is apparently the motivation for the apparently delirious quotation of Tasso by Rousseau in the place where Rousseau compares himself so inappropriately to the Sophronie of *Jerusalem Delivered*. The lines he quotes were precisely the lines he cut from his translation of the Second Canto years before, "an attempt to surreptitiously restore the integrity" of a text he himself had dismembered. And the stories he tells of moments he "generously" left out of the *Confessions*, so as not to appear too great and noble in the eyes of his reader — these have to do with dismemberment too. The story of the shiny, smooth cast-iron rollers in which he lost the ends of his two longest fingers through the carelessness of Fazy *fils*, and the time he was struck on the head by a mallet wielded by his friend Plince and almost killed — both have to do with castration and beheading. The ostensible reason for telling the stories now in the fourth reverie is to show how noble, how like Sophronie he was for not telling on the boys, how you can suppress facts and not be a liar. The "real" reason is that the stories have to do with Rousseau's scarcely-

articulated thoughts on the nature of language, blood-red thoughts in which this whole mad text on lie and fiction is awash. If we remember that the "machine" was what generated his excuse about his children to the pregnant woman, then we can see just how radical the separation of a text's performance from its meaning has to be. A signifier ("Marion" or "Sorry, no kids") is randomly produced, mechanically produced. It gets loose ("plays") and (to change the metaphor) sprays cognition in every direction, cognition which tries desperately to catch up with the randomness of its origins. Guilt is produced to make sense of the senseless. We know we are not telling the truth about the guilt, so the more we protest that we are not liars, the more we produce guilt and the need to confess. This distinction between the cognitive and performative is de Man's version of the theme with which we began when we were characterizing the text as trace or difference, the signifier as being a strange contradiction in the sense that its connection to the signified is hopelessly difficult to establish or at the very least problematic. We might also point out that de Man's distinction is related to Saussure's arbitrary relationship of language to the world of things it designates; to Nietzsche's analysis of "truth as illusion"; and to Hegel's separation of the "this" of sense to any linguistic taking note of it.

De Man does not bother to draw any implications from what he has said about Rousseau's texts. One could hardly pretend to exhaust the implications in the space remaining. Surely, though, those who complain that de Man suppresses history and demand that he be more openly political should acknowledge the difficulty — if we take de Man seriously — of showing cognition as the determination of material forces. Not that this is the only way of being political, but it is a start, perhaps *the* start. I quote Marx: "The mode of production in material life determines the social, political, and intellectual life processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but . . . their social being that determines their consciousness."[28] In de Man, on the other hand, the machine of language whose "laws" don't cognition and culture seem to be productions of entirely exclude randomness. The textual web woven by this machine in turn covers over something really quite alarming and *béante*, something that takes some courage to lean over and look into. In Derrida we find a text-produced author. Here we have a cultural apparatus talked into existence by the play of idioms. Under these rather radical circumstances, it is difficult to see how we can make the transition from de Man to Marxism, even by seeing him as one of the Frankfurt school thinkers who separate theory and "reality," superstructure and infrastructure, and have theory churning out its products independently of real historical time with only a mutually indirect access present between them. If for Althusser, let's say, there is still a faith that "the order and connection of ideas themselves is the same as the order and connection of things," then this is a Spinozistic faith in the rationality of it all that, to say the least, is not available to de Man.[29] There is rationality, all right, but it is produced to cover up the craziness of everything else. Are we not justified in saying that if cognition is culture, then culture is a misunderstanding; that if texts have power, as Said and Foucault say they do, they are thus misread, misunderstood, regardless of whether they *try* to tell the truth or not? (Rousseau's were trying, on the public level, to tell the truth, set the record straight about some of his fictions.) The defenders of culture and its attackers are both blinded. They both think they have made sense of things. But it is when we have made sense of things that we become so dangerous; we think because we have got it we can now do something — the more violent the better — to everyone who doesn't have it. Much more humane, perhaps, is the *aporia*, the all-roads-closed, which those who defend the monument, Nietzsche's great columbarium of ideas, and those who attack it, both find such a dreadful and monstrous symptom of nihilism. □

[28]Karl Marx, from "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," *Selected Works*, Vol. I, pp. 356-357.

[29]Jameson, p. 108. See Umberto Eco, *La Struttura assente* (Milan, 1968), p. 360, cited by Jameson.

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Carlos Edmundo de Ory

THE STARS . . .

Translated by Will Kirkland

The stars of very dense neutrons
The stars for giving you kisses
White dwarf stars
We know no more than the smallest
part of the universe
And I know your mouth entire

John Mosier

POLITICS AND EXCELLENCE AT CANNES

Riots, the chaos of a new facility, and pervasive critical disgruntlement at Cannes in 1983 obscured the fact that there were some important films shown, all except one outside of the competition section, and most of them shown as part of the Directors Fortnight, which emerged as the one clear success of the festival.[1] The one important exception was Ann Hui's *Boat People: Return to Da Nang,* shown as the "surprise" film, a category that the festival management has invariably used to allow them to show films which for various reasons cannot be shown in the regular competition section, but which, for other, presumably cogent reasons, cannot be shown in one of the sidebars. Given the welter of seemingly necessary regulations, this is a sensible solution, and some of the films shown in the past have been extremely significant, e.g., Tarkovsky's *Stalker.* Unfortunately, bunker problems meant that Hui's film was shown in the infamous *salle Debussy,* which, by the time it was shown, was a place that it was difficult to pay people to go into. This, together with the muddle pervading the festival by May 15th (the first screening of her film), meant that it did not receive the attention that it deserves. In four feature films Ann Hui has emerged as a tremendous new talent, and one of the most promising women directors in the world.[2]

The premises of *Boat People* are simple ones: the new Vietnam is a miserable place where a government composed of hypocritical paranoids continues persecuting a population by now composed of largely innocent bystanders, although its treatment of even the vaguely guilty is worthy of the worst excesses of the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s and China in the 1960s. In some senses then this is a traditional muckraker, and it uses some of the same devices. The protagonist is a Japanese photographer named Akutagawa, sympathetic to the North Vietnamese cause in the early 1970s, who has returned to see how the country around Da Nang has prospered now that the revolution has succeeded. Akutagawa is very much the average journalist: he was sympathetic to the revolution, and deserves his title of "foreign friend." He is pleased by his tour of Potemkin village (or 'pokazhuka' to use the Russian term), and believes that what he sees probably represents — on the balance, since journalists rarely think of themselves as naive or credulous — the reality of the new Vietnam. His discovery of Vietnamese reality is forced upon him largely by accident, again, in typical fashion: he wants to wander around by himself, meet people, and get a sense of ordinary life.[3] He certainly is not an investigative reporter trying to uncover anything. Hui's construction of Akutagawa is impressive (as is actor Lam's realization of the part), and it reveals a detailed knowledge of how journalists operate, as well as how they look at the world around them. Thwarted by his guide, Akutagawa takes advantage of his connections, and goes to see Nguyen, an old cadre member who is now a senior official. Nguyen gives him permission to go around on his own, somewhat to the irritation of Nguyen's juniors. Akutagawa starts taking photographs on the street, and quickly encounters an impoverished family of four: Ah Nhac, the oldest boy, and his sister Cam

[1]This is the 2nd part of a 2 part article on the 1983 Cannes Film festival. The first part, which appeared in *NOR* 10.3-4 (1983), pp. 111-123, discussed the problems referred to in the opening sentences.

[2]Hui's third feature film, *The Story of Wu Viet,* shown in the Directors Fortnight in 1982 followed the plight of two South Vietnamese refugees who escape first to Hong Kong and then to the Philippines. Although some critics were impressed, the judgment "a passable local version of 'film noir' Cantonese Hong Kong style," was the reasonably apt judgment of the 20 May 1981 *Variety* reviewer. The same reviewer had the following to say about *Boat People*: "A classy film, high in intellectual and artistic content and it proves the Hong Kong film industry can occasionally produce a cinematic gem. Intelligently conceived, researched, scripted, motivated, and acted" (*Variety,* 3 November 1982).

[3]Compare Akutagawa with reporter Elizabeth Pond in *From the Yaroslavsky Station* (New York: Universe Books, 1981): "It seems the closest I can get to the man on the street is the woman on the train . . . . All my visits to collective farms . . . have been meticulously planned to exclude any risk of unplanned conversation with plain farmers . . . foreign correspondents are shielded from a spontaneous contact with proletarians . . ." (pp. 16-17). Pond's interest in such meetings was one of the reasons for taking the Trans-Siberian (the ostensible subject of her book).

Nuong introduce him to their mother and infant brother.

It is when Akutagawa starts getting interested in these children that the film reaches its stride, and a bloody sort of stride it is. How do they earn enough to live on? By scavenging from corpses at the conveniently near execution grounds, nicknamed the chicken farm, where they strip down the warm corpses of those just executed imperialists, counter-revolutionaries, and revisionist backsliders who appear to constitute a sizeable portion of the population, judging from the numbers that are being shot daily.

And it is here that Akutagawa reveals himself to be typical of his profession in another way. He is profoundly shocked by this disregard for humanity, he is impelled to protect those he knows from it, and he is apparently surprised by it. Although his shock is commendable proof of his humanity, his surprise is probably only a sign of his lack of knowledge about the political system he has so openly admired. In China, at one time Vietnam's staunchest ally, the general secretary of the party revealed in 1980 that a million Chinese had died in the period 1966-1976 and that thirty million more had been "persecuted." He also admitted, in so many words, that this was a mistake. Presumably, an earlier reign of terror in the decade following WWII, in which nearly a million Chinese were killed simply because they were landowners or "counter revolutionaries," was not. Of course the Chinese were simply replicating, albeit with ingenious and depressing variations, the pattern established by Vietnam's most steadfast ally, the Soviet Union. In Stalin's lifetime one out of every ten Russians was either executed or died in a camp.[4]

Akutagawa has little time to be philosophical, however, because at the chicken farm he meets another marginal, To Minh, under such circumstances that they are both thrown in jail after being beaten badly. To Minh is working in a New Economic Zone, and tells the photographer that the one he has seen is the model one (an orphanage), the "pokazukha." The one he works at is a forced labor camp where the inmates' "work" is to dig for unexploded American mines with hand tools, and Akutagawa makes arrangements to go there. When he does, he finds that the conditions there make Ivan Denisovitch's Siberian camp look like a ski resort. One of the things that makes Hui's film so brutal is that she shows in documentary fashion what is really going on, whereas even the most gruesome of those films about "work" camps never actually showed the scenes that were so horrifying.[5]

This is a film, by the way, where things inevitably turn out badly. No matter how awful the situation is, it deteriorates. Ah Nhac, still a boy, gets blown up by an unexploded mortar shell that he picks up when he and other children are scavenging for valuables. To Minh survives digging up mines, even though all of his comrades are killed. With the help of his girlfriend, proprietress of a famous black market bar and restaurant, he accumulates enough money to escape in a boat, but is promptly machine-gunned to death by a government patrol boat. Cam Nuong's mother has become a prostitute — something the young girl finds an increasing temptation. But when the mother is denounced and arrested, she rips her throat out with a meathook rather than be separated from her children and sent to a camp. The experienced revolutionary Nguyen is denounced by his subordinates and packed off to a similar camp as Akutagawa watches. Even the bystanders are not spared: one cheerful old man we see at the orphanage, whose main happiness lies in his North American Army boots, dies during the film and the head of the orphanage appropriates the boots.

But Akutagawa resolves to save Cam Nuong and her little brother, and buys their passage out. This act is seen not as an example of his radicalization, but as a result of his concern about the young girl, who has already shown signs of drifting into prostitution. Akutagawa is pro-

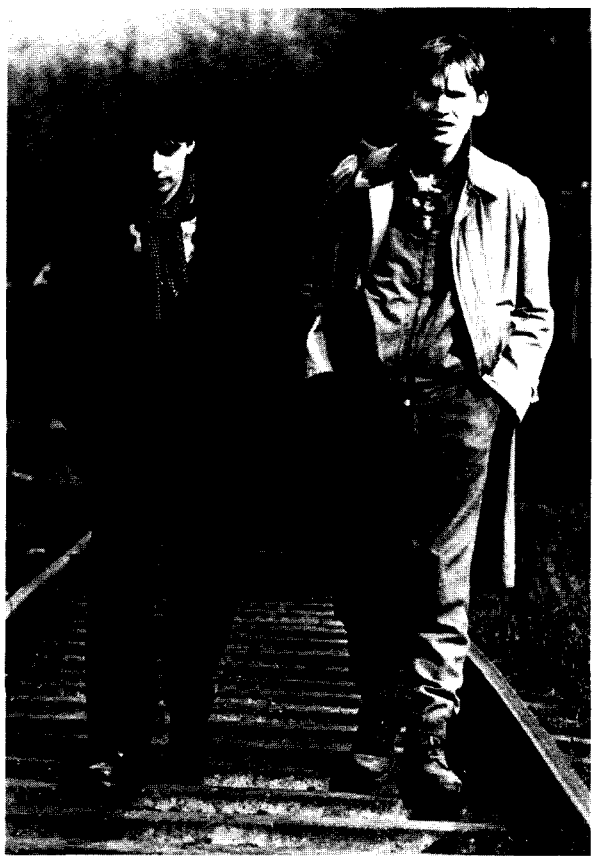
[4]The figures cited are taken from Philip Short's *The Dragon and the Bear* (New York: William Morrow, 1982), pp. 154-156. Short was the London *Times* correspondent in both Moscow and Peking successively during the 1970s, and uses much hitherto unpublished (in the West) Chinese material. See also Pond, p. 59, and Alexei Tolstoy *Stalin's Secret War* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1981), pp. 15ff: "Twelve million died throughout all GULAG." Unlike either Pond or the fictional Akutagawa, by the way, Short is well aware that interchanges between the citizens of socialist states and Westerners can have disastrous consequences. See pp. 2-4.

[5]Even films as harrowingly detailed as Munk's *The Passenger* and Pontecorvo's *Kapo* only show occasional glimpses of the sorts of things described by the inmates of Treblinka and other camps. As Treblinka survivor Samuel Rajzman said: "We don't need authors with great imagination. We need people who can depict the reality as it was. It was so overpowering that the facts speak for themselves." (From his account of life in Treblinka in Alexander Donat's *Death Camp Treblinka* [New York: Holocaust Library, 1979], p. 251.) This quote could serve as both an epigraph for Hui's film and as a justification of its method. And according to one hapless individual who experienced both Stalin's and Hitler's infernos, Stalin's were worse (Tolstoy, p. 16).

foundly horrified by her willingness to accept that life, and it is this purely personal encounter that motivates him to initiate the dangerous process of buying her passage. At first all goes well, and the two youngsters are actually on the boat, but when a policeman shoots the gas can that Akutagawa is carrying to it as part of the price of passage, the gasoline ignites. So does the journalist, who becomes a human torch lighting the children's apparently successful passage out to sea.

Although there is nothing technically or thematically exciting about the film, it surpasses all of its models in its savagery and its unrelieving gloom, and the director offers no alternatives, casts no backward glances, nor does she even appear to be offering a general denunciation of communism. But the truth is that what she portrays is a unique feature of communist states. Only communist states have systematically incarcerated and tormented their own cadres and disgraced their own leaders. Only in communist states has the concept of the deathcamp and the workcamp been linked with the concept of "re-education." Only in communist states have constituent members of the state, that is, its primary citizenry, seen their standard of living reduced and their rights violated.[6] Of course such gross abuses are not necessarily invariably common to all communist states. Historically they have only been true of Russia in the 1930s and 1940s, of Eastern Europe until Stalin's death, and of Mainland China in the 1960s, and of certain parts of Indochina in the 1970s. But Hui's implicit specificity may lead some people astray: the complex of state behaviours that she depicts is not common to all totalitarian states. Fascist states have their own unique complex of horrors.

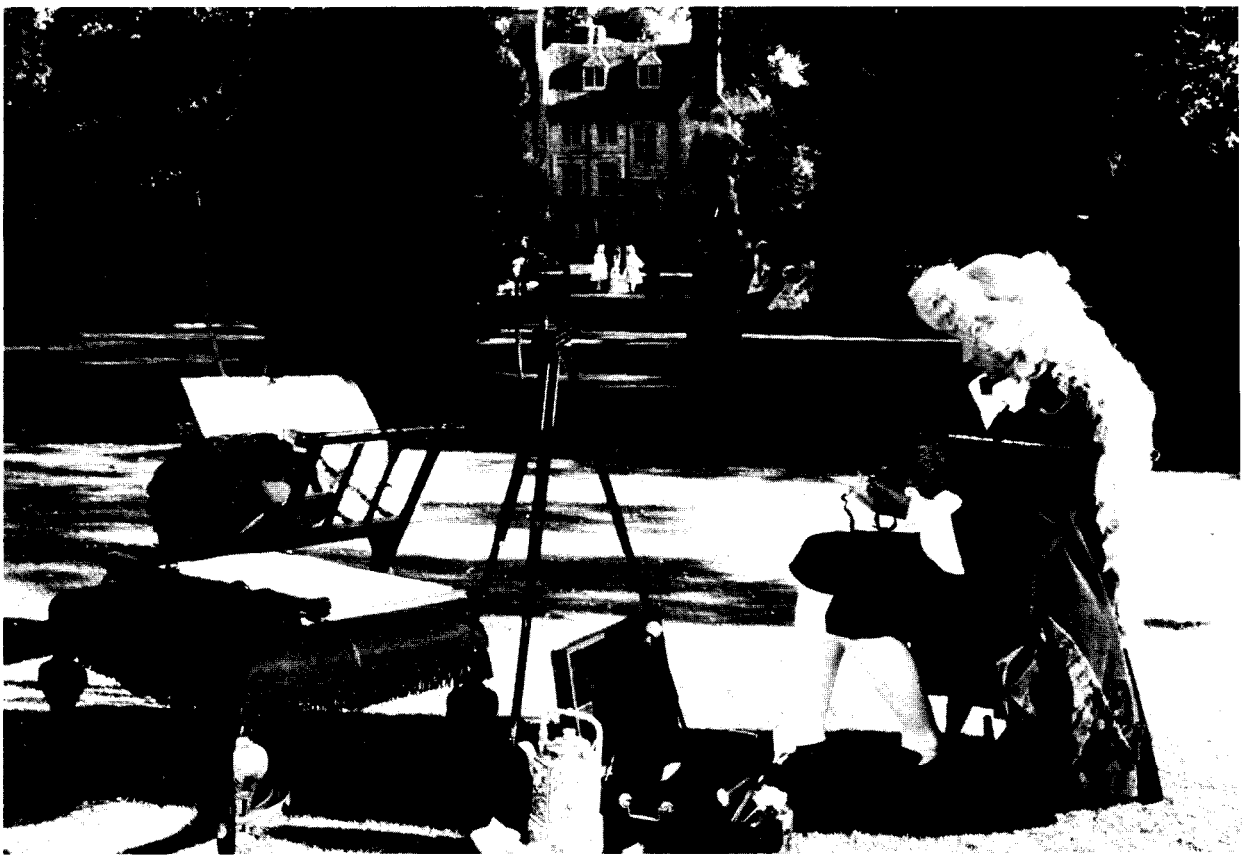
The film's purpose essentially is to make certain arguments about the nature of Vietnamese communism, and the question is how successfully does it do this. Looked at from one perspective, the answer is that it will have little effect. Western intellectuals in the past have refused to believe unimpeachably documented structural criticisms of leftist governments. The actual state of affairs inside Stalinist Russia was not that secret. What happened was that, like the Papal astronomers, they simply did not want to look, because what they saw would force them to restructure their view of the world.[7] The problem



Daniel and Gyuri.

[6]The best recent analysis of the repressions in China and Russia is in Short, pp. 143-166. One feature of these campaigns that differentiates them dramatically from National Socialist reigns of terror is noted by Zhores A. Mevdev in his biography of *Andropov* (New York: Norton, 1983): "During Stalin's time party officials were even more in fear of the security people than ordinary citizens were" (p. 67). This sometimes had consequences as surreal as what happens to Nguyen: "The following spectacle presented itself . . . the officer was sitting at his desk, crying and lamenting, 'Today I am interrogating you, tomorrow they'll interrogate me. Alas, our life is worth but a kopeck!' The prisoner was standing near the interrogator and patted his shoulder trying to comfort him." (As quoted in Tolstoy, p. 63.) For other references, see note 5. See also the lengthy interview-discussions in G. R. Urban (ed.), *Stalinism* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1982), in which both the scope of Stalinist (and Chinese) repression is discussed at great length by survivors, scholars, and outside experts.

[7]"But one of the most disheartening aspects of the Russian people's suffering was the widespread indifference with which it was regarded in the free and relatively luxurious West . . . . Solzhenitsyn's indictment of *The Gulag Archipelago* awoke the world . . . yet, magnificent as is Solzhenitsyn's achievement, there are virtually no facts of importance which could not have been drawn from numerous first-hand accounts published in every Western language since Lenin authorized the first punitive camps in 1918" (Tolstoy,p. 10). Compelling reasons for these failures are presented by Milovan Djilas "A Conversation with Milovan Djilas," *Encounter*, 53 (1979), p. 30. This interview is essentially reprinted in *Stalinism*.



Draughtsman's Contract. Anachronistic posts hidden in the shadows.

Barbarosa and friends.

is not that the information is inaccessible, but that people refuse to access it. The other, smaller, group who have contrary views will find nothing in the film that they have not read about already, since Hui's own information came from extensive interviews with refugees who fled from Vietnam to Hong Kong. Films such as this one tend simply to polarize intellectuals of a certain age rather than to persuade them.

But this is far from saying that the film fails, or that it will be an isolated and ignored piece of truthsaying. There is a large group of younger people in the world whose views on the subject have not been ossified by the Indochinese Wars, which have had a corrosive effect on intellectuals both in Europe and in North America. Those younger and hopefully less tainted people will find the film a compelling one, and it will doubtless shape their views on that subject and on similar ones. It will do so not only because of its brutal images, but because of the lucidity of its development. *Boat People* is a pellucidly clear vision of contemporary Vietnam, in which situations are portrayed with such incisiveness that there is absolutely no doubt about what the choices are for each individual. This gives the film a peculiar kind of strength that is lacking from Pal Sandor's *Szerencses Daniel,* the other significant film, which, although a better work of art, as well as a more courageous one, may in the long run suffer precisely because of its textual density.

The Hungarian film is also a political film, and a surprising one, since it is the first film made in a socialist regime that deals directly with a revolt against that regime. In one respect there is an important similarity between Hui's film and Sandor's. Both films deal with individuals struggling through the aftermaths of national catastrophes. When *Szerencses Daniel* opens, the 1956 Uprising is over. In fact it is approaching Christmas of that year. And both films follow people who are faced with a very basic decision, to leave or to stay, and both follow similar points of view, in that the decisions are viewed sympathetically albeit realistically. There are important differences. Pal Sandor's film is not one that deals with the behaviour of the state as it attempts to reconstruct society, for instance. The primary focus is on the young Daniel, his girlfriend Marianne, his close friend Gyuri, and their immediate families.[8]

Daniel's decision to leave is more personal than political: Marianne's family is leaving and taking her with them. It is Gyuri who must leave because he actually fought. The conventional English translation of the Hungarian title is *Daniel Takes the Train,* which catches the sense of the action (much of which takes place on and around trains), but misses entirely the sarcastic flavor of Sandor's title, which might best be translated as "Lucky Daniel." Of course this is a pun, since Daniel's last name is Szerencses, just as Vera's last name is Angi, and in quite a few respects this film is Sandor's sardonic comment on *Angi Vera.* Why sardonic? Because the ingenuous Vera submitted, even welcomed, her systematic brainwashing, becoming, by the end of the film, a perfect tool of the party, and in this sense the wretched sounding English title *Vera's Training* is apt. But such films have double-edged messages. While on the one hand they are penetrating analyses of how the state manipulates its citizenry, at the same time they provide those members of the contemporary audience who happen to be citizens of the state with a comfortable alibi, because they imply that it was difficult if not impossible to do other than Vera Angi did. This is one way of understanding why a film, even a good and thoughtful film like *Angi Vera,* is not so unequivocal as Western critics might think. It also explains why the state produces films like these and sends them off to be seen as well as letting them be seen inside the country (although this last is only true for Hungary, and it is going to be a long time before Czech or Polish audiences see such films). Sandor's film is important because it argues that this simply was not the case. It does so in casual fashion because of the director's conviction that after enough time passes, there is a certain futility in a filmmaker discussing the past. It can become (as the issue of relative freedom in socialist countries usually does) a labyrinth of contradictory information.

Isolated facts in these cases usually turn out to be irrelevant. When Andropov succeeded Brezhnev "facts" about his taste for Western books, records, and furniture were used to demonstrate his liberalism, as though any member of the nomenclature in a socialist country would fill his house with Ukrainian bookshelves, Siberian records, or Moldavian literature. He would no more subsist off of native products in those

[8]Sandor's handling of this topic is as elliptical and implicit as Hui's, although in focusing on young people he parallels the arguments developed by Bill Lomax in his *Hungary 1956* (New York: St. Martin's, 1976), the best study of the uprising, which argues that it was caused by students and workers, not intellectuals, and that those involved wanted to bring about a regenerated socialism, not a Western government (p. 17).

areas than would Brezhnev ride around in Russian copies of twenty-year-old Fiats. The late Chairman of the Presidium preferred expensive foreign cars, something widely remarked on in the West — but without anyone concluding that this fondness for West German automobiles betokened a fondness for Western ideals. In their differing ways Hui and Sandor have managed to avoid this labyrinth of fact versus interpretation, Sandor by his reliance upon textural densities, Hui by her forced doses of brutality. We automatically abhor any system that does to people what happens to the people in *Boat People,* and we sympathize with the aspirations of young men as appealing as Daniel and Gyuri. At the same time, in both films we throw our lot in with failures: To Minh and Nguyen fail to escape, and Akutagawa's martyrdom is purely incidental and accidental, while events work out so that neither Daniel nor Gyuri makes it across the border. Daniel decides to stay, Gyuri commits suicide by throwing himself off the homeward bound train.

Sandor by now is one of the best of the younger Hungarian directors, and he is absolutely the most underrated. The prizes which his film has been awarded are long overdue recognitions of his talent.[9] There are three reasons for this unusual combination of talent and relative anonymity. One of them is trivial but consequential: Sandor is one of the few good Eastern European directors whose English is minimal. The other two are intrinsic to his work. Sandor's films are simple in their exposition and eminently understandable in their impact on an audience. But they are extremely difficult to write about, because the complex of images simply does not allow itself to be broken down into the sorts of easy summations and analyses that characterize many other films. The other reason is that Sandor's preoccupations probably go deeper into the subsoil of Hungarian consciousness than any other director's. His films consistently evolve a metaphor of isolated individuals trapped spiritually and geographically who are struggling to get out but finally are unable to do so because of their perceptions that they cannot escape the environment that is destroying them. They cannot live inside it, but at precisely that moment at which they might escape, that they could escape, they see that they cannot function outside of that environment, so that to leave it would be simply another form of destruction. And, to compound the complexities, these realizations are not articulated, they are felt, and they are expressed more by the actors than by some line of dialogue, or even by some simple (but effective) complex of images.

This last remark serves to separate out three levels of Hungarian filmmaking: difficult films of a greater sophistication than anything dealt with in the West (most of Jancso, early Kovacs, and now Sandor); significant films that are more or less comprehensible (*Forbidden Relations,* some of Istvan Gaal), and films that, while they are certainly better works of the cinema than the critics of most countries see when they view their own national film production, are more or less like their own works (Istvan Szabo's films). This may seem a cumbersome, if not incomprehensible, criteria, but it is necessary to explain why a film like Sandor's is an entire order of magnitude better than either *Forbidden Relations* or *Job's Revolt,* the latter of which has been justifiably described as "an outstanding human account of a Holocaust story set in Hungary in 1943. Expertly and originally told . . . ."[10]

Job is a prosperous farmer. Except for the fact that he is Jewish, he could be simply another prosperous farmer. But this is 1943, and he has heard things. His revolt is simple: he goes to an orphanage and buys a gentile orphan, back dating the papers so that his adoption will stand up, and his proposition is that he will hand on all of his property to his adopted son, who, as a gentile, will be able to inherit it. There is a Yiddish word for this. In fact there are several. Job's revolt is a triple one. He strikes, obviously without knowing it, deeply at the heart of National Socialist ideology. He revolts against his fate. And he revolts against the God of Israel. All in one fell swoop.

Although most of the film deals exclusively with the growing relationship between the old couple and their adopted son, it is obvious that the entire 97 minutes is aimed at the end: what will happen as the old couple are wagonned off? And it is at this point that *Job's Revolt,* rather than being perhaps a deeply significant film, ends up

[9]In addition to receiving the FIPRESCI prize at Cannes, which is awarded by a jury of international film critics, the film won a prize in Hungary as best film of 1982. See the review in *Variety,* 2 March 1983. Comments on Sandor are the result of an interview I conducted with him in Budapest in June 1983.

[10]*Variety* review of 16 May 1983. The reviewer had no problem with the ending discussed in the following paragraphs. Note that in the article cited in note 1 this film was referred to as *Jacob's Revenge,* which is incorrect.

being an outstanding one. The final images are of the young boy running frantically across the fields as his "parents" are taken off, having already denied him in order to save him. Although this certainly does not mar the resolution of the story, it is, once one understands Sandor's level, an inferior solution, because it leaves everything suspended in a moment of cinematic art (the actual end of the film is a combination of slow-motion and freeze frames of the young child running across the field). Nonetheless, this is a powerful and moving film about an aspect of WWII that the socialist countries of Eastern Europe have scarcely been honest about.[11]

Intriguingly enough, *Job's Revolt* was made by West German and Hungarian television, yet another instance proving that there is absolutely no reason why television cannot fund good pieces of cinema. And increasingly in Europe (both East and West), the television networks have been producing or co-producing films of substantial merit. Olmi's *The Tree of the Wooden Clogs* would be a perfect example of an excellent film (it won the palm at Cannes in 1978) funded by television, in this case Italian television. Despite the voiced fears of the North American film industry, this is a trend which from a global point of view has been beneficial to the cinema, just as television has vastly upgraded the technical abilities of actors (as well as giving them something to live on) in countries like Brazil and Mexico.

What the English speaking world is getting instead are three separate items all confusingly lumped together under the rubric of televison: films that look like they were made for television, in all the worst senses of the word; films that obviously were made for television audiences who are embarrassed about watching television but are tired of PBS; and a default category of growing importance, films that will never go into meaningful distribution theatrically and will only be seen on television. Cannes provided North American critics with three perfect examples of this muddling. John Sayles' *Lianna,* shown in the *Critics Week,* looked like it was shot with television filmstock, or, in some of the worser scenes, on videotape. Lianna is a matron whose husband is a university film professor of the most obnoxious sort. She is going to school at night to improve herself, falls head over heels in love with her psychology professor, and moves in with her. In the process she has to grow up somewhat. The characterization and the dialogue is considerably worse than most regular commercial television, and it is exactly of the same sort: lines that are written without regard for either the character who says them or the development of the character. The sex is explicit enough, and pointless enough, that the actresses would only have to be marginally more attractive to fit right into the evening lineup of the Playboy channel, which runs films with almost precisely similar story lines all the time. One of the more depressing features of the independent film movement both in the United States and Europe is how many of the films can be lumped into one of two dreadful categories: films which regardless of their pretensions appear to have been made for television and films which are so incoherent and incompetent that they could not even be shown on television.

The Draughtsman's Contract, which was co-produced by the British Film Institute and Channel Four, is a nice example of the second category — films made for television audiences that are tired of watching PBS. All of these films (including *Chariots of Fire*) have a certain cartoon quality about them. What they are in fact is costume drama of the same type that Hollywood and Cinecitta pioneered. The dialogue is full of howling verbal anachronisms. The characters in *The Draughtsman's Contract* recite a dialogue that has a wonderfully superficial similarity to Restoration comedy. If Neil Simon wrote a 17th-century play, this is the sort of dialogue we would hear. Like DeMille's epics, the film has a sort of fraudulent historicity about it which stems from the costumes and the sets, but goes no deeper. That

[11]Eastern block censors rarely if ever allow the persecution of the Jews during WWII to be something that is singled out: "Other prohibitions from the serially numbered annual List of Materials and Information Forbidden for Open Publication in the press include . . . reference to the special extermination of Jews in German-occupied Soviet territories in World War II" (Pond, p. 64). Not unexpectedly, few if any films dealing with death camps or work camps imply that Jews were isolated target groups or even a large component of a targeted group. One of the few exceptions to this is Conrad Wolf's *Stars,* made in Bulgaria in 1957. Generally they are mingled in with the other millions of socialists, anarchists, Christians, gypsies, and slavs who were also gassed, massacred, or worked to death. Although it is important to understand that probably as many Gentiles died in this fashion as did Jews, and that the Russians really did lose 20 million people, the socialist states of Eastern Europe appear to have systematically denied that Jews, particularly in Poland (but in all countries) were systematically singled out and exterminated, not for the sake of historical accuracy but as part of the continuous anti-semitism of most socialist states: "An outstanding example (of censorship) is the consistent cuts of Semitic names from the reports on the Cosmopolitan Drive in order to conceal the strong anti-semitic basis of the campaign" (Harrison Salisbury, *Moscow Journal,* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961], p. 16).

is after all why the term costume drama became such a pejorative. And in any meaningful sense the plot is completely incoherent, building up to a sort of Twilight Zone double whammy. But the point is that this really is a television film in the same sense as that endless British adaptation of Tolstoy in which those boring tedious scenes in *War and Peace* where Tolstoy failed to give us proper living and breathing characters are spiffed up to the standards of contemporary television scriptwriting schools.[12]

The question is why do films like this have any impact at all, and the answer is that television has had as corrosive an effect on Anglo-American intellectuals as did the Indochinese Wars. In a country like Great Britain, where there is no real film industry, and hardly any director of any talent at all, or in a country like the United States, where intellectuals simply don't see films, television really has become the dominant force in relaying to those people current ideas about both film and drama. In both cases the ideas are feeble indeed. Unfortunately they are also contagious.

The more's the pity, because at the same time, television, even in the United States, is increasingly performing an important function: it is becoming the primary mass transmission for all of those films that are deprived of any meaningful commercial circulation. Fred Schepisi's *Barbarosa*, shown in the Directors Fortnight, is probably one of the best Westerns made in recent years, and it certainly confirms Schepisi as one of the best (in my view the best) of the Australian directors. He has made three films, all of them different, and each one excellent in its own way: *The Devil's Playground* in 1976, *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* in 1979, and now *Barbarosa*. Each one, by the way, has been at Cannes. So what does this have to do with television? That's probably the only place most audiences will ever get the chance to see the film, possibly because of the fact that it is a Western, a "genre little more than box office poison in the last decade and neither actor possesses the marquee power to draw an instant audience."[13]

The two actors referred to are Willie Nelson and Gary Busey, an unlikely pair at first glance for a Western, although their performances are perfect. Nelson plays a semi-mythical Southwestern outlaw whose name, and the film's title, come from his red beard. Busey plays a hulking farm boy who must flee his own home owing to a blood feud. He stumbles across Barbarosa, and the two of them form a sort of comic partnership. Much of the success of the film comes from its bland balance of violence and humor, as well as the depth of the script. It was clearly the best Anglo-American film shown at Cannes, but that has had very little effect on its commercial distribution in the United States, and it quickly made its way to the cable graveyard. The sad irony that films like this are now a regular feature of television goes a long way to countering some of the gloomier prognostications about it.

One of the earliest and most durable charges against Cannes has always been its preference for commercial films at the expense of art films. As noted earlier, this charge has only been a just one at certain times early on in the history of the festival, and since the 1960s there has been a concerted attempt to exhibit films that are completely anti-commercial. Nowhere has this been truer than with films from Latin America, where directors such as Glauber Rocha, Rui Guerra, and Fernando Solanas have represented a tradition that is deeply innovative and intellectual. And it has generally been their sorts of films that have been shown in the different sections of the festival. During the 1970s, however, the directions of Latin American filmmakers began to shift away from films that, regardless of their merits, were obviously going to be condemned forever to small audiences in France and North America. Newer artists have come to the fore, and their ideas about their art, and their traditions, are dramatically different from those of earlier years.

Adolfo Aristarain is a good example of these shifts. Born in Buenos Aires in 1943, he is at first glance an unlikely candidate for Argentina's best director. Of his first three films, two were musical

[12]But see the favorable review of *Draughtman's Contract* by the late Gene Moskowitz in *Variety*, 8 September, who mentions that it is "a good tv and homevideo item." There is an extensive and negative review by Pauline Kael in *New Yorker*, 22 August 1983. The example from Tolstoy is not hypothetical. Compare Tolstoy's treatment of Nikolai's rescue of Princess Mary after her father dies and what happens in the 23 part serial directed by John Davis for the BBC in 1972-73. The same critic who praises Pulman's "explicit and authentic script" of Tolstoy's novel apparently believes that Tolstoy kills off Nikolai during the course of the novel: "One of the human casualties of this process is Nikolai Rostov, killed in a harebrained charge against the retreating French" (Christopher Duffy, *Borodino* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973], p. 170). This gives a fair example of the sort of foolishness that goes on.

[13]Despite a favorable review of *Barbarosa* in *Variety* (10 January 1982) and an enthusiastic one by Pauline Kael in the *New Yorker*, 9 August 1982, p. 78, the film went very quickly into cable distribution.

One of the more charming assasssins (left): *Last Days of the Victim.*

Federico at target practice: *Last Days of the Victim.*

comedies made in 1979 and 1980 with the unpromising titles of *The Beach of Love* and *The Disco of Love;* and his first feature film dates only from 1978. By 1980 there was very little to distinguish his work from the normal commercial films that Argentina has made in reasonable quantities since the advent of sound film: technically acceptable but of no real lasting artistic merit. Although there have been some stimulating artists working in Argentina besides Leopoldo Torre-Nilsson, the Argentine's contributions to global cinema, or to Latin American cinema, has been inversely disproportionate to its resources and talents.

Aristarain's fourth film, however, was another story entirely. Called *Time for Revenge,* it won the prize as best film at four separate festivals in 1982: Biarritz, Montreal, Havana, and Cartagena. It was quickly followed by another film, *Last Days of the Victim.* The first international review of *Time for Revenge* called attention to its *film noir* qualities, and both films have clear affinities with the genre.[14] In both, the hero (ably played by Federico Luppi) is a brooding and distant man, capable of casual cruelty, but also possessing a sardonic sense of humor. His struggle is a completely personal one. In the first film, it is a struggle against a crooked mining company, while the second film tracks the adventures of a hired killer. Like the famous North American "detectives" Marlowe and Sam Spade, Luppi constitutes a world unto himself. He has his own ethical code, and in neither film is it one that allows us to identify with him as a character.

Although *Time for Revenge* has won all of the prizes, the second film is probably the better of the two. For one thing, the subject is much more general. Essentially, the first film is an unusually cynical account of labor relations. Simply put, *Time for Revenge* is about violence in modern life. Second, and more important, the later film is a work of substantial narrative sophistication. As Aristarain has observed, the film offered "the possibility of a narrative form as attractive as it is difficult to visualize: to tell the story using the first person, while keeping the protagonist's viewpoint, in order to compel the audience to unravel the plot having no more information than the protagonist himself, and at the same time succeed to have the public identify with the narrator, who is not sympathetic nor has any redeeming qualities. There was a risk of audience rejection, because identifying with a killer implies that one unconsciously accepts that violence is latent inside each one of us."

The *film noir* protagonists were equivalent sorts of men. And although Aristarain is careful not to use the term, his discussion of the film could serve as a model definition of the genre. Where he departs from the convention is that he eliminates the *noir* part, in that his films consist of images that are well lit, and there is nothing particularly dark or brooding about the scenes. It sounds excessively simpleminded, but it is worth pointing out that the genre, as it was originally defined, was supposed to rely upon images that were themselves "black" rather than "light." Although these concerns were doubtless thought to be more cinematic, in reality they do sound somewhat simpleminded, and it is to Aristarain's credit that he has relied upon the more cerebral aspects of the concept, specifically the idea of the hero, to establish links with the genre.

Although Aristarain's vision of contemporary Argentina as a playground for murderers of all types who kill for motives that are never satisfactorily explained has so far, regardless of its relevance to an understanding of the country, not gotten him into any real difficulties. The Brazilian companion piece, however, has more specific aims, and it has been more controversial, which is surprising in several senses, one of them being that its director, unlike Aristarain, was an entrenched member of the Brazilian establishment.

Roberto Farias, often mentioned as one of the original *cinema novo* directors, made his first feature film in 1957, and his most notable, *The Paytrain Robbery,* in 1962. In the early 1970s, however, Farias stopped making films and became actively involved in the various national film organizations in Brazil, becoming the chief executive of Embrafilme, which virtually controlled the international marketing of Brazilian films, and, through a complicated system of government subsidies, much of the funding for production. As Farias later observed, in a terrific understatement of what actually took place: "I became withdrawn, so much so that people even began to misunderstand my motives."[15]

Pra Frente Brasil forces a major correction about his motives, as well as his talents as an artist. The difficult to translate title is a soccer cheer, and the

[14]See the *Variety* reviews of 19 August 1981 (*Time for Revenge*) and 5 May 1982 (*Last Days of the Victim*). The quotation from Aristarain is taken from the 1983 Catalog of the Directors Fortnight. The discussions of Latin American films that follows will appear in *Americas* in 1984 in somewhat different form.

[15]The quotation is taken from a mimeographed sheet inserted into the copies of the press kit distributed at the festival. I must admit that Farias certainly had me fooled as well.

film is set in 1970 during Brazil's quest for the World Cup. Jofre is a typical young executive with a wife and two children. In an opening of the sort made famous by Hitchcock (who of course got it from Eric Ambler), Jofre, who happens to be in a taxi with the target of a police death squad, is abducted in the resulting shootout. He disappears. When his wife and brother start making enquiries, the assumption of the authorities and his employers increasingly becomes that he must have had links with leftist terrorists: in their attempts to find the absolutely innocent Jofre, they only draw attention to themselves as possible leftist sympathizers.

In the case of Jofre's brother, Miguel, there is in fact a link, but it is a precisely articulated link: he has an old girlfriend, Mariana, who is an urban guerilla, a fact which has ironically put a considerable damper on their relationship. Miguel's investigations of his brother's disappearance lead him deeper and deeper into a complex political situation. The situation is not one of organized repression of the people by the state, it is a situation of near anarchy, lawlessness. There is no real authority or order. The family, like all good upper middle class Brazilian families, has its own connections. Enquiries are made. But by the time Jofre is found and retrieved, he is dead, killed in a final act of defiance by his torturers, who do this while the authorities look on in impotent rage. Never has the old Brazilian proverb (first put on the screen by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade in *Macunaima* and later popularized by Werner Herzog), seemed more appropriate: "It's every man for himself and God against us all."

Marta resolves to flee the country, and Miguel seeks vengeance, much of which he gets. Like Aristarain, Farias is deeply familiar with the conventions of North American films, and one of the things that makes *Pra Frente Brasil* so good is the use of those traditions: Miguel's gradually escalating fury links him with several generations of Hollywood heroes.

Farias' film is a far better film than *Missing*, not least because of its authenticity. Instead of the cardboard conspiracies of the left and the right, he accounts for the collapse of decency and the rise of terror by depicting the behaviour of isolated people whose fear, hypocrisy, and greed lead them into secret organizations which fund killers and employ psychopaths, results which are far from the original aims of the fundors but the painfully inevitable outcome of their actions.

Films such as these two are important films because they give extensive portrayals of national political and social conditions which can be understood easily by large audiences both within and without the country, which was the case with Hector Babenco's film about the death squads, *Lucio Flavio*. Their effect then goes far beyond the effects of films made by (and invariably for) an intellectual and cultural elite. Farias' act of courage in making the film, coupled with his accomplishment in so doing, naturally caused him problems in Brazil. The United States excepted, there are very few countries in the world where successful films that lay bare the national sores are shown in any meaningful way. Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity*, a lengthy and talky documentary about the French in WWII (scarcely a crowd pleaser), had still not been shown on French television twelve years after it was made. The French example is appropriate because it suggests that society punishes its filmmakers not by shooting them or running them off but by denying them audiences as much as can possibly be done.[16]

Although most Latin American countries make comedies, Brazilian directors have consistently been the most successful in making humorous films that also make serious points about contemporary life. Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's *Macunaima* is the first such work, a wildly comic and endlessly inventive film which scores some telling points about such sobering themes as internal emigration, modernization, and neocolonialism. It presents us with a fascinating comic portrait of a "typical" Brazilian, Macunaima, who both exemplifies and satirizes the Brazilian character. Joaquim Pedro's colleagues predicted that his film would establish a new model for successful Brazilian comedies, and in a surprising way, this has been true, because the best Brazilian comedies are characterized by the three concerns that his film melds together: serious social criticism, portrayal of national characteristics through typical characters, and reliance on slapstick.

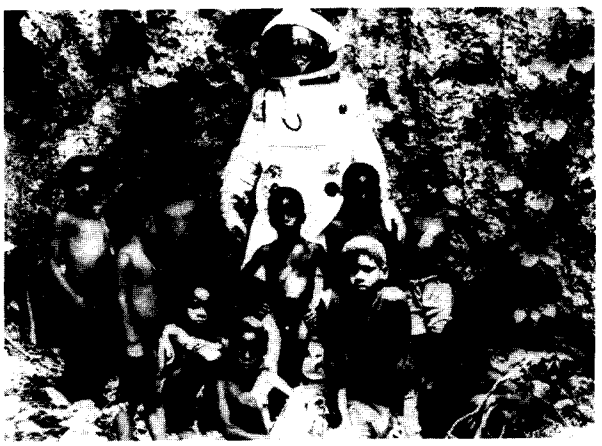
The director whose comedies best exemplify these tendencies is Hugo Carvana, who also stars

[16]However, it is important to note that these films are seen in Brazil. Babenco's *Lucio Flavio* is the 4th most widely seen Brazilian film in the country. Or, to put it another way, more people in Brazil have seen a film about the death squads than have seen a film about wookies, and almost as many Brazilians have seen *Pra Frente Brasil* (1.1 million), as have seen *Gandhi*. In fact, Farias' film was the 2nd most widely seen Brazilian film during the January-June reporting period, and the 4th most widely seen film released (including foreign films). Statistics taken from *Variety*, 26 October 1983, p. 358.

in the movies that he directs. Carvana's first hit was *Get a Job, You Bum*. Carvana plays an ex-convict who attempts to recreate the lifestyle he enjoyed before he went to jail. But Rio has changed. Inflation has begun to make life more difficult. His friends are older and wiser, somewhat more respectable and considerably more impoverished. But our hero rapidly destabilizes their lives: rescuing one from a mental institution, another from door to door selling, reseducing his old girl friend. His aim is to restage a championship pool game on which he will make a fortune by some judicious fixing. Any summary of the film ends up being completely inadequate, because Carvana's great strengths as an actor lie in his acrobatics, and his strength as a director lies in a surprisingly delicate touch. For all the low comedy, the film has a beautifully nostalgic tone: it is a memorial to a way of life that has vanished from Rio just as it has vanished from much of the West. Thus abstracted, *Get a Job, You Bum* is a serious film, even though the tone and the talents of the actors make it a deeply comic one. The greatest shift from Joaquim Pedro's ideas of comedy to Carvana's is that Carvana believes that the better parts of human nature will ultimately prevail, even if the human beings who contain those parts are themselves every bit as defective as Macunaima. *Macunaima* ends on a sardonic, if not pessimistic note: Macunaima, abandoned by his brothers in the Amazon, dives into a pool of water and is eaten up by a water sprite. Carvana's film ends with fellowship and reconciliation: the pool match broken up by the intervention of an angry wife and an outraged lover, the cast begins a procession through Rio. It is an intensely informal and unselfconscious moment which is greatly aided by Chico Buarque's musical score.

Yoky Yosha directing Anat Atzmon in *Dead-End Street*.

Bar Esperanza, which Carvana also directs and stars in, is a similar although substantially better film. Carvana is Zeca, a television playwright who disrupts his marriage and his life by quitting his job when he feels his principles are compromised. His great desire is to travel into the Amazon with a troop of theatrical performers. His wife Anna (played by Marilia Pera, the star of *Pixote*) is a popular soap opera star. Just as the lives of the characters in the first film were built around the two pool games, so in this film they are built around the Esperanza Bar, which is a physical memorial to a way of life that is threatened, since at the end of the film the owner is proposing to sell it, which will make room for yet another new development. The bar is the great meeting place not only of neighbors, but of artists, which allows Carvana to make some sarcastic comments about artists and their critics. One of the painters who frequents the bar holds his newest exhibition in the mens' room. The paintings he exhibits there are all white on white, or, as a layman might say, completely blank. This does not prevent the critics from some absolutely marvelous appreciations of his talents.



Astronauts at work in *The Rose of the Winds*.

The reason the film is so successful is that it manages to parody things without being bitter about them. The wife of one of the bar's habitués resolves to shame him so thoroughly that he will stay at home. To that end she comes into the bar and does a striptease. But the result of her amateur performance is that she is given a television contract to work in a national advertising campaign as an instant celebrity. So her public disrobement, far from being a unique situation that traumatizes her husband, becomes a series of performances from which they both profit. There

are serious moments as well, particularly as the film chronicles the breakup of Zeca's marriage. Although at the end he and Anna are reunited, the film manages this in reasonably realistic fashion: one certainly doesn't get the feeling that the personal and social problems the film portrays are all neatly swept under the rug at the end. Carvana's films lack the mordant wit of the best of Jabor, or of Mexican films like *Calzonzin Inspector,* but they do something that the majority of comic films can't do, which is they maintain a precise balance of these three components, and, above all, they have the ability to entertain audiences in a way that some of the more savage comedies just can't.

Anyone who covers Latin American cinema regularly quickly meets other critics and viewers whose skepticism resolves itself into a simple question: do these films really have any important aesthetic values? How can Brazilian films really be any good? (The counterpoint to 'how can anyone struggle through Hungarian films.') Critics who went from the screening of Scorsese's disastrous and hardly ever funny *King of Comedy* to one of *Bar Esperanza* would rapidly understand what those values are. Carvana's films may not be works of the probity of Sandor and Hui, but they have an integrity about them that is as refreshing as the fact that they are genuinely funny. In a festival where most of the humor was unintentional, and where film after film dealt with failures of various sorts (or were themselves failures), that was quite enough.

Although some of the first sustained cinematography in Latin America was by documentarists, most notably the Mexican Salvadore Toscano, the quality of documentary films in the region has never matched the quantity. Cuba has put the most effort into the form, but over the past twenty years the best artists have been Patricio Guzman from Chile and Fernando Solanas from Argentina. Of course from time to time there have been excellent documentaries such as Tania Quaresma's *Cordel* in Brazil and Ciro Duran's *Gamin* (Colombia). But the tendency has been for filmmakers to make documentary films at the earlier stages of their careers, and then to embark on more ambitious (and expensive) fiction films as soon as they were able. Brazil's Ana Carolina and Mexico's Marcela Fernandez Violante are both perfect examples: each made excellent documentary films early on, but neither thinks of herself as a documentarist nor is perceived as such.

And a close study of Fernando Solanas reveals his case to be similar. No sooner had he finished the massive trilogy for which he is most famous — *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968) — than he began a project for a "political paraphrase of an original poem," based on *Martin Fierro.* This film, in no sense a documentary, was begun in Argentina in 1973, finished in Europe in 1977, and shown at the Directors Fortnight in 1978. Although financial problems have drastically limited Solanas' productivity, his works illustrate the tendency for artists to shift from documentaries to fiction films, whether or not they are perceived of as being chiefly "documentarists." Even in Cuba, where they are well supported, the lure of making a fiction film appears to be a strong one: Jesus Diaz, one of the country's more respected practitioners, recently made a feature length fiction film, *Red Dust,* which was well received critically.

So for a long time Patricio Guzman was unique: he was a prolific documentarist whose films were seen around the world, and he stayed with the form all through the 1970s. In 1975 the first part of his monumental trilogy about Chile in the 1970s was shown at the Directors Fortnight at Cannes, and the succeeding parts were completed in 1976 and 1979. Although it was the first of these that formed his international reputation, Guzman's work all through the decade certainly established him as a respected filmmaker working in a medium usually abandoned very quickly by artists.

His one solitary fiction film, *The Rose of the Winds* is certainly far from proof that he has abandoned the form, although the brief survey might make one suspicious. What it is proof of is more difficult to say. Guzman's script produces a brief and simple plot devoid of characterization: the quest to find a mythical or mythological leader of the people who exists and re-exists at all the points of the compass. He is both limited and indestructible, proclaiming his existence and his mission now from the mountains, now from the jungles. As the film progresses the questers, thoroughly Europeanized and rational though they are, must come to accept that their task is in any literal sense impossible. The hero can neither be found, that is located in any one place at one time, nor destroyed. He remains a dynamic symbol of Guzman's belief that "the American people found a refuge in their own proper culture."[17] It is theirs, and it is both an internal force that sustains them, and an external one that shields them from spiritual or cultural colonization.

There is no doubt that Guzman accomplishes

his aims: unlike the earlier films of Rui Guerra, Miguel Littin, and Glauber Rocha, all of whom were interested in similar mythologizing, there is nothing cluttered or ambiguous about Guzman's film. Most of what happens is mystical, and some of it is baffling, but the bafflement is clearly intended and serves the obvious intellectual purposes just mentioned. And some of the images are striking: the image of lunar explorers setting foot in Latin America is both brilliantly conceived and beautifully executed. Guzman's achievement, then, is to make a fiction film that breaks decisively with the dominant traditions of his (and of Latin America's) documentaries. The decisive break is that this is a brilliantly photographed film with a lucid script. The problem lies in the earlier comparison with Guerra and Rocha: the idea of the film is by now a venerable one, and too old for the film to have the real impact that its technical accomplishments deserve.

Guzman's film, then, is an intriguing one but certainly not as significant as some of his earlier work. The same was true of Yaky Yosha's *Dead-End Street*, which follows the attempts of a prostitute in Israel to reform herself and lead a straight life, a decision for which the catalyst is a filmmaker who is interested in her. Yosha has by now become the great chronicler of the seamier side of Israeli life, as well as its best director. This film, which in some senses is based on events in his own life, is certainly courageous in its denunciation of the extent to which prostitution is a pervasive part of Israeli society.[18] It is a well-made film, and the presence of Israeli actor Yehoram Gaon is not really the miscasting that Israeli critics only too familiar with his work in their cinema feel it is. So *Dead-End Street*, like *Rose of the Winds*, is worthwhile but disappointing, although, once again, both films are substantially better than the majority of the films shown in the competition section this year.

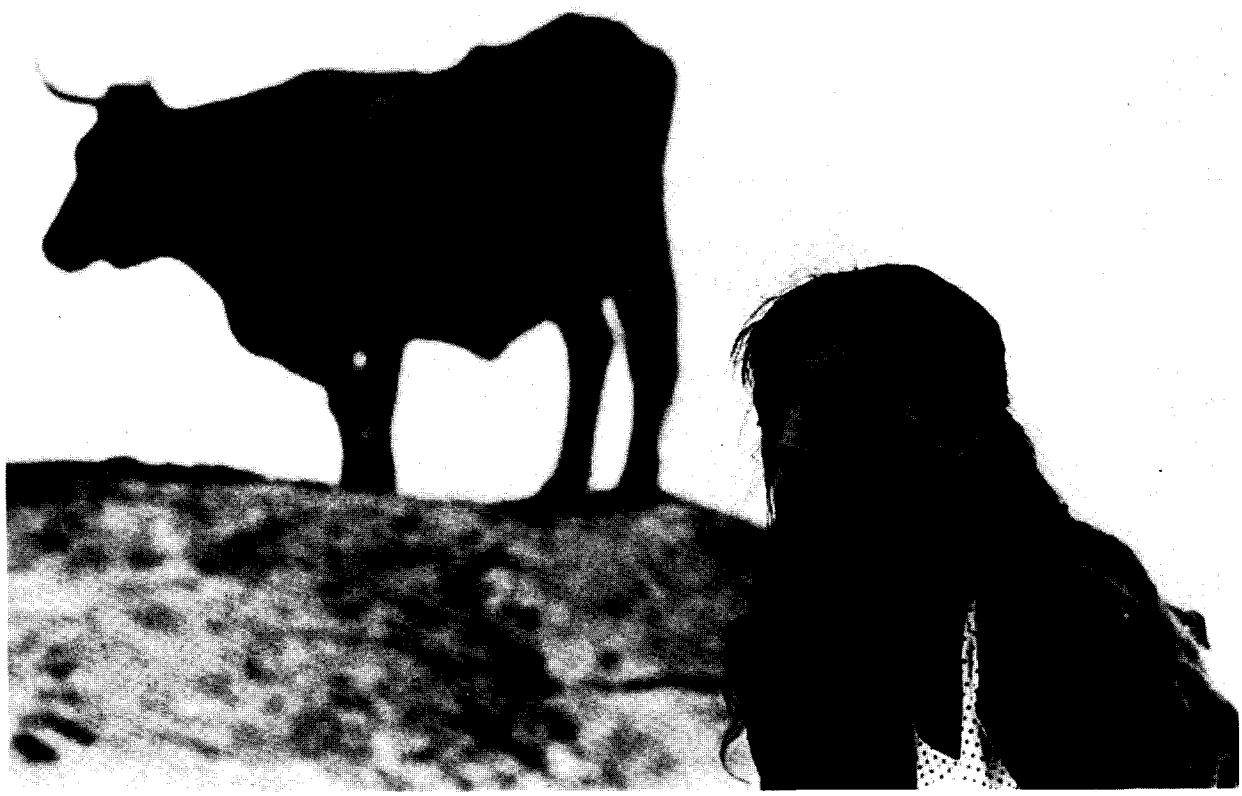
However, the best film shown at the Fortnight, which was undoubtedly the most popular with both critics and audiences, was the Spanish film *Demons in the Garden*, directed by Manuel Gutierrez Aragon. Gutierrez Aragon's films have been winning prizes since 1973, but they have been exhibited internationally mostly at Berlin. North American critics, if they are familiar with his work at all, know it through his work as a scriptwriter, since he did the script for Borau's *Furtivos*. But Gutierrez Aragon, who has made seven films, should by this time be established in Europe at least as a significant talent, and hopefully this last film will bring about some real fame. It has been a tremendous commercial and critical success in Spain. At Cannes it should definitely have been the Spanish film in competition. Not only is Gutierrez Aragon's original script an interesting one, but the film has good performances from some of Spain's best actors and actresses, particularly the latter, as Angela Molina, Ana Belen, and Encarna Paso are in the film.

Demons begins at the end of the Civil War in the household of an affluent store owner. Its matriarch, Gloria (played by Encarna Paso) is a shrewd merchant whose dealings in the black market have made her prosperous and will soon make her even more so. Despite the fact that this is the worst socioeconomic period in the history of Modern Spain she and her two sons are living very well. The oldest son is being married off to Ana (Ana Belen), and her youngest son, Juan, is having an affair with Angela, and has gotten her pregnant. The film opens on the day of the wedding. There is a fight between the two brothers on that same day and Juan leaves for Madrid, leaving Angela more or less as a servant who raises their son, Juanito, beneath Grandmother's solicitously paranoid eyes.

There are only rumors from Madrid of Juan's rise to power, but he never returns and his son never sees him, so he is raised variously by his mother, his grandmother and her servants, and by Ana. To say that he is fought over is an understatement. Years pass. Juanito becomes ill and is removed from his mother's rural hovel to his grandmother's by now palatial shop. Ana, childless, spoils him rotten, all the more so as the doctors have advised the women that it is very bad for him to get upset, and so he should be given everything he wants. Mothered by both Ana and Angela, Juanito's childhood is a true life of Riley. The only pity is that Freud was not alive to see the film and write a psychoanalytic critique of the influence on a young boy of having Ana Belen and Angela Molina as competing mother

[17] "Although there will probably be a consensus that it is beautiful to behold, some will consider it as rather pretentious and repetitious symbolic twaddle, both confusing and not properly thought out," *Variety*, 1 June 1983 review of *The Rose of the Winds*.

[18] See the perceptive, judicious, and finally negative review by Edna Fainaru in *Variety*, 24 November 1982. Fainaru notes that the film, although "loosely based on authentic facts . . . finally didn't stick very close to any of them." She also questions the effectiveness of the characterization and the choice of actors.



figures.

All this time one has a shadowy image of Juan in Madrid, as though he has become a significant figure at Franco's court, but his son has never seen him. Finally, at the news that the entourage will be passing through, Juanito blackmails the women into taking him to see his father. But to Juanito's consternation, his father is simply a waiter in Franco's retinue, and the young boy voices his immediate (and blackly comic) rejection of the whole business. Shortly thereafter both Father and son begin to encounter difficulties. The doctor says that the son can be treated like any other boy, and the father gets into difficulties in Madrid. Secretly he also becomes his sister-in-law's lover, and Juanito sees Ana stealing money out of the till for him, for which Angela is blamed. It is at this point that Juanito

The end of *The Revolt of Job.*

has to choose his allegiances carefully, and he does so. In a peculiar way this is a film about the possibilities of finally making correct moral decisions.

The end of the film bears an uncanny and deliberate resemblance to the beginning. The two brothers again have an angry confrontation, but Ana more or less resolves it by successively proposing that Angela and Juan get married, and then, shooting Juan. But not so fatally that he is unable to stagger out and pose for the family portrait, which ends the film.

Demons is a wickedly humorous film, from the black comedy surrounding the rearing of Juanito to the kinky parodies of standard Spanish melodramas, as though Milan Kundera had taken a Perez-Galdos plot, stuck with it, but written it in his own way, warping the characters accordingly. It also partakes of the kind of dark Freudian comedies of the Brazilians as well, but it differs from them in the acting. The plot is such a wild melodrama, in which the activities of the characters are so preposterous, that it could only hang together with actresses who are able to resist the temptation to overact, which demands both excellent actresses and a director whose touch is so sure that he knows he will get the effects he wants through the images themselves. In this last respect Gutierrez Aragon was aided immeasurably by having written his own script. It was quite the best script at Cannes. As a director directing his own script, he winds up the melodrama and keeps it going, but he spends most of his time following the young boy. The complicated machinations of the plot are there, but they are subordinate to the child, who is, like all the children in Spanish films, perfect for the role. He manages to suggest a basically intelligent and good-hearted boy who is never so spoiled by things that he becomes a real monster, and never so depressed by the tragedies of Juan's abandonment and his mother's poverty that he loses his sense of control.

Demons in the Garden has of course its allegorical components, as does every Spanish film of any substance that deals with modern Spanish history. But it is as wildly successful as it is for the reason that it tells an interesting story using people who make it even more interesting, and in this it recalls Erice's *Spirit of the Beehive.* But its portrayal of characters whose hate runs as deep as their love, and who manage to conceal both behind an iron reserve, suggests *Furtivos.* One hopes that in time it will become better known than both of them. It certainly deserves to be. □

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Miguel Labordeta

SONG OF FRUSTRATION OF THE DREAMER CHILD

Translated by Will Kirkland

I'd like to be a lightning strike of vulture on Sunday afternoons,
wood asleep through centuries of rain,
a mine collapsing on itself
smashed arteries of throbbing pain.
I'd like to be the eyelid of astronomers
or the damp footstep of the unknown god
that circles the sinister hills
at the ominous hour of birth;
a desire that's lost at sea,
still lip of the girl who's in love
or longing, irresistible longing
for a great and illusionless death,
I'd like to be a tear out of hell that's nearing escape
or the emperor of desperate mannequins
or the boasting executioner on his afternoons of melancholy,
a sad perhaps of hermitage in its silver forests
or a river slow and ceaseless growing in the springtime.
I'd like to be the deep desire
crying from my guts volcano,
breath of cloud and light and diver
or simply earth and earth and earth;
or eternity pregnant, still without stars,
still without fear,
without faith,
without enemies.
To not have been born,
not ever
my friends.
This is,
yes,
this is,
what I'd like to be,
for once and forever destroyed.

Andrew J. McKenna

DOUBLE TALK: TWO BAUDELAIREAN REVOLUTIONS

Barbara Johnson, *Défigurations du langage poétique: La Seconde Révolution baudelairienne*. Paris: Flammarion, 1979.

Pierre Pachet, *Le Premier Venu: Essai sur la politique baudelairienne*. Paris: Denoël, 1976.

There was hardly a time perhaps when Baudelaire's observation that "la critique touche à chaque instant à la métaphysique" ("Salon de 1846," in *Oeuvres complètes* [Paris: Pléiade, 1961], p. 878) had more relevancy than today, when the literary work of art is so often analyzed and appraised for the questions it poses to our Western metaphysical tradition. The work is liable to praise or blame according to its detectable complicity with or challenge to Western logocentrism, that seemingly inveterate belief in an ideal center, an ultimate unity or transcendental origin (God, Nature, Being) in which our representations and actions seek their ground, their justification. Works have been subject to periodization and classification according to whether they are experienced as logocentric or deconstructive. Somewhat in the manner that Baudelaire opposed the linear contours of Ingres to the colorism of Delacroix ("C'est l'infini dans le fini" [OC, p. 1053]), the openness of the text is contrasted to the hide-bound closure of the book, and that determination, with attendant value judgements favoring the former, is grounds for expulsion or inclusion in the literary canon of our "modernity."

This too is a term we do well to date with Baudelaire. For he is one of its inaugural theoreticians, its etymo-archeologist, as he self-consciously plays on its awkward novelty in relation to present time and "la mode":

> [The Painter of Modern Life] looks for that something which we will be allowed to call *modernity*, for no better word presents itself to express the idea in question. It is a matter for him to extricate from fashion ["la mode"] the poetic content in what is historical, to draw the eternal out of the transitory.
>
> (OC, p. 1163)

Much of our debate about the metaphysics of presence and the problematics of representation is implied in the curious formula by which Baudelaire stakes a paradoxical claim for "la mémoire du présent," as well in the playful juxtaposition of such terms in the opening pages of "Le Peintre de la vie moderne":

> Other artists represent the past; but it is to the painting of the manners of the present that I wish to address myself today. The past is interesting not only for the beauty which artists for whom it was the present were able to extract from it, but also as past, for its historical value. It is the same with the present. The pleasure we derive from the representation of the present comes not only from the beauty with which it is clothed, but also from its essential quality of being present.
>
> (OC, pp. 1152-1153)

Baudelaire's remarks thus take us to the problematic core of an ontological debate which deconstructive criticism has chosen to regard as the primary issue in the interpretation of literature. Frequently decried as merely the latest Parisian fashion, as more modish than truly meaningful, it deserves to be related to other, more baleful aspects of our modernity if we are to comprehend its significance for our time.

For if Baudelaire is the herald of our literary modernity, he is also the prophet of a devastating social disintegration, with all its consequent terrors, in which we cannot fail to recognize our own historical experience:

> Machinery will have so much Americanized us, progress will have so well atrophied all that is spiritual in us, that nothing among the sanguinary, sacrilegious or antinatural reveries of the utopians will be able to be compared to these positive results . . . Do I need to say that the little that will be left of politics will flounder painfully in the embrace of general animality, and that those who govern will be forced, in order to stay in power and to create the phantom of

> order, to have recourse to means which would make our contemporary humanity shudder, hardened though it be already?
>
> (OC, p. 1263)

It is with the feeling of "le ridicule d'un prophète" that Baudelaire tells us that "le monde va finir." In fact the scenario of internecine rivalry which he conjures up in this famous passage from *Fusées* bears comparison with the indictment which Jeremiah hurls at Judah, as at the world at large:

> Then [writes Baudelaire] the son will flee the family, not at 18 but at 12 years old, emancipated by his gluttonous precocity; he will flee the family, not to seek out heroic adventures, not to deliver a beauty locked up in a tower, not to immortalize a garret by his sublime thoughts, but to found a business, to get rich, and to compete with his infamous papa — founder and stockholder of a newspaper which will spread enlightenment and which would make the Times or Tribune [*le Siècle*] of his own time seem like a henchman of superstition.
>
> (OC, pp. 1263-1264)

> Let each be on his guard against his friend [warns Jeremiah], be mistrustful of your brother, for every brother is a very supplanter [a Jacob, a usurper] and every friend a diligent slanderer. Each deceives the other, they do not speak the truth, they have accustomed their tongues to lying, they are corrupt, incapable of repentance. Fraud after fraud, deceit after deceit.
>
> (Jeremiah 9: 4-6)

What is common to the prophetic visions of Jeremiah and Baudelaire, as to their apocalyptic imprecations, is the sense of a general breakdown of the social order consequent to the fissuring of communal energies into rival and mutually destructive desires. Jeremiah ascribes this to disbelief in God ("They refuse to acknowledge Yahweh" [9:7]) and Baudelaire, more concretely, to the eradication of the rights of primogeniture:

> Of religion, I think it useless to speak and to look for its remains, since still taking the trouble to deny God is the only scandal in such matters. Property had virtually disappeared with the suppression of the right of the first born; but the time will come when humanity, like a vengeful ogre, will tear away their last morsel from those who believe they have legitimately inherited from revolutions.
>
> (OC, p. 1263)

Baudelaire's vengeful ogre of humanity and Jeremiah's fiery divinity ("I mean to make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a jackal's lair, and the towns of Judah an uninhabited wasteland" [9:10-11]) are all one for the devastation they will reap. With the impending proliferation by Americans of the neutron bomb in Western Europe, which would preserve property and destroy its possessors, one reads Baudelaire with the sense that he is telling our story, prophesying our history.

Baudelaire's continuity with Hebrew prophecy and the pertinence of both for history is enhanced and complicated by what we might construe as the poet's virtual complicity in the horrors of the phantom order he predicts: "Belle conspiration pour l'extermination de la Race Juive," he writes amidst lapidary reflections on our infernal bookishness: "On the infamy of the printing press, a great obstacle to the development of the Beautiful," and "The Jews, *Librarians* and witnesses to the *Redemption*" (OC, p. 1300). Baudelaire the moral accomplice to the holocaust? Perhaps only in the sense that ultimately all are accomplice to the evil about them, before them as well as after them, as propounded by the doctrine of original sin — to which Baudelaire clung as adamantly as he did to the agency of the devil in otherwise inexplicable, seemingly unprovoked malefactions. Constrained by the light of our profane reason to believe as little in the one as in the other, we are bemused, embarrassed or simply puzzled by the "Catholique incorrigible" in Baudelaire, who could write to the incredulous Flaubert about the "levain de catholicisme" in *Le Poème du haschisch:*

> I was struck by your observations, and, having probed very sternly in the memory of my reveries, I have discovered that I have forever been obsessed by the impossibility of accounting for certain sudden actions or thoughts of man without the hypothesis of an intervention of an evil force exterior to man. There's a gross admission which the whole 19th century could

not conjure me to blush at. Note well that I do not renounce the pleasure of changing my mind or of contradicting myself.

(*Correspondence* [Paris: Pléiade, 1973], Vol. II, p. 53)

It is a very measured statement, and alive to what is inquisitorial ("conjuré") in the demystificatory temper of his era, which would have him, as doubtless we would have him, abjure his apparent faith in demons. But it is one of the ruses of the devil, as Baudelaire has an abbé remark in "Le Joueur généreux," to persuade us that he does not exist. Such double binding logic is only reinforced by Baudelaire's recourse to the demonic pleasure of self-contradiction.

What is at stake of course, for us as for Baudelaire, is not the existence of the devil but of evil, and the need of an explanation for it. The devil is a figure, a fiction, an imaginary representation of evil, by which our culture, among others, has represented the invasion of an alien will, an ill-will contrary to the inherently good will of the subject, which as Georges Bataille remarked à propos Baudelaire, "can only will the Good" (*La Littérature et le mal* [Paris: Gallimard, 1957], p. 66). The devil bears the blame of our evil desires, he is as structurally opposed to good will as desire itself, which we have come to understand as ever proceeding from the other. The devil is a rational hypothesis for the irrational, of which we stand to make some sense if we comprehend, with René Girard (*Deceit, Desire and the Novel* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965]) or Jacques Lacan ("Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse," in *Ecrits* [Paris: Seuil, 1966]), the inherent contradictions of desire. As an external projection of evil, its mythical alienation, the devil has functioned as a sacrificial mechanism, by which evil is expelled from the bosom of man, supernaturalized and made Wholly Other, or sacred, until such time as, with the progress of enlightenment, it can be dispensed with altogether, along with the sacred itself. The work of exorcism is accomplished by our demystifications. René Girard has argued the same point about the pervasiveness of the sacred as Baudelaire about the existence of the devil. The expulsion of the sacred from the horizon of our attention only testifies to the sacrificial character of our rationality, whose realization in our thermonuclear capability nonetheless threatens global devastation with a power traditionally only ascribed to divinities. Devil or not, devastation or not, we can at least expect to better comprehend Baudelaire's demonic imagination if we situate it within the sacrificial discourse which he takes over from Joseph de Maistre and which pervades the *Journaux intimes,* where the poet's utterly scandalous prognostics are to be found.

This is the compelling interest of Pierre Pachet's excellent book, *Le Premier Venu: Essai sur la politique baudelairienne* (Paris: Denoël, 1976), which has the merit of taking Baudelaire's political and religious vocabulary seriously as a potent conceptual instrumentality with which to comprehend modern experience. Pachet's book bears a dedication to Girard, as well as to Victor Goldschmidt, the eminent Plato scholar and author of a systematic review of Rousseau's social theory (*Anthropologie et politique: Les Principes du système de Rousseau* [Paris: Vrin, 1974]). But it is especially to Girard, as author of *La Violence et le sacré* (*Violence and the Sacred,* trans. Patrick Gregory [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977]), that Pachet attributes his "impulsion décisive," which consists in articulating a theory of sacrifice which is dispersed in Baudelaire's writings (most notably in "De l'Essence du rire") and which Pachet relates to the problematic status of the individual, to the ambiguous experience of solitude, in modern, post-revolutionary society. The play of substitutions between self and other, the convertible dynamics of group and individual are "pratiques sacrificielles" which Pachet discovers in "la sociologie baudelairienne." "Le Premier Venu" is a multivalent term taken from Baudelaire himself, serving to translate the aleatory dynamics of violence in egalitarian society, the ethical indifference between criminal and prosecutor, as between tormentor and victim, the structural indifference between a conspiracy of one and the conspiracy of all against one in a non-hierarchical culture.

It is for this structural indifference on the predominantly social plane that Pachet's analyses are of interest for Barbara Johnson's resolutely post-structural reading of Baudelaire's prose poems in *Défigurations du langage poétique: La Seconde Révolution baudelairienne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979). The comparison is all the more intriguing as these two books proceed from opposite points on our literary critical compass, as they are dedicated to what are regularly seen as rival fronts on our contemporary critical terrain. Johnson's book bears a dedication to Paul de Man, and is just as unilaterally concerned with rhetorical structures as is Pachet's book with social structures. *Défigurations* may be legitimately described as an exer-

cise in deconstructive criticism of the kind that de Man practices in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Proust, Rilke, Nietzsche and Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). Johnson extends this mode of analysis expertly to Baudelaire's *Petits Poèmes en prose,* where she discovers a strategy bent on undermining the lyrical dualism upon which *Les Fleurs du mal* is constructed. "Défigurations" is Johnson's term (which we also find in de Man's "Shelly Disfigured" in *Deconstruction and Criticism,* ed. Harold Bloom [New York: Seabury Press, 1979]) for the process by which totalizing metaphors are seen to emerge by a series of permutations in Baudelaire's text as contingent, metonymical relations suggesting the arbitrariness of meaning and the facticity, rather than the analogical destiny or necessity, of lyrical "transports." Thus the static dualism sustaining the traditional identity of verse in its opposition to prose crumbles from within the very project and execution of the prose poems. Some are shown to reread *Les Fleurs du mal* ("Une Hémisphère dans une chevelure, whose indefinite articles betoken the tactics aimed at the richly metaphorical "La Chevelure"; the two "Invitation au voyage" contrast by the figural banalizations, the levelling out of associations in the prose poem). Others pose the problem of their own reading (most notably the "Dédicace" to Arsène Houssaye, which exploits the generic indeterminacy and ambiguous novelty of the prose poem; "Le Thyrse," which configurates the relation of literal and figurative in an undecidable way by posing their relation in terms of a figure; "Les Fenêtres" and "Laquelle est la vraie," which problematize rather than stratify or emblematize the relations of art and life, such that life is found to differ not so much from art as from itself). The book is highly successful in accounting for rhetorical (or anti-rhetorical) effects and lexical choices which other eminent readers of the prose poems (Georges Blin, Suzanne Bernard) were not equipped to explain in terms of a more traditional or classical esthetics.

Johnson's reading is properly, one might almost say by now classically, post-structuralist for the way a difference which is traditionally felt to obtain between the poles of a binary opposition (signifier/signified, signified/referent, prose/verse, metaphor/metonymy, nature/culture, etc., which ramified in so many uninviting grids in the previous decade of structuralist criticism) is displaced, reinserted or rediscovered within each of them. This sanctions her apposite use (but once) of the Derridean anticoncept of "différance," along with now canonical references to Lacan and to Freud (the Uncanny, of course), as well as some discreet indulgence in homonymic wordplay on her own part. She laudably exceeds the ahistorical practice indicated by the subtitle of de Man's book by extending her interrogation of figure to Mallarmé, namely to his "Crise de vers," which consists in locating a crisis no longer between verse and prose, or poem and criticism, but within each of these designations and consequently within the notion of crisis itself. This leads to illuminating considerations of "le poème critique" in Mallarmé ("Le Démon de l'analogie") and to what have become familiar claims against critical metalanguage.

Johnson does not conclude, after de Man, as to the dread "unreadability" of Baudelaire, which so scandalizes de Man's adversaries, but she shows convincingly the strategic "dysfunction" in Baudelaire's text of the differences which (de)constitute the identity of literary versus ordinary discourse, and consequently of literary versus critical text. So she is doubtless a mark for the sort of polemics aimed at deconstructive critics by those for whom such differences are sacrosanct, are the indivisible law and order of academic discourse. Still another essay on these same two books could be devoted to that debate, whose issue is difference and consequently meaning itself. I allude to it because Johnson offers an exemplary reading of texts as "parole sur la différence", while Pachet's book would aid us infallibly in detecting the sacrificial character of the debate (p. 10).

The interest of these two books for each other, and for us, is that they both testify, in their respective domains of reference, to Baudelaire's own acute perception of a loss of difference, of a radical undecidability, which Johnson locates in the "dysfunction" of metaphor and of rhetoric generally (pp. 37, 94, *et al.*) and Pachet in the "reversibilité des dispositions de l'expérience" (p. 120) resulting from "l'instabilité des différences modernes" (pp. 120-122). There is a significant correspondence here: in the hierarchical order of the "ancien régime," figure has its place apart from the proper sense and subordinate to it in the order of discourse; with the overthrow of that hierarchy, with the formal, statutory eradication of social difference — "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" — the order of discourse succumbs to a homologous levelling out or "mise à plat," as Johnson describes the rhetorical process. Tzvetan Todorov has noted this homology in Hugo's "Réponse, à un acte d'accusation," where the

poet declares "Guerre à la rhétorique": "But to perceive figures as a difference ["écart": also "variation," "deviation," "swerve"] implies that one believe in the existence of the norm, of a general and absolute ideal. In a world without God, in which each individual is deemed to constitute his own norm, there is no more place for the consideration of deviant expressions: equality rules between expressions as between men" (*Théories du symbole* [Paris: Seuil, 1977], p. 138). The war declared by Hugo rages, clearly, within his own rhetoric, as it will later in the writings of Rimbaud and Lautréamont. With Baudelaire, as Johnson shows, it is already a war of attrition, to whose violence, as Pachet shows, no one, least of all the reader, is immune. Here is Pachet on Baudelaire's notorious incrimination of the reader ("Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat [l'Ennui],/—Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère!"):

> To identify a criminal, that is to identify a man among others in order to declare him criminal, and on the other hand to identify a reader, that is to constitute him from the indeterminations of boredom and leisure, these two operations seem to have only a structural relation. But if we note that every singularization of a man is arbitrary, we understand what hold the artist, master of the artificial and therefore connoisseur of the arbitrary, possesses on social reality: "Here is the man, the man whom you seek: he is none other than just anybody" ["n'importe qui"].
>
> (pp. 79-80)

In our own time we have witnessed the utter dissolution of the art object, and the election, as Harold Rosenberg wrote of Andy Warhol, of "the artist as anybody" ("Warhol: Art's Other Self," in *Art on the Edge: Creators and Situations* [New York: MacMillan, 1975], p. 105). Warhol now publishes the very high fashion magazine *Interview*. In the wake of Baudelaire, in our celebrations of indifference, we have decriminalized the artist who challenges difference, who sets himself apart and risks immolation by that challenge. Pachet enables us to understand this phenomenon as reflecting the dynamics of post-revolutionary, egalitarian society, whose deconstructive avant-garde advertises *Misère de la littérature* and *Haine de la poésie* (both by Jan-Luc Nancy, Philipe Lacoue-Labarthe and others [Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1978 and 1980]).

There is, then, an interesting and I think illuminating transitivity between the books of Johnson and Pachet, such that they can be read as translations of each other. Pachet's "first comer" might be the figures, anomalous in their very banality, with which Baudelaire lards his prose poems so as to undermine their lyrical difference:

> Un vrai pays de Cocaigne, te dis-je, où tout est riche, propre et luisant, comme une belle conscience, comme une magnifique batterie de cuisine, comme une splendide orfévrerie, comme une bijouterie bariolée.
>
> A true land of plenty, I tell you, where everything is rich, clean and shiny, like a good conscience, like magnificent kitchen utensils, like splendid goldsmithery, like gaudy jewellery.
>
> (OC, p. 254).

(This is from the prose poem "version" of "L'Invitation au voyage," in which Johnson discovers a "perversion" of its verse double in the chapter she devotes to them, which she has translated for inclusion in *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981]. This book bears an inaugural epigraph from de Man's *Allegories of Reading*.) Johnson rightly demonstrates that these crude and heterogenous figures are inept by design, as they ironically literalize the potential of "l'universelle analogie."

Johnson's "Seconde Revolution baudelairienne," on the other hand, might be taken to translate the "oscillation entre les êtres," the "alternance" (Pachet) which governs, in Baudelaire's account, the juridical selection of a victim, the election of a tyrant, or for that matter, the delineation of esthetic form:

> Il s'établit alors un duel entre la volonté de tout voir, de ne rien oublier, et la faculté de la mémoire qui a pris l'habitude d'absorber vivement la couleur générale et la silhouette, l'arabesque du contour. Un artiste ayant le sentiment parfait de la forme, mais accoutumé à exercer surtout sa mémoire et son imagination, se trouve comme assailli par une émeute de détails, qui tous demandent justice avec la furie d'une foule amoureuse d'égalite absolue. Toute justice se trouve

> forcément violée; toute harmonie détruite, sacrifiée; mainte trivialité devient énorme; mainte petitesse, usurpatrice. Plus l'artiste se penche avec l'impartialité vers le détail, plus l'anarchie augmente. Qu'il soit myope ou presbyte, toute hiérarchie et toute subordination disparaissent.
>
> There is a duel set up then between the will to see everything, to forget nothing, and the faculty of memory which has developed the habit of a lively absorption of general color and silhouette, of arabesque contour. An artist having the perfect feeling of form, but accustomed to exercise especially his memory and imagination, is as if assailed by the riot of details, which all demand justice with the fury of a mob smitten with absolute equality. All justice is necessarily/ forcibly violated; all harmony destroyed, sacrificed; many a triviality becomes enormous; many an insignificance, usurping. The more the artist leans with impartiality towards detail, the more anarchy augments. Be he long or short sighted, all hierarchy and all subordination disappear.
>
> (OC, p. 1167)

Pachet cites this text as an illustration of the "fondement sacrificiel" of order, esthetic as well as political, for Baudelaire. He further adduces the example of the "caractère molochiste visible" which Baudelaire admired in Delacroix (OC, p. 870), and devotes a luminous chapter to the prose poem "La Corde," in which a boy model hangs himself when censured by his artist employer for his "immoderate taste" for sweets and liquors.

> In "La Corde," [Pachet comments] we see clearly how the liaison [sic] is made between the sacrificial character of the work of art and the actual putting to death of a human being. The work of art is sacrificial as we have seen [alluding to the passage just cited above], because in it a hierarchical principle ordains choice, refusal, subordination. It is a selection which rediscovers the selective truth of things.
>
> (p. 192)

Johnson's method of reading, had it extended to "La Corde," would only have confirmed Pachet's analysis. For it averts us to the pun ("l'accord") which interprets the misunderstanding between the artist and his epicurean model, his double, his victim, whose rope ("la funeste et béatifique corde") takes on sacred value binding the community together by its "commerce." "A community reconciled by an innocent victim, a commerce founded on a sacrifice," comments Pachet (p. 193): "La Corde" — "commerce" — "Concorde."

For Baudelaire, art is originally hieratic, as the representation of an order which is violently imposed upon reality. "La vie ancienne *représentait* beaucoup," he concludes in his sketch of the violence sustaining the old order: "Qu'était-ce que cette grande tradition, si ce n'est l'idéalisation ordinaire et accoutumée de la vie ancienne; vie robuste et guerrière, état de défensive de chaque individu qui lui donnait l'habitude des mouvements sérieux, des attitudes majestueuses ou violentes. Ajoutez à cela la pompe publique qui se réfléchissait dans la vie privée" ("What was that great tradition, if it is not the ordinary and accustomed idealization of the life of old; robust and warlike life, state of defensiveness of each individual which gave to him the habit of serious movements, of attitudes majestic or violent. Add to that the public pomp which was reflected in private life") (OC, p. 949). In the amorphousness of modern life, violence is not eliminated, it is democratized and internalized. Baudelaire accordingly describes "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" as a swordsman, a duelist engaged in a struggle against reality as against himself, "dardant sur une feuille de papier le même regard qu'il attachait toute à l'heure sur les choses, s'escrimant avec son crayon, sa plume, son pinceau, faisant jaillir l'eau du verre au plafond, essuyant sa plume sur sa chemise, pressé, violent, actif, comme s'il craignait que les images ne lui échappent, querelleur quoique seul et se bousculant lui-même" ("darting on a piece of paper the same look which he attached a moment ago to things, fencing with his pencil, his pen, his brush, making water spurt out from the glass to the ceiling, wiping his pen on his shirt, hurried, violent, active, as if he feared that the images might escape him, quarreller though alone, jostling himself") (OC, p. 1162). The artist is "tyrannisé par les circonstances" whose impressions are "despotique."

Baudelaire's recourse to political as well as to religious figures serves to situate historically an esthetic dilemma which arises with the emergence of democracy in post-revolutionary France and in the West as a whole. (Pachet wisely sug-

gests the numerous affinities between Baudelaire and de Tocqueville.) What is lost in the reclamations of individual detail is "la silhouette," "l'arabesque du contour," "la forme": figure, in a word, which recedes into ground much as the "morceau de pain" in "Le Gâteau" is dispersed, disseminated amidst the grains of sand which are the ground, the plat-form of its violent appropriation by warring doubles. "'Il y a donc un pays superbe,'" concludes the narrator, "'où le pain s'appelle du *gateau*, friandise si rare qu'elle suffit pour engendrer une guerre parfaitement fratricide!'" ("'There is then a superb country where bread is called *cake*, a nicety so rare that it suffices to engender a perfectly fratricidal war!'") (OC, p. 251). Johnson reads this text as the annihilation of figure resulting from its endless proliferation: "To say that the poem establishes an equivalence between the figurative ["le figuré"] and nonsense, between rhetoric and death, is only to participate in figurativity to the second degree, which introduces us to the infinite repetition of metaphorical structure, and consequently into the impossibility of arresting or of dominating its functioning" (p. 82). Yes; but the aporia affecting figurative and proper sense by their common inscription under the hegemony of figure also parallels the aporia of group and individual, whose subjective self-ish reclamations, whose aspirations to transcendence (figured by the "pain" as "gâteau") are those of every member of the group:

> Ensemble ils roulèrent sur le sol, se disputant la précieuse proie, aucun n'en voulant sans doute sacrifier la moitié pour son frère. Le premier, exaspéré, empoigna le second par les cheveux; celui-ci lui saisit l'oreille avec les dents, et en cracha un petit morceau sanglant avec un superbe juron patois. Le légitime propriétaire du gâteau essaya d'enfoncer ses petites griffes dans les yeux de l'usurpateur; à son tour celui-ci appliqua toutes ses forces à étrangler son adversaire d'une main, pendant que de l'autre il tâchait de glisser dans sa poche le prix du combat.
>
> Together they rolled on the ground, disputing the precious prey, neither one wishing to sacrifice half of it for his brother. The first, exasperated, laid hold of the second by the hair; this one seized the other's ear with his teeth, and spit out a small bleeding piece of it with a superb patois oath. The legitimate proprietor of the cake tried to sink his little claws into the eyes of the usurper; this one in turn applied all his force to strangling his adversary with one hand, while with the other he tried to slip into his pocket the prize of the combat.
>
> (OC, p. 250)

The symmetrical rivalry of subjects for the same object brings about a cannibalistic confusion of subject and object, "précieuse proie," "prix du combat" and later "sujet de bataille." Not rhetoric alone (as the difference between figurative and proper) but the whole of the real (in its social dimension as the difference between subjects, its ontological dimension as the difference between subject and object) is invested with the violent dynamics of mimetic rivalry, of "différance." On the scene of another text, these dynamics result in Dionysiac dismemberment: the "sparagmos" of *The Bacchae*, as elucidated by Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*. In Euripides' tragedy they accede to the murder of a king and the cult of a god, Dionysus by name, who is no less violent in modern times for bearing the name of man, of "moi." Pachet calls our attention to the inherently sacrificial impulse of "L'Homme-Dieu" in *Le Poème du Haschisch*, who is none other than "l'homme sensible moderne, . . . ce que l'on pourrait appeler la *forme banale de l'originalité*": "—toutes ces choses ont été créées *pour mois, pour moi, pour moi*! Pour moi, l'humanité a travaillé, a été martyrisée, immolée" ("—all these things have been created *for me, for me, for me*! For me, humanity has worked, been martyred, immolated") (OC, pp. 375 & 382).

I am endeavoring to suggest how the books of Johnson and Pachet, when read across each other rather than against each other, can allow us to consider the relation of historical and social structures. I take up Johnson's analysis further, then, with her explication of "Le Joujou du pauvre," both as a more detailed illustration of her argument and as still another point of departure for the issues explored by Pachet.

The narrator of this text treats us to the spectacle of two children, one rich and one poor. Their equality is nonetheless suggested by the beauty which the former openly displays and which the latter hides to all but an impartial eye beneath "la patine de la misère." To this is compared in turn — the turn of the ever troping narrator, whose role in the prose poems merits a monograph to itself — the slapdash varnish ("vernis de car-

rossier") covering a "peinture idéale," in order doubtless to recall the "splendid toy, as fresh as its master, varnished, glazed and gilt" ("verni, doré"). This play of surface and depth as of difference and likeness is at once repeated and displaced by the poor child's toy:

> A travers ces barreaux symboliques séparant deux mondes, la grande route et le château, l'enfant pauvre montrait à l'enfant riche son propre joujou, que celui-ci examinait avidement comme un objet rare et inconnu. Or, ce joujou, que le petit souillon agaçait, agitait et secouait dans une boîte grillée, c'était un rat vivant! Les parents, par économie sans doute, avaient tiré le joujou de la vie elle-même.
>
> Et les deux enfants se riaient l'un à l'autre fraternellement, avec des dents d'une *égale* blancheur.
>
> Across these symbolic bars separating the two worlds, the highway and the chateau, the poor child showed to the rich child his own toy, which the latter examined avidly as a rare and unknown object. Well, this toy, which the little urchin bothered, teased and shook in a grilled box, was a live rat! His parents, doubtless for economy, had drawn the toy from life itself.
>
> And the two children laughed at each other fraternally with teeth of an *equal* whiteness.
>
> (OC, p. 256)

To the "barreaux symboliques" separating the two economies of excess and scarcity, as of culture and nature, corresponds the "boîte grillée" encaging the rat, which has the symmetrically symbolic effect of separating "la vie" from "elle-même" (the rat from nature). "Every signified," Johnson comments, "is thus but another signifier: as soon as 'nature' begins to *signify*, it is irremediably cut off from all coincidence with itself. If something in this polarity remains irreducible, it is not some ground of animal nature, but the presence, insignificant but unbending ["incontournable"] of the bar" (p. 72). "Incontournable" yes, in that the bar is only ever displaced, re-presented, represenced, never lifted. But "insignifiante"? The bar signifies no other object but difference itself, first, externally, between the worlds of rich and poor, second, internally, within the world of the poor, whereby its objects are uprooted from their natural ground and radically revalorized. The rat is converted into something like gold — "Or, ce joujou . . ." — for the "enfant doré," who succumbs to the transfiguring agency of desire effected in turn by the return of the bar and the valorizing prohibition it constitutes. A revolution in values takes place by the displacement, the re-presentation of the bar, which indeed functions as "différance": it opposes objects to themselves, making them contradictory, antithetical, other than what they are and thereby rendering their experience uncanny, sacred. It is only the multiple presence of these bars which prevents a "guerre parfaitement fratricide," whose object and whose subject, whose goal and whose agency, would be the sacred as such, violence as such. It is only the "forces enfantines" of the appropriative contenders that prevents their destruction along with the object in "Le Gâteau." In our time, violence has fully come of age, which is doubtless why we confront on the scene of history such an uncanny restaging of Baudelaire's tragic scenario.

It is by the unruly law of "différance" that a sign differs from itself as signifier and signified, each of which is divided in turn and indefinitely by that difference. So Johnson is right to compare "La Seconde Révolution baudelairienne" of the prose poems to the second Saussure (pp. 15-16), who forsook the diacritical structure of signifieds to pursue the play of signifiers in the literary text. But the revolution in values is not only semiological or rhetorical but ideological as well. Johnson does not pause to remark upon Baudelaire's ironic use of revolutionary language ("égalité," "fraternité") to show how it overturns revolutionary ideology by turning it against itself. Equality and fraternity, rooted in profound likeness, are realized as a function of difference, signified and in every sense upheld by the bar and the consequent constraints on "liberté" it imposes. This is how Baudelaire steals a march on the de Maistrean critique of the Revolution, which sacralizes the differences composing the social hierarchy. "On the contrary," as Pachet observes of this text, "the ironic aristocratism of Baudelaire lies in wait for the moment in which is realized a short-circuiting in social mediations" (p. 121). Short-circuit, we recall, is one of the terms by which Freud designates the operations of *Witz*. In "Le Joujou du pauvre" Baudelaire has his little joke on the Revolution by demonstrating the mutability, the "différance," of its most sacred tenets.

The prose poet does the same thing in "Assomons les pauvres," which Johnson does not explicate, but which her kind of reading greatly illuminates. Here he opposes "égalité" and "liberté" to "fraternité": "'Celui-là seul,'" whispers the narrator's demon, "'est l'égal d'un autre, qui le prouve, et celui-là seul est digne de la liberté, qui sait la conquérir'" ("'He alone is the equal of another who proves it, and he alone is worthy of freedom who knows how to conquer it'" (OC, p. 305). A beggar is throttled in order to incite him to equal violence, engendering thereby a confraternity of hatred which the consequently disfigured narrator takes for a *"bon augure"*:

> Alors [after being reciprocally throttled], je lui fis force signes pour lui faire comprendre que je considérais la discussion comme finie, et me relevant avec la satisfaction d'un sophiste du Portique, je lui dis: "Monsieur, *vous êtes mon égal*! veuillez me faire l'honneur de partager avec moi ma bourse; et souvenez-vous, si vous êtes réellement philanthrope, qu'il faut appliquer, à tous vos confrères, quands ils vous demanderont l'aumône, la théorie que j'ai eu la *douleur* d'essayer sur votre dos:
>
> Il m'a bien juré qu'il avait compris ma théorie, et qu'il obéirait à mes conseils.
>
> Then, I made ample signs to make him understand that I considered the discussion as finished, and picking myself up with the satisfaction of a sophist at the Portico [beneath the columns of the temple], I said to him: "Monsieur, *you are my equal*! Please do me the honor of sharing my purse with me; and remember, if you really are a philanthropist, that you must, when they ask you for alms, apply to all your confrères the theory which I have had the *pain* of trying out on your back.
>
> He certainly swore to me that he had understood my theory, and that he would obey my advice.
>
> (OC, p. 306)

"Ample" does not adequately translate "force," but neither does anything else in our language since it is an idiom, a worn out metaphor reinvested by the context with literal significance. (Johnson is very instructive on overused metaphors and commonplaces in Baudelaire.) "Force signes," by its revitalized figurative excess, both contrasts and equates with the figurative recess of the understated "discussion," the euphemistic metaphor of the violent exchange: the "différ*a*nce" or "viol*a*nce" governing speech and action. "Force signes" encapsulates metaphorically Baudelaire's interrogation of social theory and practice, of sign and force, of speech (and/or) acts, an interrogation induced by the narrator's surfeit of books "où il est traité de l'art de rendre les peuples heureux, sages et riches en vingt-quatres heures . . . toutes les élucubrations de tous ces entrepreneurs de bonheur public, — de ceux qui conseillent à tous les pauvres de se faire esclaves, et de ceux qui leur persuadent qu'ils sont tous des rois détronés" ("wherein is treated the art of making the people happy, wise and rich in twenty-four hours . . . all the elucubrations of all the entrepreneurs of public welfare, — of those who advise all the poor to make themselves slaves, and of those who persuade them that they are all dethroned kings") (OC, pp. 304-305).

The narrator's quarrel is with rhetoric ("ceux qui persuadent"), with figures ("esclaves," "rois détronés"); his solution is to literalize rhetoric, to put it into action, which he attributes to the agency of the devil. "Il existe cette différence entre le Démon de Socrate et le mien, que celui de Socrate ne se manifestait à lui que pour défendre, avertir, empecher, et que le mien daigne conseiller, suggérer, persuader" ("There exists this difference between the Demon of Socrates and mine, that the latter's only manifested itself to him to prohibit, warn, prevent, and that mine deigns to advise, suggest, persuade") (OC, p. 305). The devil is no more than a figurative double of the poet, the poet as "finctor" and adept to the ruses of rhetoric, of double-talk. "Si tu n'as fait ta rhétorique," reads the "Epigraphe pour un livre condamné,"

> Chez Satan le rusé doyen,
> Jette! tu n'y comprendrais rien,
> Ou tu me croirais hystérique.

("If you have not done your rhetoric/ With Satan, the crafty dean,/ Discard! You would understand nothing,/ Or you would believe me hysterical.") The poet's madness — ". . . pourquoi n'aurais-je pas l'honneur, comme Socrate, d'obtenir mon brevet de folie?" ("why would I not have the honor, like Socrates, of obtaining my brevet of madness?") — is to take his figures seriously, and in every sense catastrophically.

Baudelaire's quarrel with rhetoric is at the same

time his quarrel with history. The endless proliferation of violent doubles engendered by the narrator's application of rhetoric, by his literalization of discursive practice, will result in a properly revolutionary society. "Ajoutons," he says of the Belgians, who are but a "caricature des sottises françaises" as well of "la liberté, la gloire et le bonheur des Etats-Unis d'Amérique,"

> Ajoutons que quand on leur parle révolution *pour de bon*, on les épouvante. *Vieilles Rosières*. MOI, quand je consens à être republicain, *je fais le mal, le sachant*.
>
> Oui! *Vive la Révolution*!
>
> Toujours! Quand même!
>
> Mais moi je ne suis pas dupe, je n'ai jamais été dupe! je dis *Vive la Révolution*! comme je dirais *Vive la Destruction*! *Vive l'Expiation*! *Vive le Châtiment*! *Vive la Mort*! Non seulement je serais heureux d'être victime, mais je ne haïrais pas d'être bourreau, — pour sentir la Révolution des deux manières!
>
> Nous avons tous l'esprit républicain dans les veines, comme la vérole dans les os, nous sommes démocratisés et syphilisés.
>
> Lets add that when one speaks to them of revolution *for real*, they are appalled. *Old Queens of the May*. When *I* consent to be a republican *I do evil, knowing it*.
>
> Yes! *Long live the Revolution*!
>
> Always! All the same!
>
> But I am not fooled, I have never been fooled! I say *Long live the Revolution*! as I would say: *Long live Destruction*! *Long live Expiation*! *Long live Punishment*! *Long live Death*! Not only would I be happy to be a victim, but I would not hate to be an executioner — to feel the Revolution of the two manners.
>
> We all have the republican spirit in our veins, as the pox in our bones, we are democratized and syphilized.
>
> (OC, p. 1456)

Baudelaire's remark in defense of *Les Fleurs du mal* that we are all hung or right for hanging ("Nous sommes tous pendus ou pendables") owes less to a retrograde apprehension of primordial guilt than to his intuition, as Pachet writes, "of a social menace whose mechanisms can be explicitated provided that they are recognized in oneself, in one's own election" (p. 132). The ultimate social disease, synonym-homonym of our civilized being, is for the poet a symptom, a metaphor of a diseased society, prey to the reclamations of "l'individualité, — cette petite propriété," which Baudelaire accuses by another turn of phrase of having "mangé l'originalité collective" (OC, p. 949). This is how it differs from all others before it as from itself within itself: by its desire to have its cake and eat it too.

What I am calling two Baudelairean revolutions are ultimately one. The violence of order in ancient times is supplanted by the order of violence in the modern. A power structure is succeeded by a terror structure, which in its own, proper, thermonuclear way is post-structural, perhaps definitively. The rhetorical dysfunctions deftly scrutinized by Johnson at once reflect and reveal this "dysorder," as we might call the situation analyzed by Pachet. "*Vive la Révolution*! . . . *Vive la Mort*!" Baudelaire's historical consciousness informs his rhetorical consciousness — they are one and the same "conscience dans le mal" — with this ultimate catachresis, which opens up on what Jean Paulhan, in a telling figure, called *La Terreur dans les lettres*: the violent refusal of rhetoric. Barbara Johnson's book, after de Man, reminds us that it is one of the ruses of rhetoric to persuade us that it does exist, that apart from the proper meaning of words, the prose of the world with direct reference to external reality, there exists a legitimate activity consisting in indirect representation: "Les figures du discours" from anacoluthon through zeugma, which rhetoric before the Revolution could call its own. We post-moderns, post-structuralists, and in a sense that remains to be articulated, post-Christians, do not believe in that difference. Like the God of the medieval philosophers, it is everywhere and nowhere, and like that same Being, it has succumbed to our demystifications. But we have not yet come to terms with the ruses of the sacred, to which Pierre Pachet, after Girard, beckons our attention. □

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FEATURED ARTISTS

Octavio Armand is the editor of *escandalar*. His most recent volume of poems is *Biografía para feacios*.

Tony Cartano has published six novels and has co-edited the *Dictionnaire de litterature française contemporaine*. He edits the new French journal *Roman*. This is his first appearance in English translation.

Sandra Russell Clark was the recipient of the 1982 "Artist Fellowship" award presented by the Louisiana State Arts Council. She has been working exclusively with B&W infra red film and hand tinting her photographs for the past several years. She is represented in museum, university, corporate, and private collections throughout the United States.

Lee Fahnestock's translation of Françoise Sagan's *The Painted Lady* was published by Dutton in 1983. She lives in New York.

H. E. Francis is the author of *A Disturbance of Gulls*, published by Braziller. He teaches at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Will Kirkland lives in San Francisco, where he translates from Castillian, from Catalan and, in courageous bursts, from Basque. His work has appeared in *New Directions Anthology #45*, *The American Poetry Review*, and elsewhere.

Miguel Labordeta, born in Zaragoza in 1921, published four volumes of poetry, taught secondary school far away from the centers of literary activity and died almost unnoticed in the mid-sixties. Only with the 1968 publication of José Battló's *Anthology of New Spanish Poetry* did Labordeta's "furious surrealism" receive long overdue attention.

Hugo Lindo, the author of poetry, novels and short stories, is one of El Salvador's most distinguished writers.

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