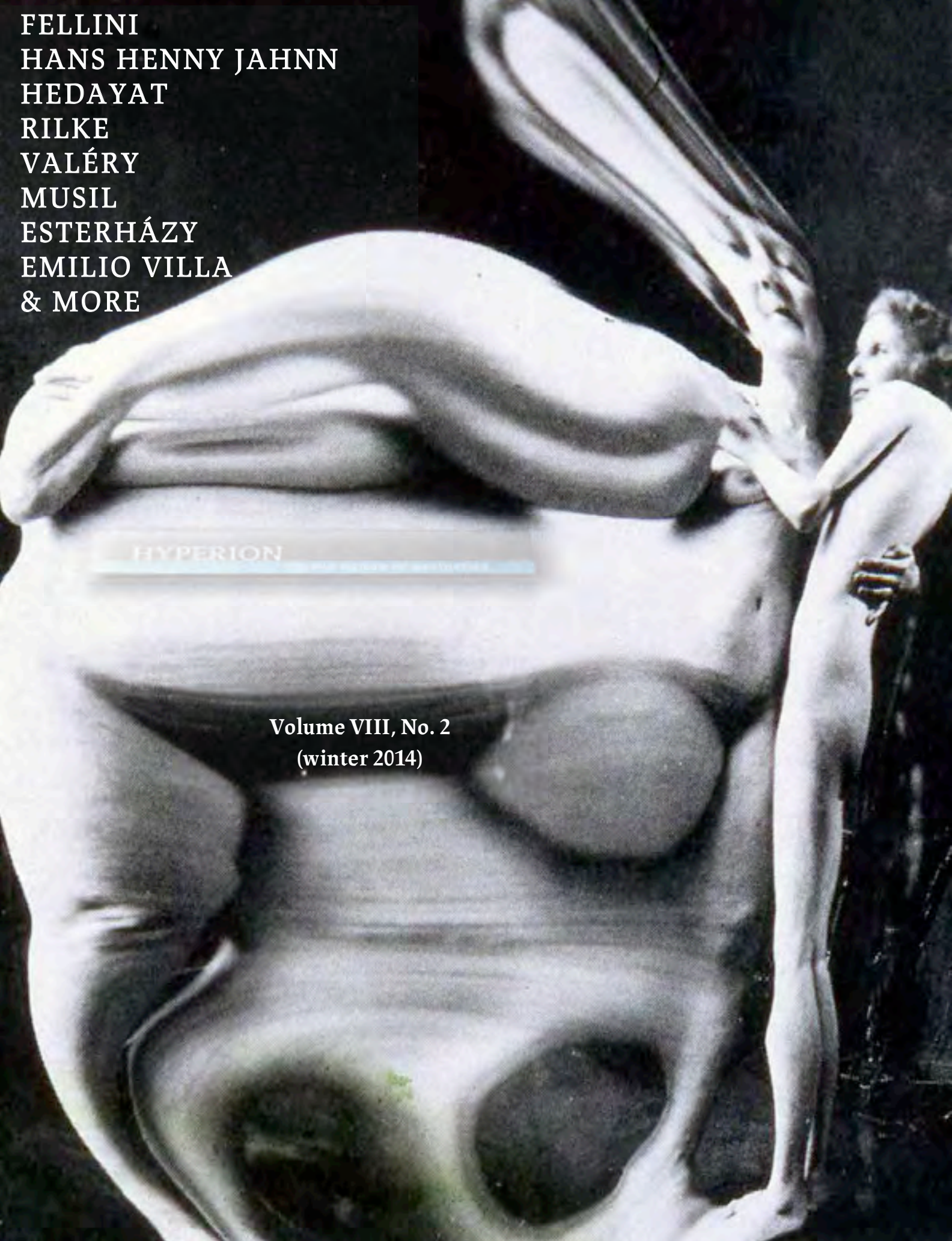


FELLINI
HANS HENNY JAHNN
HEDAYAT
RILKE
VALÉRY
MUSIL
ESTERHÁZY
EMILIO VILLA
& MORE

HYPERION

Volume VIII, No. 2
(winter 2014)





MAST HEAD

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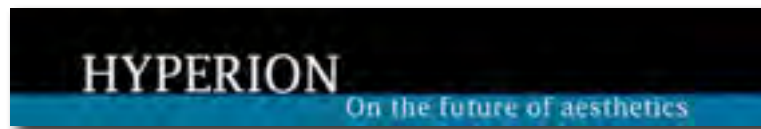
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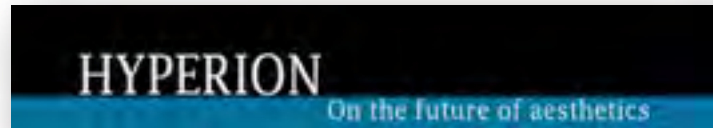
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...the 20th-century metaphor for [syncretism] was “collage,” which is bringing different things together into one area. Pound’s *Cantos* and similar work by a number of the great Modernists, are essentially collage-based. That is a core 20th-century image — I’ve said often enough that collage is probably the only 20th-century technical innovation, entering in all its force with the one new 20th-century art, film, as montage. In a way, I want to move these “nomad poetics” into the 21st century, replacing “collage” with the notion of the “rhizome.” Something that can go any place, any time. The collage is in a strange way often determined by an aesthetics, and I don’t want an aesthetics to determine the nomad poem. Modernism is an aesthetics of the collage, in a way, and that’s also the limits of Pound and others, because what can come in, enter that space, finally? Even if it looks like everything comes in, I don’t think everything can come in — or, many elements from heterogeneous areas that are brought in will be homogenized quickly by the collage canvas, in fact via an unavoidable aestheticization — and in a historico-political way, that goes a long way in explaining the connection between aesthetics and politics, and especially in that age, with fascism. The way the articulation of aestheticized elements happens in High Modernism leads — or certainly can lead — to relatively fixed and static work. I mean, the great example of that would be Eliot, even more so than Pound. — Pierre Joris, *Cartographies of the In-Between*



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FEDERICO FELLINI



Why *Satyricon*? Why Petronius?

Translated by Christopher B. White

Cinema—literature: it's an approach that usually springs from polemical relationships, misplaced priorities, and fabricated dependencies. Every work of art resides in the dimension in which it was conceived and expressed; transferring it, moving it from its original language to a different one, means cancelling it, denying it. When cinema turns to a literary text, in the best of cases, the result will always and only be an illustrative transposition that simply conserves statistical similarities to the original: the story, situations, characters, in summary a series of materi-

als, opportunities, and occasions that observing everyday reality and reading the newspaper, for example, are capable of supplying with a more generous and stimulating richness and immediacy.

Cinema depicts its worlds, stories, and characters through images. Its form of expression is figurative, like that of dreams. Don't dreams fascinate you, scare you, thrill you, disturb you, and nurture you with images? It seems to me that words and dialogue in movies serve to inform you, to permit you to rationally follow the event and give it a sense of verisimilitude according to the reality we're accustomed to; but it's precisely this operation, references to so-called everyday reality echoing on the images, that takes away at least in part that unreal aspect of the dreamed image, that visual aspect of dreams. In fact, silent cinema has its own mysterious beauty, an evocative power of seduction that makes it more real than sound film because it's closer to the images in dreams; they're always more alive and real than anything we can see and touch.

So why *Satyricon*? Why Petronius?

You have to have an excuse to begin, and who knows why this time I chose *Satyricon*. I read Petronius' book for the first time many years ago, back when I was in high school, an edition of the text with illustrations so intentionally chaste and ugly that it made them all the more erotic. The memory of that reading long ago has always been particularly vivid in my mind, and over time that interest slowly became a constant and obscure temptation. I just reread *Satyricon* after so many years, maybe less voraciously than before, but it was just as entertaining, and

this fresh reading made the temptation to base a film on it more intriguing.

Satyricon is a mysterious text because it's fragmentary. Although its fragmentary nature is emblematic in a certain sense. It's emblematic of the way the ancient world appears to us today. This is the true appeal of the book and the world it depicts. It's like an unfamiliar landscape wrapped in dense fog that you catch glimpses of when it unveils itself now and then. Renaissance Humanists used antiquity to justify and explain themselves, projecting their preconceived notion of antiquity onto it. But I can't project anything; I don't have preconceptions. For me the ancient world is a lost world and my ignorance of it leaves me with no connection to it other than a fantastic, imaginative one, nurtured by hypotheses and impressions severed from facts and historical knowledge.

School, or at least the school I attended, almost always drowns out and freezes the content it aims to cover; it impoverishes it and reduces it to an interminable series of meaningless, abstract notions with no point of reference in the end. The discovery and knowledge of the ancient world you acquire in school, for example, is the cadastral or nomenclatural sort, it encourages a relationship to that world made up of mistrust, boredom, and disinterest, at best a morbid, abject, or rather racist curiosity, in any case it doesn't concern you and is disagreeable like math or chemistry, irrelevant like the training you undergo before national military service.

The ruins? The Appian Way? Or better yet the photos of ruins and the Appian Way you see in history books or on postcards? Watered-down ghosts, lifeless features, cemetery perspectives soaked in funereal sadness for

smug photographers' exhibitions, especially the German ones who take pictures of these ruins against the light at sunset with a couple of little fluffy clouds in the foreground. The frescoes in Pompeii? Herculaneum? What I saw of the Capitoline Museums didn't impress me much; it was obscured by the dullness it acquired from those gloomy readings and lectures in school. The splendid unchanged state of the exhibits that fill the museums is about as familiar as those scholastic notions or the casualness of personal suggestions. At a certain point I thought I recognized the sickly, frightened little face of a cousin of mine from the countryside in a marble bust with empty eyes. Her name was Jole and she had red hair. She was always sick in bed when I saw her and she had to drink constantly. For a moment I felt like there was an imperceptible contact, a fleeting understanding between us; that bust had Jole's face, I caressed its braided stone hair, "Who knows if you can help me a little... Solonina?" (the name was written on a plate on its neck). As I was thinking that, my learned friend who was with me was saying Solonina was skilled at massacres and crucifixions, and her favorite activity was taking the hearts out of her human victims during sacrifices.

The layer of the psyche containing these memories is buried, submerged in millennia of other myths, figures, and stories.

This time I'm even faltering and disoriented over the choice of faces. Usually the human tapestry in a movie of mine is the surest method, the most precise tool for delving into the meaning of the film itself, yet this time the plot is hard to arrange, still uncertain and even incongruous. There are no models, aesthetic standards to follow,

or at least there aren't any compatible with the confused ideas I have in mind. Every conventional means of expression is jumbled, overturned, and if I happen to let myself be tempted by it the result could be unexpected or catastrophic. If I happen to say, "Well, that guy has a Roman face," when that man is dressed and made up like a Roman, he puts on the air of a bureaucrat in the registry office or a streetcar driver. The bust of Messalina in the Capitoline Museums has the plump, easy-going appearance of an egg vendor.

Maybe it was just the other night at the Colosseum... That horrendous lunar catastrophe of stone, that giant skull consumed by time and stranded in the middle of the city, I saw it for a moment as evidence of a civilization from another planet and it sent a shudder of fear and pleasure. It was just for a second but for the first time I felt immersed in the frenetic lucidity of dreams, the feverish temperature of premonitions and fantasy.

To conclude these uncontrolled digressions and return to the subject of the film, I'd like to do this: invent a Roman world as if it were evoked by a supernatural, ectoplasmic operation. I like to imagine that the movie, like an archeologist who uses pottery shards to attempt to reconstruct a fragmentary, incomplete, and mutilated form, an amphora, a bust of a man, or a woman's face, should suggest through incomplete episodes, some without a beginning, others without an end, and yet others still with gaps in the middle, should indicate the boundaries, the realities of a vanished world, the lives of creatures with incomprehensible habits and customs, the rituals, the daily character of a continent buried in the galaxy of time. Historical accuracy, bookish documentation, and self-

satisfyingly erudite anecdotes have no place in a story that aims to revive characters so distant from us, to capture them as if by surprise in the same freedom with which they move, scuffle, tear each other to pieces, are born and die, like beasts in the dense wilderness when they don't know they're being watched.

Maybe I've been speaking a little too freely! But sometimes it serves to stimulate, provoke the film, make it come out of the fog of its hypothetical forms, force it to show itself, declare itself and be recognized. The film should offer a glimpse of an excavated universe, suggest images obscured by the earth, a movie broken with its uneven structure; it should have long, well-organized episodes, others more distant, out of focus, that cannot be rebuilt because of their fragmentary nature. Not a historical film, but a science fiction movie. It should be Asclito, Encolpio, and Trimalchio's Rome, more remote and fantastic than the planets in Flash Gordon.

I ask myself if it'll be possible to cancel two thousand years of history from our memory, to attempt to imagine the myths, attitudes, and habits of ancestors so remote from us without looking at them with an air of moral superiority, without judging them, without critical reservations, without psychological inhibitions and prejudices? Maybe it won't be possible. I want to try nevertheless; I want to invent a clear, detached eye that knows how to view another dimension unperturbed. Perhaps the ancient world never existed, but there's no doubt that we dreamed it. *Satyricon* should possess the enigmatic transparency, the undecipherable clarity of dreams. The most

difficult task this film requires from me is making two completely opposite and parallel operations coincide. Everything's made up in the film: faces, gestures, situations, objects and environments. Then I have to express the fruit of this imaginative operation in concrete form in order to explore it again, to be able to find it together again intact and unrecognizable. Things happen differently in dreams. They have content that deeply pertains to us, through which we don't express ourselves, but in the light of day the only cognitive relationship we can have with them is intellectual in nature.

I could say decadent Rome resembles our Rome today, with this grim craving to enjoy life, the same violence, the same absence of principles, the same desperation and the same fatuousness. I could say Encolpio and Ascilto, the main characters in *Satyricon*, are a lot like hippies in that they obey only their bodies, search for new meaning in drugs, and ignore their problems. I could say it, and perhaps I'd venture to say I'm right. Yet all of these more or less convincing explanations aren't worth much in the end. The important thing is that in making this film I'm rediscovering a pleasure, a joyous fervor I feared I'd lost. I think I sense that my will to make movies hasn't run out.

Director's Notes.

I DON'T KNOW YOU
WHO ARE YOU?
NAZIS — RACISTS — JODELLE
MINERAL — NEUROTIC — HALLUCINATED —
PSYCHEDELIC —
BARBARIC — SCIENCE FICTION
MARTIANS — MENTAL HOSPITAL.

A different vibration in the air. Do you remember the
dream about fat pink men, burned, in the little rooms of
the asylum?

Agitation. OVERHEATED.

Like trying to reconstruct an ancient amphora with
shards found centuries later.

Dust — Darkness (Evocation).

Ending with parts that are more and more incom-
plete, torn; fragments...

"...the old man laughed as he pointed to something
in the glare..."

"...the horse drenched with sweat..."

"...his eyes had grown sad."

DARKNESS — BLACK TAILS — HOARSE VOICES GUR-
GLING WORDS THAT BECOME MUDDIER AND MUDDIER;
DROWNED PEOPLE TRYING TO SPEAK.

REMEMBER:

The horrible fixity of the bas-reliefs. Empty eyes.
With no pupils. Bronze eyes.

The parties — The night was studded with fires of
joy.

Lots of homes under construction. Bridges. Collapse.
(Earthquake at the Insula Felix, the terrifying palace-
skyscraper, immense, dark, swarming like Breughel's
Tower of Babel.)

A film about the Martians. It should have the same
allure made up of alarm and tension as the first Japanese
films had for us: you never knew if those characters were
laughing or crying, Toshiro Mifune's sudden leaps and fe-
line roars made your heart stop: would he have hugged
you like a brother or cut you in half with a blow from his
scimitar?

ARRHYTHMIC — FAINT — INDIRECT — UNPREDICTA-
BLE.

Exasperating slowness, the speed of microbes.

ACTED POORLY, with extremely long periods of si-
lence, faltering language. Broken, hesitant; an impersonal
dubbing, detached like the voices for news on the radio.
Dubbing that's technically incorrect, with voices that finish
before their lips do or continue afterward: enough to hor-
rify sound technicians and above all the Americans who,
in front of a shot filled with thousands of angry, mutinous
sailors, would take the trouble to avidly spy during a sea

in a tempest if the orders the admiral shouts coincide with the movement of his lips.

A great, suggestive and mysterious fable. A film made up of fixed, immobile frames, without dollies or other movements of the camera. A film to contemplate, similar to dreams: and it leaves you hypnotized. Everything will be disjointed, fragmentary. And at the same time strangely uniform. Every detail will stand out, isolated, enlarged, absurd, monstrous: like in dreams. The atmosphere will also be dreamlike. Lots of darkness, lots of night, lots of obscure, dimly lit environments. Or landscapes like limbos, soaked in unearthly sunlight, faded, dreamy. Lots of corridors, ambulatories, rooms, courtyards, alleys, staircases and other similarly distressing, narrow passageways. Nothing bright, white, or clear. Clothing in dirty, opaque colors suggestive of stone, dust, mud. Colors like black, yellow, red, but everything will appear as if clouded by ash falling perpetually. In a figurative sense, I'll try to achieve a contamination of the Pompeian with the psychedelic, Byzantine art with Pop Art, Mondrian and Klee with Barbaric Art... the chaotic liberation of images.

REMEMBER:

INCOHERENT PROPORTIONS.

TINY MEN IN CLOSE-UP AND GIANTS IN THE BACKGROUND. The colossus of Nero transported on a chariot through the alleyways of Suburra.

MAKEUP on the *animals* (I want to do this myself!)

UNFAMILIAR ANIMALS OF EXTINCT SPECIES

IMPORTANT: gestures, winks, grimaces that refer to undecipherable understandings. Fixed stares. Or wander-

ing feverishly. (And what if GITONE were to express himself solely through gestures, miming things, people, facts in his own obscure language, fascinating and sibylline like Harpo Marx?)

LUPERCALIA.

The statues of Venus with the calamity in her belly and Mars are strongly drawn to one another.

...out loud, "The night is over. The night is over!"

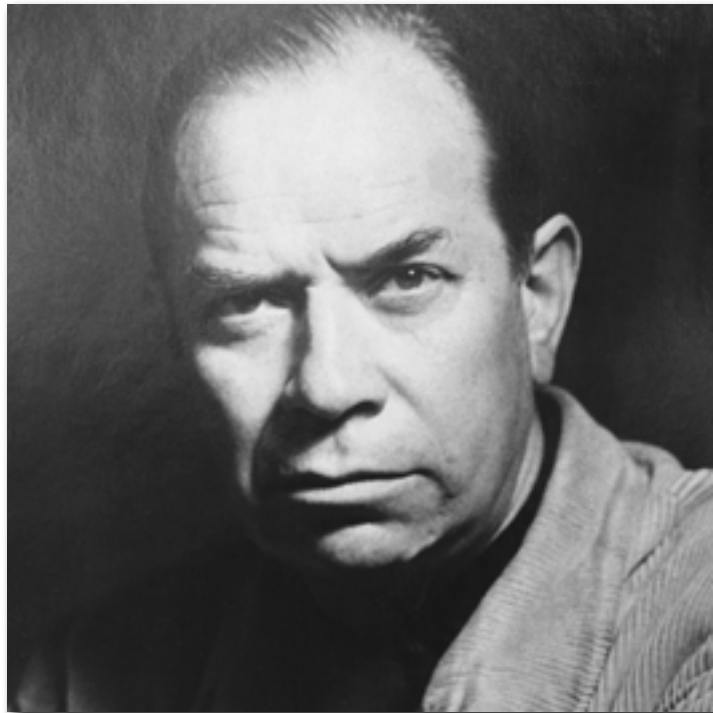
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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Hans Henny Jahnn

***Perrudja* (an excerpt)**



Translated from the German by Adam Siegel

INTRODUCTION: HANS HENNY JAHNN

According to Klaus Mann, Hans Henny Jahnn (1894–1959) “stood alone. He was part of that secret kingdom of unofficial German literature, a kingdom of unknown and uncrowned royalty.” A native of Hamburg, autodidact and polymath (writer, architect, pipe organ restorer, biologist manqué), Jahnn spent the First World War in exile in Norway. Following the war, his career as a German Expressionist dramatist was launched with his Kleist Prize-

winning play Pastor Ephraim Magnus. Reviled by critics as “a poison-chest of humanity,” “the helpless stammering of a profoundly sick individual with a pronounced tendency toward coprolalia,” “a yawning chasm of compost,” it attracted the attention of Bertolt Brecht, who co-directed (with Arnolt Bronnen) the play's premiere in 1923.

“As a writer,” Jahn said, “I am preoccupied with the primeval tragedy of how the individual is overwhelmed by his environment.” His vivisector’s fascination with the facts of the human body anticipates the transgressions of Bataille, Artaud, and even Americans such as William Burroughs, Kathy Acker, and particularly Dennis Cooper.

Man as a creature deeply implicated in the natural world was one of his main themes: his novels *Perrudja* (1929) and *Fluss ohne Ufer* (1949–1961) illustrate the terror of the sublime as effectively as any work of art in the last two centuries; as the poet Peter Huchel said of him, “One has to go back to the ancient Egyptians and the Greeks to find such a mythic conception of nature.” Jahn himself saw his work as addressing “the problem of death, of decay ...”

Jahn spent the years between 1933 and 1945 in exile: he chose to leave Germany when Hitler came to power — although he returned to Hamburg a number of times during the thirties and never renounced his German citizenship. He bought a farm on the island of Bornholm in Denmark, where he bred horses, studied the properties of hormones, and wrote.

After the war Jahn returned to Hamburg with his family; as a German citizen, he was forced by the Danish government to sell his property. Jahn was an active participant in the cultural politics of Cold War Germany, and his longstanding suspicion of science and civilization blossomed in the 1950s, as he became a leader in the anti-nuclear and animal rights movements in West Germany. After his death, Hans Erich Nossack offered his valedictory: “I’ve never known anything more worthy of the name ‘religion’ than your empathy for all creatures, for every drop of water, for every living organism.”

Adam Siegel

The Horse

Perrudja ate his supper. Bite by bite. Carefully, almost daintily. His hand constantly at his mouth. His teeth grinding the coarse bread. The steady crunch of snapping bread crust gave him no pleasure. He ate. Better never to have suffered that alluring and incomprehensible compulsion within that made him do so. Even that instinct for self-preservation, that thundering life affirmation of blood, of entrails, which he endeavored to silence. There was however always the possibility that all of it might break through somehow into the realm of his dreams, his heart. It might be worth mentioning that never before had Perrudja been conscious of his hunger. (Something lying in store for him; just as other unforeseen experiences lay in store for him.) His meal times were regulated by a subconscious schedule, which he might have called absurd had he been forced to do so. Never having summoned the patience to give the matter a second thought, a trifle, or nothing at all.

A small lamp stood shining on the table. Like every evening. Revealing the reprehensible, slovenly disorder: dishes, utensils, books, leather bridle straps, a brush, a bottle of oily liquid. The lamp's beam coned steeply downward, sharply illuminating the young man's chest and shanks. His drooping arms. His head in shadow. As though sliding down into another world. Suddenly, as if for no reason, the young man's body jerked backwards, only to be caught by the back of the chair. His torso straightened once more, forced upright as he took a deep breath. A loud sigh. His eyes glazed. The very notion of be-

ing left him. Drifting away from the here and now. Figures of the unreal rose up within him, motivated by non-existent laws. Having never existed. Except in his longings. He dreamed his dream with his senses awakened. Of his desire, of the unattainable. The miracle, reluctant to intrude upon the day, disrupted by the interweaving of all things. During the day, during his sober hours, he knew this: the moon cannot be removed from the firmament and leave the heavens undisturbed. But whence this longing, which had rendered pointless the insights of the great Chinese poet? The one who once said: "Moonlight falls on the white road. Falling like snow. I think of my home." No magic spell can make us disappear, only the body's decay. Nothing can withstand death, the number of witnesses to this ever increasing.

But Perrudja the man sailed on, in the face of reason, in the face of tears shed by the Chinese poet when he thought of his home.

For which Perrudja the boy had been scolded. But there was no one to deny Perrudja the man. He slipped into the unseen. Invisible, he transformed the earth itself. Waters bore him, storms bore him away. He saw the deeds of others close at hand. They troubled him, they frightened him. He wanted to cry out from seeing only despotism, injustice, and suffering. But his form had been annihilated, his voice stilled. He crept forward, unnoticed and unimpeded, creeping at the feet of others, even the smallest, they who loomed above him like giants. He saw things fall apart, molder, rust, decay. Water carried mountains into the sea. Blameless flowers scourged the soil. The grain, the grass, the entrails of man and beast. One's existence meant the other's destruction.

Unseen, he coiled. He felt his forehead expand and swell. No longer could he stand witnessing creation without morality. He lit his magic ring. He split the water and the rock. He divided the transitory and the permanent. Cyclopean walls emerged from the milk-white quartz as temples rose. He stepped in and walked and walked, touching the columns as round and mighty as mountains. He looked up at the granite domes with their arches and squinches and spandrels. Gray-violet light. From the distance, broken a thousandfold, a sound like that of metal pipes. He took all of it in, and thought: the dance of people laid bare.

In the throes of his ecstasy he sensed his foes gathering.

His temple abstracted to an island. Around the island a mountain range. Steep and smooth like dark glass. Below the mountain range, calm water in pools against rocky ground: a reef. Beyond the reef, very far away, choppy restless seas. It was only him, sailing safe and sound on a sound ship, across an ocean made in accordance to his desires. A ship and other ships, all of them his. One large, three small. A huge ship, then, three large and five small. Then a huge ship. Three heavy, five light, seven nimble. Churning, steaming, clanking, the fleet sailed on. Driven by nothing. Or by something, some inexhaustible power. Something invulnerable. Driven by new physical laws that only he could reveal. In great round slices of bronze — like wheels, shining with oil — he drilled secret caverns and holes where states of tension and motion entwined.

He went forth against his foes, against the foes of his island, against the foes of his temples, against the foes

of his light, against the foes of his dances, against the madmen who succumbed to the law of creation without affirming the law of destruction.

And what was his desire...? To destroy their wicked cities. And to salvage something from the destruction: a painting, a temple, a child, a woman, a man, a dog, a cat, a bauble. Random thoughts from a human's point of view. He gathered together his anointed, he spoke to them. He wanted, in his indescribable exultation, to offer them his heart, his blood, his soul. They would learn to speak his language. They would raise the Etemenanki, mightier than the structures on his island, and greater than his Cyclopean walls.

Suddenly his forehead burned red with shame. To destroy, to kill. To spill blood, to exult in the devastation. No. His island was enclosed. Why wage war against the outside world? Why succumb to the need to show he knew better? He, who knew nothing?

He struck out, sinking his invincible fleet. He kept only one very small ship, a small boat. On it he sailed back. Slowly, he sailed. Wanting nothing from any of those who remained, however few. He sailed slowly. He could run aground, be dashed against the reef. But he reached his harbor. He wandered through the halls of his imagination. A storm outside. He heard the wind through the pines. He thought of a home he did not know. He ran his hand through his brown hair. He saw the room where his body was laid, visible and warm and breathing. He softened. He stood up; he had forgotten to feed his horse. He went in the stall. The beast nickered. He scattered its feed. He listened to it feed. He raised his hands, now shaking. He stroked its head. Indescribably soft. He slipped out

of the barn and wept. He thought of a home he did know. Weeping because he saw the futility of all his deeds and desires.

It began to freeze. But his Swedish oven kept putting out heat. Even so Perrudja the man crawled into bed. He hugged his slender, boyish limbs tightly together. His sadness was lighter than any sensual feeling. In a cloud of boundless excitement he fell asleep.

Perrudja owned the noblest and most beautiful mare in Norway. The most fertile valleys of the Gudbrandstal, home to the gentry of the oldest farming families in the land, clans well endowed with money, grain, good soil, well endowed with customs both fair and fell — but none of their holdings had ever produced such an animal. Perrudja's land was poor. His soil had not been granted that hidden power which enhances the nobility of warm animal blood. No grain grew there. His summer pastures were wild mountain meadows. His property was forests and raw fields, brush and streams. Others called Perrudja the owner of the forest. Not because he had taken to the habit of the rich sawmill owners to slash and burn the stands of pine. When the first heavy clouds of winter passed through, pregnant with snow, and the cold sank fast in the windless air, the plaintive pounding of the axes began. Singing like the flutter of batwings, but resounding, and audible even from far away. The evergreens were stripped of their branches, a fate they did not share with their kin, the birches, whose leaves lay yellow on the ground. The steel took away their limbs as well as their needles, durable as orchids, peeling back their bark so

that they looked skinned. Looking already dead. But they did not know it. Stout horses dragged them, naked, utterly naked and pale as corpses, across the snow. Chained to horses. Down to the river they went. Stacked on the ice. Buried in clumps of snow. Until the coming of the warmth made them breathe once more. And yet they were flayed. Water roared over them. They swam, their numbers swelled to millions. They were driven. They floated far downriver. They came to rest on land. To be washed away again. Great barricades halted their journey. They had reached their destination. Hundreds of millions of white corpse-trunks gathered. All dead in a dead harbor. If the force of the water were too violent, the barricades might be torn away, and the pale trunks would be driven out to sea to drift. A national tragedy. A tragedy for the sawyers and the mill owners, yes, and for the woodcutters and the paper-mills. One night Perrudja went out onto the wharf whose wooden pilings transected the bay. Moonlight ruthlessly cleaving the black water from the white. Whenever fear rose up within him, it was this image to which he turned.

His existence was not subject to forethought; it was defined neither by the desire for growth nor the desire for gain. He had arrived one day from a distant village, almost a child, barely seventeen years old, and had bought, all on his own and at a low price, a forested plot with mineral rights from the bereft Per Helvede. (Per's sole desire was to fully give himself over to his schnapps, as clear as water and as sweet as kümmel.) Gradually, the boundaries of the young man's holdings had extended (who would not trade barren stone for good gold?). His acreage lay far from the settlements, hard against the

high mountain range, giving way at the ridgeline to dwarf birches, brush, and blueberry brambles. Perrudja did not want to gather or cut wood, plough or harvest. As property, granite was worth more untamed than raw acreage. Unturned sod awakened a nameless fear within him. He found the import of the remorseless instruction of dung and blossom (and not just yellow grain) unbearable. He did not strive to acquire more land. His sole enchantment was the extent of his holdings, to reckon how much of Norway belonged to him.

Atna and Uti were the names of the villages whose contours were just barely visible even when one climbed above the ridgeline. Old Herr Gaustad had farmed one large landholding long considered part of the Atna community until just before Perrudja settled there. Of Gaustad it was said he was educated. He spoke only correct Danish. He demanded that his farmhands, his maids, and his servants all master the language. Assuming that this region whose mores had fallen into a precipitous decline required order. It was his habit to have plans on hand for the reform of every procedure in the farm's workings and operations. Nevertheless, no other farm in the area was as slovenly as his. The doors of his stables and barns hung askew on their hinges. Every year he sowed and harvested at the wrong time of the season. The state of his livestock, even more than the disorder, showed what a poor squire he was. It was true that year in, year out, his cattle grew fat grazing in the lush mountain meadows. But his horses, which did not enjoy the blessings of free range through the pastures, remained, during the period of their maturation, stunted and miserable creatures. Overworked and abused, poorly fed and

treated, snappish, subject to the vilest indignities. The other horses in the region scarcely fared any better. Although the other farmers liked to mock Herr Gaustad for the way he treated his horses, he was their model. His intolerable indifference to his horses (his grooms all either delicate flowers or sadists) was all the more surprising given that he had brought from England an excellent stud-boar for breeding pigs, which he treated with a not inconsiderable affection. He was always on hand when the other farmers drove their sows to be mounted by his boar. During the congress he offered novel pieces of wisdom regarding the breeding of pigs. Because the act of mating swine is a time-consuming one, over time the squire grew into a veritable font of wisdom. But his wisdom was one-dimensional. In the villages and on the tenant farms throughout the region, the amount of pork consumed each year increased, and the number of sows grunting around multiplied (together with that of the fat hogs), and eventually Herr Gaustad had to purchase a second boar. But from that moment on he lost his taste for breeding. He became a chronic alcoholic. His new predilection was faint consolation to his poorly treated horses. There were no stallions for miles around. When they were young his little mares tormented each other, and bit their pathetic gelding companions. Once a year, from Lillehammer or beyond the Mjösa, a stallion-driver came with his humble beast, and spent three or four days in the village. Each day, his stallion had to mount four or five ugly, careworn nags; he did so willingly, as a sort of sacrificial service. Though revolted by them, he spent himself without complaint. And the beaten-down, peevish, long-suffering little mares became pregnant: after twelve or thirteen months

both they and the donkeys brought forth weak and skinny-shanked offspring. And if they birthed a colt, the tiny organs between his legs were sufficient to allow a stream of the devil's allotment to wash a few Øres into someone's pockets. (Oh schnapps, clear as water, sweet as kümmel!) Herr Gaustad regarded this as a process long sanctioned by tradition. The obligation to breed — his holdings were great enough and well-suited for horse-breeding — he rejected. But rumor had it that Herr Gaustad made, during his occasional appearances at horse mating, "an impressive spectacle." His servants repeated the phrase in the purest Danish and as accompaniment opened their trousers to make an obscene gesture.

Kaare Fjellstuva had taken his magnificent lowland stallion, which showed every sign of being as virile as his sire, to the Lillehammer horse market to sell after the big-hipped animal threw a full-grown man. He was asking 7000 kroner. The farm agents from the agricultural associations were stunned by the high price Kaare was asking. Lustful in their desire to purchase, they tried to strike a deal, but the owner refused to countenance even the smallest discount. Insulted, the horse dealers inveighed against the obdurate farmer, prophesying the ruin of his estates, castigating him as the despoiler of his own good fortune. An excess of madness, they opined, must be squeezing his narrow skull. Almost in tears, they committed themselves to getting the purchase price down to 6000 kroner. "It's a reasonable price," they called to prospective buyers — "It's too high," they told Kaare. But he remained steadfast. He explained that he was offering for sale the finest horse ever reared in the valley. If someone good-naturedly or jocularly objected that his horse was a

bit small, its neck a bit too thickset, he would lash out in response, insisting that they knew nothing of horses. When they lost patience and began to argue with him, he would respond by rattling off the names of all the splendid animals who had contributed to the stallion's bloodline over the years. He cried, "Fjalir, Fjalir" — a stallion recently purchased by the royal house of Sweden to serve as the primary sire for the northernmost provinces. With this, the breeder got so agitated that he raised the stallion's price to 8000 kroner. He passed around the certificates and medals he'd earned as the beast's owner. He led it out of its stall and paraded the liver-coated animal before the gawking crowd. The excitement grew. The representatives from the agricultural organizations lowered their heads, were joined and then separated by a few of the horse-dealers. Yes, they asserted, Kaare ought to be paid 7000 kroner.

Herr Gaustad used the Lillehammer horse market as a pretext for taking in a good lunch and a couple of bottles at the Viktoria or the Grand Hotel. Going to the market bored him (oh, that schnapps, clear as water, sweet as kummel!). He had seen the stallion in the throng; he knew it could be put to good use in the village. He went over to Kaare. The ensuing conversation ended with an agreement that the stallion was to be sold to Herr Gaustad for 8000 kroner, along with a 50 kroner commission for Per. Per was accompanied by a dubious crony named Ole, who presented himself, more or less plausibly, as a dealer in low-quality cattle, and so they went to the Viktoria Hotel, where they found Gaustad half-drunk and dozing. Per sat down at the landowner's table and began to speak as he usually did, free-spirited, a bit brash and a bit earnest,

talking in his dry and rustic idiom. The words poured out: he was from Atna, and he knew Herr Gaustad very well and respected him. Ole seemed to think he was wandering off topic — he kept changing the subject, making pointless digressions — but said nothing, as Per had not yet pressed all the way to the heart of the matter, had not made the sign the livestock-dealer was waiting for. Finally, Per's disquisition reached its conclusion. Herr Gaustad had recently lost a horse. Thus it was advisable to use the horse market as an opportunity to buy a new one as a replacement. In making this observation, he wished only to present himself as a man of good intentions. The landowner became angry and scolded him: the fewer people sharing such confidences, the better. But over brandy he became more conciliatory toward the two of them. He was overcome by the feeling that he had done Per an injustice. At a somewhat later stage, Kaare was brought in. Gaustad, his good friend, offered encouragement of his own. His head was pleasantly numb. The brotherhood of man was assembled, with him at its center. He purchased the animal sight unseen. Per was contracted with driving the animal home. There was no talk of money that day.

The next morning, in a bed that stank of overnight travelers, Gaustad realized that he owed a debt of 8,000 kroner. Per received no wages for driving the horse back, although he had to set aside three days to do so. The landowner, who had taken the train and hence arrived before Per, expressed his feelings emphatically by unloading a volley of buckshot while leaving his estate. Accidentally striking the man. Per filed a complaint with the police. Most people wanted to believe that Gaustad was the injured party, but he could not prove it. His heightened and

constant agitation sharply debilitated him. He failed to respond to the liens that Kaare Fjellstuva issued against him. He became obsessed with the notion that the schemes of others would go awry should he do nothing. But before the resulting lawsuit could be settled, he died, struck down by a sudden apoplexy. Thus it was decided that the stallion remain part of his estate. A distant relation to the deceased was named as his heir.

The heir began clearing out the manor house almost immediately. He destroyed the beautiful furniture that had belonged to the deceased. He cared nothing for the lacquered imported wood. He was afraid of soiling the silk upholstery. So he destroyed it. Chests of deal, tables, benches, stools, all brightly painted, replaced the well-worn but comfortable furniture. It was easy to see that a farmer with no hidden affections had taken over the property. The previous master, who had earned that title, was carried out in a black coffin and buried. No more wisdom, no more interesting pronouncements. Rather: cleanliness, order, punctuality, objectivity throughout the entire enterprise. Rich harvests, fat cattle, the bounty of the yeoman's discipline. Within two years the manor was scarcely recognizable, inside and out. Unsightly white-washed additions marred the old Baroque villa. The stallion was housed in a new barn, which bore a strong resemblance to the vault of some great bank. Iron bars and gray concrete to protect the noble animal from threats of fire and theft.

The new owner — a giant of a man, a beast who might have taken ten women in his bed in a single night. But with his overripe wife, breasts seeping milk, eyes like those of a doe or a cow, with a mouth not only compel-

ling, but enticing, he was only able to produce a couple of feeble offspring. Blood that had been bred for experience went wasted.

So he smashed the mahogany and ebony furniture. It was a typical quarrel between his existence and the world. Even the paintings — family portraits, mostly — were pitilessly and unceremoniously cast into the flames. He cut himself off from the sources of his own power. He did not know. The late owner had possessed a library whose value was based mainly upon a collection of musical scores. Generations of Gaustads had been utterly lacking in musical ability; the old squire would fall into a rage as soon as musical notes whispered in his ear, but he collected scores centuries old. He had devoted hours of contemplation to reading signs that he could not understand. Perhaps he had inherited this art of interpreting books, and could hear the music of the spheres, music that actual notes would only threaten. And so the library, along with the furniture and the paintings, was reduced to smoke and ash. As compensation to the deceased for this act of barbarism, the new owner ordered from Oslo a great gravestone of black, polished Labrador marble, adorned with gilt letters that told of his fate. He also worked in the realms of the divine. One day there appeared in the village an architect from Germany — or so they said. A German-born architect who had been living on a small Skäre in the Oslo Fjord for years, practicing his profession, which he had learned without ever having gone to school. The Romanesque church with its smooth, deeply set windows carved from soapstone, the color of dark Chinese jade, and its portal that might have opened skyward without shame, let alone into the humble structure, was demol-

ished. Its blocks of stone were broken into rubble to build cowsheds for the neighboring farms. Like the proud cathedral in Hamar, whose remains had been lost, besmeared, pissed on — what sort of sanctity can withstand ignorance — and despised by the descendants of the people who built it. They left to the mountain that swims on the water the name “Helgoet,” greeting the towers of the mainland with the clang of greenish bells. Green the damp air, green its age, green the rash upon reddish copper. Lime kilns smoking humans destroy mountains. (So far from the mountain that swims on the water, in one great Chinese city 10,000 starving people, driven by hunger to revolt, were shot dead in one day. A bullet in the back of the head from a foot away. Brain splatter. So far from capitalism.) In the vacant lot created by the demolition of the chapel — from which rotting corpses laid out in rows in the chalky soil were dug up, to be re-interred in the churchyard along the steeply sloping and damp banks of the creek, where they might finally molder away — there soon arose a stark and whitewashed edifice: the new church. The impious and incapable had shown that they no longer deserved any covenant with God, other than to indicate that they understood what sort of pigsty they ought to build. But He chose not to take vengeance. (The mountain and the tens of thousands remained unavenged.) The living to Him seemed ever more living. Gaustad’s harvests grew richer with each passing year. The old saying: he whose lips move shall be heard. A piece of oft-ridiculed theater. He had appeared in another form. Or was God in love with the brown stallion? With his thick bones. With his sinews surrounding them. With his brown coat. He sired. And his sire was movement and form,

slowly growing within the mares' dark bellies. Or was He watching the humans? Smiling, because of this good-for-nothing named Perrudja.

The farmer knew the debt he owed his stallion.

He purchased three splendid mares. The stallion deigned to give his love to one of them, but he rejected the other two. They were black. He did not like the smell of a black female. The two outcasts were peremptorily removed from the farm. Herr Gaustad, as the new owner could now be styled, was not upset by this, nor did his zeal for his stallion diminish. He noted the animals' peculiar inclination and took it into account. He procured from some place — he was gone for eight days — two grey mares, one of which had a flesh-colored vulva. Both became pregnant; the pink one was not accorded the status of favored mare. Herr Gaustad had anticipated this. He felt deceived. The bounds of reason are so quickly reached. For the upcoming spring the owner intended to pasture his stallion in the high mountains. He tried to provide the animal with a great herd of mares. His activities were successful enough, and from as far away as Fron, Ringebu, Oeyer, and even Faaberg, animals were promised in ever-greater numbers. Painstakingly, he marked the border, bounded by dips and streams, with the neighboring stallion's territory so that a chance encounter between the two herds might be avoided, that rivalry for the females not pitch the males into battle with one another. He traversed the surrounding valleys — perhaps he was gifted with a sixth sense for nosing his way through the mountains, as if he could track the sweat of horses. These were among the few hours of his existence during which his determination to sober-mindedness was broken.

Spring came. Gaustad told all parties involved the exact day and hour his male would be driven out into the high mountains, so that the delectable mares might be waiting.

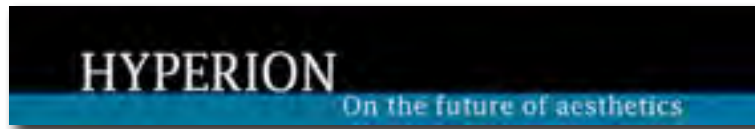
In winter he noted that both the gray mares and the brown ones were in foal, but the black ones remained barren. After grazing, their owners found them nervous, drawn, afflicted with their protracted heat. They were unsullied lovers.

The stallion's reputation took a blow. It was said he was too old. His qualities were a topic of discussion in the villages and settlements. The aggrieved farmers refused to pay the interest due for pasturing. Since Gaustad steadfastly denied that his stallion was fallible, a young farmer from Fosse Gaarden went to him — he had sent a three-year-old mare — claiming she was still a virgin. The landowner burst out laughing. Then a description of the unsullied maiden horse. They began to argue. Gaustad took the occasion to forcefully make his point and sketched out anatomical drawings as support. The farmer became flustered. He began to ramble and lost the thread of clarity. Verifiable facts eluded him; gradually, he fell silent. Adled by these astounding observations. The stilted conversation that followed his consternation concluded with a troubling inference — his own young wife had not been unsullied when he came to her on their wedding night.

After this the stallion's reputation suffered even more. It was through the dissemination of this ridiculous anecdote that Perrudja heard about the contentious animal. He went out to the farm to have a look. He found its coat coppery brown and shining like a vein of ore. He rubbed the powerful croup with his hands, embraced the

stout, thick neck. The horse bent his neck and tugged at the long hair on the human's head with his bright white incisors. Perrudja pressed his fingertips past the animal's rubbery lips.

With a heavy heart, moving as if stunned, he crept away. His heart had begun to fall in love. His thighs longed to ride. In his lonely wooden house, in the heart of the vast forest, he threw himself sobbing into bed. He had no idea as to the reason for his sadness. He was soft and weak.



Sadeqh Hedayat



DEATH / La mort

Translated into French & English
by Rachel Seghetchian & Andromeda Tait

INTRODUCTION

Sadeq Hedayat (1903, Tehran – 1951, Paris), was one of the most significant Iranian writers of the first half of the twentieth century. Original, almost marginal — though he was linked to other writers and intellectuals, Djamalzadeh and Choobak in Iran, and in Europe, for instance, to the surrealists in France — today he remains a fascinating figure, for his personality (a secretive, cynical vegetarian and vodka-drinker) as much as for his prolific work. Influential to generations of writers after him, he is indeed considered one of the most important contributors to the development of modern Iranian literature. Aside from his

highly notable short texts and satirical writings (his qazieh), some of his other most significant work includes his groundbreaking work on Iranian folklore, his study on Kafka, his four collections of short stories (Zende be gur (Buried Alive) from 1930, Se qatre khun (Three Drops of Blood) from 1932, Sâyeḥ Rowshan (Chiaroscuro) from 1933, and Sag-e velgard (The Stray Dog) from 1942) and, perhaps his most famous work, The Blind Owl, which was first published in Bombay in 1937.

In the following short essay, “Marg” (Death), which is one of his earliest texts, Hedayat's preference for Death over Life and the reversal of values not only reveals a profoundly tormented personality but is also an iconoclastic attack, a provocative and cynical vision of the society he was living in and which would later censure his work. From the famous 12th-century poet Omar Khayyam to Dostoyevsky, the mosaic of influences on his work reveals a profound distance toward his own cultural background but dialectically. It is not a matter of indifference but, with his sharp eyes, a desire to enter into a particular modernity, in literature as in politics, and not necessarily the modernity advocated by the states (Iranian, British, and American). Key to understanding this text is the troubled political context of 1930s Iran, under the Pahlavi regime. His attraction to death, his sensibility for nature and religious references (particularly his interest in Zoroastrianism), already significant in “Death,” appear later in his other writings.

Hedayat wrote this text after a first suicide attempt on the banks of the Marne; though he was unsuccessful in 1927, he eventually succeeded in Paris in 1951.

— Rachel Seghetchian

DEATH

What a frightening word, how disturbing it is! Just hearing it evokes painful feelings that leave man bereft. The smile is wiped away; his heart is taken when darkness and sorrow have set in, a thousand turbulent impressions pass before their eyes.

Life and death are inseparable. If there were no life, there would be no death, and if there were no death, there would be no life, no existence at all. From the biggest star in the sky to the smallest molecule on Earth, all die eventually. Stones, plants, animals, all ceaselessly come into the world, and follow the path to the abode of nothingness, and end forgotten in dust.

The earth, careless, continues to turn in the infinite skies, nature recreates life from these remainders: the sun shines, the breeze brushes by, flowers perfume the air, birds sing. All that lives is teeming and raucous. The sky smiles, the earth brings forth, and death reaps life with its blunted scythe.

Death, with one look, metes the same fate out to every life. It recognizes no riches, no poverty, no weakness, no strength, and in the darkness of the grave humans, plants, animals sleep side by side. Only in the cemetery do the bloodthirsty, the torturers, let go of their injustices; the poor are not tortured, there is no oppression, no tyranny, the great and the small sleep peacefully. What a calm, soft sleep! They don't see the face of the morning; they don't hear the screams, the worries, the tumult of the living. It is the best refuge for suffering, sadness, grief, the injustices of living; the bright fire where desires and wishes are silenced. All this war,

strife, killing, savagery, combat, the vanities of humans become calm in the breast of the dark cold earth, in the narrow tunnel of the deep grave.

If death did not exist all would wish for it, desperate cries would rise to the sky, they would curse nature. If life never ended, how bitter and frightening it would be! When the ordeal of life has already extinguished the beguiling glow of youth, the benevolent source runs dry, the cold, the darkness, the ugliness seizes us by the throat. It is death that offers a solution; that gives shelter to twisted limbs, to lined faces, to suffering bodies.

Oh death! You who lifts sadness and pain from our shoulders, you who puts right the unlucky, the destitute, the lost, you who are the antidote to grievances, to despair, you dry eyes full of tears, you the benevolent mother who embraces its child after a day of anguish, strokes him and puts him to sleep. You are not bitter and carnivorous as life is, who leads man astray, and throws them into a dreadful gyre, you laugh at mediocrity, meanness, vanity, avarice and greed, you hide it all behind a screen. Who does not taste your poisoned wine? It is man that has given you a terrifying face, he flees you, he has taken the bright angel for a furious demon! Why is he afraid of you? Why has he denigrated you so? You, bright ray, they think you are the darkness; you are the angel of good news, but he complains at your threshold, you are not the messenger of grief, you heal withered hearts, you open a little door of hope to desperate faces, you take into your arms the caravan of weary, reduced existences, you save them from sadness and exhaustion, you are worthy of praise, you are eternal life...

Cannes, 1936

La mort

Comme ce mot effraie, comme il déchaîne toutes sortes d'émotions ! Rien qu'à les évoquer, ces sentiments douloureux laissent l'homme désespéré : le sourire qu'ils avaient aux lèvres est gommé, la joie qu'ils avaient aux cœurs, emportée, l'obscurité et la tristesse font passer milles sortes de pensées de détresse et d'affliction devant les yeux.

La vie et la mort sont inséparables. S'il n'y avait pas la vie, il n'y aurait pas de mort et de la même façon, s'il n'y avait pas la mort il n'y aurait aucune vie, aucune existence du tout. La plus grosse étoile du ciel et jusqu'à la plus petite molécule sur Terre meurent tôt ou tard : les pierres, les végétaux, les animaux, chacun, sans cesse, vient au monde et s'achemine vers la demeure du néant puis tombe aux oubliettes, poussière. La terre nonchalante poursuit dans les cieux sans fin sa propre rotation, la nature à partir de leurs restes fait revivre : le soleil brille, la brise murmure, les fleurs embaument l'air, les oiseaux chantent, tout ce qui vie bouillonne et retentit. Le ciel sourit, la terre devient fertile, la mort moissonne de sa faux usée, la vie.

La mort d'un regard égalise le destin de tous les êtres : elle ne connaît ni riche, ni mendiant, ni chétif, ni costaud, et dans l'obscurité de la tombe, êtres humains, végétaux, animaux, dorment côte-à-côte. Il n'y a guère qu'au cimetière que les assoiffés de sang, les bourreaux, cessent leur injustice ; les purs ne subissent pas la torture, pas d'oppression, pas de tyrannie, grands et petits dorment paisiblement. Quel sommeil tranquille et

bon ! Ils ne voient pas le visage du matin ; les cris, les inquiétudes, le tumulte des vivants, ils ne les entendent pas. C'est le meilleur refuge aux souffrances, aux tristesses, aux chagrins et aux injustices de l'existence : feu étincelant, les désirs, les envies se taisent ; toute cette guerre, les querelles, les tueries, les sauvageries, les mêlées, la vanité des êtres humains, dans le sein de la terre obscure et froide, dans l'étroit tunnel de la tombe creusée, s'apaisent.

Si la mort n'existait pas tout le monde l'espérerait, des cris désespérés s'élèveraient au ciel, ils maudiraient la nature. Si la vie jamais ne s'achevait, qu'elle serait amère et effrayante ! Lorsque la difficile épreuve de vivre a déjà éteint l'éclat trompeur de la jeunesse ; la source bienveillante s'est tarie, le froid, l'obscurité, la laideur nous prennent à la gorge ; c'est elle qui nous offre la solution, c'est elle qui donne l'asile aux membres tordus, aux visages ridés, aux corps souffrants.

Ô toi la mort ! Toi qui de nos épaules enlève le poids de la douleur et de la tristesse. Toi qui rétablis le malchanceux, le misérable, l'égaré, toi qui es l'antidote aux lamentations, au désespoir, tu sèches les yeux pleins de larmes, toi qui comme la mère bienveillante prend dans ses bras son enfant revenu d'une journée tourmentée, qui le caresse, qui l'endort, tu n'es pas amère et carnassière comme la vie, elle qui entraîne les hommes vers l'égarement, et les jette dans un tourbillon épouvantable ; toi qui te moques de la médiocrité des hommes, de leur bassesse, de leur vanité, de leur avarice et de leur cupidité, tu jettes un voile sur tout cela. Qui ne goûtera pas à ton vin empoisonné ? C'est l'homme qui t'a donné un visage effrayant, il te fuit, il a pris l'ange

lumineux pour le démon en furie ! Pourquoi a t-il peur de toi ? Pourquoi t'a t-il ainsi calomniée ? Toi rayon lumineux, il croit que tu es l'obscurité ; toi ange porteur des félicités, mais sur ton seuil il se lamente ! Tu n'es pas messagère du deuil, tu es le remède pour les cœurs flétris, tu ouvres une petite porte d'espoir aux visages désespérés, tu accueilles tendrement la caravane des existences usées et impuissantes, tu les sauves de la tristesse et de l'épuisement, tu es digne de louanges, tu as la vie éternelle...

Cannes, 1936

Rainer Maria Rilke

Primal Sound



Translated with an introduction

by Marya Vrba

INTRODUCTION

Rilke composed his late speculative text "Primal Sound" (Ur-Geräusch) in the summer of 1919, shortly after his arrival in Switzerland to search for a new creative home after the end of the war. The text, however, draws on ideas that had long haunted the poet, echoing all the way back to the technological transformations of the previous century. Rilke here describes the intersection in his imagination of two phenomena that do not obviously share a connection: the phonograph and the skull. He himself seems surprised by the leap he makes between the

"tightly winding lines" produced by a primitive phonographic device in his school class and the jagged seams of a skull observed in Paris fifteen years later. Many more years are needed before he chooses to write about the experiment he then envisioned: to "play" the primal sound, as it were, by submitting the cranial sutures to a phonographic needle. Admitting that he mistrusts this idea, and has never attempted to realize it, he still finds it an eloquent basis for reflections on the nature and limits of (human) sensory experience. Faced with the chasms of the unknown that divide our senses, what is the experience of the lover, the scientist, the poet? In the vision of this text, the artist represents the master builder of bridges between our sense islands. If Rilke ultimately balked from his experiment on the skull – in feelings of "disbelief, timidity, fear, awe" at the primal sound it would produce – it can be argued that he repeatedly dared such crossings on another plane, in the synesthetic labor of his poetry.

Marya Vrba

PRIMAL SOUND

At the time of my school days, the phonograph must just have been invented. At any rate, it was in the spotlight of public fascination, which likely explains why our physics teacher, a man who liked to dabble in all kinds of craft projects, instructed us in the skill of building such a device out of the most ordinary supplies. All we needed was a piece of flexible cardboard, folded into a funnel, to whose smaller round opening we immediately pasted a bit of impermeable paper, like that used to seal jars of fruit. This created a vibrating membrane, in whose center we then inserted a bristle from a sturdy clothbrush, so that it stood up perpendicular to the surface. These few elements served to produce one part of the mysterious machine; the receiver and transmitter were ready to go. It remained only to construct a recording cylinder, which could be pushed close to the engraving needle by turning a small crank. I no longer remember what we used to make it; we did our best to coat some sort of cylinder with a thin layer of candlewax. Because of our impatience, which had been growing while we jostled each other in the urgent pasting and fitting of parts, the wax barely had time to cool and harden before we put our work to the test. It's easy to imagine what happened. When anyone spoke or sang into the mouthpiece, the needle touching the parchment transcribed the sound waves onto the receptive surface of the roll rotating slowly before it, and if the busy needle was then made to retrace its path (meanwhile fixed in place with a varnish), the sound that had been our own

came back to us, trembling and wavering from the paper funnel, uncertain, unspeakably soft and tentative, failing altogether in places. The effect each time was sublime. Our school class was not one of the quietest, and we must rarely have achieved such moments of collective stillness. The phenomenon continued to surprise and even shock us at every repetition. It was a confrontation, in a sense, with a new and infinitely tender aspect of reality, from which something far superior to us, yet indescribably immature, seemed to be appealing to us children, as if to seek our help. At the time, and for years to come, I thought that this autonomous sound drawn out of us and preserved externally would remain unforgettable. However, the different turn of things is precisely the reason for this account. For it was not the sound from the funnel that most deeply affected my memory, as we shall see, but the markings etched into the cylinder, which made a much stronger impression on me.

This only came to my awareness some fourteen or fifteen years after my school days. It was during my first stay in Paris, when I was quite eagerly attending the anatomy lectures at the École des Beaux-Arts. It was not so much the manifold mesh of muscles and sinews that appealed to me, nor the perfectly harmonious arrangement of the internal organs, but the arid skeleton itself, whose austere energy and elasticity were already familiar to me from the drawings of Leonardo. No matter how much I tried to puzzle out the construction as a whole, it was too much for me; my attention kept turning back to studying the skull, in which it seemed this chalky element had achieved its maximum potential, as it were; as if in this case it had been persuaded to make a great

effort, to render a crucial duty by offering its strongest protection to something of the utmost audacity, whose field of activity knows no bounds, despite its narrow enclosure. This special structure, sealing off all worldly space, fascinated me so much that I finally procured a skull in order to spend many nocturnal hours with it; and, as always happens with me and things, it was not just the moments of conscious attention that brought this ambiguous object strangely into my possession – rather, I certainly owe part of my intimacy with it to the quick glances in which we automatically survey and perceive our usual environment, when it has any kind of relationship to us. It was just such a glance that I suddenly checked in passing, fixing it with precision and alertness. The candlelight, often so eerily watchful and searching, had just at that moment brought the coronal suture into striking relief, and I knew instantly what it called to mind: one of those unforgotten tracks I had once seen engraved in a little wax cylinder by the point of a bristle!

And now I do not know if it is only a rhythmic idiosyncrasy of my imagination that is responsible for the urge I have repeatedly felt, often at intervals of years, to use the similarity I then abruptly perceived as the basis for a whole series of unprecedented experiments. I must confess that I have always greeted any outburst of this desire with the sternest mistrust — if proof is needed, let it be the fact that I have only now decided to make a cautious statement in this regard, after the passing of more than a decade and a half. And I cannot justify my idea with anything more than its stubborn recurrence, which has surprised me in the most various

circumstances, cropping up here and there, without any link to my other occupations.

What is the suggestion that keeps presenting itself to my mind? Namely this:

The sutures of the skull (and this would first need to be investigated) have — let us suppose — a certain similarity with the tightly winding lines that the needle of a phonograph engraves on the receptive, rotating cylinder of the device. What if one were to trick the needle, and guide its return path over a track that did not originate from the graphic translation of a sound, but existed in itself, in natural form — well, let's just say it, over the coronal suture (for example) — : What would happen? — A sound must be created, a tonal sequence, a kind of music ...

Feelings — which ones? Disbelief, timidity, fear, awe — : yes, which of all these possible feelings is preventing me from suggesting a name for the primal sound that would then enter the world ...

Setting that aside for a moment, would it not be possible to take any kind of line, appearing anywhere, and test it under the needle? Could we not follow any contour to its conclusion, as it were, in order to experience the effect it has on us when transformed in another sensory domain?

At one time, when I had begun to take an interest in Arabic poems, which seem to arise from the simultaneous and equal participation of all five senses, it first occurred to me how unevenly and disparately these channels are used by the contemporary European poet, who is almost constantly overwhelmed by one of them:

the sense of vision, overloaded with the world. In contrast, how little is contributed by inattentive hearing, not to mention the apathy of the other senses, which operate only remotely and with many interruptions in their limited field of use. Yet a perfect poem can only be born on condition that the world, grasped with all five levers simultaneously, is perceived, from a certain aspect, on the supernatural plane that in fact belongs to the poem.

A woman to whom such thoughts were mentioned in conversation exclaimed that this wonderful and concurrent capacity and exertion of all the senses was nothing other than presence of mind and the grace of love — and she thus (incidentally) testified to the sublime truth of the poem. But that is precisely why the lover is in such magnificent danger, because he relies on this interplay of the senses, knowing even so that they must meet in that unique and daring center where, giving up all their breadth, they run together and lose their existence.

In writing this, I can imagine the picture that has always provided welcome help when thoughts of this kind intrude on me. If the full range of the world's experience, including those areas that surpass us, is represented in the form of a complete circle, it is immediately apparent that the black sectors, standing for that which we cannot experience, are much larger than the irregular, light sections on which the senses cast their illumination.

So, the lover is in the situation of feeling suddenly placed in the middle of this circle, that is, where the known and the incomprehensible condense at a single point, become complete, and turn into pure possession, with the loss of all individuality. The poet would not be

well-served by this dislocation, for he must remain in the presence of all that is various and individual, being called to exploit the sensory sectors to their full breadth, and thus he must also desire to extend each one as far as possible, so that his concentrated delight may leap through all five gardens in a single bound.

If the lover's danger lies in the lack of an expanded perspective, the danger faced by the poet is to become aware of the chasms separating one sensory order from another: they are indeed vast and consuming enough to tear from us the greater part of the world — and who knows how many worlds?

The question then arises of whether the scientist working to enlarge these sectors, at the level assumed by us, can in fact broaden their scope by any significant degree. Our gains from the microscope, the telescope, and the many other devices that extend our sensory reach upwards and downwards — do they not fall in another sphere, as most of the increase achieved in this way cannot be deciphered by the senses, i.e., cannot actually be “experienced”? It may not be too rash to suppose that the artist, who develops the five-fingered hand of the senses (if we may call it so) to achieve an ever more active and spiritual grasp, does the most crucial work of all in expanding the individual sensory domains, although the accomplishment giving proof of this does not allow him to inscribe this personal conquest of territory onto the general map opened before us, since it is not ultimately possible without a miracle.

But if we are seeking a way to form the imperative connection between these so strangely divided realms, what could be more promising than the experiment

suggested earlier in this account? If it is again proposed here at the end, with the reticence already noted, at least the writer can be given a certain amount of credit for resisting the temptation to let his imagination run wild with the hypotheses he has suggested. To this end, the task which has kept slipping away and reemerging again over so many years seemed to him both too limited and too specific.

Soglio, on the Feast of the Assumption, 1919

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

The Sounding Silence of Fulya Peker's Sonic Poetics



RAINER J. HANSHE

Words have killed images or are concealing them. A civilization of words is a civilization distraught. Words create confusion. Words are not the word. . . The fact is that words say nothing, if I may put it that way. . . — Ionesco

Blink: the eye flutters like a hummingbird, flickering like the tongue which articulates and mutters words; fragments and disjoins them; breaks them into syllables, letters, or *pure sound* free of meaning — a borborygmic, aphasiac, bestial stuttering akin to the dismemberment of the body itself. The sacrificial sparagmos. Peker's rendering of the subject, de-subjectified into the void. . .

This is what we see, or are made to experience, in her short video [Nerve Meter: Blink](#) — the depth of the eye; the eye as planet; cornea as cloud, fog, or vapor. It is consciousness fluttering in and out of reality, like radio signals short-circuiting, or the violent static of language, of the body, that is, *of the cosmos speaking in the body*, its manifestation in a sputtering & magmatic lingual assault.

The breath, the expansive void of the eye, the mouth, all spheres that morph into a single mutating sphere as one struggles to hear before her sound assault, to clarify the uttered word. Indistinct language, violent static broken by silence, silence broken by violent static, the terrible vividness of death — thought, Peker whispers, *is liquefied*. Not spoken, but shattered, like the body without organs, and Peker clearly works within the lineage of Artaud and Bene (not to say Dada), those mad sleepless fiends who live with the strain of an abject orality, but, while paradoxically denying the very possibility of clarity, articulate that impossible possibility with violent force, with terrible unsettling precision. It is the absolute refused. Imagine the physicalization of a Francis Bacon painting, as if it were to be animated and speak, or sputter and scream through its spasmodic and spectral body, a body reduced, or rather, *concentrated*, to sound waves. Peker's poetics flare to life in this image, and it recalls the silent emphatic gesture of the sequence she created for David Michalek's *Portraits in Dramatic Time* (2011), a performance displayed on an 85' by 45' screen in the main square of Lincoln Center, which, as each cycle of the film came to her sequence, was infected by the contagion of her sonic poetics. Consider the scale, the immensity at which such a ritual expressionism is displayed, or *etched* into the screen

of consciousness. Pivoting upon a concentrated point, pallid and mercurial in dress and visage, Peker makes a near 360° swivel, her face first blank and expressionless, her eyes never blinking but peering sharply into the beyond, then, upon completing her arc, replete with horror, her hands contorted with the agony of a primal sound, the disquieting *sounding silence* of the stillest hour. . . What did she hear? What must she obliterate? At this moment, when she writes then erases words in the air before her, one realizes that she is behind a sheet of glass, and so, as Bene said of his original stage production (1966) of his novel *Our Lady of the Turks*, which was also performed behind glass, the spectator is forced “to see ‘actions,’ not to have to hear words.” Although Michalek’s work had no sound track, Peker’s choice was deliberate, and the silence of her sequence distinct, devoid of sound, aurality refused but silently articulated, carved in the air like a hieratic gesture, a hand signaling through the flames. . .

In time’s brokenness is narrative’s brokenness. Thermodynamics echoes from the outer reaches of the cosmos to our larynxes. The possibility of ‘story’ no longer exists. To pursue such is anachronistic. The actor as storyteller is the actor out of tune with reality. Ruled by non-knowledge, by the puzzle of possibility, or *puzzibility*, Peker embodies in her body without organs the entropy that pervades the cosmos. Living decay; the decay of the living. Life does not exist without death. Death is not the end of life, but its possible genesis, its actual creator, as chemist Jean-Claude Ameisen has demonstrated. The collapse of onto-theology, of what Peker calls “the grand verb,” echoes through to language itself, just as thermodynamics, which is why language undergoes this trial, why

it has been disemboweled and there is laughter with knives. As one burns, what is there to sense, to smell, to touch? What is breath to a body without organs? It is heard scratching in the void, and this subtle if not haunting event evokes Peker's arresting work with both Richard Foreman's *Ontological-Hysteric Theater* as well as her numerous turns with *Object Collection*, particularly her performance in their staging (2011) of the late Robert Ashley's *Automatic Writing*, wherein Peker, again in near absolute stillness, wrestles with the unconscious force of the Ur-realm of the oral, with what is permissible to utter aloud in the polis. In an amorphous cascade of modulated breaths, vocables, whisperings, and half-formed, inarticulate words, as if choked by legal or social impediments, Peker struggles to voice, to articulate, to let involuntary speech flow forth, such as spastic, uncontrollable Tourettic utterances. Through transgression, the impermissible manifests, like errant tonalities erupting to strew discord.

This same exigent play with language is an instrumental element of Peker's *Nerve Meter: Blink*. Out of the de-subjectivization of the grand verb, language undergoes metamorphoses and reversals, and Peker turns over and empties out sentences, phrases, words, breaking them down to syllables, to single letters, to mutilated noises in which consciousness itself is made to crack, to be *pressed* to its absolute extremity, to the experience of what occurs in the sleepless second that is nothing less than eternity, the timelessness that only the insomniac knows. In the eye of her *Nerve Meter: Blink* is a cosmos — eye as planet, as galaxy itself, as the surface and image of a planet, or like the blurry but enigmatic, spectral infrared images of

the cosmos. The manifestation of dark matter in the flesh. How can the thirst for tomorrow be nothing but illicit?

Originally instigated by catalyst material Paul Amlehn sent Peker (and others) for a film project, from its general vision to its linguistic mutilations, *Nerve Meter: Blink* is another distinctive incarnation of Peker's aesthetic. The same exactitude and formal rigor in her (dis)articulation of the word was evident in the strenuousness of the exacting and near *microscopic* mise-en-scène of her *Plague* (2011), the figures of which were directed in one sequence *to spell out letters with their eyeballs*. To some this was fanatical; the artist as tyrant; a rigid, stultifying demand. But this viewpoint is blind to the geometrical precision of Peker's stagecraft, which is no less decisive than Beckett's. Peker is not rigid; she is rigorous. This ever rarer architectural sculpting of form is superior to the lazy ineptitude of the improvisatory ethos which infects and largely rules the age, masquerading its maladroitness as 'play.' The ludic buffoons, however, are not true clowns — they lack anarchic force just as much as they lack the wild avid glee of children playing with dirt. And the prevailing view that only the spectacle which involves the viewer, who must in some way be able to directly affect its outcome (video game mentality), is primary and preferable, derides thinking itself, fails to recognize that the mind wrestling before such active rigor as Peker's *is* involved. It is the most exacting form of 'participation,' and it is only intensified and acute perception that will reveal the dramaturgy of the cosmos even in the cornea of her figures. Whether or not such gestures were readily discernible to each and every spectator — it is clear whom (and what) Peker evokes with her "everyone and nobody" — is of no consequence.

What is discernible, what is felt, what is experienced — forget the insistence of understanding, forget meaning —, what the spectator *undergoes*, is palpable, and the extremity of disorientation is discernible, hence, the nerve meter registers the choice. Only the most highly attuned, only the most astute, truly engaged spectator, only the one who participates with rigor through hazarding their own desubjectivization, will know that. This same astuteness is necessary to recognize the spluttering of consciousness in Peker's sonic poetry, which finds its excoriating fusion in each and every frame of *Nerve Meter: Blink*, just as it exists in the sculpted framing of her breaths and the verbs she dismantles to root atom and beyond, to dust, to void, to the most extreme negation, to the splintering knife of chaos and its exacting threshold.

In the brief, lightning-like, terrifying brevity of the blink is the self, the self evaporating like the disarticulated verb sent into a borborygmic spasm. As Mandelstam realized, in the 'inferno,' in the grammar without futures, we literally hear how the verb kills time. It is this death that Peker articulates and animates, but it is a creative death, the sounding silence of a sonic poetics.

If, as Mauthner nihilistically proclaimed, and justly so, it is language that makes it impossible to know one another, perhaps what Peker is seeking beyond its homogenization and sclerosis is a subatomic unity — beyond understanding, beyond meaning, beyond communicativity, by way of the *via negativa*.

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

WHO AM I? (Antonin Artaud)



by FULYA PEKER

Dear Reader,

Let's admit it! Some groundbreaking modernist artists and their works, which are essential to the self-pronouncing denunciation of modernity, initiated an undeniable genealogy for our current aesthetic visions. Therefore, by laying upon an autopsy table the work of these figures, which I call Modern Mythologies, it is possible to explore the connection between myth-making and artistic creativity; to activate anew inert knowledge as well as the process and experience of art making; to question what lies behind the act of mimesis and its function; to delve deeper into "the unknown" via metaphors and mythologies. Along with my experiences in Butoh and experimental music, Antonin Artaud's life and art led me to create the Modern Mythologies Project (MMP) in 2006.

For MMP solo performance pieces, I first develop textual scores (a monologue) out of an individual artist's personal writings or letters; then I articulate the monologue through intonation methods inspired by what I imagine would be the sounds of the artist's inner life and environment, which are then presented as either live recitation or pre-recorded scores used during the performance. In addition to this aural aspect, I create movement notations through embodying the images, spoken words, and found objects that represent the artist's work. While rehearsing each MMP piece, I use an exercise I developed called "split and unite," which is inspired by the tension built up over time between the physical and vocal expressions of the body. This is done to: trigger the initial sensory connotations of words and to stimulate the body to freely respond to them once again; to create awareness of the interaction, integration, and interruption that occurs between form and sound. Through these operations, the artist's words become the music through which I set their artworks in motion. With these performances I aim to reverse the process of artistic creation and to revert the mimetic impulse to its formative myth-making state; by doing so, I try to convert art works into modern mythologies.

The monologue that follows was the inaugural MMP solo performance piece. The text for the performance was formed out of Artaud's writings in order to create an analogy between his artistic vision and his existential stance. It is extremely difficult to have a sense of Artaudian aesthetics without exploring his personal strife since, as he stated with finality, he could not conceive of art detached from life. Similar to performing an autopsy, after extensive research on Artaud's journey into the cruelty within himself, namely his body — his I — without organs, I dismantled, rearranged, and composed this monologue using his own words compiled from texts by Martin Esslin, Bettina L. Knapp, Naomi Greene, Charles Marowitz, and Stephen Barber.

As a final note, although I resist talking about my work and prefer that it talk for itself, since the following monologue is about the question of the self, — the I — the rather modernist wording of the first person singular encountered above hopefully fits the work presented below.

*Sincerely,
Fulya Peker*

Here where others offer up their works I

pretend to nothing more than showing my mind. Life is a burning up of questions. I

can't conceive of a work detached from life. I

don't love detached creation. I

can no longer conceive of the mind as detached from itself. It happens that one day, where I

was at and the way I

was, I

was no longer virgin, nor intact, nor free, nor alone, nor at the beginning, nor the beginning itself. Who am I? I

am he, who can dissolve the terror of being a man and go among the dead, for is not my body miraculous ash whose earth is the voice of speaking death? I

was born from a uterus in which I

was in spite of myself and with which I

had nothing to do even before, because this is no way of being born, to be copulated and masturbated for nine months in a gaping membrane which devours without teeth. Ever since my childhood I

have noticed these periods of stuttering and the horrible physical contradiction of my facial nerves and tongue, which came after periods of calm and perfect ease... Spasms of pain in the right side of the neck, which cut my breathing... Limbs, which become numb, begin to prickle, violent itching, which suddenly moves from the arms to the legs, the spinal column full of crackles, is painful at the top. A violent weakness, to drop to the ground, which is an amplification of the unbearable compression of the head and shoulder blades... At times a general cramp, heat, shivering, droning, noises in the ears, pain caused by light... Muscles as if twisted, then laid open; brittle feeling of being made of glass; wincing and cringing at any move or sound. Unconscious incoherence of steps, of gestures, of movements... Willpower, constantly inhibited in even the simplest gestures, renunciation of simple gestures, something or other... Body motions run haywire in sort of death exhaustion. Mind, fatigued at the simplest muscular tension like gesture of grasping — unconsciously clinging to something, holding it together by constant will power.

Who am I

? Where do I

come from? Here where I

stand, a man I

stand what I

myself do, a man I

do, there is nothing more there will be nothing more than that. There is no science, no wisdom, life has been lost from the day one single thing became known. I

am not of your world, mine is on the other side of all that is, knows itself, is conscious, desires and acts. It is entirely another thing. There science, knowledge, envy, desire and its attractions are unknown. As for as, I

have never been able to understand how it could cause erection, suck with the tongue, fill the cheeks, wet the ganglions. It is only the illusionary power of attraction that I

deny. Myself, Antonin Artaud , I

am a pure spirit and make my body rise looking at it as I

do like the asses of the holy spirit of god who believe that man is a double composed of a well rounded spirit and then of a body, an organism that is regulated by the spirit of the master of eternity on high. I

suffer because the spirit is not in life and life not in the spirit. I

suffer from spirit as organ... I

am suffering from this terrible sickness of the spirit. My thought abandons me to all possible measures, from the simple fact of the thought itself to the external fact of the materialization of words. Words, the shape of sentences, the internal direction of thoughts, a simple reaction of the mind. I

have struggled to try and exist to try and consent to the forms, all the forms with which the delirious illusion of being in the world, fallen at last, fallen, risen into the void which I

had rejected, I

have a body which experiences the world and spews against reality. I

could no longer be my body, I

did not want to be this breath turning to death all around it, until its extreme dissolution. Thus wrung out and twisted, fiber on fiber, I

felt myself to be the hideous corridor of an impossible revulsion. And I

know not what suspension of the void invaded me with its groping blind spots, but I

was that void, and in suspension, and as for my soul, I

was nothing more than a spasm among several chokings. Where to go and how to get out was the one and only thought leaping in my throat blocked and secured on all sides. Every wall of charred meat assured me it would be neither through the soul nor the mind, all that is of a former world, without the mind, the mind, the patient.

For a long time now I

have felt the Void, but have refused to throw myself into the Void. I

have been as cowardly as all that I

see. When I

believed I

was refusing the world, I

know now I

was refusing the Void. For I

know that this world does not exist, and I

know how and why it does not exist. My sufferings until now consisted in refusing the Void. The Void that was already in me... If only one could taste one's Void, if one could really rest in one's Void, and this Void were not a certain kind of being but not quite death either. It is so hard to no longer exist, to no longer be in something. The real pain is to feel one's thought shift within oneself.

But thought as a fixed point is certainly not painful. I

have reached the point where I

am no longer with life, but still have appetites and the insistent titillation of being. I

have only one occupation left: to remake myself. We are not yet born, we are not yet in the world, there is not yet a world, things have not yet been made, the reason for being has not yet been found. If I

commit suicide, it will not be to destroy myself but to put myself back together again. By suicide I

reintroduce my design in nature, I

shall for the first time give things the shape of my will. I

free myself from the conditioned reflexes of my organs, which are so badly adjusted to my inner self, and life is for me no longer an absurd accident whereby I

think what I

am told to think... I

can no longer live nor die, nor am I

capable of not wishing to die or live. And all mankind resembles me... I

reflect on life, and I

am the only witness of myself. His who is speaking to you is one who has truly despaired and who has known the happiness of being in the world only now when he has left the world, when he is absolutely separated from it. Being dead, the others are not separated. They are still circling around their own corpse. I

am not dead. But **I**

am separated. Who am **I**

? Where do **I**

come from? **I**

am Antonin Artaud. And if **I**

say it as **I**

know how to say it immediately you will see my present body burst into fragments and under ten thousand notorious aspects a new body will be assembled in which you will never again be able to forget **I**.

* *dedicated to Sadun Belgin (1947–2014)*

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

PAUL VALÉRY



Four Letters Concerning Friedrich Nietzsche

Translated by Frank Chouraqui

Hyperion is proud to present the first English translation of Paul Valéry's writings on Nietzsche. Valéry's engagement with Nietzsche spanned most of his writing life & fluctuated between irritation & admiration. The letters presented here represent the most self-conscious of Valéry's published attempts to engage with Nietzsche. Alongside the 1927 preface penned by Valéry, these letters from the period of 1901–1907 chronicle his response to the French translations of Nietzsche's works published by Henri Albert. This translation will be followed in our spring 2015 issue with a selection of texts on Nietzsche from Valéry's Notebooks and Letters, accompanied by a synthetic critical note from the translator. Together, these two segments aim to offer to the English-speaking reader a complete if impressionistic gathering of the remaining traces of the poet's grappling with the philosopher, at the turn of a tragic century.

Paul Valéry

***Four Letters Concerning Nietzsche*¹**

Preface, 1927

I think it has only happened to few people to everywhere stumble upon and to reread some letters one had written for only one person to read, without thinking of the future, or imagining that they would one day become items of curiosity and of commerce, that they would then circulate under the protection of laws of which we all know that they are reluctant to defend all that is not material, and with how much difficulty, and what reluctance, they stoop to taking into account the interests of the heart or of the spirit. Everyday I see some very old friend I once had, sell what I had written to them in confidence; and some of them not even holding on to the notes and epistles that concerned their own life and intimate vicissitudes. Such papers of my writ circulate and come to sell themselves door-to-door, appearing in the front windows of shops and are reproduced in catalogues. And all of this because of the laws; that is to say, because of the lawmakers who failed to remove letters from the marketplace like they once removed people.

I only speak of this abuse here (which should be blamed on the general baseness of the spirit of our laws as well as the costliness of life, the accompanying weaken-

¹ The original text appears in *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, Series 18, Issue 2 (1927) 9–27.

ing of resistances and the increase of inferior curiosities), to publicly acknowledge the propriety of the request presented to me by the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* requesting that I allow the publication of four letters I had once addressed to Henri Albert concerning his successive translations of Nietzsche's works. The opportunity is precious to me as it grants me the chance to pay homage to the highly deserving and remarkable work of Albert, who has devoted so many years of his life to introducing the thought of the philosopher of *Zarathustra* to the French public.

As regards my letters, they are very little: a few words of thanks, a few lines very hastily written in which my reader's experience barely comes through. I have very little recollection of the ideas I held in those days about the theses of Nietzsche. Yet, as I re-read these short notes as if they were from another's hand, I happen to recognize myself in them. Nietzsche excited in me the combativeness of the spirit, and the inebriating pleasure, owed to the promptness of answers that I always enjoyed a bit too much. I also liked him for the intellectual vertigo of the excess of consciousness and of intuitive connections, because of a few *limit arguments*, because of the presence of a superior will coming in to create obstacles for itself, and the exigencies without which any thinking could only evade itself. I recognized some unknown intimate alliance of the lyrical and the analytical that no one until then had deliberately accomplished. Finally, in the play of this ideology gorged with music, I very much appreciated the blend and the very fortunate use of notions and information of scholarly origins. Nietzsche seems as if armed

with philology and physiology combined, all remarkably suited to or associated with his own mental mechanisms.

But, he shocked me in other ways. He unnerved in me the feeling for rigor. I could not fathom that such a violent and vast spirit did not get over the unverifiable...

Further, I see in these letters a few words that touch upon politics. I allude to the German question.

One may wonder what the author of the *Untimely Meditations* would think today?

As for myself, I re-read my note to Henri Albert of October 1907, and I find nothing that needs changing. Yet, in the interval, something took place.

Paul Valéry

Letter I

Monsieur Henri Albert etc.

Sunday²

My dear Albert,

I devoured a piece of *Daybreak*, with all the bad feelings of use when one is reading Nietzsche, which I mixed with the periodic gratitude owed to the translator.

In a time when the best of what goes to print is translation you surely have a fine place. Please be sure that I admire you for seeing this long-term task to its achievement and for fighting at length and without break with a whole string of books in which a genius — of the most tiresome, most strident kind — proliferates.

Do you sometimes go to the *Mercure*?

I find myself quite remote from it — in several ways — for, even when I vanquish the distance, I always run into — an absence of kinship — a faded chatter that makes me regret ever taking the trouble of coming.

Thus, I do not know where I could shake your hand, apart from this insufficient piece of paper.

Yours truly,

P. Valéry

P.S. And Bonnières? Do you still go to his Mondays?

² The letter is postmarked 11/11/1901.

Letter II

Monsieur Henri Albert ³

My dear Albert,

What a wanderer, and what a Shadow following him! A scandal, this Nietzsche — a display of human forces, a prodigious one — and indeed, prodigious forces too.

But, how many weaklings will believe themselves strong for having merely read!

And yet, if all of us were to reflect and touch the immeasurable inside — then, Nietzsche is justified; he dominates — be it only among us...

Rightfully yours is the extraordinary facetiousness of having transported to current day France, one who was very curious about, and even avid for the France — of late.

And the reader could blush before some of the praise he no longer deserves.

At least — let the excellence of the translation be praised — I saw with great pleasure some articles in which the consistency of the perfection that you have invested in this enormous work was duly appreciated. I repeat these truths to you, and I add to them my old signs of gratitude and of friendship,

P. Valéry

³ The letter is postmarked 10/12/1902.

Mon cher Albert,

Actuelles
certainement pour le lecteur
de prose (qui faut être) me
paraissent les considérations -
ou que même de plus germaniques
ne fut écrit par l'auteur, ou
que tout le germanique main-
tenant et l'avenir de ce monde
central d'Europe est une cinquième
capitale pour tout le monde et
les germains.

A nous autres, du moins, de la
mesurer, de la circonscrire, en toute
lucidité, comme le philosophe le
fait de son mal.

Rien n'est plus singulier dans
toute l'histoire que cette oreille de
le Français tendue vers le bas, autrefois
en 1903 - plus curieusement aujourd'hui
essayant de percevoir quelque chose
de vrai, suspendue à des bruits
contradictoires, horriblement incertains.

Chose Ah admirable (si je ne me trompe)
il me semble que Nietzsche n'en savait
rien des autres; il sentait tout Pascal de
sa nature, mais il ne nous dit rien sur
la suite.

Après tout, il suffit, peut-être, de regarder
quelque pléiade et de feuilleter un livre
de statistiques...

Très cordialement à vous
F. Val,

Letter III

Monsieur Henri Albert

11 Rue Mazarine

Paris ⁴

40, Rue de Villejust—Mardi ⁵

My dear Albert,

I have read, the best I could, these less finished volumes, more important — deserving of a total investigation, that you addressed to me.

But, nowadays, I possess neither the little amount of tranquility nor the fierce leisure required to weigh, and burn, on a low meditative fire these few innumerable ideas.


By way of concerns that are nothing short of speculative, I recognize that I do not like the Eternal Return, any more than the many infringements that the author is guilty of against the very “integrity” he so deservedly praises and defines. For example, his criticisms of Christianity are mere shadows —outlining the shadows of a Christian — the truth — is the diversity of billions of Christians — within which one could easily recognize all the possible types — even doctrinal types — Napoleon learnt his catechism just like Louis XIV.

⁴ This letter was reexpedited to Niederbronn (Alsace).

⁵ The letter is postmarked 4/8/1903.

So the critique only applies to the written paper, if that!

The same goes as regards Morality — there are at least three things — morality as a *written* set of rules — morality as a bizarre and uninscribable deliberation (which cooks itself up in the spirit —) and finally — what we do. There is no way one could reason about the last, which is the important one — the second is *half*-decipherable hieroglyphics — and the first is fantasy, approximation — (all things that could be said of the productions of the quill, et cetera).

As regards the section you pointed out in our conversation — it seems to me it could not use the energetic theories with any benefit, for having come too soon. Besides, he appears to ignore certain results that were already acquired in his day  which could have either supported his views or turned him away from them — all is possible. But if I am not mistaken, the *odious* Spencer too fabricated an Eternal Return on the basis of these theories and in spite of the theorem of Clausius,⁶ which seems to preclude it.

Pardon this hasty judgment — to which I do not adjoin in detail the favorable “considerations” — which are admiring — as I should do.

⁶ Rudolf Julius Emanuel Clausius (1822–1888) was a German physicist and a pioneer of thermodynamics. His “theorem” (also known as the “virial theorem”) of 1870 provided the possibility to calculate the overall kinetic energy available in a given closed system, and by extension, to compute the possible kinetic events of the system. For the possible influence of Clausius’ thinking on Nietzsche’s thought of eternal recurrence, see Paolo D’Iorio, “The Eternal Return, Genesis and Interpretation,” tr. by Frank Chouraqui, *The Agonist* Vol. 3, No. 2 (2011) 1–44, esp. 39–40.

I am elsewhere; I concern myself with the eternal
return!

Be assured, my dear Albert, of my best sentiments
of friendship, and find here all my thanks.

P. Valéry

Letter IV

October 1907

My dear Albert,⁷

Undoubtedly, for the reader of prey (that one must be) the consideration seems to me to be timely — for nothing more Germanic was ever written by the author; for all that is Germanic nowadays as well as this central European cloud is an enigma for everyone as well as for the Germans.

It is for us to at least meditate over it, circumscribe it in all lucidity, just like the philosopher does his malady.

Nothing is more remarkable in the whole of history than this French ear occupied with over there — anxiously in 1905 — more curiously today, trying to perceive something true, an ear suspended to contradictory rumblings, shamefully unsure.

One very admirable thing — if I'm not mistaken — it seems to me that Nietzsche did not know any more than this: he felt the whole actuality of his nation; but he says nothing about what is to follow.

After all — contemplating some world map and leafing through some book of statistics might still be sufficient...

With my friendship to you,

P. Valéry

⁷ This letter, undated and without envelope, was dated in Henri Albert's handwriting as October 1907.

Auguries: The Stuff of Modernism

Tim Conley, Brock University



1. In an early scene in *Attack of the Clones* (2002), the second episode of George Lucas's *Star Wars* films, we catch sight of what appears to be Constantin Brancusi's "Bird in Space" — a 4 ¼-foot tall, bronze abstract sculpture — resting on a low table, in a brief scene on Coruscant, a wholly urbanized planet that is evidently the seat of galactic government. What is it doing there — in "a galaxy far, far away"? How "real" is it: is it a CGI effect, like the character of Jar Jar Binks, who is the very opposite of a Brancusi sculpture, or is it a material prop, like Hayden Christensen? The sculpture's presence has no discernible aesthetic effect whatsoever on the characters conversing in the foreground. So much for modernism, one might be

tempted to sniff; so much for the shock of the new! But if we can refrain from such sniffing, and even see beyond the strange deixis and narratological quandaries that the appearance of this twentieth-century artwork in this galaxy of unearthly phenomena cannot help but provoke, we discover rich problems that not only transcend the specific narrative frame of *Star Wars*, but require useful reconsideration of what constitutes modernism itself — or, perhaps more aptly put in this context, of what stuff modernism is made.

2. Mina Loy on Brancusi's "absolute act / of art":

As if
some patient peasant God
had rubbed and rubbed
the Alpha and Omega
of Form
into a lump of metal
("Brancusi's Golden Bird" 79)

3. Where the opacity of Gertrude Stein lies in her syntax (the paragraph is the unit of construction), Loy's is in her vocabulary, which might be characterized as *coruscant* (though it is interesting how unusually accessible in this regard are the lines that I have just quoted). The title *Lunar Baedeker* (1923) suggests walking on the moon — Loy takes us into outer space on a bird, a millennium falcon.

4. Imagine Marinetti watching *Star Wars*. Words scroll up from the bottom of the screen, projected into space: "It is a period of civil war. Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire..." *Parole in libertà!*

5. Brancusi's sculpture is itself part of a series, cast and recast an unknown number of times between 1923 and 1940. There is no one bird, no "genuine" or "original" and thus no discernible or definite "aura." The birds are clones — but of what?

6. Two births in 1903: the word "clone" (from the Greek for "twig" or a "slip" like a plant cutting) and Theodor W. Adorno, the century's most anxious intellectual when it comes to "mass culture." The next year, in Paris, Mina Loy gives birth to a daughter, Oda, who dies only a year later.

7. Identifying herself as a Futurist, Loy writes "Parturition," a poem that celebrates

LIFE
A leap with nature
Into the essence
Of unpredicted Maternity

at the same time that it sounds the depths of the pain of childbirth. It is easier to imagine Marinetti watching *Star Wars* than to imagine him genuinely sharing or approving these feelings. Loy proclaims herself "Identical / With infinite Maternity" (in other words, a reproduction of Reproduction), but there is grief in this proclamation, too. The poem ends with the words "Thank God," which are satirically presented as the pious words of the church-going "woman-of-the-people" with her "ludicrous little halo": creation misconceived. Yet this ending is more emotionally mixed than this, if it is remembered that the name Oda may come from the Greek *oide* ("song") but it may also be an abbreviation of Odelia, from the Hebrew for "thanks be to God."

8. "Bird in Space" was detained by United States Customs in 1926. The problem was how to classify and thereby assign a tariff to the imported object, and customs agents saw it as raw material rather than art. They grudgingly allowed it to be released "on bond and under the classification 'Kitchen Utensils and Hospital Supplies'" while it made its gallery tours (Giry), but the following year a trial opened in New York to determine the question.

9. In declaring open the "Great Exhibition of Modern Art" of Munich ten years after the Brancusi trial (1937), Hitler scorned the conception of art "as nothing but an international communal experience." This "theory" of art, he went on, "lumped together" art "with the handiwork of our modern tailor shops and fashion industries" (561). Modernism, in fascism's view, reduces the artist to artisan, just as Loy has a "peasant God" working on "a lump of metal." Degenerate art (*entarte Kunst*) was precisely that art which was not romantically generated (*erzeugt*) but the yield of labor. In the lexicon of National Socialism, *work* is punitive ("Arbeit macht frei").

10. One of the products of the industrial revolution, Roland Barthes has observed, is the "image of the writer as a craftsman who shuts himself away in some legendary place, like a workman operating at home, and who roughs out, cuts, polishes and sets his form exactly as a jeweler extracts art from his material, devoting to his work regular hours of solitary effort. ... Labour replaces genius as value, so to speak; there is a kind of ostentation in claiming to labor long over the form of one's work" (63). Again there is a Hitlerian distinction to be pieced out between "strug-

gle” and “labor”: a thousand-year Reich (understood to itself be an aesthetic accomplishment, as it was conceived) may be a matter of noble struggle, but no genuine art is a product of work. This is because talent, ability, genius, and so on are natural qualities inherent to the artist.

11. Said one of the art experts consulted by U.S. customs on the aesthetic qualities of Brancusi’s sculpture: “If that’s art, hereafter I’m a bricklayer” (Giry). Loy, writing about Stein, rebukes those who go looking for

canons of beauty in some sort of frame or glass case or tradition. Modernism says: Why not each one of us, scholar or bricklayer, pleasurably realize all that is impressing itself upon our subconscious, the thousand odds and ends which make up your sensory everyday life? (“Gertrude Stein” 244)

11. Modernism is the clash between Romanticism and materialism. Its inherent disunity is in some ways encapsulated by the difference — discernible, though difficult to grasp exactly — between “No ideas but in things” (William Carlos Williams’s mantra in *Paterson*) and Stevens’s “the thing as idea.” Loy herself stresses the “bare fact” that drives Williams’s poetry. Williams, she writes, “wishes you to know just how uncompromisingly itself that fact is” while that fact “becomes a part of Williams’ own nature as well as the thing itself” (“Modern Poetry” 161). But what does she mean by “nature”?

12. Dolly the sheep, the most complex organism cloned successfully, died the year after *Attack of the Clones* was released. She was not quite seven years old; the average life expectancy of a sheep is ten to twelve years.

13. Caroline Bergvall, an unrecognized inheritor of Mina Loy's poetic experiments, has written a series of interrelated texts — they might be called drafts within a textual evolution — concerning Dolly. "Les jets de la Poupee" (2000) appeared in an anthology the year after it was written; also in 2001, a full book, *Goan Atom*, appeared, with a longer and different version of the same project; and the mutations continued in *Meddle English: New and Selected Texts* (2011). It makes sense that a poet so committed to performance should resist a stabilized "final product" and that a poem that explores genetic experimentation should keep evolving.

14. A crucial problem in the Brancusi trial: can art be multiple, or is a work of art by definition singular, unique? It would have been then too early to consult Walter Benjamin, whose "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" he did not compose until 1935. (That is, the first version of the essay, for it too has different iterations.)

15. Bergvall's mutations are also paratextual and intertextual. For instance, there is no epigraph to "Les Jets de la Poupee" (though the title is a variation on *Les Jeux de la Poupée*, the title of Hans Bellmer's haunting prints of dolls dismantled and anatomically rearranged), but *Goan Atom* begins with a quotation from Duchamp: "*Arrhe est à art ce que merde est à merdre.*" In *Meddle English*, the text has two epigraphs: Duchamp is preceded by Frank O'Hara: "Our responsibilities did not begin in dreams, though they began in bed." Where Duchamp draws upon Alfred Jarry (whose *Ubu Roi* confrontationally, nonsensically begins

with “merdre”) to construct his analogy, O’Hara amends Yeats (a line that was itself an epigraph). All of these linked references constitute a genealogy, a sharing of genes, and all of these allusions (as they might very loosely be called) connect art and authorship to the body. The sources for and inspirations of Bergvall’s poem are fluid; they flow back and further back.

16. From “Les Jets de la Poupee”:

In short
ALL OF
DOLLY’S
A FUNC (913)

The various and perhaps simultaneously active meanings of “funk” (a bad mood, a foul smell, cowardice, groovy rhythm) pertain here, but so too does the implied (but incomplete or broken) “function.” Women are routinely reduced to a function (sexual gratification of the male, reproduction, “women’s work”), but what if the doll has the wrong parts (“Has got up elvis?” [“Les Jets” 913]), or, like Barbie, lacks the necessary parts? What if Dolly doesn’t work? And what is the work of women in the age of cellular reproduction? Does the advent of cloning portend liberation for women from this defining functionality, or a threat to their identity and economy? (Discuss.)

17. In pure mathematics, it is debatable whether the non-transformative reproduction of a variable —

$$f(x) = x$$

— actually constitutes a function worthy of the name, though the repetition of Stein demonstrates how transformative is the formula: *la plus ça change*.

18. Translation operates as a polylinguistic function in this mathematical sense. Bergvall writes:

Jarrings, interruptions, the assumptions of incomprehension in the reader, all point to a positive re-evaluation of untranslatability against a discrepantly universalist translatability. Bhabha tellingly speaks of this as 'the stubborn chunks', the opaque, resistant detail in the traffic between cultures which signals contextual differences against a totalizing project: 'Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements — the stubborn chunks — as the basis of cultural identifications.' In such a context, it is untranslatability, not translatability, which favors a recognition of the particularities of personal and collective experience. ("Performing Writing" 261)

19. Translation is not cloning but cross-breeding. This is another way of saying that it is transformative rather than strictly duplicative.

20. Pirated DVDs — illegal clones — of the *Star Wars* movies are not difficult to come by in China, though they are notorious (& by the same token, it is not unfair to say also beloved) among fans for their bungled translations: "May the force be with you," for example, becomes "the wish power are together with you," and "Jedi Knight" is rather endearingly rendered as "Hopeless Situation Warrior."

21. Modernism takes up Romanticism's struggle with the (Platonic and enduring) reification of *essence*. This reification is itself one of the great flaws of the modernity that modernism revolts against (recall, for example, Ernst Mayr's compelling explanation for the slow and troubled understanding of Darwin's ideas). Loy, as we have seen,

invokes essences — for example, she admires Brancusi's work as "the form on which form is based" (*Stories and Essays* 222) — but she is at least as intrigued by, even obsessed with, the mutability of being. For example, in a late poem, "Mass-Production on 14th Street" (1942), women shopping for the latest fashions gradually change from thriving bees to "walking dolls" who "jolt to their robot turn" (112) and finally perceiving subject and perceived object are transposed:

only — — the buttons are clothespins
the mannequin's, harlequins. (113)

Dolls — "composite babies with arms extended" ("Three Moments in Paris" 17) — repeatedly meet the reader's gaze in Loy's poetry.

22. Brancusi: "All my life I've been looking for one thing, the essence of flight" (qtd. in Giry). He did not find it — poor Hopeless Situation Warrior — but instead manifested figurations of flight.

23. The hybrid identities of both Loy (English-Jewish-American) and Bergvall (French-Norwegian-English) are inscribed in their poetic languages: interbred mishmashes, forever breaking down and reassembling into strange new lexicons. And here it is vital to insist on identity not as an essence but as a process.

24. Against the uncanny, technologized, and tyrannical clones Lucas poses the vitalist individual without an origin ("Anakin": without kin, not akin), an immaculate conception. Yet these allegorical readings may (despite the prom-

inent scene in *Attack of the Clones* in which Anakin Skywalker battles against a factory assembly line) distract us from the materiality of the narrative itself — how the story is made. Slavoj Žižek makes this point about essentialized identities:

The usual leftist critical point that the multitude of exotic alien (extra-human) species in *Star Wars* represents, in code, inter-human ethnic differences, reducing them to the level of common racist stereotypes (the evil merchants of the greedy Trade Federation are a clear caricature of ant-like Chinese merchants), somehow misses the point: these references to ethnic clichés are not a cipher to be penetrated through an arduous theoretical analysis; they are directly alluded to, their identification is, as it were, part of the game. ... what is crucial here is that [these aliens] are not played by real actors, but are pure digital creations — as such, they do not merely refer to clichés; rather, they are directly presented, staged, as *nothing but* animated clichés. For that reason they are, in some way, ‘flat’, lacking the ‘depth’ of a true personality: the grimaces of their almost infinitely plastic faces give immediate and direct expression to their innermost attitudes and feelings (anger, fear, lust, pride), making them totally transparent. (4–5; ellipsis added)

Lest we forget, the very term “stereotype” bespeaks mass reproduction, while “cliché” refers to the negative of a photograph, from which any number of copies can be made.

25. Modernism as an index of clichés is itself almost a critical cliché. Yet reiteration (say it again, no ideas but in things) does not generate transparency but (Steinian) opacity: it restores the materiality of words, allows us to see them again as things. An ultimate modernism, then,

would have us perceive each other as the unique genetic alphabets that we are.

26. One of the most significant conceptual advances in cloning is the shift from a molecular focus to an understanding of “BioBricks” — units often likened to Lego blocks — which are assembled “either by prefixing one [BioBrick] component with another, or by postfixing one component with another. In each case, the result is a new, compound component” (Knight et al. 4). Genetic manipulation, including cloning, is bricklaying.

27. A chain from *Goan Atom*: “gasp sag toga goat cot go cat fag fog tao sat as tag at ass fast” (13). Prefixing and postfixing yield new, compound components. “In the art of combination and attributions,” writes Bergvall, “rebus can be signatory, secretive, secreting: No waste. Less dead-meat, more worms” (“Truncated/troncated” 58). Genetic decomposition and recomposition: this in an essay that begins by wondering about the letter “c” that somehow erroneously slipped into the title of Mina Loy’s *Baedeker*, and then slipped out again in later versions of the text.

28. Broken lego, untractable genes, bad BioBricks — stubborn chunks.

29. “Bird in Space” now truly is “in space” — at once more alien to us (so removed as it is from an Earth that may or may not even exist in the *Star Wars* universe) and of considerably less importance (it’s no light saber, and thus not the phallus your father wanted you to have when you

were old enough). This reintroduction in the age of cloning is illuminating, instructive.

30. This gesture with which Bergvall concludes “Les Jets de la Poupee” cannot really be called an allusion, for whatever else it may be, it is not coy:

quote Somday Independent
22 Febr 1998
“The hurdle is nerve tissue”

Bergvall refuses to repeat (to stereotype) the newspaper name accurately, but nonetheless gives a date and even uses inverted commas. To play with, to explore, to alter, to animate a doll is art when it is subjective, wondering how it feels; the object has no feelings that can be observed, translated, reproduced. Loy refers to the “polished hyperaesthesia” of “Bird in Space”: an artifice of concentrated feeling (the opposite of aesthetics is not ugliness but anaesthesia). “Reach out with your feelings,” counsels Obi-wan. This stuff makes us nervous. Modernism is the feeling of feeling.

* For a list of the works cited in this essay, go to p. 206.

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Robert Musil, *Short Prose* (excerpts)



**Translated with an introduction
by Genese Grill**

Introduction: **Filaments of a Life's Web**

*Robert Musil, although known most of all for his work on the great unfinished novel *The Man without Qualities*, was in fact consumed throughout his whole writing career with a vast web of scenarios, characters, and experimental possibilities which all had the potential to serve the purpose of exploring an interconnected collection of themes and questions. Before his unfinished novel — which itself was never fixed into an absolute structure — began to take the shape that it did, it existed in many*

other iterations, availing themselves of different stories, different characters, different genres of writing. Autobiography mixed with utopian fantasy and scientific reportage and espionage; epoch-making events and personages in Musil's own life, and even single words or phrases like "Valerie," "still life," "South Pole," "the twin sister," "the spy," "cannibals," P.A.," "Paderewski," became repeating echoes appearing in notebooks and literary sketches, containing within their nuclei rich thematic worlds. Pressure to publish may have forced Musil into choosing certain of these possible metaphoric thematic explorations, but in his own mind, and within the reams of manuscripts organized in complexly categorized folders of potential works and potential combinations, Musil himself must have seen them all as related — as fragments of a partial and shifting universe of ideas. As such, almost holographically, each chapter of the novel, each essay, story, newspaper gloss, notebook sketch, or letter to a friend, and many a repeating phrase or word or name we find in his hand, holds a key to the whole within itself, which is not to say that each small piece of writing, each chapter, polished or prepared by Musil, reluctantly released to his publisher, was not a work of ordered art in its own right. We are not speaking here of a random rhizomatic chaos, but of a lucidly categorized hierarchy of interconnected idea-systems, masterfully orchestrated by the conductor of precision and soul from the podium of an incomparable brain.

The pieces included here are unfinished sketches for short prose pieces that would have, had they been finished, probably been printed in one of the journals that published similar works of Musil's during the twenties and thirties in Vienna, Berlin, Prague and Paris. But more than just self-contained pieces in their own right, these sketches and scenarios point outside of themselves to the collation of questions and themes that exorcised their author over thirty years of literary life. The ideas and phrases contained in these short sketches can be found repeated in shorthand abbreviations throughout Musil's notebooks. In the case of the first piece, "The Cannibals," originally written between 1911–1914, we see Musil returning to it a decade later to place the story within another story, framing the exotic within the everyday. In the second and third pieces here we see Musil moving back and forth through his own memories of youth in an attempt to understand the complex and subconscious connections

between poetic experience, eroticism, and sense-memory. We see how even within one piece of writing Musil is immersed in a lifetime of work as an observer of his own psyche and senses, constantly collecting and comparing experiences, memories, facts and ideas — the more seemingly far-fetched and unrelated the better — in an ongoing attempt to resist the threatening ossification of thought, feeling, morality and language. He is always tempering every mood with its opposite, always asking of each received idea what would happen if we were to look at it in a new context. And he does this not only with content, but stylistically as well — always presenting us with an unexpected juxtaposition of living words, images, and indeterminate genres, in order to constantly surfeit thought with feeling and feeling with thought. As the narrator in “P.A. and the Dancer” says, after leaving the realm of the purely logical to furrow in the musky treasure chest of long-buried memories, “one ought to follow that trail more often...feelings that have never become real, sudden, reckless flashes.”

It is Musil’s particular agility to lead us on a dance into his interconnected web of possibilities, maneuvering out of the clutches of both the spider of static certainty and the amorphous nothingness of airy vagueness. For a web, like a work of art, is a structure, relying upon fundamental physical laws — but in this case it is not a web purpose-built to feed its maker (who constitutionally, in any case, is unable to choose any one bite over another), but a web built for its own sake, because making it is as natural to him as breathing. When any new living thing or idea touches it at any point, the reverberations shiver along every filament, changing its aspect, calling back echoes of past presentiments. It is a living web of correspondences. A living life’s work. And here I am pleased to offer you a few raw morsels.

Genese Grill

CANNIBALS

The sun had just risen above the steppe. Round and red. It was the enrapturing quarter of an hour, wherein the cold of the night dissipates and the heat of the day has not yet abruptly increased. The poet...went for a walk. The sun shone down vertically upon the skin of his temples, which was taut and embossed like the new leather of a club armchair or the good voluptuous binding of a heavy folio. Over his shoulders, the light ran like the oil of cocoa beans. His hands, however, when he lifted them while talking to himself, were almost transparent in this suffusing morning hour, and their polished palms shimmered like gems in the most tender gradations from silver to pink. In the wide alley between the two rows of huts in the outlying city, children saluted his priestly headpiece. His limbs were covered by elaborately forged rings. His thoughts were occupied with a distich, because it was still held to be important to evoke a gentle overtone of spiritual shivers through the placement of a word. Had the slave handler not spoken to him, he would not have noticed his greeting.... Won't you buy something, sir, the animated one called...remaining standing. He was a lover of human flesh — it was still slightly surrounded by a frisson of mysticism, despite all habituation. And his career as a priest, which required that he determine the slaughtering days by prayers and inspirations from within, bound his interests all the more to it. Later...he said, I will come to you. What kind of people do you have...warriors from the upper Nile. Oh, their flesh is too firm; they are bellicose, muscular, and without nuance. If they are men and grown, sir. But the

boys, if they are fattened up from childhood on, and the women too, if they don't work as they do at home and become fat, have an unreproducible aroma of power and tenderness, of *rauque et douce*.... He continued on and thought about his distich and the great myths of his people, which he collected, and the wise and merry sayings, to which he sometimes added. On the way back he spoke to —; visited the copper smith, and —, the potter. He let them show him their new wares, and they spoke about the refined combination of abstract ornamentation and the surface effect of the pieces.

The prisoners whom he oversees are merry. They are kept in a good mood, so that they do not lose any flesh. He takes a few for himself, among them the sensible slave woman. His relationship to her is without eroticism. This sentimental European nuance is unknown in —. Perhaps in spring, when one sometimes hears the lioness off to the side of the hunting path, making different sounds, and when the jackals are restless along the great trading routes, something like that comes over the people. But one does it in harmony with these creatures, without looking for a human difference in it. Outside of war and hunting, the soul of the man is consumed by the great myths, by the thrill of the magical woods, and this is the backdrop of their lives. — takes the slave woman for himself, but he already has all of the fattening slaves of the city with him. Those that are not needed are sent on into the interior. It is a gentle occupation. It requires knowledge of men. The fattening slaves have to perform light field and housework, so that they do not become reflective, and they are retained for strumming, singing,

and dancing, so that their flesh becomes tender. Only the unmanageable are over-fed; but even in those cases, afterwards one tries to educate them spiritually so that milder methods can be used once more. Caring for them is a thoughtful occupation, and — loves it very much. One gains the wisdom of a shepherd. The men are allowed to have sexual relations with the women of the city; then the child belongs to the father and remains a fattening slave. Many mocking songs circulate about how the women love these fat mounts — especially the ones who were born into slavery. Such adultery is not considered a sin; it does not touch the honor of the free person, and the *corpus delicti* is eaten along with his progeny. Often, one of these slaves lives for years in the city.

One is satisfied; it is not an everyday sustenance, and nuance is required. When it is possible, one brings the flesh of a person of a certain age. They don't run away. For one thing, a lone person who is unarmed cannot make it far along the great trade road anyway because of the wild animals, and secondly, he would only fall into the hands of another tribe. Thus they move around quite freely, imprisoned only by the futility of flight. They even circulate among the tribesmen quite casually and amicably. They live for their contentment, but it is really no different than when a factory boss converses jovially with his workers. One day, without their suspecting the moment in the least — for one acts in secret and with deception, in order not to harm their flesh — they suddenly receive a blow to the nape of the neck. Only some, who are needed for ceremonies, are killed with their own knowledge. In the first case, the difference compared to our life is only that our fate is not

personified in a bourgeois fashion, and that we have no personal relations with it. (Naturally, also, that we live longer; but it is somewhat like the situation of a consumptive patient). This purely ideal and really inconsequential minus is countered by the great plus of a relation of tenderness, which follows from the requirements of the fattening culture. — really has an unbelievably tender relation with the slaves. It is a priestly profession. He often has the opportunity to reflect on and speak about these things in intercourse with Arab merchants, who execrate the practices, but as good traders they are not so recalcitrant in the discussion. He is interested in the slaves' lack of will. Even those who are slaughtered during festivals allow themselves to be led without resistance. It is a stupor of the will, an atrophy of the will because of their former lives; perhaps also they do not offer resistance because everything occurs in such a civilized and accustomed manner. One sees the well-known faces; it is a pleasant morning; the thought that something will happen cannot take root, remains abstract. — Possibly the fantasy of a physicist, or....

In a sanatorium in Switzerland, the high plateau of common sense.

Journal of Doctors: *Exitus*

Case study by doctors. Daughter of a factory owner?

[1911–1914]

Cannibals and Consumptive Story.

Girl or young woman. In the first days after the onset, like a soft airy mountain bearing down upon her. Then the sun hails small arrows into her body. One feels: it is like the dry body of a violin.

Fear: will she improve? Shame, to look the doctor in the face with the frightened question, as everyone does.

She notices her neighbor. He nods at her. She knows nothing about this man. Her husband has left her in the lurch. Even if he had to. She has commenced the life of the outcast. A person — this man beside her — may be amiable; one doesn't have to know anything about him.

They help each other pass the time.

He had been a journalist. Traveled a great deal. Public franchises and the publishing concerns. For the sake of success. How long ago that was.

They speak of the difficult condition of humanity. They come from the same country, are German.

He says: every combination of feelings is normal; it is only when looked at from the extreme development of one of the components that the extreme development of another person seems outrageous. One embodies more possibilities than the normal condition of repose allows one to suppose [...]. And one has not taken advantage of them. — The woman had envied him, the traveler. If we detach the environment from ourselves, something amorphous remains. Or he doesn't say that either, or only in part. And he tells her the story of the cannibals. Every night in the dark solarium. And they are "un-formed," step

outside of themselves; one doesn't know whether they are telling this to each other or experiencing it. It must be eerie; they are already living a different life; the whole world seems to have come under their power; these consumptives are stronger than the passionate creators of the world.

Then they are separated, since the woman's case improves, while his remains bad.

[1924?]

TRAVEL NOTES

Cacophony

A Visit to My Youth

Miniature view: visited Brünn, the city of my first years as a student, between seventeen and twenty. I enjoyed it languorously like a gourmand; everything important to me that once touched my life here. Early afternoon rambling over the Franzensberg. For the first time: what a strange mountain. It bulges out like a snail's house in a spiraling slope; shrubbery, thin acacia trees. Have I ever seen a person pause in these places? They are only there to conceal these naked ugly flanks of earth that stretch from the top to the bottom of the city; one passes through them; the looping paths along the sides only serve to provide the illusion of a pleasurable walk; no one follows them; places that are not there to be pleasant, but to divert us from unpleasantness. (Symbol of our pleasures?) Humble mountain. Rocky paths, old broken balustrades, crooked lantern posts; on the benches, the muddy

footprints of children's shoes, between the bushes, the scant loose earth. Above, an obelisk: from the obedient citizens to the good Kaiser Franz. Does one go to such extremes for the sake of pleasantness or in order to divert us from an unpleasant internal bleakness? Pathology of contemporary existence. A chain of associations begins with a guiding concept: ideals. The sun shines, sparrows chirp, not a person to be seen. Sparrows roister about a sycamore tree standing two thirds of the way up the mountain. One stands at the little wind-warped balustrade. Looks down on one side into the empty whores' district. Looks from the back into the houses like opened boxes. [...] ¹ In this city, it suddenly occurs to me, I heard Paderewski play Chopin for the first time. Slanted houses, angular courtyards with staircases climbing up the exterior walls, a hand pump, a saw horse, an overturned bucket. Everything in shadow. Only the little chimneys smoke away, and a cat, curled up on the ledge of a roof, lets itself be lit up. Little forest houses, farmer-peacefulness. One night we went on a lark through these streets, actors and students. Broke into one of these little houses. It had a little square window, petroleum lamps, sofa beds of black oilcloth. We didn't want anything. One of us stuck the tip of his cane into the vulva of one of the girls. We all stood around; she was a strong ugly girl. The "mama" made a frightened face. Then the girl laughed. We all laughed. The mama laughed. (Was I there?) (Who were the others? No idea.) I don't remember melodies. But I know precisely when a feeling first came to me. At

¹ Here Musil has tried out the sentence in slightly different syntax: "as into opened boxes into the houses," a construction which, aside from being repetitive here, cannot be rendered in English without great awkwardness.

that time when I was seventeen, when Paderewski played, it was bound up with the thought of a woman. This woman would have to be older than me. I did not see her before me; I only had a feeling about my affinity for her. In the arc of a minute; such a thing exists. And then I imagined really meaningless conversations with her, without periods or commas. Just so: as when one stands in the sun and is brushed shivery by the wind.

[1911?]

P.A. & THE DANCER²

A lady in the fourth row could not find a way to end her private conversation. A young gentleman behind her leaned forward and backward impatiently, and for a change of pace from left to right as well. But the dancing girl, who read aloud from “P.A.’s” books had already spoken the word noble twelve times and the word exceptional eight times, when the lady thought of one more important thing to say and then finally became silent. After that there was a general moment of silence; then another inattentive mood rose slowly to the surface. Even the young man, who had listened with an amiable expression, became annoyed. She cannot recite, he thought. Then: she honors Peter Altenberg with ceremonial formal German like a serving maid who has a fancy lover. Like a serving maid? — like a modest, good

² Peter Altenberg (1859-1919), notorious Viennese flâneur and writer of genre-free small prose that celebrated café society, the demimonde, and beautiful young ladies’ legs in a light, gay, melancholy style.

little serving girl, P. A. would say. Oh well. But then she danced. And she certainly did not perform the *Critique of Pure Reason* with her legs either nor the footnotes to Diel's *Den Fragmentis Veterorum Stoicorum* and her thighs did not elucidate the darkest spiritual uncertainties as Duncan's do. Instead, she danced more cabaret; she had a splendid costume, dulcet movements and beautiful legs. Her legs sometimes appeared from behind her garments as the legs of performers appear in the opening beneath the bottom of the curtain of the circus tent. Heart thumping. A fleeting scent. Loosened hair, green velvet, gold trim. But really the scent was the most powerful part, the scent. It rose up as when one opens the trunk with mama's and your sisters' winter clothes, just when the darkness bedazzles one's eyes. One had to run away, lie down, steal something; one wanted to go after this smell like a little stable boy or a growling gorilla with swinging arms, this smell that receded into irreality. Only then could one make out perspiration shields and fur amid the well-known friendly frills and skirts.

Then the man's thoughts acquired a philosophical tumescence. Longing? What was it like? Sometimes I have longed for a glass of water, when I really longed deep down for a beloved, but didn't want a real one. I did not suddenly see a new goal; I saw no goal at all, but I was saturated by a stronger, more masterful, foreign kind of expectation, like a room so radiant that one believes something must enter it. One feels a wonderfulness of receptivity, toward something that doesn't really exist, something that one could receive... The dancer slowly beckoned his memories back up into his limbs, like a hot lamp softly buzzing. The one with the scent and the

thumping heart came from a circus in the city of Steyr in Upper Austria. Back then he was a little fellow and could not grasp that such vagrant people could lead a regular family life; and when the town dignitaries returned the greeting of the principals on the street and even remained standing with them, he was thrilled by their incomprehension. But after that he had bored through to the unimaginable; in the back, in the make-shift walls of the circus, he had secretly cut a hole, and only when it let him see into the stable and not the dressing room, did his courage fail him, and he hadn't dared to make a second hole. But then he found a cave in the city woods and actually sat in there, thought about the marvelously beautiful Blanche, who was below in the city at that time with loosened hair, in green velvet on her white horse, practicing jumps for the evening; and he fiercely gripped a deer antler in his pocket, ready for anything that might come.

But the next memory was from a restaurant called Casino in a medium-sized city. It was part of the cabaret, had little rooms decorated in white and gold, with red carpets. Habitué, regulars, took their dinners there, quiet, friendly, on their way out. But the fact that they stayed there to the last, gently and courtly, even taking the time to pause for a tender smile at their escorts in the doorway, was what drew him every week to this little Casino where he spent all his pocket money on a fine dinner that he devoured all by himself. How is it done? I want you: singer, dancer, trapeze artist... You already know how and what for. But listen, I don't mean to make any mere declarations of love; I don't want to throw myself away; I know how you are; I want to have you ...

with as little verbiage as possible, for you are wonderfully beautiful, dark... But don't think that I don't know how you are to be attained: one pays for a dinner, promises a jewel and says: *allons* — *allons* one says and already you know. — For an elite connoisseur, this is the only way that your beauty becomes the glorious abyss that it is. But how is it possible for one to smile tenderly without suddenly crying out from being in love and without begging you, despite everything, to just stay sweet...?

But not one of them understood him. They sat together, spoke of agents and venues, or read the ads in the trade papers. "A front man who can perform good somersaults sought." "Alto needed at 12 Sisters..."

It is a profession, an honest profession. And if one accepts an invitation once in a while, why shouldn't one be really gay for once? That every night one has to say or do something indecent on the stage..., really, what do you have against it?... What can you be thinking? The people fly to us as to sugar! Little man, even if somebody blames us, what do you want from us anyhow...?!

Then the young man's thoughts strayed. As long as the widow is not thrown on the pyre, there are graduated differences. Whether one is the life partner of a new man every night, or for three, five, fifteen years? Or just being able to consider that it could be nice? And ourselves? When Kamilla A. dies or betrays us, we come down with peritonitis from heartache, and when Kamilla B. comes along, we are masters of shameless forgetfulness, once again and in fact actually truly pure and untouched. With Kamilla M. we finally have arrived, and note only the mysticism of the experience; allow ourselves from then on to have our nails painted pink and our body hair removed

in the Roman style; and we powder ourselves under the arms — all from an uneasy feeling of going astray and not being able to turn back anymore.

When the dancer read aloud again, what the young man had begun earlier to think about P.A., the man became very vivid without his being able to come to any conclusion. It occurred to him: P.A. was a great writer. But we must speak of a phenomenon that becomes increasingly clearer in this writer who has gradually been left behind: to the extent that he retreats from us, becomes less nuanced, more stereotyped, to that extent his contour is complete and becomes a sharp silhouette, as with people in front of an evening sky. If we turn around, we see him like that on a distant chain of hills, walking back and forth, always here and there over the same distance, with an almost incomprehensible lack of weariness, but distinguished by that sharp, sharp silhouette. His heights are called the hills of goodness and are nineteen hundred and eight years closer, in any case, than the last ones of the same name. He will never leave them again, and manages there a small apothecary: Grillon's laxative to induce a soft, exhilarating stool; decoctions from the tree of life for little girls who have gotten into trouble; flowers for melancholics; little, primitive hourglasses for the all-too frolicsome ones. He heals the soul with a hundred genuflections and the body with encouragements; he calls this awakening the life energies. He is at his best when he is laughed at. If a girl says to him: "Be nice, Peter; the Baron wants to come to see Paula tonight; sleep for just this once in the servant's room," then Peter, like the wise, dear elephant, like the earnest, considerate tapir, follows the wonderfully

beautiful, noble girl, and lays himself down on the servant's bed. "If it was a help to you," he says the next day to Paula. But if another one says, "Get lost, Peter! You are a dishrag, not a man!" — he gathers up his soft organs, lifts up his eyes to her once more and leaves. Leaves and stumbles again over his soul's intestines, drags them along, hears laughter, gathers them up into himself again with a patient gesture, and continues on. Continues nobly, sad and ridiculous, legendary, and with a face quite similar to our own... a Christ with a pince-nez of horn.

This occurred to the young man about the remarkable and beloved man P.A., while he wandered through his writings. Why? He didn't know. He would have been much more tender if he had not had all of that other business weighing on him. For which reason he finally became silent altogether, and somewhat sadly devoted himself to the little dancer all the more. But now not only because she danced wonderfully, but also because she read so poorly and because she made P.A. petty with her anxious efforts. A languorous longing rose in the air. This longing, he felt, is like the half-illuminated circus when one comes too early for the show. Blanche will appear, Blanche will smile, Blanche will accept the invitation of the Herr District Commissioner. She will be laid down at night in the great empty circus, where only a gas-lit star burns; and when one opens the door she will smell enchanted, like the clothes in mama's chest. And even at home, when he looked at the room in which he sat in the mirror and found it to be a bit unreal, he said to himself: one ought to follow that trail more often...feelings that have never become real, sudden, reckless flashes.... What was that like back then...and even

an hour ago? One ought not forget such things immediately....Then he thought of how he had seen Blanche one more time; it was the only kiss that she had ever given him, on the way to the train station in Leoben; he had been fifteen years old; Blanche was already somewhat gaunt in the face. "We are going away tomorrow, away from Europe," she said, "to Spain...."

[1911–1913?]

Péter Esterházy

Yes



Translated by Ferenc Takács

As my explanations here are probably above your understandings, lattle-brattons, though as augmentatively un-comparisoned as Cadwan, Cadwallon and Cadwalloner, I shall revert to a more expletive method which I frequently use when I have to sermo with muddlecrass pupils. Imagine for my purpose that you are a squad of urchins, snif-flynosed, goslingnecked, cloththeaded, tangled in your lacings, tingled in your pants, etsitaraw etcicero. And you, Bruno Nowlan, take your tongue out of your inkpot! As none of you knows javanese I will give all my easyfree translation of the old fabulist's parable. Allaboy Minor, take your head out of your satchel! Audi, Joe Peters! Ex-audi facts!

The Mookse and The Gripes.

Gentes and laitymen, fullstoppers and semicolonials, hybrids and lubberds!

FW 152.4–17

What were the thoughts of Leopold Bloom, no, start again, what were the thoughts of the author of the sentences that follow here when the afternoon of the Monday of Pentecost was in full bloom and, instead of basking in the warmth of the sun popping its head up above the

hills of Buda and pleasantly passing the time with his friends both male and female, exchanging words, *fermented words*, sentiments, even thoughts (*horribile dictu!*), he had to sit, a prisoner, in his shithole of a study working diligently to make the claim ironclad and failsafe that he is indeed the author of the sentences that follow here; yes, what were, then, the thoughts of the present author about the President of the Hungarian James Augustine Aloysious Joyce Society, *aka* Professor Ferenc Takács, the man who charged him with the task, carrying no doubt much accolade, of writing the sentences that follow here?

His thoughts, literally, in the words of Miklós Szentkuthy's translation of *Ulysses* in my Hungarian talk (and in Joyce's original words in the English version of my talk) were these: that the said worthy person, president and literary historian, should kiss *the plump mellow yellow smellow melons of his (the author's) rump, on each plump melonous hemisphere, in their mellow yellow furrow, with obscure prolonged provocative melonsmellonous osculation.*

The visible signs of postsatisfaction?

A silent contemplation: a tentative velation: a gradual abasement: a solicitous aversion: a proximate erection.

What followed this silent action? Somnolent invocation, less somnolent recognition, incipient excitation, cathetetical interrogation.

Let us, then, interrogate cathetically. What is it the author of these (and, no doubt, other) sentences should keep in mind?

He should keep in mind that Ellmann, Richard Ellmann, could identify the strumpets of Episode 15 by name.

The discovery of the author of these sentences: the number of pages of the *Scribbledehobble* notebook can be expressed as the difference between two multiple powers of the number two in that the number of pages equals two on the tenth power less two on the third power. Can this discovery be considered as a significant contribution to Joycean studies and, also, taken as evidence of the author's strong affinities with the spirit of OULIPO (*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*) as well as of his desires and instincts?

No, it cannot.

Then it is perhaps time for a spot of Commie-bashing?

No, it is not. What the hell does it have to with the present matter anyway?

Well, it was a passing thought. We could have fared much worse with a Hungarian free-association interior monologue... "Virág" is after all a "Hungarianized" name... But never mind that, forget about it, let me rephrase it: how would you translate, in this context, the old slogan "Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live ever after", the last bit, if I recollect it correctly, is '*budyet zhit*' in Russian?

Anna was, Livia is, Plurabelle's to be.

Does the Hungarian language have anything relevant to say to our present topic (the one we are in the dark about)?

It does. There are lots and lots of Hungarian phrases and adages that contain the word *virág*, that is, "flower," that is "bloom." It was *virág*, it is dry weed now. No *virág*

will wilt on his hat (meaning that the person in question is dumb, because instead of brains he has water in his head, and water is the sustenance of *virágs*, you see). Who loves a *virág*, cannot be a bad man. A written *virág* is often praised though never smelled. Not all *virágs* will have fruit. A spider can suck poison even from a *virág*.

Does all this make any useful sense?

Not much, really. But then a single *virág* never brings spring along.

Can the following interpolated text in German be considered a step towards the metalanguage that was Joyce's supreme ambition?

It cannot. In 1915 Joyce said to a friend of his that "I would like to possess a language above all languages, a language to which all other languages are ancillary" or something to that effect. Now if we think of the German text as Hungarian, or, in English translation, as English — the meaning of this is something everybody should work out for himself while he is on his own, at night, in the seclusion of his home doing his homework, and should, furthermore, consider the case when all this is translated into German — we think and act in truly Joycean spirit. In June 2004, on the occasion of Bloomsday 100, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* asked a number of literary notables to answer this question: *Haben Sie den Ulysses auch nicht gelesen? (You, too, haven't read Ulysses, have you?)* My answer ran as follows:

Péter Esterházy: Eine jämmerliche Frage

14. Juni 2004

Mit voller Entrüstung und ebenso voller Entschlossenheit weise ich die Umfrage der sicherlich renommierten und

sicherlich zu Kerneuropa gehörenden oder sich selbst jedenfalls dorthin zählenden, berühmten Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung zurück, da die Umfrage mit ihrer Oberflächlichkeit und ihrer lässig scherzenden Weise nicht nur jenem deutschen Geist eine primitive Falle stellt, ohne den eine solche Umfrage gar nicht erst vorstellbar wäre, und nicht etwa nur, weil diese Umfrage die europäische Tradition, auf die der „Ulysses“ (in beiden Werkformen!) zurückzuführen ist, kokett mißachtet, sondern weil sie sich wie eine gräßliche Ohrfeige jener intellektuellen Verantwortung gegenüber ausnimmt, die, genauer gesagt, ohne die. . . zum Teufel, jetzt habe ich den Anfang des Satzes vergessen.

Wie dem auch sei, diese jämmerliche Frage basiert auf dem mittelmäßigem Scherz, auf dem scheinbaren Witz, daß sich zwar alle auf Joyce berufen, ihn aber niemand liest, und wer ihn liest, ihn bald schon satt hat, wie eine Hündin, die grade sieben Welpen wirft, um es mit dem ungarischen Volksmund zu sagen. Nein, nein und nochmals nein. Ohne die eigene Person in den Vordergrund stellen zu wollen, möchte ich betonen, daß für mich die Lektüre des „Ulysses“ eine vergnügliche und leidenschaftliche Unterhaltung war, vor allem war sie leicht und natürlich, in ihrer Leichtigkeit nur mit den „Jerry Cotton“-Heften zu vergleichen, die in meiner geistigen Entwicklung übrigens ebenfalls eine bedeutende Rolle gespielt haben.

Was die Frage „Wovon handelt der Roman?“ betrifft, möchte ich mich mit einer konkreten Antwort, die alle feinfühligen geistigen Menschen demütigen würde, zurückhalten, bin aber jederzeit bereit, eine Prüfung vor Professor Klaus Reichert abzulegen, inklusive den Einteilungen der achtzehn Kapitel nach Farben, Schreibtechniken, künstlerischen (wissenschaftlichen) Ausrichtungen und Körperteilen, und für Interessierte würde ich gerne (naturgemäß auf Kosten der Redaktion) in Dublin eine Joyce-Tour durchführen, von der Eccles Street bis zum James Joyce Tower (früher Martello). Daß ich mit der Familie Virág aus Szombathely ein inniges Verhältnis habe, muß ich gar nicht erwähnen.

Als Abschlußdrohung möchte ich noch hinzufügen, daß ich aus „Finnegan's Wake“ das Kapitel „Anna Livia Plurabell“ frei erzählen kann.

(. . .)

Ich bestehe auf dem wörtlichen und ungekürzten Abdruck dieses Artikels. Meine Handküsse an die Redaktion.

P.S. Etwas übertreibend könnte man behaupten, daß seit dem „Ulysses“ alle (europäischen) Romane am 16. Juni spielen. Der ungarische Roman muß darüber hinaus noch wissen, daß an diesem Tag auch die Hinrichtung Imre Nagys, der Hauptfigur der 56er Revolution, stattgefunden hat (1958). Ein glückliches Zusammenspiel, könnte ein ungarischer Romanschriftsteller sagen, sagt ein ungarischer Romanschriftsteller.

I resist the temptation of summing up the meaning of the German text above. The coincidence mentioned in the postscript is indeed both felicitous and deeply significant. In my book *An Introduction to Literature* (1986) the time is 16 June, and this is the only specific temporal reference in the text, a date which is the day of all 20th-century fiction as well as the day of blackest shame in Hungary's 20th-century history, the day when Imre Nagy, Prime Minister of the Revolution of 1956, was executed in 1958. This duality, the interplay of sophisticated intertextuality and the omnipresence of the brutality of historical past, is characteristic of my book as well as, perhaps, of much of the so-called Central European literatures.

Ulysses came out in Hungarian in 1974, in Miklós Szentkuthy's translation, a work that was a meeting of congenial minds. (This was the second Hungarian version, following Endre Gáspár's *Ulysses* in 1947, a translation worthy of remembering.) For me, Joyce's voice, in Szentkuthy's translation, sounded very natural. I had no difficulty reading the book, and it gave me much pleasure. There is something in *Ulysses* that reminds one of Balzac, the ambition of totality, the way the book refuses to settle for anything less than the entire world. The novel as the mapping of the universe and, also, the vulnerability, the

exposure attendant on this ambition — this is what Joyce's case makes us see with exceptional clarity.

There were strong parallels between the aims of the scientists and the artists of the period. They seem to have been concerned with the same questions: time, space, experience and knowledge. For an example of this, I'm bringing Freud up not in connection to psychoanalysis and interior monologue, which has, of course, a very real connection to psychoanalysis. Rather, I see Freud as somebody who demolished our linear ideas about our lives, intervened in time and, we may say with some exaggeration, explored and exposed the structure of time. He showed and represented for us that life can only be seen and experienced in commented-on form, that comment and what is commented on are inseparable, that no status difference sets the two apart, that the signified and the signifier are found on the same plane. These are all narrative problems, too. These are the times when the picture in the gallery unexpectedly reciprocates the gaze of the spectator, when the picture is also viewing its viewer.

This is Wittgenstein's time: the limits of my language are the limits of my world.

Flaubert was the first to ask the questions of the twentieth century. For instance, the question of knowledge and knowability — witness *Bouvard and Pecuchet*. This is what Heisenberg and, a little later, Gödel, were concerned with. The nineteenth century saw the dignity of man in the possibility of omniscience: everything can be described, painted, known, and, oh, yes, Nature can be properly subjugated. The new century sees the dignity of man in the recognition and acceptance of limits. We know either the place or the speed of an ele-

mentary particle, but do what you will, and break your heart in the effort, you can't know both at the same time, and it is not because our instruments are still not good enough; it is impossible in principle. Impossible, period. And this kind of limitation holds true for those divine disciplines like mathematics, too, even if nobody expected this to happen, least of all Bertrand Russell.

The Tower of Babel has become the new symbol. Make no mistake: it was the Lord himself who confounded our language. This is the age of Einstein, the age that can't separate, because it does not find it useful to separate, space and time, the age that, also, immediately supersedes Einstein, too. Einstein, if you come to think of it, couldn't keep up with himself; yes, God plays with dice, it is not a matter of events, it is the probability of events that is the matter. Literature has always known about these things as much as science itself. Offhand, we could mention Sterne, and, after all, *Don Quijote* can also be described in the shape of a Moebius strip, a postmodernist snake biting its own tale.

This knowledge, including the knowledge of the impossibility of knowledge, attains a celebratory climax in Joyce. With him, personal time, historical time, mythic time, kidney time and God's own time become one universal time — I saw the delta of the Danube, I saw what it's like, I saw it with the imagery gaze of the nonexistent eyes of my Countess Hahn-Hahn, I saw the infinity of Danubes that make up the Danube, and you can't even say which is forward and which is backward, in which direction the river flows — and just as the novel is no longer able to confine itself to the universe of one particular story but becomes, always, the story of the universe, the pro-

tagonist of the novel becomes Everyman (who is who who is not Bloom?), everything and nobody, mirror, the reflection in the mirror (and the foil of the mirror!) where there is no sense in making distinctions between face and mask; he is the protagonist of all twentieth-century fiction, he is always *on* 16 June, he is the man without qualities who possesses the playful possibilities of the possibility of all qualities. The puppet is filled inside, Rilke says; he is the hollow man, Eliot says.

Should we return, by way of conclusion, to Hungarian fiction, perhaps with a view to the special Hungarian duality of 16 June, and in the hope of producing further dualities?

No, we should not.

Not even tangentially?

What can be best described by the name James Joyce is something that failed to happen in Hungarian fiction. Krúdy, Kosztolányi, Móricz, even Márai, failed to get this work done. Yes, the books were translated but it's not the same. Translation brings the news of things, not the things themselves. That is why the contemporary Hungarian novelist faces a double task: first he has to build what he will then dismantle, demolish or, pardon my language, deconstruct. He is standing above nothingness, which is also everything. This is an interesting and powerful predicament.

Nowadays literature is timid again, feeding the appetites of those who crave for stories — the kind of person whose life lacks a story and expects novels to deliver the missing story. I'm not against stories, it is the most beautiful thing if there is a story, but it is the most disastrous thing if we surrender to these ever-stronger demands of

conventionalism even when there is no story to tell. Let's learn the opposite of this timidity; let's learn ferocity, which is the most natural thing, from Joyce. We can learn the same from composers: from Ligeti and Kurtág, to mention the Hungarian ranks, and from my contemporaries, Jeney, Sáy, and Vidovszky, whose names almost constitute a single word in my mind, something like this: Jeney-Sáy-Vidovszky.

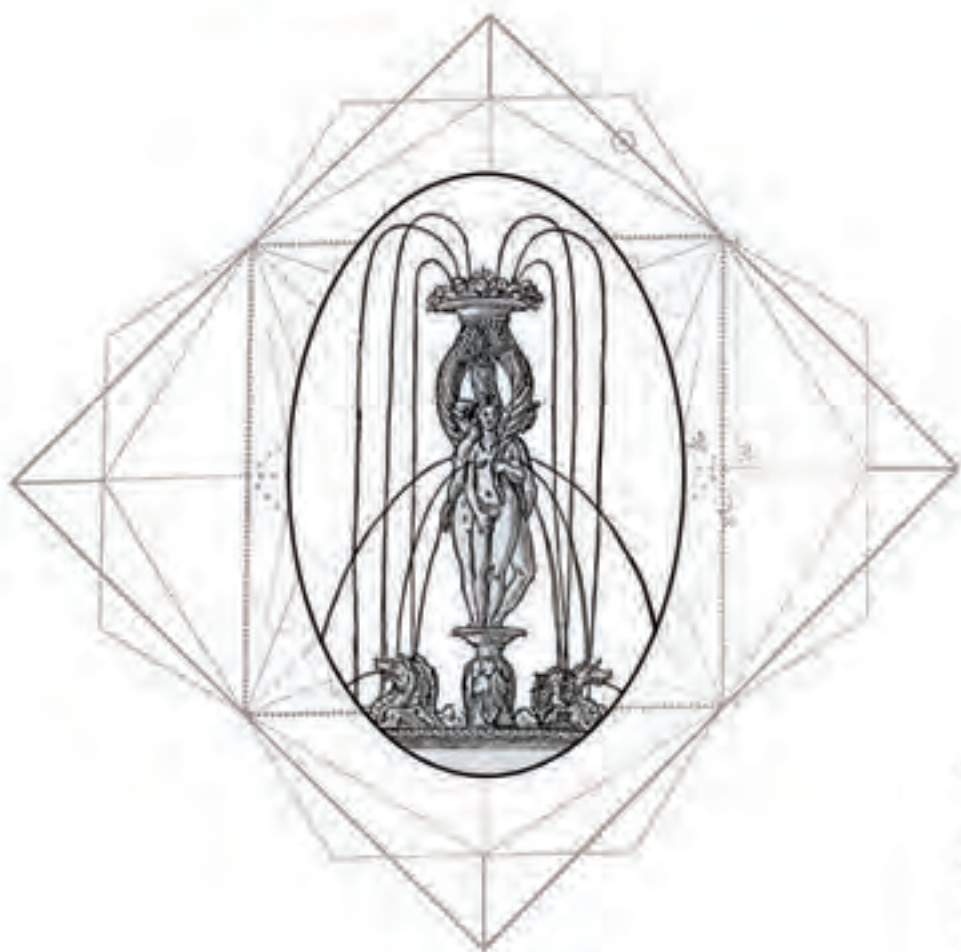
Wow, how warlike we have become towards the end! Shouldn't we find, rather, a more emphatic place for Molly's Yes, anticipated in the title?

Yes, we should.

Yes.

Élet és Irodalom, 28.07.2006

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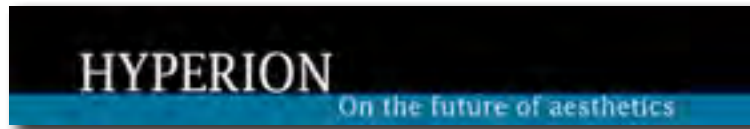
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Fritz Senn

**The *Odyssey*
Through Joycean Lenses**



Ulysses would not have been possible without Homer's *Odyssey*, but perhaps Joyce's *Ulysses* has also changed the *Odyssey*. The following non-expert speculations about the *Odyssey* are a consequence of a protracted involvement in Joyce's epic, but for once the direction is reversed, with the growing conviction that Homer's and Joyce's techniques, the way they handle language, have more in common than may have been put on record. The focus is not on matters of characters or actions, but on textual subtleties, on the lexical level of word relations, at times on word play that, to the best of my admittedly limited knowledge, have not been taken up by classical

philologists. The point of departure is that if the actual text of the *Odyssey* were given the same scrupulous or over-eager attention that some of us deploy on *Ulysses*, some features that tradition has not been carrying along might come to the surface.

They might, theoretically, also influence translations though, in the nature of the different possibilities of the languages involved, the changes would affect precisely those aspects that elude appropriate recreation. Another way of stating it, this essay (in the sense of a simple attempt) is to point out qualities that have rarely, if ever, become manifest in Homer translations. In my experience it seems that this has not even been endeavored.¹

Joyce's influence on Homer has become an intriguing pastime with all the hazards of over-reading. Interacting with Joycean close-ups I may willfully transfer an engrained reading habit, with its attendant distortions, to Homer. A mere dabbler in Greek, without the drill of proper instruction, may naively see, or invent, more minute relations than trained and well-informed experts do. To their judgment the following amateur gropings, a random series of select examples, are submitted.²

¹ This is quite in tune with some near impossibilities in adequate Joyce translations. The verbal transfer of a plausible mistake in English may well be out of reach for other languages, as when a typist erroneously, possibly as the result of emotional disturbance, inserts a gratuitous letter "I": "I called you naughty boy because I do not like that other world. Please tell me what is the meaning of that word?" (*U* 5.244). Few languages would allow an equivalent change in meaning by a minimal insertion, it is a significant change on a meta-level since it plays into the hands of a writer of fiction — which consists in creating illusory worlds out of words.

² In practice I am dealing with items not glossed in *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, 3 vols, ed. by Alfred Heubeck and Arie Hoekstra (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988–92).

The most common denominator for all the devices under inspection are verbal similarities as they are used by Joyce more than by most other writers and are intensified beyond limits in *Finnegans Wake* (outside the range of this attempt). In *Ulysses* they may consist in repartee, chance echoes, phonetic or semantic congestions ("Madden back Madden's a maddening back," *U* 14.1519), slips of the tongue (a "wife's admirers" are close to her "advisers," *U* 12.762), word play, whether clever ("lecturer on French letters to the youth of Ireland," *U* 9.1101) or forced ("What opera resembles a railway line? ... The Rose of Castile ... Rows of cast steel," *U* 7.514, 589),³ the comic or lewd potential of names, such as "Cockburn" (*U* 12.231), "Opisso" (*U* 18,1466), and analogous applications.

Some of Homer's analogous devices are on record. The best-known instance, Odysseus calling himself "Outis," Nobody, and so outwitting the naïve Kyklops, is so conspicuous that it could not be overlooked. Homer notably plays with names elsewhere. The beggar Arnaïos is called "Iros ... because he used to run on errands" like the divine messenger Iris. When challenged in combat, "Iros" may become "Airos" (he is "un-Irosed," *Od* 18.73).⁴

³ Quotations refer to James Joyce, *Ulysses*. The Corrected Text, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (London: The Bodley Head, 1986). It is customary to cite by episode and line numbers.

⁴ Quotations by book and line follow The Loeb Classical Library Edition, *Homer: the Odyssey*, with an English translation by A. T. Murray (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919).

O-dys-seus

Odysseus is introduced not by his name but by his epithet, “*polytropos*” (much turned, much traveled, versatile, many-faceted) before he is named in the assembly of the gods in Book 1, where Zeus in a leisurely causerie complains that humans generally blame the gods for all evils and yet are mainly responsible for their own fate. He picks out Aigisthos, who killed his mother against explicit divine warning, so his deed was a transgression, beyond what was ordained, “*hyper moron*” (*Od* 1.35, “*moros*”: what is allotted by Fate).

At this point Pallas Athene, impatient, bursts in with a spirited appeal for her protégé: “But my heart is rent for wise Odysseus,” who is “*dysmoros*,” hapless, ill-starred, unlucky. Whereas Aigisthos acted beyond, in the teeth of, Fate, Odysseus had Fate, the allotted portion, pitted against him. What is maintained here is the emphasis on an accidental “*dys-*” in his name, it has no etymological basis, but it is deployed as a contrast: Aigisthos sinned against his apportioned lot (*moros*), Odysseus became its victim. He is the man whose actions go *dys*, wrong, bad, against him; this distinguishes him from the other heroes returning from Troy. Without “*dys*,” that is, misadventures, there are no plots worth telling, and certainly no *Odyssey*, which is a series of *dys*-adventures from which its protagonist extricates himself by cunning strategies adapted to each occasion. As it happens, on a minor, everyday scale, a lot also goes *dys* in

Bloom's day, from the girl next door turning the wrong way out of the butcher's,⁵ all the way to Molly's affair.

Odysseus is called "*dysmoros*" on more occasions, when he is drifting in the sea, or when described by Philoitios, it is finally what his old father calls him (*Od* 7.270, 20.194, 24.290), and again when, almost gratuitously teasing his father, he talks about himself in the third person and characterizes himself as "*dysmoros*" (*Od* 24.311). Towards the end of Book V, when he is fighting the waves, we are told that, if Athene had not given him courage, "hapless" (*dystenos*) Odysseus would have "perished beyond his fate" (*hyper moron*, *Od* 5:436); and again "*hyper moron*" is contrasted with a different adjective: "*dys-tênos*," which has already been applied to Odysseus earlier on (*Od* 1:55), or by Menelaos (*Od* 4:182,) by Athene (13:331) or Telemachos (*Od* 17:10), he is a wretched one ("*dystênnon*," *Od* 17.483, again ("*dystênos*" wanderer, *Od* 17.501); Penelope refers to him by the same adjective (*Od* 19:354), and so does his father Laertes (*Od* 24: 289). Compounds on *dys-* are his trademark. Within the same context Zephyros, the West Wind, is called "*dysasaês*" (ill-blowing) when it, along with the other winds, sends the hapless man a destructive wave (*Od* 5.295). When he is finally safe among the bushes of Phaiakia, he still fears the night bringing pain or discomfort: "*dyskêdea nykta*" (*Od* 5.466).

When Penelope converses with the beggar who is her husband — whom she may (less likely) or may not

⁵ "Mr Bloom pointed quickly. To catch up and walk behind her if she went slowly, behind her moving hams. ... She stood outside the shop in sunlight and sauntered lazily to the right. He sighed down his nose: they never understand." (*U* 4.147)

(more probably) recognize — she decides on the fateful trial of the bow. Drastically changing the subject to her recent dream, she announces that the “morn of evil name” has come: “êôs ... *dysônymos*,” it is immediately followed by “which is to cut me off from the house of Odysseus,” with nearly echoing sounds (*Od* 19.571).

Homer, like Joyce, may accommodate lucky coincidences. Odysseus, hearing the screams of Nausikaa and her companions, emerges from under the bushes he has been sleeping in; the phrasing is “*hypedyseto dios Odysseus*” (*Od* 6.127), where a wholly unrelated and non-etymological syllable “-*dys*-” intrudes; “-*edyseto*” is an aorist form of the verb *dyein*. At this moment Odysseus is at his lowest point, helpless, without even clothes and totally dependent on support — that is to say, never more “*dys*” or “nobody” in the whole poem. A slight phonetic pattern, “*hypedyseto dios Odysseus*,” might underline the possible connection. The form “*hypedyseto*” only occurs in this passage.

When in that first session on Olympos Athene introduces the name, its very first occurrence, she underlines it with alliterative force: “*Odysêi daiphroni daietai hêtôr*” (literal: “[for] Odysseus wise is torn [my] heart”). She soon provides more phonetic emphasis by throwing in that Kalypso, daughter of Atlas, “keeps back the unlucky sorrowing man”: where “... *dystênon odyromenon*” almost echoes and scrambles the name (*Od* 1.55). As though to top this, she famously concludes: “Why do you have such wrath against him, O Zeus?” — ending with an emphatic “*ôdysao, Zeu*” (*Od* 1.62). She is manifestly playing upon the derivation of his name, which

is explained as a suggestion of his grandfather, the tricky Autolykos, who describes himself as “one who has been angered with many” (“*odyssamenos*”) and so the child should be named “*Odysseus*” (*Od* 19.407–9). This play with the name is inscribed into the epic and has frequently been pointed out. It is as though Athene by orchestrating a tangle of echoing “*dys*” and “*ody-*” or “*ôdy-*” sounds were dinning in the name in phonetic modulation to remind her chatty father that it is time for supportive action.

The name of the nymph Kalypso looks like an *ad hoc* derivation from the verb *kalyptein*, to cover, envelop, hide. She has been hiding Odysseus on her island for seven years. In the Homerically named “Calypso” episode of *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom and her husband play a complex game of hiding and revealing.⁶ In Book V of the *Odyssey*, Kalypso is forced by divine decree to release her former lover and send him off on a raft. On which occasion she is covering her head with a veil, called “*kalyptrên*” (*Od* 5.232). Angry Poseidon, Odysseus’ arch-enemy, smashes the raft and forces him to swim for dear life until he reaches the safe shore of the Phaiakians where, utterly exhausted and destitute, he finds shelter under bushes. He covers or envelops himself with leaves: “*Odysseus phylloisi kalypsato*,” where the verb nearly spells the name of the goddess who has been hiding him. The adventure closes with Athene shedding sleep in his eyes and enfolding his lids so that his “toilsome weariness” might end; the word for enfolding, “*amphikalypsas*” in

⁶ A letter from Bloom’s rival Boylan for example is conspicuously half hidden: “A strip of torn envelope peeped from under the dimpled pillow” (*U* 4.308).

fact closes the fifth book (*Od* 5.493). Somehow having the name Kalypso towards the beginning and at the very end of the song envelops (“*amphi-*,” around, on each side) the episode. The adjective for the toilsome weariness is “*dysponeos*” (from “*ponos*,” labor, hardship) and adds another “*dys-*” so that the two main protagonists deviously seem to come full circle.

Under, Out, and Forward

A case in point of what appears to have been overlooked is a passage in Book 6 where Nausikaa and her companions are driven to the beach to do their laundry, a place where springs provide clear water. Practically all translations render the lines under discussion in basically the same manner, expected variants in wording apart: “Now when they were come to the beautiful stream of the river, where truly were the unfailing cisterns, and bright water welled up free from beneath, and flowed past, enough to wash the foulest garments clean, there the girls unharnessed the mules from under the chariot and [turned] them loose” (*Od* 6.84–8, B&L 95).

Greek verbs abound in prefixes, sometimes Homer puts two together, and on rare occasions joins even three of them. In the original the water wells up from under (*hyp*), flows out (*ek*), and then forward (*pro*), which results in an unusual but very graphic combination: “*hypekprorheen*” (*Od* 6.87). This is matched in similar, parallel construction in the line immediately following: they loosened (*lys-*) the mules from the harness, in an identical triple prefix: “*hyp-ek-pro-lysan*” (*Od* 6.88). Clearly some playful echoing is going on. Clearly? Either

the commentators take the salient ripple on the surface for granted or consider it beneath their dignity, or else it has escaped critical attention. A fairly recent commentary glosses “*hypekproreen*” (a variant of the verb in some editions) by merely referring to its present tense, but not its internal connection.⁷ To a reader of *Ulysses* it looks as if its joker in residence, Lenehan, could have produced something of the sort.

A combination of the same three prefixes attached to a verb for fleeing is linked to Charybdis, the whirlpool, when Odysseus wonders how he could escape from its deadly clutches: the form is again a very graphic “*hypekprophygomai*” (*Od* 12.114). He uses the identical combination with Pallas Athene when the slaughter of the suitors becomes imminent: how could he escape — “*hypekprophygomai*” (*Od* 20.43) — from their avengers. It is glossed in the *Commentary of Homer’s Odyssey*: “*hypekprophygomai*: the compounded prepositions that create this unusually long verb suggest that Odysseus will need to get ‘out from under’ and then move ‘ahead’ of the threat of vengeance from the families of the murdered suitors” (III, 120).

Spectral Knees

The word for Odysseus, woken up by the screams of the girls on the beach playing with a ball, coming forth from the bushes, “*hypedysato*” (*Od* 6.127), has already been commented on because of its coincidental *-dys-*. Its construction is similar: “*hyp-e-...*” (*ek* losing its *k* before

⁷ Alfred Heubeck, Stephanie West, J.B. Hainsworth [eds], *A Commentary on Homer’s Odyssey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) I, 289.

certain consonants); he also then “came forward,” in fact like a shaggy lion (*Od* 6:130). Joyce commented on the scene. Odysseus, “when he advanced, naked, to meet the young princess, he hid from her maidenly eyes the parts that mattered of his brine-soaked, barnacle-encrusted body.” He was “the first gentleman of Europe.”⁸

The scene is worth a close look. As Odysseus approaches the bevy of young girls, with a protective leafy branch in one hand, and not a great sight, he considers the best way of addressing the princess, who is the only one to meet him undismayed. He ponders whether he should clasp her knees (*gounôn*) or else, standing apart, beseech her with gentle words. With almost the same phrasing he decides it would be preferable to remain at a distance and use the gentle words, “lest the maiden’s heart should be wroth with him if he clasped her knees (*gouna*).” Such a move might be misconstrued (and what would he do with the branch anyway?). Words are preferable to the physical contact of knees (“*gouna*”).

What Odysseus then utters is “*Gounoumai se... .*” For one fleeting moment an audience picking up “*goun-*” might wonder what Odysseus is doing with her knee after all, but the full verb is merely metaphorical: “I beseech you,” a figurative, not physical touch. It is at least possible to conceive of a potentially erotic misdirection. None of the translations inspected aim at a possible erotic ripple, it is out of their notice, interest, or range.

As it happens, knees are featured in Joyce’s voyeuristic “*Nausicaa*” episode. Gerty MacDowell “ ...

⁸ Frank Budgen, *Joyce and the Making of “Ulysses”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) 17.

caught her knee in her hands,” Bloom “... had a full view high up above her knee,” and there are decorous genuflections in a nearby Church (*U* 13.696, 729, 675). But then Joyce, relying on translations, probably never came across the original verb “*Gounoumai*.”

Undertones

A possible lewd undercurrent may be at work when Odysseus faces Agamemnon in the underworld. Agamemnon has good reason to feel bitter about women since his wife Klytaimnestra was a party in murdering him on his return: “there is nothing more dread or more shameless than” such a woman and he condemns the whole sex. But he pointedly excepts the wife of Odysseus, Penelope, who is very prudent and “of an understanding heart” (*Od* 11.420–46). The formula frequently used in the epos for this feature is “*mêdea oide*,” literally “she knows *mêdea*,” that is, discretion, schemes, or devices. But an outwardly identical word *mêdea*, of different origin, has the meaning of “genitals, private parts.” As such it occurs precisely in the scene when just out of the bushes Odysseus discretely hides his own “*mêdea*” from the sight of the innocent maidens (*Od* 6.129). Later on the beggar Iros is threatened to have his “*mêdea*” torn out and fed to the dogs (*Od* 18.870); after killing Melanthios the victors of the slaughter tear out his *mêdea* and give them to the dogs (*Od* 22.476, translators tend to use euphemisms like “nakedness” or “vitals”). Whatever Homer wanted to convey, it is a lexical fact that two unrelated words coincide. One can imagine sniggering schoolboys discovering them in a dictionary and being sternly

reprimanded. It is conceivable, at least, to imagine Agamemnon, jealous of his still living companion with a wife awaiting him, hitting below the lexical belt with a psychological double entendre. Bloom's wife, at any rate, does "know *mêdea*."

Homer may or may not exploit minor verbal coincidences. According to custom, Menelaos does not immediately ask his guest, Telemachos, for his name in conversation (Book 4). Yet when Helena makes her stately appearance she instinctively notices his similarity to Odysseus. She instantly takes over and becomes the dominating figure. Her entry is impressive, she comes forth in style, attended by handmaids, sits down upon a chair, and "below was a footstool for the feet," "*thrênys posin*" (Od 4.120–37). There are several variants for the dative plural of "*pous*," foot, metric convenience usually determining the choice; the form used in this passage is "*posín*." Sitting down she turns to her husband to ask who the strangers are; the word for husband in the accusative is "*pósin*"; the accent alone differentiates the feet "*posín*" from the husband ("*pósin*"), but they are close enough to speculate whether perhaps Menelaos is no more than her footstool. He is in fact subordinate, the renowned Helena's husband merely: it was she who wreaked so much havoc, the cause of a protracted and disastrous war.

Matters of Tone

In *Ulysses* certain words stand out conspicuously and get the full limelight. They might be shocking (when the sea is called "scrotumtightening") or strange ("Agenbite of Inwit" is a Middle English loan translation from Latin

"*Remorsus Conscientiae*," the remorse of conscience, *U* 1.481), and foreign as when Bloom has to explain the Greek term "metempsychosis," which Molly pronounced as "Met him pike hoses" (*U* 4.539, 8.112). Homer features at least one, a powerful *a-â-a-tos* with three a's in succession, a long "a" between two short ones (the word stands little chance of getting into print, officious editors tend to shorten it to two a's). Its meaning has been given as "decisive, ruinous, destructive, perilous, awful...." It is applied to the impending trial of the bow, the "decisive contest," "*aethlon aaaton*" (*Od* 21.91). When at the climax Odysseus is finally in possession of the bow and facing all the unarmed suitors, he takes up the phrase: this "*aaatos* contest is now ended": "*aethlos aaatos ektetelesthai*" (*Od* 22.5), before he shoots the first arrow at Antinoos, his chief antagonist. Even without knowledge of Greek the phonetic impact of the short and weighty passage can be felt: the four a's in "*aethlos aaatos*" are succeeded by four rapid short e's, "*ektetelesthai*." The line allows for performative scope; it can be spoken in a defiant, vindictive, even nasty tone. The power of the ominous adjective is hard to convey in translation and comes out far less ponderous, threatening, fateful or poignant.⁹

⁹"One venturous game this hand hath won today." (*The Odyssey of Homer*. Translated by Alexander Pope [London: Oxford University Press, 1925] 339); "This prize, though difficult, hath been achieved." (*The Odyssey of Homer*. Translated by William Cowper [London: J. M. Dent, 1920] 325); "Lo, now is this terrible trial ended at last." (*The Odyssey of Homer*, done into English Prose by S. H. Butcher & A. Lang [London: Macmillan, 1887] 359); "So the dread ordeal ends." (*The Odyssey. Homer*. Translated by George Herbert Palmer [New York: Bantam Books, 1962] 265); "So the great game is played." (*Homer. The Odyssey*. Translated by W.H.D. Rouse [New York: New American Library, 1937] 243); "So much for that. Your clean-cut game is over." (*Homer. The Odyssey*. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald [New York: Doubleday, 1963] 409); "Now at last / the crucial test is at an end."

A similar tone may express resentment when Kalypso is told that she has to release her lover after seven years. The messenger is Hermes, who is accorded a somewhat curt welcome when he unexpectedly arrives in far away Ogygia. It was custom among mortals and probably gods that a guest was to be treated to a meal first, and serious matters were to follow afterwards. Kalypso knows her guest (gods know each other) and with almost undisguised misgivings blurts out her question: “Why have you come here?” and then adds a courteous “honored and welcome, *philos*.” She urges him to state his mission straightway and precedes it with a less than welcoming clause: “My heart bids me fulfill it, if fulfill it I can, and it is a thing that has fulfillment” (*Od* 5.87–90). Even in translation the preliminary hedging sounds more cautious than cordial, but more so in the original, where “fulfillment” is based on the word “*telos*”: “*telesai de me thymos anôgen, ei dynamai telesai ge kai ei tetelesmenon estin*.” Here the reduplication of short e-sounds (“*telesai ... telesai ... tetelesmenon*”) lends itself to an embittered intonation.

Homeric epithets have something grand or stately about them, they are often formulaic: the Myrmidons are

(*The Odyssey of Homer*. A New Verse Translation by Allen Mandelbaum [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990] 445); “Look—your crucial test is finished, now, at last!” (Homer. *The Odyssey*. Translated by Robert Fagles [New York: Penguin Books, 1996] 439); “So indeed our harmful contest is ending.” (Homer. *The Odyssey*. Translated by Edward McCrorie [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004] 317); “So here is one hard trial brought to its end.” (Homer. *The Odyssey*. Translated by Martin Hammond [London: Duckworth, 2000] 226); “The match is played and won!” (Homer. *The Odyssey*. Translated by E. V. Rieu [London: Penguin Books, 1946] 338). Or a free rendering: “Now that we’ve separated the men from the boys ...” (*The Odyssey*. Translated by Stanley Lombardo [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000] 336).

“enchesimôrois,” “eager with spears,” “champion spearmen” (*enchos*, spear: the second element is uncertain; *Od* 3.188, also *Iliad* 2:692, 840). This is on a par with *“iomôros,” “eager with arrows”* (*“ios” Iliad* 4:242, 14.479). A similar propensity can be transferred to the dogs seeing Odysseus approach the hut of Eumaios: *“kynes hylakomôroi”*; *“prone to barking,”* they attack him (*Od* 14:29). But later on, when Telemachos arrives, the *“bark-prone”* dogs notoriously do not bark, but fawn (a sign of their knowing him, as Odysseus points out): *“kynes hylakomôroi, ouk’ hylaon”* (*Od* 16.5). Dogs doing their duty may well deserve a resounding epithet, but nevertheless there is something bathetic (and humorous) about dogs being characterized like battling heroes, and possibly a touch of parody.

Wandering

Most of the intricacies of a Greek original are beyond the grasp of translations. A passage in book 14 can demonstrate how the impact and tone of a rejoinder may change. Odysseus disguised as a beggar has arrived at the hut of Eumaios, who instantly laments the absence of his master. Odysseus pretends to want to know the name of this master, perhaps, he suggests, he has seen him on his wanderings and may have news. Eumaios dubiously retorts that travelling strangers are likely to invent convenient reports in order to ingratiate themselves to their hosts and their tales don’t deserve much credence. Such an air of distrust pervades the Nostos part of the *Odyssey* (and, incidentally of the Eumaeus episode): Odysseus is generally the suspicious one but here the

tables are turned against him. This is the version as given by Butcher & Lang:

...tell me, if perchance I may know him, being such an one as thou sayest. For Zeus, methinks, and the other deathless gods know whether I may bring tidings of having seen him; for I have wandered far. (Butcher & Lang 226)

Then the swineherd, a master of men, answers him:

Old man, no wanderer who may come hither and bring tidings of him can win the ear of his wife and his dear son; but lightly do vagrants lie when they need entertainment, and care not to tell truth. Whosoever comes straying to the land of Ithaca goes to my mistress and speaks words of guile. And she receives him kindly and lovingly and inquires of all things, and the tears fall from her eyelids for weeping, as is meet for a woman when her lord hath died afar. And quickly enough wouldst thou too, old man, forge a tale, if any would but give thee a mantle and a doublet for raiment.¹⁰ (*Od* 14.119–3)

Eumaios picks up on “wandered far”: wanderers or travellers will tell tactical lies, and so does “every one who finds his way” here. Odysseus, the resourceful inventor of stories, is warned. In Greek the passage plays with variant repetitions of “wandering”; the verb is *alaomai* (I wander, rove) from a root “*alâ*” or “*alê*,” it spawns related noun and verb forms. Odysseus had ended, I have wandered far: “*polla d’alêthên*”; Eumaios rejoins with three different

¹⁰ *The Odyssey of Homer*, done into English Prose by S.H. Butcher & A. Lang (London: Macmillan, 1887) 359.

formations, words based on “*alê-*” or “*alâ-*” (marked here for emphasis):

ô geron, ou tis keinon anêr *alalêmenos* elthôn
angellôn peiseie gunaika te kai philon hyion,
all' allôs komidês kechrêmenoî andres *alêtai*
pseudont', oud' ethelousin alêthea muthêsasthai.
hos de k'*alêteuôn* Ithakês es dêmon hikêtai,
elthôn es despoinan emên apatêlia bazei. (*Od* 14.119–3)

A wanderer is first “*anêr alalêmenos*,” a man who is wandering (participle of the verb), then there are “*andres alêtai*,” men who are vagrants (a noun), an alternative word is “*alêteuôn*,” from a closely related verb. It is easy to see why translators — if they noticed the similarities at all — do not follow suit, since a close succession of “wanderer” or “wandering” might have sounded too ineptly monotonous. But without the repetitions it is far less obvious that Eumaios is throwing the word back at his guest, possibly with a notably mistrustful or mocking tone.

That travelling strangers don't tell the truth is said twice: they lie (“*pseudont*”), they do not care to tell the truth (“*oud' ethelousin alêthea muthêsasthai*”). The word used for truth in Greek is “*alêthea*”; it is wholly unrelated to wandering but, as it happens, only minimally different from “*alêthên*,” the departing point. Those who “*alêthên*” do not speak “*alêthea*.” Wanderers wander from the truth. Eumaios is pointedly exploiting a chance similarity: he is in fact punning. His speech is cunningly orchestrated, the passage is vibrant with echoes and taunts. It makes the swineherd a match for resourceful Odysseus.

A grace note may have slipped in when Eumaios addresses his unrecognized master as “Old man” and then goes on to say “not one of those wanderers ...,” in the

original: “*ou tis...*” Unwittingly he uses the form for “not anyone,” close to the name Odysseus gave himself in the cave of the Kyklops, Outis, and which was so propitiously misunderstood by the grudging fellow Kyklopes and efficiently saved Odysseus’ skin. The powerless beggar of no identity or possession is at this juncture in effect once more a nobody.

Eumaios goes on: “And quickly enough wouldst thou too, old man, forge a tale” — “*epos paratektênaio*” (*Od* 14:131). This aptly describes what the disguised beggar will produce, a tale that is fashioned (-tekt-; a *tektôn* is a skilled craftsman or carpenter, the same root is in “architect”) alongside (*para-*) the truth. Eumaios is right, Odysseus will claim that he came from Krete undergoing various adventures but was stranded on Ithaka; his later tales equally depart from the facts but bring him to Ithaka by alternative routes. To “*para-tektainomai*” is to construct something alongside, to invent a fiction that may be close to, but not identical with, reality. Odysseus excels at that in the following episodes, until the final showdown in book 23, he will make up fake or para-biographies, plausible falsehoods, to account for his presence. He is the *archi-paratektôn*, throughout, not only fabricating apposite yarns but also suspecting others of the same tricks. Odysseus is the one who is versatile at *para-tektoning*, twisting the facts strategically. In some sense this also applies to *Ulysses* as a *paratektoning* of the *Odyssey*, or, if you want, a Parodyyssey.

The verb “*paratektainomai*” (a middle form) occurs only here and once in the *Iliad* when the Achaians seem to retreat, unwilling to fight, and Nestor remarks

that not even Zeus could change or prevent it; more literally, he could not “contrive it otherwise” (Il. 14:54).

Protean Changes

Homer may have prefigured Joyce in making language act out the theme at hand, in doing what it says. This also notably happens in the tale of how Menelaos managed to get hold of Proteus, the old man of the sea, who continually changed his shapes, by following the instructions given by Eidothea, his own daughter. She, too, is a goddess of shapes: “*eidos*” (appearance, originally connected with seeing). Menelaos and his companions have to hide under sealskins, that is take on the deceptive shape of seals, and once Proteus has counted them he can be forcefully grasped and then questioned.

This happens as foretold. “At noon the old man came from the sea, found the fatted seals, and he went over all, and counted their number,” “*lekto d' arithmon*”; the form “*lekto*” is an aorist of the verb *legein* (to count, or tell, it is to be found in words like “dialect, lexicon, catalogue,” et cetera). “Among the creatures he counted us first,¹¹ and in his mind did not suspect any guile”; here the past form of the same verb is “*lege*” in the imperfect tense. The story goes on: “*epeita de lekto kai autos*” (Od 4:450–4), “*lekto ...*” — what is he counting again? But here “*lekto*” is the aorist form of a different verb, whose root is *lech-*; Proteus is lying down to sleep. The second form “*lekto*” is deceptive, the same appearance or shape as

¹¹ “... he counted us first.” In Greek, Proteus “counted us first = *prôtous*,” as though to echoingly underline that Proteus might be the prime matter.

before, but an altered meaning. While “*lekto*” and “*lege*” are variant tense forms of the same activity, an identical “*lekto*” signifies a different one. We cannot trust appearances in reality or words. Language plays out what is at stake. Joyce, who undoubtedly was unaware of the intricacies of Greek conjugations, uses analogous techniques, above all in his “Proteus” episode, which deals, according to his own schema, with Philology and sports many words that look the same and yet are not: “mare,” “lap,” “loom,” “weeds,” etc.

Echoing reinforcement seems to be a device. When Polyphemos, the *Kyklops*, has been plied with strong wine, he falls on his back: “*pesen hyptios*” (from “*hyp*”) and then drops into sleep, “*hypnos*” (*Od* 9.372–3). The words are unrelated but the sound similarity links the two necessary conditions for the blinding; the giant lies face upwards and is unconscious and therefore helpless.

Similarity of sounds is a timeless expedient, in the service of playfulness, emphasis, or as a source for errors. “That’s how poets write. The similar sounds” (*U* 8.64) thinks Leopold Bloom; what he has in mind is rhymes, but it can easily be extended to misunderstandings, puns, or distortions, witty or forced, as when he remembers ‘Molly’s “base barreltone” for “bass baritone”’ (*U* 8.117). It ranges from mere uneducated sound transitions: “Pyrrhus, sir? Pyrrhus, a pier” (*U* 2.26), to shrewdly distorted quotations: “And going forth he met Butterly,” which is only two phonetic steps from “And going forth he *wept bitterly*” (*Mat.* 26:75; *U* 1.527). Joyce exploited similarities or coincidences throughout. Many poets and writers forestalled him, including Homer.

Much Ado about *Outis*

The best-known case of sleight of word is Odysseus tricking the cannibalistic Kyklops with his name. He calls himself "*Outis*," nobody, by forming a name out of the combination of "*ou*" ("not") and "*tis*" ("somebody"), and highlights it by enunciating, in an almost schoolmasterly fashion, both the nominative and the accusative case: "*Outis* is my name, and *Outin* call me my mother and father" (*Od* 9.366). When his single eye has been destroyed he cries out to his fellow Kyklopes (who are not known to care for each other) for help. When they assemble outside the cave in obvious resentment of being summoned in the middle of the night they list the two unlikely causes for such an alarm: someone might be stealing his flocks or would be trying to murder him, "by guile or by force." The way they phrase it in both cases is "*mê tis*...." In Greek the negation "*ou*" can syntactically change to "*mê*" (analogous perhaps to English "some" and "any"); it is clear they dismiss both possibilities. So when Polyphemos, with a decisive lack of clarifying redundancy, answers that it is "Outis who is murdering me by guile and not by force," they find themselves confirmed that no one, "*ou tis*" (as he phrases it), or "*mê tis*" (as they suspected), is molesting him and they abandon him unaided. In the original the semantic shifts come across as far more subtle, as well as natural, than in any translation.

Homer then compounds the verbal tangle. Odysseus is congratulating himself: "My heart laughed that my name and cunning (cleverness/stratagem) had deceived him" (*Od*. 9.414–5). The noun used is "*mêtis*,"

wholly unconnected to the preceding “*mê tis*,” a mere phonetic chance; “*mêtis*” (skill, astuteness, council, scheming) is the dominant quality of Odysseus, whose frequent epithet is “*polymêtis*” (of many devices). If Homer brings it off here, he could do it elsewhere, as it is posited in the examples adduced.

Right afterwards the Kyklops, blind and in pain, is groaning and travailing in anguish: “*ôdinôn odynêsi*,” which sounds like another echo (*ôdi-*, *ody-*) of the perpetrator. By his later admission he reveals that a soothsayer had predicted the loss of his sight, but he never expected it to be achieved by such a puny and worthless, “*outidanos*,” man, the word is, and he had already called him “*outidanos ... Outis*” (*Od* 9.515, 460).

Once the connection between Outis, “*ou tis*,” “*mê tis*,” and “*mêtis*” is established, it can be unobtrusively evoked. When Odysseus has to hold himself in control he addresses his heart to remember his escape from the Kyklopes due to his subtlety (*mêtis*, *Od* 20.20). A similar occurrence is when he, still in the guise of an unidentified beggar and so a non-entity, is questioned by Penelope as to who he is and where from. His answer begins with an address, “*Ô gynai*” (lady), followed by “no one of mortals could find fault with thee ...,” “*ouk an tis ...*” (*Od* 19.105–7), an extended form of “*ou tis*” (“*ouk*” is the form before vowels, “*an*” a conditional particle). There may be a latent hint by Odysseus, or possibly a narrative nod. There translations almost automatically use “no-one” or “nobody.”

The motif precedes the mention of the actual trickery with the name in Book 9. Odysseus, who enters

the epos fairly late (in Book 5), is foreshadowed thematically as well as verbally. Telemachos asks his host Nestor about the possible fate of his father, and Nestor descends into rambling reminiscences about the war of Troy, where “no man (*ou tis*) ventured to vie with him [Odysseus] in counsel (*mêtin*), since Odysseus excelled in all manner of wiles” (*Od* 3.120). The proximity of “*ou tis*,” “*mêtin*” (counsel or cunning, accusative) and Odysseus anticipates the adventure as it is told later.

What’s in a name? For all of Book 7 and 8 the Phaiakians do not know who their shipwrecked guest is and they become more gradually curious, but finally he is asked to reveal his name. King Alkinoos points out that “there is no one in all mankind who is nameless.” The key terms are “*ou ... tis anônymos est*” (*Od* 8.552); they foreshadow the wrong name that deceived the Kyklopes. The audience naturally cannot yet pick up what may strike someone familiar with the whole epic by hindsight. This sort of veiled anticipation is a common feature with Joyce, where the echo often precedes the report, especially in *Finnegans Wake*. In *Ulysses* already a first time reader coming upon Bloom’s unstressed remark, “The kettle is boiling,” and his observation that the kettle is “On the boil sure enough” (*U* 4.264, 271), cannot possibly extract the name of Bloom’s rival, Boylan, who is on his mind all day.¹²

When in Scheria Odysseus walks towards the city Athene surrounds him with a thick mist, “so that no one of the Phaiakians meeting him would speak mockingly to

¹² The link is later embedded in the jocular remark “I’m Boylan with impatience” (*U*10.486 11.289).

him”: and again we find a coincidental “*mê tis ...*” (*Od* 7:16). Invisible and as yet without status as a guest he is essentially a nobody. Such low-key echoes are ubiquitous.¹³

One among many proposed etymologies of Odysseus is an account given by Silenos of Chios whereby Antikleia, mother of Odysseus, surprised on her way by a rain caused by Zeus, gave birth to her son “*kata tên hodon hysen ho Zeus*,” and according to this speculation the name is synthezized from the fragments *od*, *hys*, and (*Z*)*eus*. We know that Joyce took note of this derivation when he copied “*Epeidê kata tên / odon ysen ho Zeus*” [sic].¹⁴ It is conceivable that such speculations were familiar to Homer, in which case the phrasing of Odysseus as to how he arrived, “*allên hodon alla keleutha / êlthomen: outô pou Zeus êthele mêtisasthai*” (*Od* 9.261), literally “by another way, another path / we have come; thus Zeus wanted to devise it.” That the word for devising contains “*mêtis*” makes an undercurrent hint less unlikely. The “rain of Zeus” occurs (9.358).

Assembly of Words

Homer often uses readymade formulae for routine events so that the epic resounds in almost stereotype repetitions. As though to lighten the monotony, such acts can be exaggerated with a flavor of parody. At the beginning of

¹³ Odysseus, hiding his name, had emphasized that his mother and father had called him Outin, where the verb for calling is “*kiklêskousti*” (*Od* 9.366) and has the consonant structure of *Kyklops*, so that Nobody and *Kyklops* are already in phonetic opposition.

¹⁴ Phillip F. Herring, *Joyce's Ulysses Notesheets in the British Museum* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972) 30; Roscher I, 374.

Book 2 Telemachos calls an assembly; he "...bade the clear-voiced heralds to summon to the assembly the long-haired Achaïans." This is done in almost mechanical repetition: "And the heralds made the summons and the Achaïans assembled quickly. Now when they were assembled and met together, [Telemachos] went to the assembly ..." (*Od.* 2.6–10).

The passage seems to be pivoting around two roots. The word for herald is "*kêryx*," what they do is "*kêryssein*," to gather people is built around the verb "*ageirein*," the assembly place is the "*agorê*," and more derivatives are thrown in. They are highlighted in the transcription

Aipsa de **kêrykessi** ligyphthongoisi keleuse
Kêryssein agorênde karê komoôntas Achaïous.
Hoi men **ekêrysson**, toi **d'êgeironto** mal' ôka.
Autar epei r' **êgerthen** homêgerees t'egenonto,
Bê r' imen eis **agorên**. (*Od.* 2.6–10)

An illustrative but impossible translation of the effect might sound like: "He bade the clear-voiced heralds to herald the long-haired Achaïans to the gathering-place. Those heralded, they gathered. And when they had gathered together Telemachos came to the gathering place." In Greek of course the various forms with their inflections sound far less monotone, but a touch of mockery may be made out, quite apart from a series of *ep- êg- êg- eg-* in a single line. Joyce flaunts similar effects in *Ulysses*: "When one reads these strange pages of one long gone one feels that one is at one with one who once..." (*U3.144*). The most extreme example occurs in the Sirens episode:

Bald Pat who is bothered mitred the napkins.
Pat is a waiter hard of his hearing. Pat is a waiter
who waits while you wait. Hee hee hee hee. He
waits while you wait. Hee hee. A waiter is he.
Hee hee hee hee. He waits while you wait. While
you wait if you wait he will wait while you wait.
Hee hee hee hee. Hoh. Wait while you wait. (*U*
11.915)

Many of the above items can be attributed to mere coincidence, a perennial risk of nitpicking interpretation. But then one can only assert that coincidences of this sort are more dominantly frequent in Joyce than in most other writers — and, perhaps, also in the *Odyssey*.

Homer might have indulged in some lexical sleight of hand. A minor, almost feminist trait might be seen in the censorious term for the suitors, they are overbearing, wanton, arrogant — “*hyperênoreontes*,” a participle made up of *hyper*, and the word for man, *anêr*, whose accusative form is the first word in the *Odyssey*: “*Andra moi ennepe*” — [the] *man*, tell me, O Muse ... It is a wholly positive word, a worthy theme for the whole epic. Yet an excess of it does not result in a superman or a Nietzschean “*Übermensch*” (*U* 1:708), but it is a reproach, it designates inconsiderate, reckless, brutal virility. It is also the goddess Kalypso who issues one of the first feminist manifestoes when she complains that, while male gods are allowed to have all kinds of affairs, goddesses are denied such license and their engagements with mortal men often end in disaster (*Od* 5.117–35).

Homer scholars may decide whether the above speculations are due to a Joycean distortive twist of mind. In all likelihood Joyce, who was dependent on translations — though he might have spelled out an occasional word

in the Greek original — never set eyes on the examples paraded here. But writers of his kind may sharpen our observation for seeing more verbal animation in classical texts than they have been credited with for a long time. After Joyce, Homer may never be quite the same again. Perhaps metempsychosis is at work after all, transmigration injected in reverse.

Dominic Siracusa



1, 2, 3 *Odysseys* in Translation: Shame or Pride?

The outcome of any translation depends on a set of variables and, generally speaking, the more ancient the text, the more multiplicity it enjoys across translations over time. In the case of *The Odyssey*, for example, we have a text born under an oral tradition, likely changing from narrator to narrator, making it impossible to credit the work to one mind or to interpret the epic according to the intentions of a single author. When committed to the page, the work was inevitably altered, to various degrees

of course, according to the scribe's background or subjectivity. We must also account for language, whose meaning morphs considerably between different cultural contexts and time periods, or even simply due to the ambiguity behind a phoneme or grapheme. Moreover, the epic as a whole, although today it remains pagan and thus polytheistic in nature, cannot be said to have entirely survived certain moral redactions at Christian hands.

The translator himself also plays a large part in these variables. When it comes to an ancient text we must consider not only his erudition and philological skills in the source language but also his expertise in the target language: sometimes a modern tongue may fail to capture all the nuances of a 'dead' one, yet such depends heavily on the translator's ability to bend the target language to his needs and to those of his audience. There is also the choice of what version of a text one is translating: *The Odyssey*, as many ancient tales, is a collage of myths spawned by different cultures that, if one re-introduces them into a translation, alter significantly the paradigm of the text. Yet another factor is how one treats the lacunae that may exist within the epic: does the translator decide to leave these textual gaps where they may present themselves, or does he opt to fill them in? There is also a fine line between translation and interpretation, between fidelity and poetic liberty, that the translator must run: at what point does translation cease to be an unbiased rendering of a text and begin to act as the sum of a translator's own intentions?

Paradoxically, in some cases, it is the translator who adopts a unique philological approach to a text who is accused of embellishment. For example, certain

versions of a text have over time become canonical and have in turn influenced the ways in which it is read as well as how a translator renders it in another language. Yet language is not science; it is ambiguous on multiple levels and easily lends itself to different interpretations and translations. Often alternate versions (be it a different manuscript guided by another philological approach or the re-insertion of a mythical paradigm into a certain passage), alternate readings and translations (prompted by a unique sensibility and supported by new discoveries) which deviate from what has long been established are inevitably met with resistance and deemed outlandish in order to protect the sanctity of the canon. Since a widely accepted version does not imply a definitive or authoritative version, we cannot speak of a text, reading, or translation that is truer or more correct to an original than another for no original actually exists.

Each translation of *The Odyssey* is then the result of all of these different variables; a unique cosmos that has evolved along certain lines and will only continue to evolve as the reader interacts with it. To demonstrate such a phenomenon, I present four translations of a passage from book 6: one by Robert Fagles in English (1996), which is one of the more widely accepted renderings; one by Emilio Villa in Italian (1964, then revised in 1972 and again in 1994), which has been largely rejected by traditional Greek scholars in Italy and today has an almost cultish following; my English translation of Villa's Italian translation (introducing yet another set of variables); and finally, for comparative purposes, another Italian translation by Ippolito Pindemonte, which,

although first published in 1822, was still the prevalent translation in Italian schools throughout the 20th century.

To give the passage some context, I will briefly elaborate the preceding events: after hearing Athena's pleas, Zeus decrees to release Odysseus from Calypso's spell and allow him to embark on his journey home. Offended by the decision, Poseidon hurls Odysseus's raft into a great storm, forcing our protagonist to swim ashore. Tired, tattered, and unaware of his locus, Odysseus falls asleep amidst some brush. The next morning he is awoken by the sound of young maidens playing in a nearby river and after a monologue in which he considers whether the group is friend or foe, Odysseus decides to reveal himself...

Fagles

Muttering so, great Odysseus crept out of the bushes,
stripping off with his massive hand a leafy branch
from the tangled olive growth to shield his body,
hide his private parts. And out he stalked
as a mountain lion exultant in his power
strides through wind and rain and his eyes blaze
and he charges sheep or oxen or chases wild deer
but his hunger drives him on to go for flocks,
even to raid the best-defended homestead.
So Odysseus moved out...
about to mingle with all those lovely girls,
naked now as he was, for the need drove him on,
[...].

Pindemonte

Ciò detto, uscì l'eroe fuor degli arbusti,
E con la man gagliarda in quel, che uscì,
Scemò la selva d'un foglioso ramo,
Che velame gli valse ai fianchi intorno.
Quale dal natio monte, ove la pioggia
Sostenne, e i venti impetuosi, cala

Leon, che nelle sue forze confida:
Foco son gli occhi suoi; greggia, ed armento,
O le cerva salvatiche, al digiuno
Ventre ubbidendo, parimente assalta,
Nè, perchè senta ogni pastore in guardia,
Tutto teme investir l'ovile ancora:
Tal, benchè nudo, sen veniva Ulisse,
Necessità stringendolo, [...]

Villa

[...] Così disse, il chiaro Odisseo, e sbucò
fuor dai cespugli. Dal fitto groviglio dei rami,
con la mano muscolosa, ne divelse allora uno,
le foglie ancora attaccate, da legare intorno ai muscoli
delle anche, onde sorreggere i genitali. E partì: pareva
un leone delle montagne, fiero della sua forza,
e che, bagnato dalla pioggia e sferzato dal vento,
con gli occhi febbricitanti, assalta pecore e bovi,
o incalza cerva selvatiche: è il ventre che comanda
e lo spinge ad aggredire i greggi, penetrando
fin nell'interno di stalle ben difese. Così
Odisseo quando fu sul punto di intrufolarsi
tra le ragazze delle belle chiome: ed era nudo!
ma non poteva far altro. [...]

A Translation of Villa's Italian

[...] So he said, clear Odysseus, and leapt
from the bushes. From the thick tangle of branches,
with strong hand, he then stripped one,
with leaves still attached, to tie around the muscles
of his waist, where to support his genitals. And he set out:
he seemed a mountain lion, proud of his strength,
and that, soaked by rain and whipped by wind,
with feverish eyes, attacks sheep and cattle,
or chases wild deer: it's the stomach that commands
pushing him to assail the flocks, penetrating
the heart of well-defended stables. This was
Odysseus on the verge of prowling
among the girls with beautiful locks: and he was naked!
but there was nothing else he could do. [...]

All three renderings of the passage are extremely rich in their own right and manifest a great deal of expertise in the art of translation, yet Villa's sets itself apart from the others for several reasons, most glaringly when it comes to the line describing what Odysseus does with his genitalia. We read, in Villa, "sorreggere i gentili": while, in Italian, the verb "reggere" also means to hold or support, "so-reggere" implies that the branch has a function of holding up, propping, raising or lifting. In other words, the protagonist does not hide his manhood from the girls but rather, as if on a pedestal, proudly puts it on display. In Fagles, instead, we read the branch is used "to hide his private parts" while Pindemonte similarly renders it as "velame gli valse ai fianchi intorno" [serving as a veil around his hips].

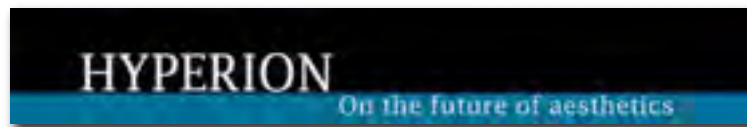
As mentioned above, the reasons for such a radical difference lie in the choices these respective translators made in their sources. Although differing in tone and register, both Fagles' and Pindemonte's translations adhere to more or less the same narrative, demonstrating that they were guided by a more traditional or canonical text. That version has, over time, taken on a more Christian tinge, in that there is an element of shame in nudity, one that strongly resembles that found in the Bible, i.e. the punishment God inflicts on man and woman prior to expelling them from the Garden. Villa, however, draws upon a vast collage of myths and languages (such as those spoken throughout Mesopotamia) that helped shape the epic's narrative long before the dawn of Christianity and consequently frees the epic of, among other things, the religion's ideological encrustations.

All the cultural, spiritual, and ritualistic aspects of a primordial man abound in these myths and consequently are rife with implications that an ancient audience would have immediately recognized when hearing the epic but have long since been lost to the modern ear. And the treatment of Odysseus's genitalia supports this: the fact that he chooses to enhance his member clearly points to early concepts of virility. Logically speaking, why would Odysseus, the great tactician, the world traveler, the envy of both gods and men, the quintessential representation of strength and prowess (further underscored by the lion metaphor in the passage) be concerned with covering his manhood in front of a gaggle of young ladies?

Both textual and para-textual examples support the opposite, demonstrating that what is found in Villa's version should not be dismissed as an embellishment, poetic liberty, or gratuitous insertion for shock value, but rather taken as evidence of philological rigor that opens the text to new interpretative possibilities. With regard to para-textual examples, an anthropologist would cite any number of 'primitive' statuettes where the artist has exaggerated the phallus to such a degree that it almost equals in size the figure itself, or even to an ancient mating ritual in which the male puts on show in order to attract a female (which really isn't that ancient at all, or only ancient). More specifically, concerning the epic itself, we have included at the head of this essay an early visual translation of our passage that still survives today: Odysseus approaches Nausicca (daughter of King Alcinous, head of the maidens) holding two forked branches. Curiously, the depiction found on the vase is more sexually explicit than Villa's rendering, for this Odysseus

requires two branches in order to support his manhood and furthermore there are no leaves on those branches, implying that there is nothing to detract from what is on display.

Remaining entirely within the text itself, we find that Villa's rendering makes more sense within the context of the passage and exposes how those by Fagles and Pindemonte really do not seem to add up. How is it that, in those two versions, Odysseus exits the brush sporting his impromptu veil but then, at the end of these lines, finds himself nude again? Did he somehow lose it along the way? If so, why is this crucial narrative element lacking from the passage? In other words, in the more traditional versions, the continuity of the narrative is clearly broken by the insertion, or rather re-writing, of that one verse at the hand of a different ideology, while in Villa, said continuity is restored: the protagonist was "supporting," not covering, and thus always remained nude. And, as Villa translates, cutting with a bit of comic relief the air of seriousness that typically envelops the text: "ma non poteva far altro" [but there was nothing else he could do].



RAINER J. HANSHE
DESIRE & DISTANCE



On Harald Hutter's *Again, I Saw...*

The inarticulate whisper, the nearness of the distant, the body alone: in space, in time, silent & contemplative. The body as a listening instrument, each pore like an ear bent to every uncertain, hesitant utterance, yet, is it always acute? Isolated in togetherness, together in isolation. The impact of space upon the body, of the body upon space, of bodies upon other bodies and time, the impact of time's slow, pervasive movement into the flesh, into consciousness, as lives *unspool* in swift absence: — the

absence of the other while present, the absence of the self before itself.

In these melancholic moments, in the repose of solitude, the tenderness of a hand, its fragility, its strangeness; uncanny moments born of tenderness and of tenderness shattered. Does the shattered body listen, or turn cold, languid, diffident? The desire for unity, the fear of suffocation, of unity grown excessive, of unity as oppressive and engulfing: — when love is but fear of too strong a solitude, or fear of solitude's terrible pressure; when love is not love but fear of self, fear of the vicissitudes, of the edges & extremities of one's own pressing consciousness. When solitude is no longer desired, despite all protestations of independence & freedom; when solitude mutates into isolation, loneliness, anguish. Unbeknownst to who it afflicts, this shift from state to state is terrifying, sharp, like the volte-face Orpheus makes toward Eurydice — it is a devastating & ultimately violent turn, one which destroys. The longing for certainty is the longing for death.

The paradox of the both strong & weak, both timid & bold, self — as, briefly, curtains open to reveal, to conceal, as the sea of sheets engulf, or open into expansive terrain, the self gains the strength necessary to reveal its fragility. Yet, only those capable of fragility are truly strong — they alone are bold enough to risk dissimulation. The decay of matter; the decay of flesh; the decay of the body thru time. To understand this is to resist immortalization; to remain resolutely anti-metaphysical. To know we evaporate like steam. Like desire. And that we are meant to. The fragility of love, of desire, of being. Amorphous, evanescent: — as misty and opaque as the

windows Hutter photographs, as protective and delicate as the curtains billowing or hanging still in each window. Sheets, glass, sky; fog, rain, shadows. Hutter's blurred, painterly images capture the blurred obscurity of the self. Reality's irreality. When too prosaic, reality is lost, severed from its oneiric roots, its eerie opacity. If one doubts the veracity of the unconscious, of forces beyond our will, one cannot doubt the presence of dark matter. One can balk at Freud, not physics.

Beds like doorways, windows to the self; to broken selves, to the emboldening tenderness of intimacy, to selves restored and shattered again. To love is to risk shattering. The diaphanous curtain, the torn, rippled, and *marked* sheet; not soiled, but rife with *the marks of desire*: — from folds to ripples to moist spots of liquefied eros; each sheet like a map of the self, maps frequently made vulgar by the world. To photograph desire and its remnants is to be a cartographer of eros; to give dignity to what others ignobly name soiled. The marks of the sheet, its multiple forms of play = oceans, mountains, rivers; borders and boundaries; empty and open terrain; caverns and seas; grottoes and groves. The forest of the self and bodies in play — each person, each helix of lovers a country and a continent, the earth and the surrounding cosmos flattened into a sheet. And the lovers explode, expand, dissipate.

Light touching like a hand, like lips; light as tender and exposing as desire, as the expansion and dissipation of eros. . . . Darkness fills space like bodies fill time, darkness not an emptiness but the *transient, persisting residue of bodies* imbuing the space of a room, a street, a café, with the energy of existence — the spent and

savored energy of desire. Dust is but flesh unknowingly swept away, selves discarded without thought, disintegrating in silence, as swift and fleeting as the orphic turn.

Energy is eternal delight, true, but delight can fall like snow and dissolve into the resolute melancholy of intimacy, of bodies becoming part of a room or landscape, of landscapes rooms or places becoming part of the bodies before them, and of the billowing, anguished distance that thereupon follows. Of inarticulate being, of flustered expressions. All pervading the self like an intrusive & persistent fog. Attentive to fragility, ever watchful, Hutter captures these elusive states: — his eyes sensitive, alert, poised to the moment, to the unexpected gesture, to the startling perspective, perched at the always receding edge of time (the approach of death, yet not death as final finality but as end of desire, end of eros, end of intimacy, of intimacy's failure, of intimacy's misprision, of intimacy as the prison and castle of solitude *and* unity, this more abiding and nuanced intermingling, if you will: dialectic), of the fade, of the fading play of eros and desire, of the inarticulate whisper & the agony of the nearness of the distant, all of which emerges in each image of *Again, I Saw*. . . Hutter makes visible what is felt and the space of his photographs is so enticing that some have pronounced a desire to live in them.

27 August 2014

Caylus–Paris

Again, I Saw Désir et Distance

Chuchotements inarticulés, proximité du lointain, le corps seul: dans l'espace, dans le temps, silencieux et contemplatif. Le corps comme instrument d'écoute, chaque pore comme une oreille tendue vers chaque parole incertaine, hésitante, mais, est-il toujours à l'écoute ? Isolé dans la proximité, proche dans l'isolement. L'impact de l'espace sur le corps, du corps sur l'espace, des corps sur d'autres corps et temps, impact du mouvement lent et pénétrant du temps, qui s'infiltre dans la chair, dans la conscience, alors que la vie se *débobine* dans une rapide absence : — l'absence de l'autre alors qu'il est présent, l'absence du *soi* face à lui-même.

Dans ces moments mélancoliques, dans le repos de la solitude, la tendresse d'une main, sa fragilité, son étrangeté ; moments unheimlich nés de la tendresse et de la tendresse brisée. Est-ce que le corps brisé écoute, ou est-ce qu'il se refroidit, languide, hésitant ? Le désir d'unité, la peur de l'étouffement, de l'unité devenue excessive, de l'unité oppressante et dominante: — quand l'amour n'est que peur d'une trop forte solitude, ou peur de la pression terrifiante de la solitude ; quand l'amour n'est pas l'amour mais plutôt la peur du soi, peur des vicissitudes inhérentes aux limites & aux bords de sa propre conscience pressante. Quand la solitude n'est plus désirée, en dépit de toutes les protestations d'indépendance et de liberté ; quand la solitude se mue en isolement, dérélition, angoisse. A l'insu de celui qui en est affligé, ce glissement d'un état à l'autre est terrifiant,

tranchant, comme la volte-face d'Orphée Eurydice — un retour dévastateur et finalement violent, qui détruit. Le désir ardent de certitude est un désir de mort.

Paradoxe du moi à la fois fort et faible, timide et audacieux — alors que brièvement des rideaux s'ouvrent, dévoilent puis dissimulent ; alors qu'une mer de draps engloutit, ou dévoile un vaste territoire, le soi s'affermir assez pour laisser deviner sa fragilité. Pourtant, seuls ceux qui sont capables de fragilité sont vraiment forts — seuls ceux-là ont l'audace de la dissimulation. La décomposition de la matière ; la décomposition de la chair ; la décomposition du corps dans le temps. Comprendre cela c'est résister à l'immortalisation ; c'est demeurer résolument antimétaphysique. Savoir que nous nous évaporons. Comme le désir. Et que c'est ainsi qu'il doit en être de nous. Fragilité de l'amour, du désir, de l'être. Amorphe, évanescent : — aussi brumeux et opaque que les fenêtres que Hutter photographie, aussi protecteur et délicat que les rideaux qui ondulent ou qui pendent immobiles à chaque fenêtre. Draps, verre, ciel ; brouillard, pluie, ombres. Le flou des images picturales d'Hutter saisissent l'obscurité floue du soi. L'irréalité de la réalité. Trop prosaïque, la réalité est perdue, coupée de ses racines oniriques, de son étrange opacité. Si on doute de la véracité de l'inconscient, de forces au-delà de notre volonté, on ne peut pas douter de la présence de la matière obscure. On peut s'opposer à Freud, mais pas à la physique.

Des lits comme des seuils, des fenêtres donnant sur le soi ; sur des soi brisés, sur la tendresse revigorante de l'intimité, des soi restitués et brisés de nouveau. Aimer c'est prendre le risque de la brisure. Le rideau diaphane,

le drap déchiré, ridé, *marqué* ; non pas souillé, mais riche des *traces du désir* : — des plis aux ondulations, jusqu'aux traces humides de l'éros liquéfié; chaque drap comme une carte du *moi*, cartes fréquemment rendues vulgaires par le monde. Photographier le désir et ses vestiges c'est être le cartographe de l'éros ; c'est donner de la dignité à ce que d'autres basement disent souillé. Les marques du drap, ses multiples formes de jeux = océans, montagnes, rivières ; frontières et limites ; terrains vides et ouverts ; cavernes et océans ; grottes et bosquets. La forêt du *soi* et des corps en jeu — chaque personne, chaque volute d'amants, un pays et un continent, la terre et le cosmos qui l'entourent aplatis dans un drap. Et les amants explosent, s'accroissent, se dissipent.

Lumière qui touche comme une main, comme des lèvres ; lumière aussi tendre et révélatrice que le désir, que l'expansion et la dissipation de l'éros... La noirceur remplit l'espace comme les corps remplissent le temps, noirceur non pas comme vide mais comme *résidu évanescent et persistant des corps* qui imprègnent l'espace d'une chambre, d'une rue, d'un café, avec l'énergie de l'existence — l'énergie épuisée et savourée du désir. La poussière n'est rien de plus que la chair balayée par mégarde, *soi* jetés sans y penser, se désintégrant en silence, aussi rapidement et furtivement qu'e l'orphique volte-face.

L'énergie est l'éternel délice, certes, mais le délice peut tomber comme la neige et se dissoudre dans la mélancolie résolue de l'intimité, de corps se fondant dans une chambre ou un paysage, paysages chambres ou lieux se fondant aux corps devant eux, et à la tourbillonnante et anxieuse distance qui s'ensuit. Des êtres inarticulés, des

expressions troublées, toutes imprégnant le moi comme un brouillard insistant et intrusif. Attentif à la fragilité, toujours vigilant, Hutter saisit ces états élusifs : — ses yeux sensibles, alertes, enracinés dans le moment, dans le geste inattendu, dans la perspective surprenante, perchés au seuil du temps en fuite permanente (l'approche de la mort, pourtant pas la mort comme dernière finalité mais comme fin du désir, fin de l'éros, fin de l'intimité, fin de l'échec de l'intimité, du *mesprisioun* de l'intimité, de l'intimité comme prison et château de la solitude et de l'unité, cet entrelacs plus nuancé et continu, si l'on veut: dialectique), de l'effacement, du jeu effaçant de l'éros et du désir, du chuchotement inarticulé et de l'agonie de la proximité du lointain, tout ce qui ressort de chaque image of *Again, I Saw...* Hutter rend visible ce qui est ressenti et l'espace de ses photographies est si séduisant que certains ont même déclaré leur désir d'y vivre.

27 Aouts 2014

Caylus–Paris

[Traduit de l'anglais par Rachel Seghetchian]

Harald Hutter

Again, I Saw...





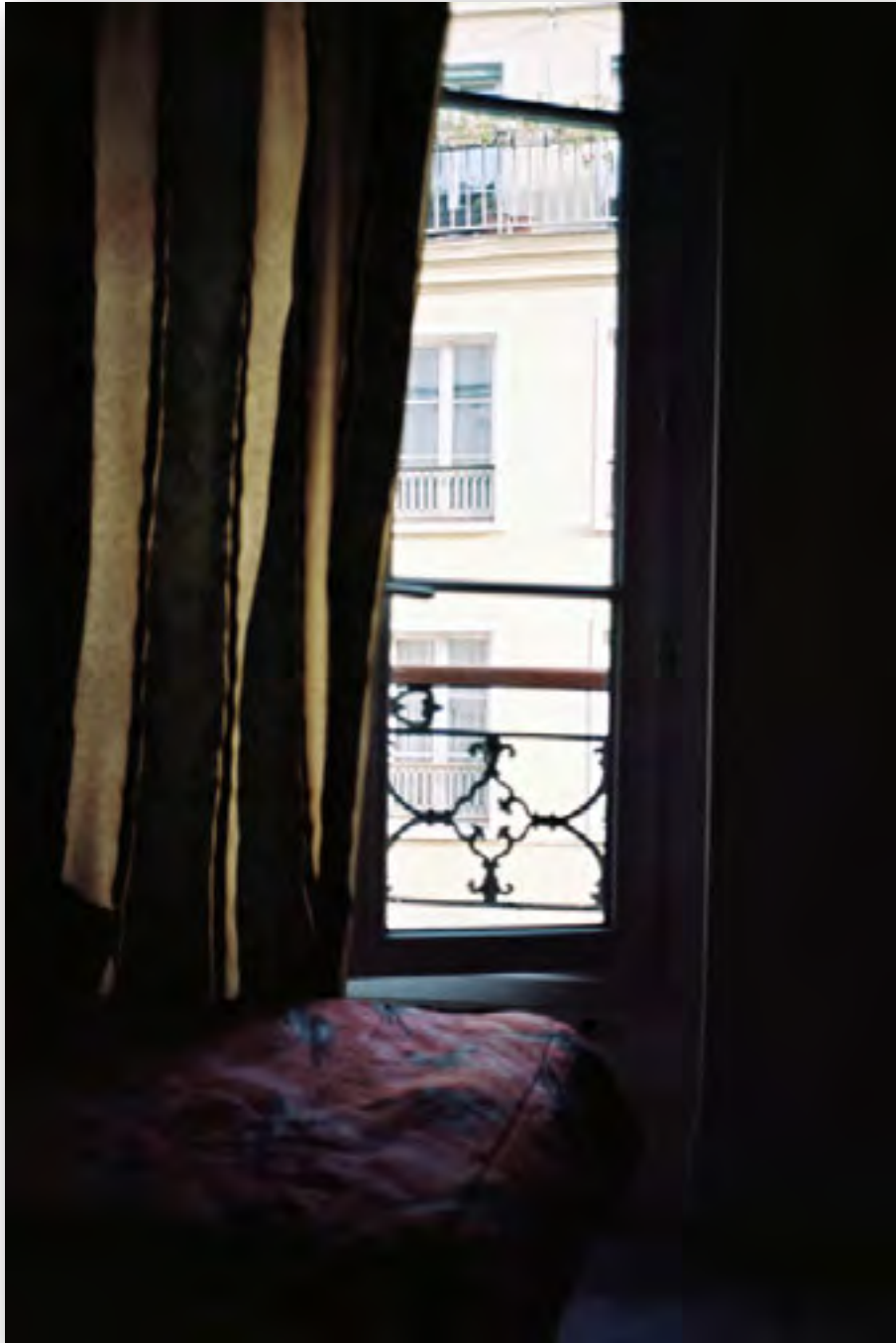
























TITLE LIST

1. *Paris, Winter*, 2013
2. *Foot*, 2014
3. *Garden*, 2014
4. *Barbican*, 2012
5. *Paris, Summer*, 2013
6. *Hand & Eye*, 2013
7. *Knee*, 2014
8. *Evening*, 2013
9. *Fleur*, 2014
10. *Arboretum (No, She Said)*, 2014
11. *Hand & Sheet*, 2014
12. *Belleville*, 2013
13. *Florian*, 2014
14. *Sans Titre (sheet)*, 2014

*Note: All images are C-prints — 60 x 80cm (or 80 x 60cm).

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Imre Szemethy

**The Vanishing Points of Metropolitan
Electroplasma**



On the Drawings of Sári Gerlőczy

The vulgarly shaved primate has long been struggling for an idea, how he could pinpoint his intimations independently from reason, taking as his guide the phonetics of the medium freshly come to his or her dunces after a half-swoon.

In her domesticated forsakenness Sári Gerlőczy brings to mind precisely the ancient Egyptian Bieder II, when she alludes in her work with aborgiastic difference

and sophisticated transparency, to the ethereal sentence snatches of the Sibyls tumultuously revoloving yet again.

He who brings forth these drawings out of the realm of visions is the *nonplusultor* of mysterious never-seen anatomies, the pre-requisitioning treasurer of Nereus's prophesying, making a dynamic distinction in favor of mysticism, the shapes of smoke, flame, ☼ wave; negotiating our way into chancy meta-phrase, the bearers of all walks of passion.

The positive deduction of some complementaritiveness of function, as though the free movement of the confraternity of citizenship straying onto the misshapen rock of finance poiesis could jointly form the shapeless shift of flavor in the climactic zone of liberal-menshevism, which we could otherwise regard, according to a different art-historical set-splitting, as a club-caprice ordered up the dillygraph pole, or as a patterned puzzledom of peculiarity and irregularity.

It is worthy of operatic laurels how she links natural coincidence and subaltern foetus-rubber with valiant eloquence into blind instinct within a single questionnaire, and dedoubling our time insists on the question: is perchance her cutcutting noughtnutricard an anthymen to the maker of brootygum wackingjabs, or is it rather a storiograph glimpsed in untrodden space on astronomical lorry-welding's majesticul?

Miklós Szentkuthy



If I were to give a title to a study of Sári Gerlőczy's drawings — something that unfortunately, or rather, thank God, is out of the question here — it would be most certainly, *The Apotheosis of the Line*. As it is a well-known fact even in the nurseries of art history, the triumphant protagonists of the millennial history of art are many-colored paintings and statues — the latter dwindling in number. What comes to mind now is, however, the drawings and incisions of the ancient vases of pre-historical man: perhaps the first image in the Ur-world was a line, line, line, scratching, incision, and there is hardly anything more exciting than to see how this archaeological content comes to bloom in the most passionate spring in these most 20th-century pictures — Lascaux cave drawings, Greek vases coming in the wake of Picasso's ballet designs

and his Minotaur series (the thousands of similar lines and line-interludes should be looked up in encyclopedias).

The subjects of these drawings fuse, in the most exciting fashion, the two great (eternal or transient?) European mythological currents: pagan erotic (ancient erotic, world-all-erotic), and the medieval *religio catholica's* imagery and world of beliefs replete with Golgothas, crowns of thorns, haloes, chalices and hosts. Incestuous kisses and communion with a Beato Angelico air have the same meaning here. These drawings have uprooted the psychological bases of all the world's myths from the soil diligently belabored by the Jungs and Freuds (others may have belabored it with even more robust spades, digging even deeper, in much earlier times) and — what is of concern in these marginalia — it is almost eerie how on these sketches, on the formulae of a thousand-and-one senses, on the single-line hieroglyphs of pre-historical to 20th-century man: in fact nothing else is ever rendered but the human shape (from the ovum to the dance of the angels: Sári Gerlőczy has not narrowed the range of her infra-homo- and ultra-homo-graphic tonalities); the objects, landscapes of everyday life, are hardly as much as glimpsed.

Are her motifs (those certain formulae, sex-mathematical figures, the bare-to-the-bone hieroglyphs of psyche and nature): monotonous, blackly and obsessively ever-recurring refrains? Embryos, stillborns, Christ-heads dropping on the chest, those forever unwilling to live, victims of pointless sacrifices on the invisible altars of unknown gods: the author of the drawings is the first to affirm the ghostly ever-presence of these motifs (by far not

her only motifs) and their repetitiveness, and will do this compelled by psychological, biological, mythological, chemical, cosmological necessity, not ashamed in the least, but proudly. The psychological reason for this? Nativity, death, sex, misery, hunger for a saving annunciation, despair and orgy, our thirst for faith, our impotent blaspheming. This is the point where we have to pinpoint, with a nail harder than the one that fastened Christ's feet to the cross, that there is no greater pleasure and no greater historical truth than to discover the pressing relationship of a work of art with all the ideas of its age, especially its scientific thinking. We have here done with Jung and Freud (whether they are valuable or not — one way or another, they play an immense role).

What about the drawings' confraternity with biology? *Molto semplice*, this: the figures morph, proliferate a thousand times over, masculine and feminine are exchanged with playful antics and with the thousand, and thousand-sensed, possibilities of live animal bodies ("polyvalence," this is how the brainy term it — for the nonce, they are right). This is expressed on the drawings now with the thousand arms of Hindu mythological legendry, now with the microscopic photography of cell biology. Between the stations of Calvary one "recommended reading" (as the current phrase has it) is Henrik Steinmann's book *The Mating of Animals*.

The drawings' instinctive kinship (the word and fact "instinctive" has to be driven in here with the hammer of Vulcan coming down on the auction table of Destiny) with up-to-date physics resides in: the fusion of the drawings' figures, their fleeing-apart, their sticking-together-again,

and their drunken identity: in the language of visual arts, this brilliantly expresses our scientific knowledge of the new, that it is an obsolescent naïveté to make a distinction between organic and inorganic, since the laughingly cosmologizing cosmos-es of minerals, flowers, animals, humans are of the selfsame, one and only con-substance.

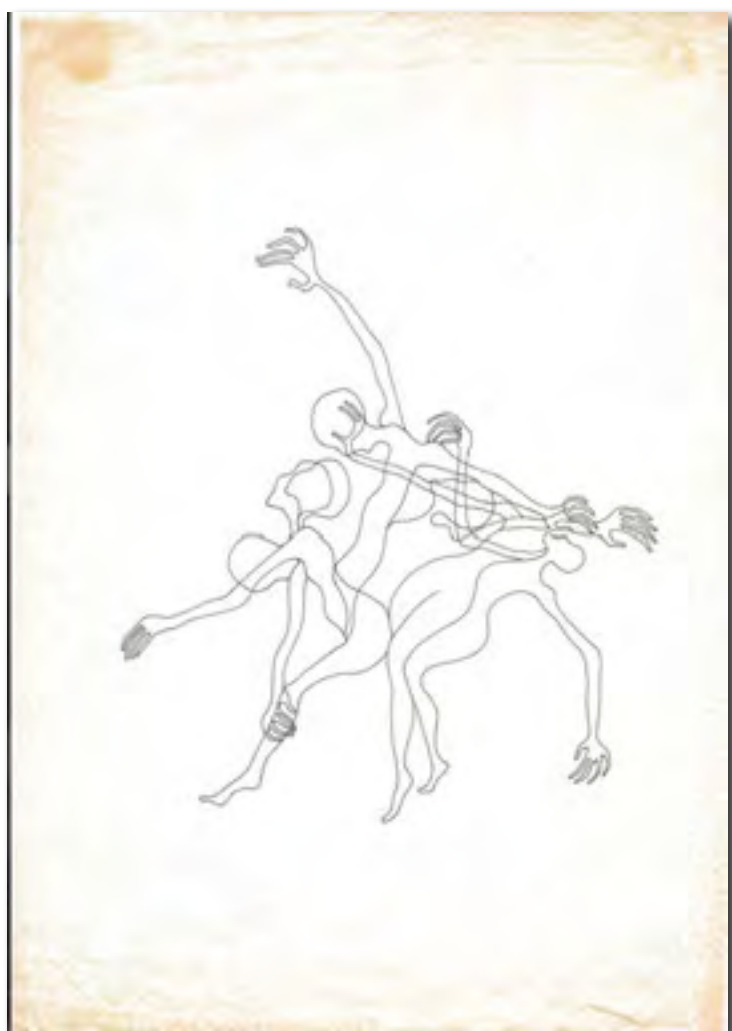
And let us not leave out from the beauty-litany summing up this work's beauty-essence: although the creator is forever whipping, or burying right under the spectators' eyes, Hades' gnomes, still, this is one of her greatest achievements: among the angels, fairies, Ariels and Mirandas — and next to the Draculas of teratology — there hover the harmony-harped nymphs found in Canova and in the *Midsummer Night's Dream's* Elysium. The maker may have stolen the self-bemoaning Nihil-larvae looking like cut-off poppy-heads, directly from Bosch's spirit, but: rainbow-colored pendants of batwings: they are the angels of Annunciation.

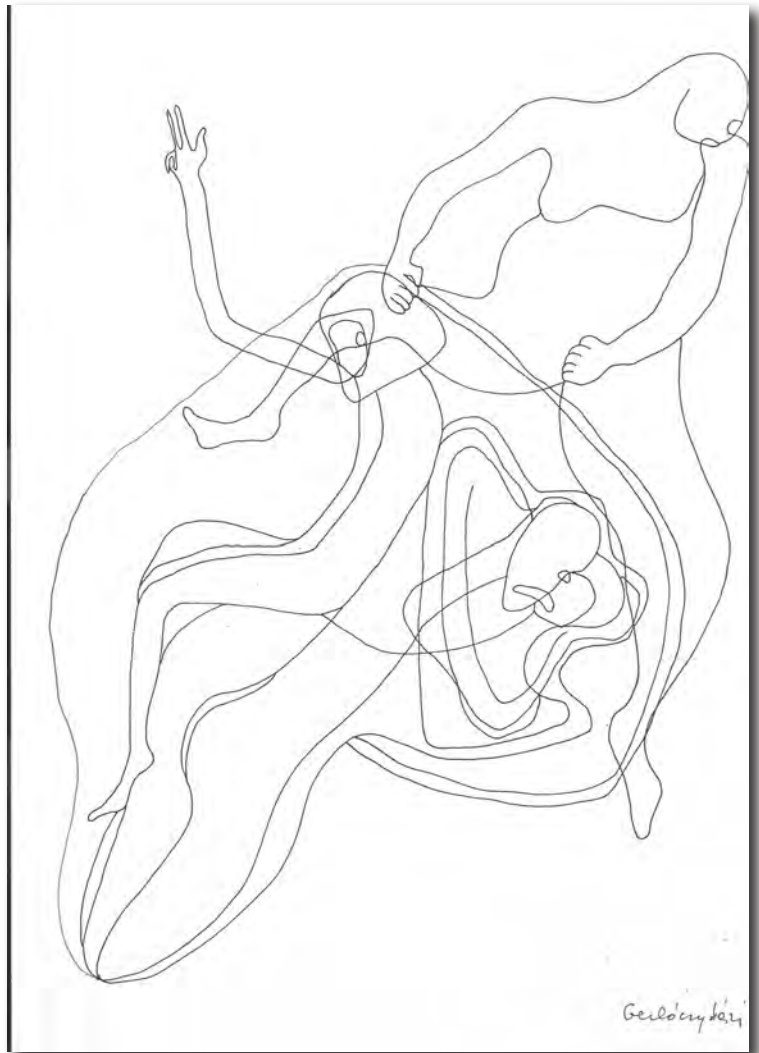
If, following the viewing of the collection of drawings and the relish of virtuosity (he who belittles technical mastery is a halfwit), the spectators muse on the frightening and universally human fundamental themes — let them try to decide if what they witnessed was a panorama of damnation, or that of salvation somewhere, some time.

Translated by Erika Mihálycsa

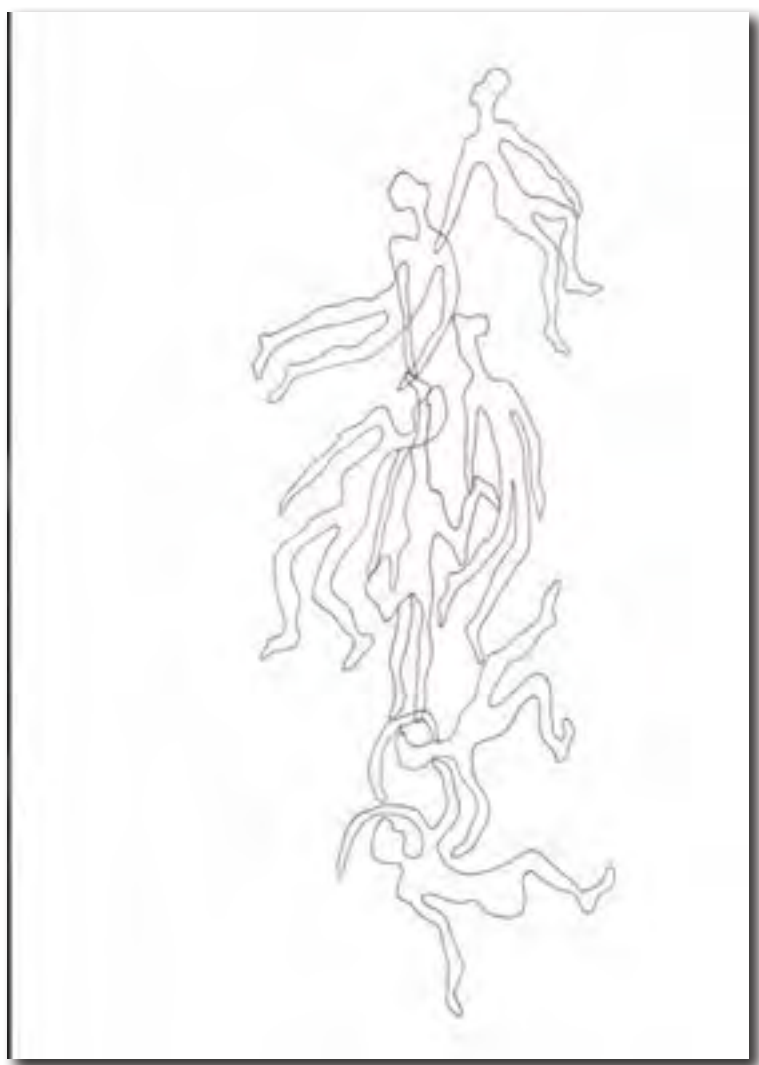
Sári Gerlóczy

Drawings & Paintings

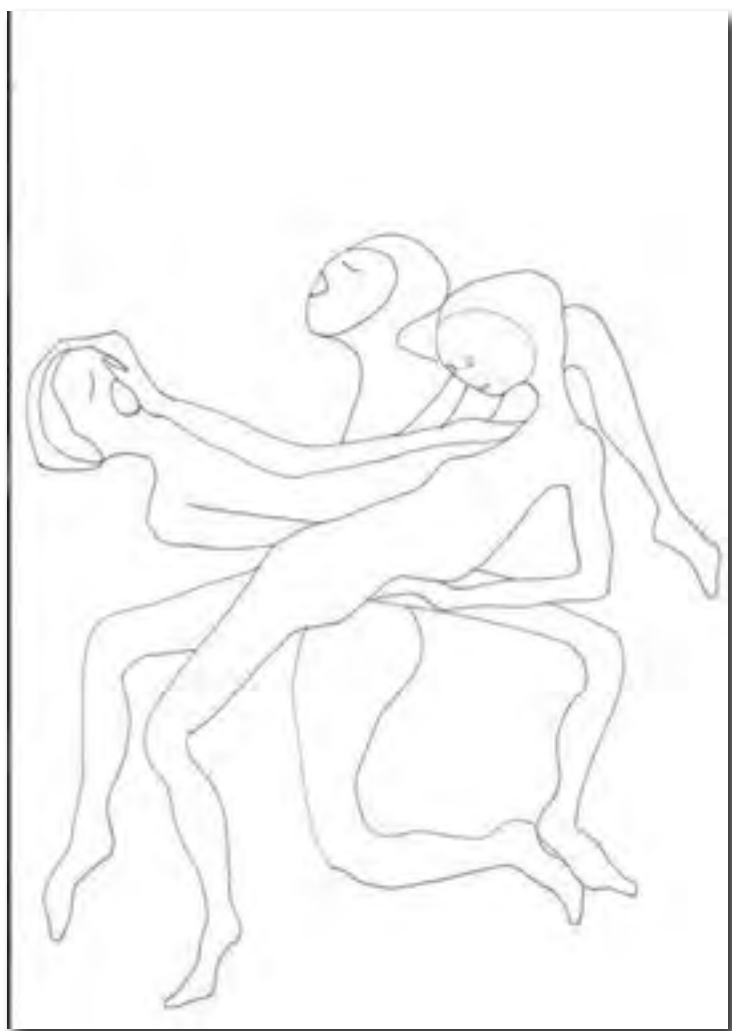


















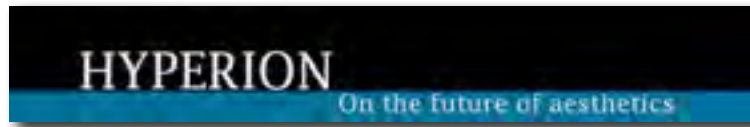












**Cinemagenic Accidenttime,
Chaotic Contradictiontime:
On New Methods of Anthologizing
the New**

Erika Mihálycsa



Jed Rasula & Tim Conley, eds, *Burning City. Poems of Metropolitan Modernity* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Action Books, 2012).

Burning City, edited by Jed Rasula and Tim Conley — a doorstopper that easily outbulks the towering modernist city-novels: *Ulysses*, *Berlin*, *Alexanderplatz*, or *Petersburg* — is, strictly speaking, neither a thematic anthology nor a “proper” reader of international avant-garde poetry on

that quintessentially modern experience of the metropolis. Rather, it seems to be a kaleidoscope of multi-sensory impressions gleaned from the global and globe-trotting *homo urbanus* with a leaning towards the arts or, as the editors themselves put it, “a directory of poetic discriminations,” a Baedeker “to the complex traffic of aesthetic impulses” (xiv); the selection is based less on chronology and received canons as on a sense of poetry as “historically contingent and cooperative” (xiv) across state and linguistic boundaries. The inclusion of writers coming from languages and literatures long invisible to (Anglo-Saxon, academic) canons of modernism, even to the detriment of the names that spring to mind more readily, positively remaps dominant topographies of the international avant-garde. The editors, modernist scholars and writers of a discreet fame, carried out Yvan Goll’s abandoned project to write the history of modernity through the poetry of the period. The volume bids us to follow, in the shape at once of Benjaminian *flâneurs* and historians of (Goll’s) present, the itineraries mapped by this “Baedeker,” to get into the heart of the all-encompassing ambient of modern life, the urban jungle, the man-made replacement of nature, open-air amusement park and variety show, whose lexicon extends from abattoirs, ads and aviograms to tango, *télégraphie sans fil* and warehouses.

When the book came out, more than half the globe’s population was living in cities, and predictions of the imminent ecological and social implosion of megalopolises like Mumbai were going viral; the newfangled orthodoxies of present-day global intelligentsia have sensibly more to

do with degrowth and urban agriculture (the first suggestion Google gives for “balcony” being “balcony garden”) than with Gulf-style skyscraper architecture, or with the aesthetics of *non-lieux* the world over, facets of the utopia of international modernism turned sour. It is all the more interesting to read through such a concentration of city-poems from Brazil and Argentina to Moscow and Japan, the vast majority of which turn to their subject with a mixture of wonder, excitement, curiosity, fascination and relish of the manifold experiences offered by urban space. Danish poet Emil Bønnelycke’s jubilant prose poem from 1918 — the end of the long 19th century and the setting in of a thoroughly modern world order — sums up this tone well: “I love you, mysterious age, rich in unguessed vicissitudes, rich in chaos, confusion beauty velocity splendor, rich in hard headed pluck and progress, rich in horror at its murderous overture War’s guns trombones drums proclaiming World Revolution” (9).

Writing at the outbreak of WW2, one year after the close of what is consensually regarded as the Modernist period (1910–1939), Orwell gives a somber warning in his essay “Inside the Whale”: “To say ‘I accept’ in an age like our own is to say that you accept concentration camps, rubber truncheons, Hitler, Stalin, bombs, aeroplanes, tinned food, machine guns, putsches, purges, slogans, Bedaux belts, gas masks, submarines, spies, provocateurs, press censorship, secret prisons, aspirins, Hollywood films, and political murders.” Yet ‘I accept’ is what most of the texts gathered in *Burning City* say, in tones varying from exultation to equanimity, to the “expansive future” of

technological advancement; in the closing formula of
Bønnelycke's poem quoted above,

I love you, happy Accidenttime...
I love you, you obvious Specialtime...
I love you, you riotous Crazytime...
I love you, chaotic Systemtime...
I love you, Darktime, Resurrectiontime,
Vast era Contradictiontime... ("Century," 1918,
tr. Jed Rasula) (11)

The reader who tries to gulp down as much as possible at one go of this extraordinarily versatile collection may often feel that cities, "the mistresses of the poets of our day" (Philippe Soupault, "Westwego," 117) turn, from "the proscribed Muse of the street" (Jaroslav Seifert, 324), into a *prescribed* muse rather, as the poems morph into manifestos rather too often: in the words of Ilarie Voronca, "What we're doing/ becomes formula" (15). Adherence to the pace of the metropolitan buzz translates into avant-garde aesthetics, the figure of life turned into art, with a Romantic pedigree. By common consent, these literary works resign the earlier mimetic pact and trumpet their autonomous created worlds amassed of fleeting visual, aural impressions, of encyclopaedic range and scope, with exhortations to the reader, such as "Reader, debug your brain!" (15) running on the margin of the same Voronca's "Aviogram" (1924). Only rarely do we find a voice of dissent in the exultant chorus singing the beacons of modernity, the Eiffel Tower or the skyscraper,

led by Blaise Cendrars and Apollinaire; such a statement (ringing, in English, with humorously Victorian stateliness) is the poetic commentary on New York in French poet Juliette Roche's "Déjà-Vu": "We will not be astonished. // We've already seen these catastrophes elsewhere / accompanied by cinema scores" (1920, trans. Donna Stonecipher, 404). The dominant tone, however, is quite different: "I love you carnivorously, / Pervertedly, wrapping my eyes / All around you, O great and banal, useful and useless things, / O absolutely modern things my contemporaries" (186), ranging from fertilizers to fraudulent reports in the newspapers, sings one of Fernando Pessoa's poetic masks, Álvaro de Campos, in a poem whose eerie dénouement turns technologized urbanism into the carnivorous, sexualized predator to whose all-powerful fangs the feminized lyrical "I" surrenders in masochistic swoon:

I could be shredded to death by an engine
 And feel a woman's sweet surrender when possessed.
 Toss me into the furnaces!
 Throw me under passing trains!
 Thrash me aboard ships!
 Masochism through machines!
 Some modern sort of sadism, and I, and the hubbub!
 ("Triumphal Ode," 1915, tr. Richard Zenith, 186–7)

This modern sort of "masochism," volunteering for the plight of the prisoner in Kafka's *Penal Colony*, goes beyond subjecting one's body to mechanical penetration in a latter-day version of ecstatic mysticism, and extends

to the erasure of authorship and of the singular, fallible created world grounded in language. It seems to herald nothing less but that the modern work of art becomes the denial of “literature” and “literariness,” and the dissolution in the immediacy of experience: “The true modern poem is life without poems, / It’s the train itself and not verses that sing of it, / It’s the iron of the rails, the hot rails, the iron of the wheels, their actual spin, / And not my poems that talk about rails and wheels they don’t have” (“The True Modern Poem,” 28). (Obviously the fact that Álvaro de Campos is one of the multiple adopted poetic masks of Fernando Pessoa ironically undercuts the manifest relinquishing of mastery and reinscribes authorship and the subject, further complicating the poem’s relationship to the ideology of the new.)

The most spectacular way of hammering out a new aesthetics for this ideology — or, of finding a novel “expressive form” that would smuggle mimeticism in through the back door of such immediacy of experience — can be seen in the visual layout of a significant portion of the texts collected in the volume. The rendering of simultaneity, fragmentation, the discontinuity and speed of perception is rendered through complex interfaces between the verbal and visual, ranging from *calligrammes* inaugurated by Apollinaire to the typographic experiments of the Futurists, Cubists, and the Central European and Russian Constructivists that result in text-image ideograms. *Burning City* is a true typographical feast for the eyes, as it faithfully reproduces these intricate visual collages; moreover, it offers a great variety of experiments with molding the text surface, from the

(post-Apollinaire) naiveté of Emil Bønnelycke's poem *New York* (1918), handwritten in the form of skyscrapers, to the sophisticated juxtapositions of word and image in Fortunato Depero, Vasily Kamensky, or in Hagiwara Kyohiko's *Advertising Tower*. Many of these works play out the emancipation of the word as visual sign, in line with Marinetti's Futurist battle-cry *parole in libertà*, and with the Constructivists' compositions of *lettere in libertà*, as it were, that qualify as visual artworks rather than linguistic artifacts — as Lajos Kassák's 1922 *Typography* exemplifies. Another great merit of the volume is that of giving a sense to the English-language reader of the many-tentacled, rhizomatic peripheral hinterland of the international avant-gardes, orphism, simultaneism, constructivism, expressionism, surrealism and dada. Some of the word-collages of such lesser-known artists are left untranslated, like the Serbian Dragan Aleksić's 1922 "Dada-Tank," or Hungarian Holocaust victim Andor Sugár's "Paths" from the same year, which charmingly juxtaposes "cabbage stew" with "gramophone" in its row of newspaper headline-like "culture conserves" (37). Others, like Vasily Kamensky's extraordinary "Cabaret" (243), Fortunato Depero's "Streetcar" (137) or Gino Severini's "CoMpEnEtRaCiOn SiMuLtAnEiTé d'idées-images" (49), are reproduced both in their original layout and given in translation.

The volume's perhaps most endearing trait is its featuring of Charlie Chaplin as one of the most poignant icons of the new aesthetic and its cognate new mythology, a status that he shares with the Eiffel Tower among others. A "dynamometer of modern humour"

(Guillermo de Torre, 1922, 444), his “monosyllabic silhouette” (Parker Tyler, 1947, 432) percolates across the writing of authors from Russia to Latin America. Alexander Rodchenko calls him “not monumental but momental” (*Charlot*, 1922, 436), thus a fitting embodiment of kine-age, of the new sensitivity of the evanescent; he also traces Charlot’s lineage back to the circus, another modern form of entertainment by excellence, from where also derives Chaplin’s awareness that “things should be bigger or smaller than a person” (436). The actor and filmmaker who, for Rodchenko, signals “the dawn of a NEW HUMANITY” equated with “revolution Communism” (437) incorporates, for Peruvian poet Xavier Abril, the disenchantment of Romanticism and comes to be equated with “pure creation, surrealism”:

1

Charles Chaplin’s reality belongs to everyone but him. Every one of Chaplin’s adventures is a loss of his reality. Pure creation, surrealism — bearing in mind the escapism of dreams.

11

From behind, Chaplin is a photographer who could have shot portraits of the lame, the disfigured, the invalids of war.

22

Something from sacred history must have snuck into the machine, so that Chaplin could have stepped into the world left left left foot first.

29

Chaplin is the New Man because he is the anti Don Juan. He is loving and grounded in his humanity — which does not require of him that he is a cowardly lover. The NEW man creates woman in an ultimate

gesture of narcissism. So it is. And so be it. ("X-Ray of Chaplin," 1929, trans. Jason Borge, 432–5)

So does the comically clumsy tramp turn into the emblem of new masculinity — *semblable* and *frère* of Leopold Bloom the "new womanly man," but also, a disconcerting exemplar of the new world order's new man, brick-holed together by Dziga Vertov's kine-montage, one of the prime obsessions of a face of modernism that would soon reveal its totalizing and totalitarian gaze — the one caricatured in Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog*, among other books. As a surrealist cherry on the ideological cake, Chaplin is also pronounced by Abril a providential replacement of the Magi. Still, probably the most striking poetic homage to his figure is the poem by Osip Mandelstam, unpublished in his lifetime, where Chaplin appears in the shape of a circus rabbit in Moscow, and whose closure — "And why is the crowd / so loving? / Because, because — / this is Moscow, after all. / Charlie, Charlie — / You have to take risks, / This is the wrong time to go sour. / Your bowler hat is the ocean, that same ocean, / And Moscow is so close you might fall in love / with the sweet, sweet road" (439) — is so puzzling as to resemble one of Daniil Kharms's exercises in radical absurdity.

It is probably the *momental* that exercised the greatest fascination to the historical avant-gardes; *Burning City* presents a generous array of poetic discriminations, which thicken into renderings of simultaneity, and into interfaces with cinema. The first is well exemplified in the text collages included in the

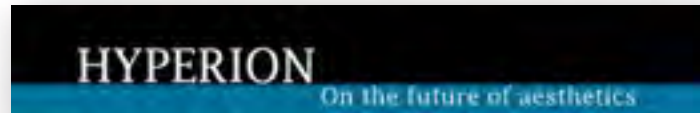
sections on aviograms, the mechanical muses of telegraphy and telephone, flânerie in the city as multiple ambient, or the experience of the circus, the music hall, jazz. Belgian poet Paul van Ostaïjen's ambitious intertextual collage, "Music Hall" (1921) is an excellent example of the spatialization of ruptured, fragmentary and overlapping perceptions by way of calligrammes, typographic juxtapositions, and ostentations, where the silences of blank spaces play a no less important role than the jostle of tango, nursery song, opera and music-hall songs from the café chantant.

The other mode of representation towards which these writings gravitate is that of cinematography, present here not only through poems this art form inspired but also by the inclusion of fragments of theoretical texts — by Dziga Vertov, Siegfried Kracauer — and such interfaces between verbal and (kinetic) visual arts as László Moholy-Nagy's "Dynamic of a Metropolis" (1921–22, 190–203), a constructivist 2-D freezing of the superimposition and montage of moving images. These poetic materializations of the X-ray or "kino-eye," of "life caught unawares" (Dziga Vertov, *Birth of Kino-Eye*, 310–11) illustrate the excitement of changing the dimensions of the sensible, of cutting up verbal fragments to pieces and splicing them together. Quite often these texts exude a sense of a children's game, reminding one of Kracauer's observations, "[The world of cinema] is like a child's toy that is put into a cardboard box. The dismantling of the world's contents is radical; and even if it is undertaken only for the sake of illusion, the illusion is by no means insignificant" (*Calico World*, 303). One gets an impression

of such radical child's play from Vítěslav Nezval's "cinemagenic poem" "Fireworks" (1924, 216–8) which reads like a film screenplay's synopsis cum simultaneist poem cum surrealist fieldwork, or Hagiwara Kyojiro's "A Love Letter" (1925, 208), a text that takes the shape of a musical-cinematographic score unreeling, as it were, both in time, and in space on an advertising tower.

As a typographical artifact and as a selection of poetry that reflects at once the discerning eye of the academic and that of the practicing writer, *Burning City* is itself a reflection of that kino-eye it celebrates. It is kaleidoscopic, interested in showing the multiple layers and simultaneities of prime strategies, modes of writing across the international avant-gardes from Sao Paolo to Bucharest; it strives more to show itineraries and lines of flight between modernist centers, documented by poetic postcards, than pedigrees and lineages of literary influences, with or without anxieties attached. It offers the reader slices of more or less contemporaneous, global modernist writing reshaping the sensorium of modern life, arranged by tentative, metamorphic categories rather than chronological and canonical precedence, among which privileged cultural icons stand out — the Eiffel Tower, the New York skyscrapers, the amusement park, the cinema hall. What is most important, the editors managed to convey a sense of the *experience* of the new — now almost one hundred years old — *in statu nascendi*, with its corollary contradictions, excitement, and bewilderment not effaced by the retrospective academic gaze. *Burning City* does not exhale a museum air. It offers much more than a worthy tool for modernism studies: a

selection not of textbook illustrations of avant-garde “Invent — invent” manifestos, but of rich, insouciant, boisterous, soft-spoken, humorous, grand, and above all, compelling texts, texts to relish in the present time.



QUOTE: LANGUAGE & MATHEMATICS

Until the time of Goethe and Humboldt, it was possible for a man of exceptional ability and retentiveness to feel at home in both the humanistic and the mathematical cultures. Leibnitz had still been able to make notable contributions to both. This is no longer a real possibility. The chasm between the languages of words and of mathematics grows constantly wider. Standing on either rim are men who, in respect of each other, are illiterate. There is as great a sum of illiteracy in not knowing the basic concepts of calculus or spherical geometry as there is in not knowing grammar. Or to use Snow's famous example: a man who has read no Shakespeare is uncultured; but not more so than one who is ignorant of the second law of thermodynamics. Each is blind to comparable worlds. Except in moments of bleak clarity, we do not yet act as if this were true. We continue to assume that humanistic authority, the sphere of the word, is predominant. The notion of essential literacy is still rooted in classic values, in a sense of discourse, rhetoric, and poetics. But this is ignorance or sloth of imagination. Calculus, the laws of Carnot, Maxwell's conception of the electromagnetic field, not only comprise areas of reality and action as great as those comprised by classic literacy; they probably give an image of the perceptible world truer to fact than can be derived from any structure of verbal assertion. All evidence suggests that the shapes of reality are mathematical, that integral and differential calculus are the alphabet of just perception. The humanist today is in the position of those tenacious, aggrieved spirits who continued to envision the earth as a flat table after it had been circumnavigated, or who persisted in

believing in occult propulsive energies after Newton had formulated the laws of motion and inertia.

Those of us who are compelled by our ignorance of exact science to imagine the universe through a veil of non-mathematical language inhabit an animate fiction. The actual facts of the case — the space-time continuum of relativity, the atomic structure of all matter, the wave-particle state of energy — are no longer accessible through the word. It is no paradox to assert that in cardinal respects reality now begins outside verbal language. Mathematicians know this. “By its geometric and later by its purely symbolic construction,” says Andreas Speiser, “mathematics shook off the fetters of language . . . and mathematics today is more efficient in its sphere of the intellectual world, than the modern languages in their deplorable state or even music are on their respective fronts.” Few humanists are aware of the scope and nature of this great change (Sartre is a notable exception and has, time and again, drawn attention to *la crise du langage*). Nevertheless, many of the traditional humanistic disciplines have shown a deep malaise, a nervous, complex recognition of the exactions and triumphs of mathematics and the natural sciences. There has taken place in history, economics, and what are called, significantly, the “social sciences,” what one might term a fallacy of imitative form. In each of these fields, the mode of discourses still relies almost completely on word-language. But historians, economists, and social scientists have tried to graft on to the verbal matrix some of the proceedings of mathematics or total rigor. They have grown defensive about the essentially provisional and aesthetic character of their own pursuits. Observe how the cult of the positive, the exact, and the predictive has invaded history. The decisive turn occurs in the nineteenth century, in the work of Ranke, Comte, and Taine. Historians began regarding their material as elements in the crucible of controlled experiment. From impartial scrutiny of the past (such impartiality being, in fact, a naive illusion) should emerge those statistical patterns, those periodicities of national and economic force, which allow the historian to formulate” laws of

history. "This very notion of historical" law, "and the implication of necessity and predictability, which are crucial to Taine, Marx, and Spengler, are a gross borrowing from the sphere of the exact and mathematical sciences. The ambitions of scientific rigor and prophecy have seduced much historical writing from its veritable nature, which is art. Much of what passes for history at present is scarcely literate. The disciples of Namier (not the master himself) consign Gibbon, Macaulay, or Michelet to the limbo of *belles lettres*. The illusion of science and the fashions of the academic tend to transform the young historian into a gray, lean ferret gnawing at the minute fact or figure. He dwells in footnotes and writes monographs in as illiterate a style as possible to demonstrate the scientific bias of his craft. One of the few contemporary historians prepared to defend openly the poetic nature of all historical imagining is C.V. Wedgwood. She fully concedes that all style brings with it the possibility of distortion: "There is no literary style which may not at some point take away something from the ascertainable outline of truth, which it is the task of scholarship to excavate and re-establish." But where such excavation abandons style altogether, or harbors the illusion of impartial exactitude, it will light only on dust.

— George Steiner, "The Retreat from the Word"

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