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**MONASH UNIVERSITY**  
**THESIS ACCEPTED IN SATISFACTION OF THE**  
**REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

ON..... 7 June 2002 .....

.....  
for Sec. Research Graduate School Committee

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## ERRATA

- p.24, line 2: "[O]n ne peut" for "on ne peut"
- p.24, line 8: "[T]he social foundation" for "the social foundation"
- p.28, line 7: Replace ellipsis with parenthetical ellipsis
- p.29, line 1: Replace ellipsis with parenthetical ellipsis
- p. 29, line 6: Replace ellipsis with parenthetical ellipsis
- p.43, line 11: "[I]f mimetic representation" for "if mimetic representation"
- p.44, line 15: "[C]es derniers" for "ces derniers"
- p.51, line 8: "Romantic" for "romantic"
- p.72, line 24: "and his" for "andhis"
- p.74, line 13: delete "the" and read "But realism witnesses a move..."
- p.78, line 25: Replace ellipsis with parenthetical ellipsis
- p.84, line 31: "[L]'écriture est destruction" for "l'écriture est destruction"
- p.84, line 34: "[W]riting is the destruction" for "writing is the destruction"
- p.89, line 7: "[L]es dieux sont du champ" for "*les dieux sont du champ*"
- p.89, line 8: "[P]our savoir" for "pour savoir"
- p.89, line 18: "[T]here is only one method" for "there is only one method"
- p.99, line 15: "[J]'étais sur un petit bateau" for "j'étais sur un petit bateau"
- p.99, line 16: "[L]e nommé" for "le nommé"
- p.100, line 5: "[A]n individual" for "an individual"
- p.105, line 4: "[I]l est nécessaire" for "il est nécessaire"
- p.106, line 8: "[J]'ai pour ainsi dire" for "j'ai pour ainsi dire"
- p.107, line 28: Replace ellipsis with parenthetical ellipsis

- p.119, line 25: "[L]a veille de sa mort" for "la veille de sa mort"
- p.120, line 3: "[O]n the eve" for "on the eve"
- p.121, line 5: "proclaims" for "pro-claims"
- p.129, line 9: "[T]he extranovelistic perspective" for "the extranovelistic perspective"
- p.129, line 26: Replace ellipsis with parenthetical ellipsis
- p.144, line 16: "[L]'eau" for "l'eau"
- p.144, line 28: "[W]ater came along" for "water came along"
- p.178, line 7: "[L]e texte lisible" for "le texte lisible"
- p.178, line 16: "[T]he readerly text" for "the readerly text"
- p.181, line 26: "[L]e plaisir" for "le plaisir"
- p.181, line 35: "[T]he pleasure" for "the pleasure"
- p.192, line 10: "[J]e me demande" for "je me demande"
- p.198, line 9: delete "to" and read "It is Nietzsche, however..."
- p.220, line 26: "comme" for "come"
- p.229, line 1: "[D]ans l'ordre dynamique" for "dans l'ordre dynamique"
- p.229, line 7: "[I]n the dynamic order" for "in the dynamic order"
- p.240, line 28: "[L]a naturalisation" for "la naturalisation"
- p.241, line 5: "[T]out système sémiologique" for "tout système sémiologique"
- p. 241, line 15: "[T]he naturalization" for "the naturalization"
- p. 241, line 20: "[A]ny semiological system" for "any semiological system"
- p.248, line 15: Insert "are" to read "in my view, are as much"

# Strategies of Realism

Realist Fiction and Postmodern Theory

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Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Thesis

Center for  
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# Strategies of Realism

## Realist Fiction and Postmodern Theory

Preface	8
Part 1: Introduction	
1. The Politics of Literary Representation	13
2. Discontinuities	37
3. The Circularity of Transgression	59
Part 2: Transparency: the Masquerade of Absence as a Realist Strategy	
4. Aphanisis	83
5. A Language of the Simulacrum	111
6. Economies of the Counterfeit	138
Part 3: Multiplicity: Excess as a Realist Strategy	
7. Radical Inclusivity	165
8. Realism: "A Past to Come"	191
9. Literature and its Doubles	216
Conclusion	
10. Conclusion: Strategic Directions	238
Works Cited	264

## ABSTRACT

The goal of the thesis is to formulate of a series of critical strategies based on an examination of the literary realism of the early nineteenth century. The critical tools used for this examination are derived from a reading of contemporary literary theory, in particular postmodern theory. The deployment of postmodern theory, however, is problematic because it defines itself in opposition to the field of discourse in question. The procedure of the thesis, therefore, is to highlight and problematize the relationship between literary realism and postmodern theory, to question the hierarchy that separates them, in order to realize a set of reading strategies that transcend these boundaries.

The first step, therefore, is to analyze in detail the various discourses in question: what is meant, for example, by the "postmodern condition" (through readings of Jean-François Lyotard and Fredric Jameson) and the nature of its relation to literary realism. This examination reveals that there is a prevailing confusion between the analyses of representation and realism, that the two discourses have been equated with a "mirroring" of reality. The implication is that representation and realism are both inheritors of a metaphysical, Platonic tradition that has been shattered, in turn, by the various strands of modernism, culminating in the "postmodern condition". As such, I have posited a third, more general term, which I have called "realology". Realology denotes an approach to the "real", and thus allows the sorting of these various discourses (representation, realism, modernism,

postmodernism) according to their approach to this "real" (including, in particular, its denial).

The thesis takes into account a double procedure in terms of realism's approach to the "real". The first is an analysis of the general tactic of masquerade, in particular the masquerade of absence. For the realist text, this involves an examination of both the "real" as an empirical problem (the complexities of describing the physical world, for example) and, by extension, the problem of the "real" in the context of authenticity (such as the ethical and positional ironies of the counterfeit text). The realist text masquerades absence insofar as it confronts the difficulties of "grounding" a discourse in which the "ground" – that is to say, the "real" – has disappeared.

Parallel to this absence is a poetics of excess that defines realism's other broad set of strategies. Having witnessed the disappearance of a "ground", realism spawns a series of ghostly doubles that play the part of semiotic substitutes. Thus, the move of realism is not merely negative ("there is no truth") but also parodic by overstatement ("everything is true"). Realism thus carries us into a realm of both temporal and spatial doubling, creating a labyrinth of discourse that refuses both closure and disclosure. Through an analysis of these tactics, the thesis evolves in detail a series of strategies relevant to future critique: demythologization, auto-critique, disengagement and multiplicity.

I affirm that the thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.



(Peter David Mathews)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Preface

## PREFACE

### "DISCURSIVE THREADS"

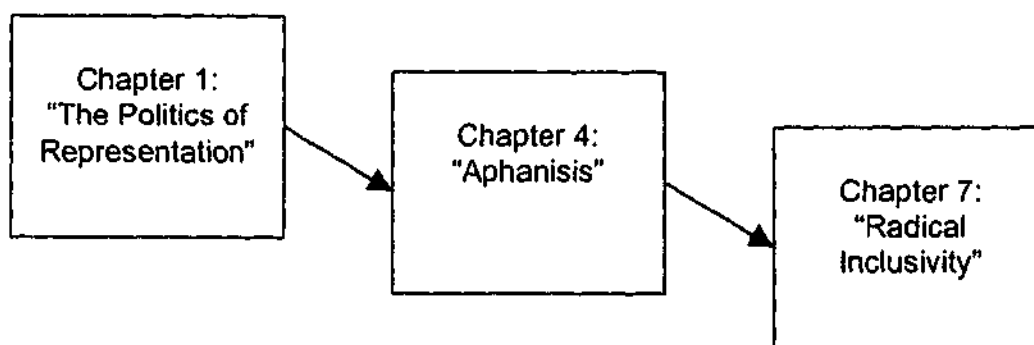
Prefaces, as we have known since Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, are written after the body of the thesis. Under the guise of introduction and summation, the preface flaunts the imminence of the text's conclusions. The purpose of this thesis, for example, is to formulate a series of strategies for rereading the field of literary realism in the context of "postmodern" theory. The author would normally provide, within the boundaries of the preface, a brief explanation of that process. Since the subject at hand is the formulation of strategy, I shall use this opportunity to discuss the maneuvers involved in the tactical construction of the thesis. The primary function of this preface, therefore, is not synopsis or repetition but a guide, a strategic mapping of the critical space of the thesis.

In their introduction to *Mille plateaux*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe the text as an "agencement" ["assemblage"], a "corps sans organes" ["body without organs"] in which the reader may wander, like Kafka's monster meandering through the indeterminate spaces of its burrow.<sup>1</sup> "En tant qu'agencement, il est seulement lui-même en connexion avec d'autres agencements, par rapport à d'autres corps sans organes"<sup>2</sup> ["As an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages and in relation to other bodies without organs"<sup>3</sup>]. These assertions take arbitrary interconnectivity to its extreme point (even if Deleuze and Guattari, by convention, must nevertheless place their thesis at the

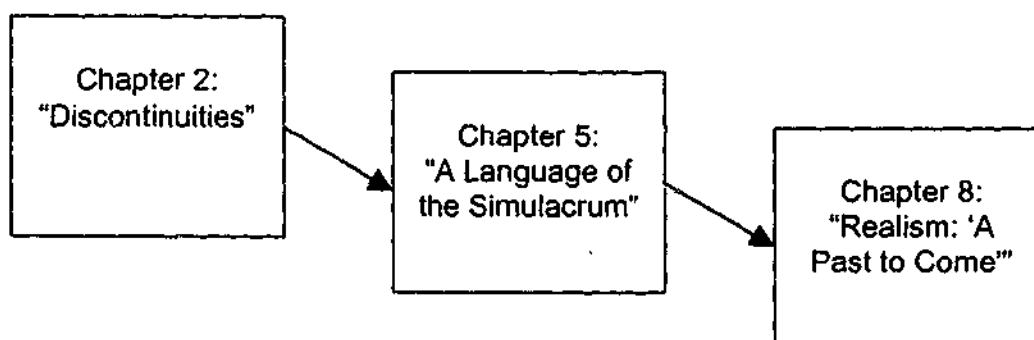
beginning of the book, in an introduction). In this context, providing a strategy for reading a text (even, or perhaps especially, one that "I" have written) suggests an authoritarian overtone.

Nevertheless, I shall take the liberty of suggesting at least two techniques of textual navigation. Deleuze and Guattari call them "lines of flight": I will label them "discursive threads". The first thread is laid down in the table of contents, marked out chapter by chapter through the thesis. A second thread breaks this apparent linearity. Although I do not expect the reader to read the thesis according to this alternative, I wish to bring its possibility to the surface. The second thread consists of three "themes" or "problems" that are treated extensively in the thesis. Thus, while the first thread forms a vertical axis for reading the text, the second provides a series of diagonal "slashes" that traverse its linearity. These diagonals create a set of "subthreads" within the second thread.

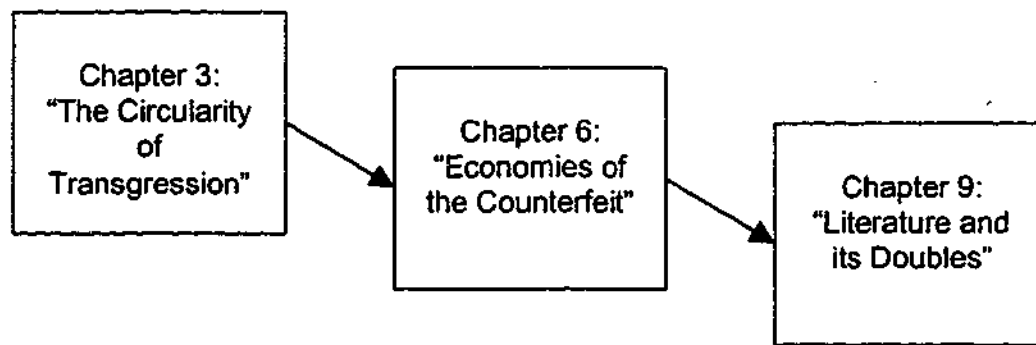
*Subthread no. 1 – "The Problem of the 'Real' in Realism"*



*Subthread no. 2 – "The Importance of Realism to Contemporary Theory"*



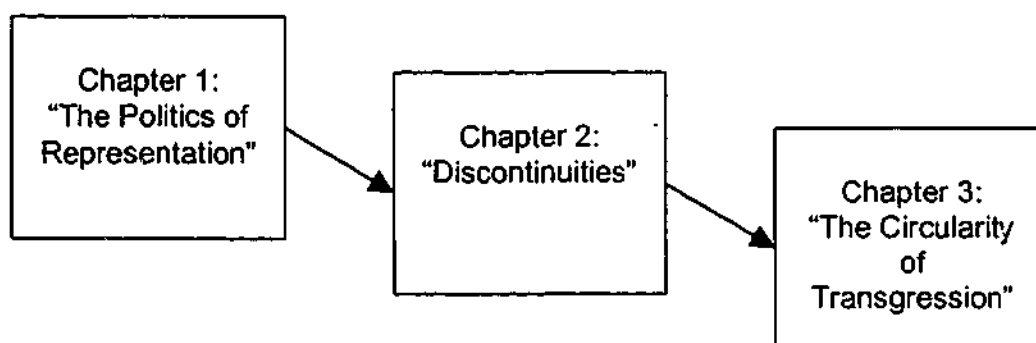
*Subthread no. 3 – "Political/Textual Strategies"*



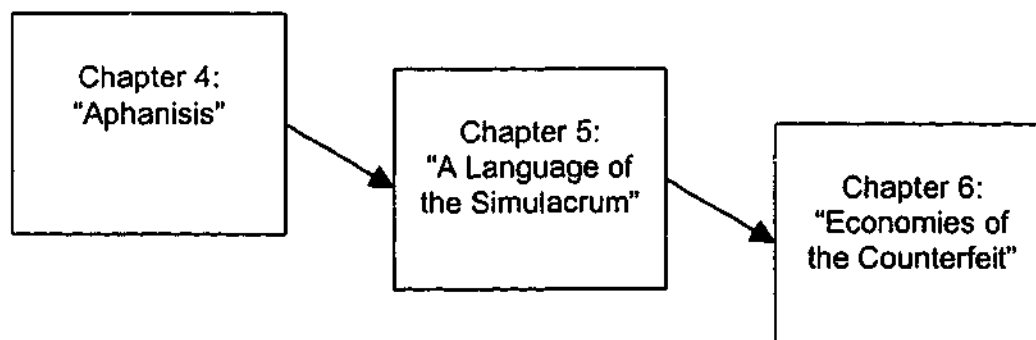
*Second Discursive Thread*

To suggest, however, that reading the text according to the first, linear thread is somehow deficient ignores a congruous pattern of textual rupture in the allotted division of chapters. The first thread possesses its own diagonals, its own lines of flight.

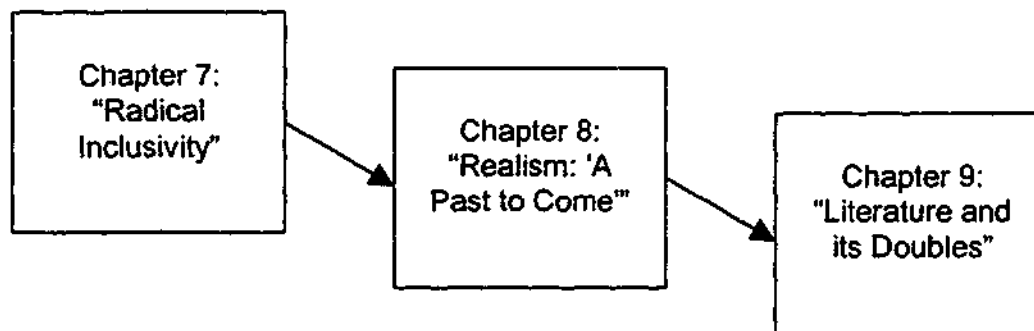
*Subthread no. 1 – "Introduction"*



*Subthread no. 2 – "Transparency: the Masquerade of Absence as a Realist Strategy"*



*Subthread no. 3 – "Multiplicity: Excess as a Realist Strategy"*



*First Discursive Thread*

Therefore, even though by conventional necessity I have provided the thesis with a definitive hierarchical structure, it by no means dictates the reading strategy: the thesis possesses a kind of "structurality without structure" that, I hope, allows the reader to begin at any point (after reading the preface, of course).

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 4.

# **Part 1:**

# **Introduction**

## CHAPTER ONE

### "THE POLITICS OF LITERARY REPRESENTATION"

#### *Structural Key:*

*First Discursive Thread*  
- Subthread no. 1 ("Introduction")

*Second Discursive Thread*  
- Subthread no. 1 ("The Problem of the 'Real' in Realism")

Here is a brief summary of the grand narrative, of the (post)modern *mythos* as it exists today: for centuries, Western thought has been dominated by a fascination with objective representation. It manifests itself in philosophical discourse, for example, mutating over time as it cuts a winding, inexorable path from Plato to Descartes into the first stirrings of modernity. Refusing to restrict itself to a single field of thought, representation disseminates across a broad range of discourses. There is not only a philosophy of representation, but also a politics of representation, an ethics of representation, an aesthetics of representation, and so on. During the nineteenth century (at what point is a contentious issue) the regime of representation was brought into question. Since then, its grand narrative has split into two intertwining parts. On the one hand, there is a discourse of sedition, a modern rending of the representative veil that has ruled Western thought for so long. On the other there is a gradual passing of the old world: representation becomes a straw man, useful only for throwing stones at in

moments of critical frustration. In the course of the thesis I will focus attention on two moments in this narrative.

The first moment I wish to consider – it is, indeed, the touchstone of the entire thesis – is the establishment of a “literary realism” during the first half of the nineteenth century (using, let us say, Honoré de Balzac’s lifespan as an arbitrary point of opening and closure). Indeed, its figureheads will be Balzac and Stendhal, giving the thesis a somewhat French bias. This partiality is justified in two ways. First, it affirms the position of much of the critical literature on the subject. Christopher Prendergast, for example, argues that nineteenth-century France is “the exemplary place and moment of what we conventionally understand as the great tradition of realism, in both literature and painting”.<sup>1</sup> The dissemination of these ideas throughout Western culture is confirmed by the readings I shall undertake of various “satellite” authors, such as Fyodor Dostoevsky and Edgar Allan Poe. Secondly, although this study is concerned with reinterpreting classic texts, its approach is in no way “classical”. The focus is both literary and theoretical, concerned with the most contemporary, “postmodern” arguments about the collapse of representation. I shall examine these allegations from a broad perspective and, of course, with special attention to postmodernism’s commentary on the realist texts in question. At first glance the paradigms of literary realism and contemporary theory appear estranged in both a temporal and philosophical sense, but they are drawn together by common critical features. Both are culminating moments in the grand narrative of objective representation. The formation of realism, according to contemporary theory, is the climax, the centerpiece of the poetics of

representation. Postmodernism, by contrast, is concerned with the deconstruction of representation. It is spawned from the successes and failures of the modernist experiments, which pushed representation to its limits. There can be no shrinking back from the modernist challenge. "Representation is dead", cries the postmodernist (striking an appropriately dramatic, Nietzschean pose), "and we have killed it".<sup>2</sup>

But if anything has been learnt from the past century of philosophical thought, this much-heralded "death" cannot – indeed, must not – be mistaken for a resolution. Death in no way marks the demise of a discursive power. Our intellectual inheritance, as Jacques Derrida has reminded us frequently, is replete with such "ghost stories".<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, for example, open their famous preface to *The Communist Manifesto* with precisely this metaphor: "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism."<sup>4</sup> In *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud explores the mythology of the establishment of patriarchy. Freud claims that the murder of the father by the sons institutes his immortal authority as a law beyond the grave (and, as such, beyond question). I have alluded already to Friedrich Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God, which bursts from the lips of the madman in *The Gay Science*. For Nietzsche this event is not an end but a beginning, the dawn of a new era. "God is dead," he writes, "but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. – And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow, too."<sup>5</sup> Marx, Freud, Nietzsche: Paul Ricoeur's triumvirate of (post)modern thinkers intertwine in this common discourse of death. Far from being a sign of irrelevance, anything marked by death lies at the

forefront of our critical concerns. Representation is the nucleus, as it were, of a peculiar kind of philosophical repression, arousing a feeling of vertigo analogous to the abject body of the dead patriarch (Freud) or the atheist who raises his eyes to an empty, indifferent sky (Nietzsche).

Answering the question of what is meant by representation is not nearly as important as realizing the political overtones of the term. The critical proclivity for attacking what are generically labeled "modes of objective representation" has given it a pejorative tinge. Furthermore, the word is very much a tool of the (post)modernist *critique* of this form of thought. In his foreword to *La Condition postmoderne*, Jean-François Lyotard's influential commentary on the postmodern paradigm shift, Fredric Jameson provides the following summary:

This "break" now links up with the other thematics of Lyotard's essay by way of an event generally taken primarily to be an aesthetic one, although it has relatively immediate philosophical and ideological analogues: I am referring to the so-called crisis of representation, in which an essentially realistic epistemology, which conceives of representation as the reproduction, for subjectivity, of an objectivity that lies outside it – projects a mirror theory of knowledge and art, whose fundamental evaluative categories are those of adequacy, accuracy, and Truth itself. It is in terms of this crisis that the transition, in the history of form, from a novelistic "realism" of the Lukácsian variety to the various new classical "high" modernisms, has been described [...] [a] shift from a representational to a nonrepresentational practice.<sup>6</sup>

Jameson uncovers a subtle transition from "an essentially realistic epistemology" to "representation". This change, modest as it seems, is crucial.

Jameson unconsciously highlights the root of the problem: the all too frequent confusion of "realism" with "representation". The distinction

between these two terms lies in the *subjective* process underlined by Jameson. Postmodernism's attack, in this case, is accurate. The "reproduction, for subjectivity, of an objectivity that lies outside it" is a throwback to the rationalist tradition that permeates Western thought since at least Plato. The construction of this subject goes hand in hand with the philosophical principles listed by Jameson: "adequacy, accuracy, and Truth itself". I do not wish, at this point, to reproduce the arguments against these values (the thesis provides ample scope for such a task). The goal for now is merely to separate "representation", which partakes of the Platonic tradition (in the broadest sense), from what I shall henceforth call "realism".

Realism includes but is not restricted to the literary realism developed during the nineteenth century. I wish to imbue the term with a more literal, etymological sense. I am writing also about "real-ism", not in the sense of an aesthetic or philosophical movement, but as an approach to the "real" (whatever that may entail). The confusion between representation and realism lies in this point: it is assumed that these terms have recourse to a transcendent, objective reality (what Jameson labels a "mirror theory of knowledge and art"). But with "real-ism" I make no such assumption, either about subjectivity or even the existence of a "real". Any mode of questioning that explores the domain of the "real" partakes of "real-ism". Even radical skepticism is – indeed must – be included in the scope of realism. The situation here is analogous to theology. It would be incorrect to equate "theology" with "theism". Theology does not assume the existence of God – atheism is a crucial contribution to its overall field – just as realism

does not assume the existence of a "real". In future, therefore, I shall refer to "real-ism" (in its segmented form) as "realology".

It would be unacceptably crude, however, to declare that "philosophy is realology" or vice versa. What cannot be denied, however, is that this problem of the "real" haunts philosophy, ethics, politics and, of course, aesthetics throughout their various histories. The specifically "postmodern" thinkers – Lyotard, Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Jürgen Habermas – all regard postmodernism as an "epistemological crisis". (In a sense, this conclusion is spectacularly mundane: every philosophy, every "legitimizing discourse", is constructed as a response to an "epistemological crisis".) The nucleus of representative philosophy has been to explore an assumed "real" that lies at the nucleus of every discourse. The postmodernists argue, by contrast, that we are faced with a new breed of thought that, in the first place, denies the existence of a "real", and as a consequence no longer seeks even to legitimize itself. In other words, realology has discovered its own form of "atheism".

Lyotard's *La Condition postmoderne* is one of the most influential statements on this subject. It centers on the intellectual exchange between science and various cultural discourses, notably philosophy, politics and literature. Lyotard reiterates the traditional distinction between raw data and the forms of knowledge (le savoir) that determine its use. Postmodernism, he argues, is a mutation in the significance of knowledge, whose preeminence has been rocked by "les transformations qui ont affecté les règles des jeux de la science, de la littérature et des arts à partir de la fin du XIX siècle"<sup>7</sup> ["the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth

century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts"<sup>8</sup>].

The postmodern condition of knowledge derives from the exploitation of a logical circularity hidden in the construction of scientific discourse. Until the modern era (for Lyotard, the end of the nineteenth century) the authority of science was founded on its apparent ability to stand outside the instability of the language games that characterize other discourses. There existed, writes Lyotard, a sharp division between scientific knowledge and the construction of narrative.

La science est d'origine en conflit avec les récits. À l'aune de ses propres critères, la plupart de ceux-ci se révèlent des fables. Mais, pour autant qu'elle ne se réduit pas à énoncer des régularités utiles et qu'elle cherche le vrai, elle se doit de légitimer ses règles de jeu.<sup>9</sup>

[Science has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables. But to the extent that science does not restrict itself to stating useful regularities and seeks the truth, it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game.<sup>10</sup>]

It is not enough, as Lyotard points out, for science simply to accumulate raw data. Such information, by itself, is inherently useless. In order for it to be transformed into a practical tool it must be integrated into a relevant narrative.

The centrality of narrative formation draws Lyotard into the twentieth-century fascination with linguistics. Echoing the analogies of Ferdinand de Saussure and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Lyotard conceives of each discourse (philosophical, sociological, political, etc.) as a complex series of "language games". These games are characterized by rules that are formed, not by legitimization, but by a conventional contract that makes each language game possible. The source of this convention lies outside the players, who

cannot unilaterally formulate rules for the language game. Nor can they eradicate totally the need for rules. Without rules there is no game, and the attempt to abolish the rules is merely another twist in the nature of the game. The language game is thus a flexible entity in which "tout énoncé doit être considéré comme un <<coup>>"<sup>11</sup> ["every utterance should be thought of as a 'move'"<sup>12</sup>] within its protean structure.

This logical twist is indeed an interesting turn of events. In the field of literature, there has been a dominant tendency over the past two centuries to construct and analyze literary texts through the matrices of science. Moving back along the historical continuum, however, the most memorable philosophical narratives of the structuralist era are not literary but anthropological: the structures of family relations in Claude Lévi-Strauss; the proliferation of myth and fantasy in Mircea Eliade; the parable of the gift in Marcel Mauss. None of these thinkers consider themselves authors in a literary sense. Their techniques are "scientific" and, although dealing with discourses that are clearly narrative in construction, they rarely waver from the habit of providing "empirical" evidence on which to base their findings. Anthropology is, in a sense, a perfect illustration of the postmodern ambiguity posited by Lyotard. It is a mode of narrative production, but in disguise. Concealing itself behind the mask of science, anthropology is one of the best examples of science in denial of its unscientific foundations.

The importation of these linguistic theories has the effect of "drawing in" the broad strands of Lyotard's argument. Into the heart of what is ostensibly a study of the morphologies of knowledge and science peculiar to the postmodern age, Lyotard introduces a technique of analysis whose roots

are grounded firmly in the humanities. Science has, in the past, projected itself as lying outside cultural language games. Its appeal is to its method: the techniques of science are the pillars of its certainty. This certainty separates it from the ambiguities of other discourses (philosophical, political, literary) and gives it the status of knowledge. This division echoes the Platonic separation between "knowledge" and "opinion": science claims its privileged position with the surety that its mode of thought is separated radically from the distortions of affect and ambiguity. Lyotard's analysis turns this convention on its head. Science, conceived of both as a language game and a narrative form, is social science in disguise. Science becomes, in effect, a form of literature.

This trend does not begin with structuralism, of course. The classificatory techniques of analysis of Russian Formalism are another great example of the ambivalent relationship between science and the humanities. The Formalist methods may be seen as more than the result of scientific application. Its mode of analysis is, in a sense, already aesthetic. The search for formal purity, for a set of rules within the chaos of poetic language, recalls the contemporaneous paintings of artists like Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky. In Formalism, science itself has become aesthetic. Its processes constitute an artistic style akin to minimalism or cubism.

The retrospective focus so far has been on the critical rather than the literary, highlighting a typically modernist division between theory as analytical science and the performance of literature as art form (this separation is naturally imperfect: the *nouveau roman*, for example, may be thought of as another intersection of science and narrative). The discursive

field is historically divided in this manner. The relational shift between aesthetics and science from the nineteenth to the twentieth century denotes a change in critical agency. The critical discourses of the twentieth century focus on describing, in as scientific a manner as possible, the processes of poetic language. It is the *literature* of the nineteenth century, by contrast, that penetrates scientific discourse in a proactive manner. This trend is articulated in the naturalism of Émile Zola, for example, and stretches back to Balzac's frequent intertwining of narrative with science (Cuvier, Saint-Hilaire) and pseudo-science (Swedenborg, Mesmer).

The outcome of the postmodern challenge to the status of scientific knowledge, argues Lyotard, needs to be considered in the context of the two great modern paradigms of social construction. According to *La Condition postmoderne* "cette représentation s'est partagée en principe entre deux modèles: la société forme un tout fonctionnel, la société est divisée en deux"<sup>13</sup> ["in principle there have been...two basic representational models for society: either society forms a functional whole, or it is divided in two"<sup>14</sup>]. The first is the vision of an organic society, a single unit that, although diverse, nevertheless retains an inherent set of boundaries that maintain it as a totality.

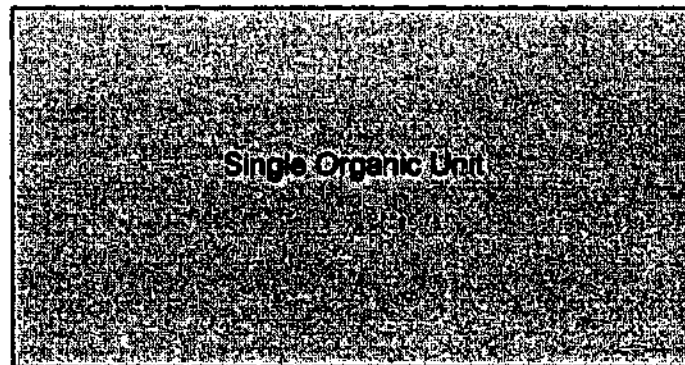


Figure 1.1 – Organic Model of Society

This is clearly the object, for example, of sociology, and Lyotard traces its inheritance back through the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann to the work of Auguste Comte. This presupposition of an organic whole is of course paralleled in literature, in particular the sociological studies of nineteenth century literature. Lyotard calls it a "réalisme de l'auto-régulation systématique"<sup>15</sup> ["realism of systemic self-regulation"<sup>16</sup>], a discipline (in the academic sense) that leads to ask questions like "what is society?" and "what is literature?". Not only is this the space of traditional science, it is associated with what, for Lyotard, constitutes an untenable political position: "Si la théorie <<traditionnelle>> est toujours menacée d'être incorporée à la programmation du tout social comme un simple outil d'optimisation des performances de ce dernier, c'est que son désir d'une vérité unitaire et totalisante se prête à la pratique unitaire et totalisante des gérants du système."<sup>17</sup> ["'Traditional' theory is always in danger of being incorporated into the programming of the social whole as a simple tool for the optimization of its performance; this is because its desire for a unitary and totalizing truth lends itself to the unitary and totalizing practice of the system's managers."<sup>18</sup>]

The second system is therefore in large part a political reaction to the collaborative tendencies of the first. Its outstanding example is, of course, the political and economic critique of Marx and the diverse strands of dialectical materialism. Lyotard, himself a Marxist during the early part of his career, expresses understandable disillusionment about the political failings of this model. Marxism, he argues, collaborated with the state by becoming an ideological tool for the communist bloc.

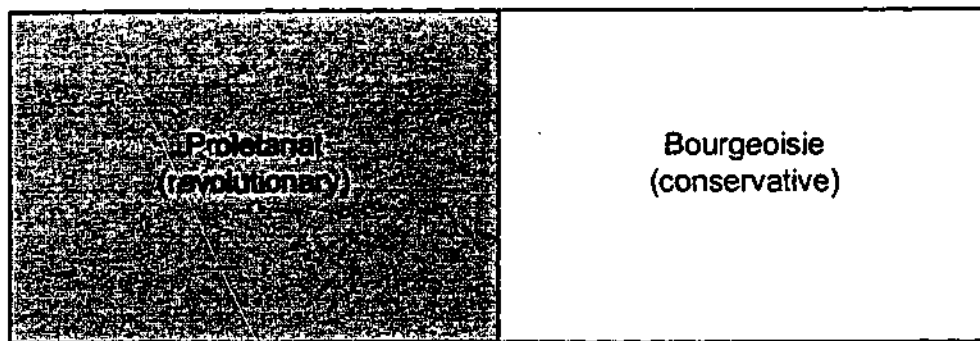


Figure 1.2 – Divided Model of Society

Only a few Marxists preserved its integrity, he argues, among them the Frankfurt School. Lyotard writes: “on ne peut cacher que l’assise sociale du principe de la division, la lutte des classes, venant à s’estomper au point de perdre toute radicalité, il s’est trouvé finalement exposé au peril de perdre son assiette théorique et de se réduire à une <<utopie>>, à une <<espérance>>, une protestation pour l’honneur levée au nom de l’homme, ou de la raison, ou de la créativité, ou encore telle catégorie sociale affecté”<sup>19</sup> [“the social foundation of the principle of division, or class struggle, was blurred to the point of losing all of its radicality; we cannot conceal the fact that the critical model in the end lost its theoretical standing and was reduced to the status of a ‘utopia’ or ‘hope’, a token protest raised in the name of man or reason or creativity, or again of some social category”<sup>20</sup>]. In other words, the second paradigm became a mutation of the first. The focus had changed from agonistics to utopianism.

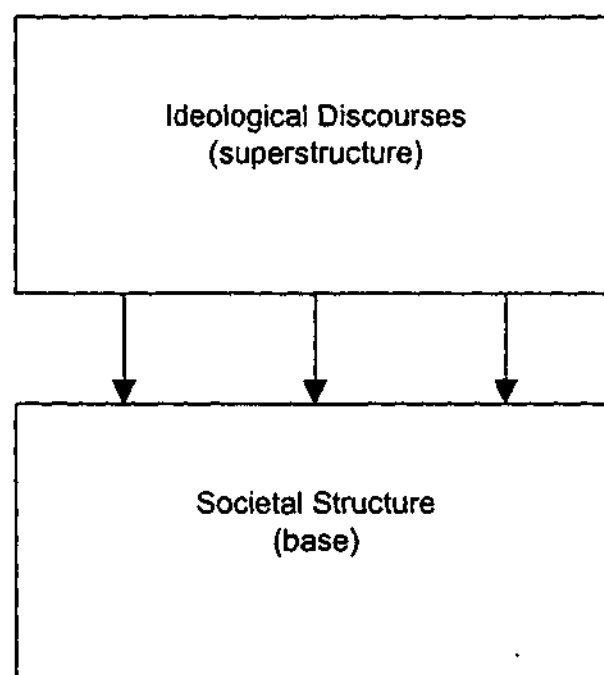
These political and sociological considerations bring to the fore an important chiasmus. Literature is political; politics is literary. Politics, according to Lyotard’s analysis, is structured as a narrative and as such constitutes a mode of literature. Even the word “politics” must be defined carefully. The French language, for example, makes an important

conceptual distinction, indicated by a gender switch in the definite article of the word "politique". In French, when one speaks of "la politique" the reference is to the workings of the conventional political machinery (politicians, parliamentary structures, public bureaucracy). By contrast the term "le politique" indicates politics in a broad, molecular sense. Because language games permeate every field, Lyotard understands "politique" in both its nuances. When it comes to literature, however, I will speak almost exclusively in the register of "le politique" (although the two meanings may intertwine, as in Balzac's wonderful dissection of public bureaucracy in *Les Employés*). But if anything, Lyotard's work marks a shift from "la politique" (a grand narrative of politics) to "le politique" (a dissemination, in Derrida's sense, of political discourses). What links literature, philosophy, politics, science and sociology in *La Condition postmoderne* is their collaboration in the various guises of representation. The critical revolt against representation must therefore be understood in the context of these intertwining discourses.

This fragmentation, for Lyotard, is the meaning of the "postmodern condition". Fragmentation has long been associated with a kind of postmodern utopianism. It is widely misunderstood that the collapse of grand narratives signals the end of totalizing systems, and thus attacks the very heart of institutional, discursive violence: the state. This claim is true only in a qualified sense. In the political realm, for example, postmodern theory has tended to argue that its critique of modernism marks the "end of ideology". This assertion is born of technical negligence, at the heart of which lies the definition of the term "ideology". Postmodern utopianism

understanding adopts a prosaic interpretation of this word. Ideology is thus incorrectly defined as the equivalent of any political theory to which one may attach the epithet “grand narrative” (much as one might hang a “condemned” sign on a building). The end of ideology is therefore touted as the collapse of, for example, “fascism”, “liberalism” and “communism” (which may explain the vehemence shown by contemporary Marxists toward postmodern theory). But “ideology”, when used in a critically sensitive manner, differs remarkably from its prosaic sense. Ideology is central to the work of Louis Althusser, who uses “ideology” as an expansion of the traditional understanding of “superstructure”.

In its simplest form the base/superstructure division reproduces the materialist division between phenomena and things-in-themselves. Althusser’s conception is more complex. His notion of ideology refers to a network of sophisticated state discourses and institutions (the superstructure) that are used simultaneously to coax and coerce the individual into conforming to the capitalist mode of production (the base).



*Figure 1.3 – The Structure of Ideology*

Althusser thus injects renewed importance into a critique in which the role of the superstructure had largely been overlooked. Althusser's brand of ideology is also important from a philosophical point of view. It brings into question the status of the sovereign individual, a Cartesian legacy that forms the heart of bourgeois liberalism. As with Freud's "discovery" of the unconscious, ideology destabilized the illusion of autonomy. It became impossible to determine absolute agency – in other words, to decide if the individual is responsible for his or her actions, or whether they are the result of ideological conditioning. Whilst ideology undermined the sovereignty of the individual, it simultaneously endowed the state with its own brand of malicious autonomy. The mode of representation was thus preserved to some extent: the individual became a projection, a "mirror image" of state ideology.

The collapse of grand narratives, however, announces the demise of the state and the end of ideology even in Althusser's sense. But this "postmodern condition" in no way ushers in a new, utopian freedom of semiotic disorder. Lyotard writes:

La nouveauté est que dans ce contexte les anciens pôles d'attraction formés par les États-nations, les partis, les professions, les institutions et les traditions historiques perdent de leur attrait. [...] Chacun est renvoyé à soi. Et chacun sait que ce *soi* est peu.

De cette décomposition des grands Récits, que nous analysons plus loin, il s'ensuit ce que d'aucuns analysent comme la dissolution du lien social et le passage des collectivités sociales à l'état d'une masse composée d'atomes individuels lancés dans un absurde mouvement brownien. Il n'en est rien, c'est une vue qui nous paraît obnubilée par la représentation paradisiaque d'une société <<organique>> perdue.<sup>21</sup>

[What is new in all of this is that the old poles of attraction represented by nation-states, parties, professions, institutions, and historical traditions are losing their attraction. And it does not look as though they will be replaced, at least not on their former scale. [...] Each individual is referred to himself. And each of us knows that our *self* does not amount to much.

This breaking up of the grand Narratives...leads to what some authors analyze in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion. Nothing of the kind is happening: this point of view, it seems to me, is haunted by the paradisiac representation of a lost "organic" society.<sup>22</sup>]

Lyotard does not herald a replacement for the state. Instead he sees the political struggle move from the grand arena of collectivity to the level of the individual self – and beyond. "Le *soi* est peu, mais il n'est pas isolé, il est pris dans une texture de relations plus complexe et plus mobile que jamais. Il est toujours [...] placé sur des <<nœuds>> de circuits de communication, seraient-ils infimes"<sup>23</sup> ["A *self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. [...] a person is always located at 'nodal points' of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be"<sup>24</sup>]. Political language games shift from a broad, statewide aggregate to the level of the specific individual. The result is a trade between the slackening of external coercive forces in return for increased speed and efficiency amongst the societal atoms. The language of Lyotard's shift is disturbingly utilitarian: the new societal "système" ["system"] puts in place "les régulations" ["regulatory mechanisms"] that are instituted in order to "améliorer ses performances" ["improve its performance"].<sup>25</sup> "On peut même dire que le système peut et doit encourager ces déplacements pour autant qu'il lutte contre sa propre entropie et qu'une nouveauté

correspondant à un <<coup>> inattendu et au déplacement corrélatif...peut apporter au système ce supplément de performativité qu'il ne cesse de demander et de consumer"<sup>26</sup> ["It may even be said that the system can and must encourage such movement to the extent that it combats its own entropy; the novelty of an unexpected 'move', with its correlative displacement...can supply the system with that increased performativity it forever demands and consumes"<sup>27</sup>].

Whatever the ambiguities of the postmodern condition, Lyotard's politics are not tied to the prosaic monstrosities of the celibate machine.<sup>28</sup> He favors instead "une théorie des jeux, qui inclut l'agonistique dans ses présupposés"<sup>29</sup> ["a theory of games which accepts agonistics as its founding principle"<sup>30</sup>]. This procedure, as Jameson points out in his foreword, is a kind of philosophical erosion, eating away at the foundations on which the tyrannical machine is built. What is required are not more "moves" (the standard shuffles of the game) or "countermoves" (a reaction against the conventions of the game) since these merely return to the second, dialectical model of society. A language game founded on the principle of agonistics must engender surprise moves, disruptions and displacements in the system in order to produce "un <<coup>> (un nouvel énoncé) qui soit inattendu"<sup>31</sup> ["an unexpected 'move' (a new statement)"<sup>32</sup>].

As a language game, the narrative form has its own rules (although these features read more like a series of semiotic levels at which the text may be read). First, writes Lyotard, the narrative has an ideological function designed to engender positive and negative responses from its receivers. Second, the narrative weaves many different types of language games into a

heterogeneous text. It moves seamlessly between, for example, statements about "what is" ("ce qu'il en est du ciel" ["the state of the sky"], "de la flore et de la faune" ["flora and fauna"]), ethical statements and rhetorical mutations.<sup>33</sup> Third, the narrative, as a language game, must follow certain regulations in order for it to unfold, "la transmission de [...] récits [...] à des règles qui en fixent la pragmatique"<sup>34</sup> ["rules that define the pragmatics of [...] transmission"<sup>35</sup>]. These factors contribute to the propagation of a narrative. They are signifiers that denote its status as an assemblage of meaning. These markings allow its speedy passage through the societal machine, complete with performative instructions.

The effects of this narrativization of knowledge are articulated in a fourth feature. The transformation of knowledge into narrative, Lyotard writes, creates a peculiar temporal effect. "La forme narrative obéit à un rythme, elle est la synthèse d'un mètre qui bat le temps en périodes régulières et d'un accent qui modifie la longueur ou l'amplitude de certaines d'entre elles"<sup>36</sup> ["Narrative form follows a rhythm; it is the synthesis of a meter beating time in regular periods and of accent modifying the length or amplitude of those periods"<sup>37</sup>]. This cadenced quality, which is part of the narrative reception, does not reinforce memory but instead loses both sender and receiver in the oscillations of rhythm. The mode of expression (the narrative form) eclipses the content it conveys. Lyotard writes:

Il présente une propriété surprenante: à mesure que le mètre l'emporte sur l'accent dans les occurrences sonores, parlées ou non, le temps cesse d'être le support de la mise en mémoire et devient un battement immémorial qui, en l'absence de différences remarquables entre les périodes, interdit de les dénombrer et les expédie à l'oubli. [...] L'important dans les protocoles pragmatiques de cette sorte de narration est qu'ils

marquent l'identité de principe de toutes les occurrences du récit. Il peut n'en être rien [...] Reste que l'importance est accordée au battement métrique des occurrences du récit et non à la différence d'accent de chaque performance. C'est ainsi que l'on peut dire cette temporalité à la fois évanescente et immémoriale.<sup>38</sup>

[It exhibits a surprising feature: as meter takes precedence over accent in the production of sound (spoken or not), time ceases to be a support for memory to become an immemorial beating that, in the absence of a noticeable separation between periods, prevents their being numbered and consigns them to oblivion. [...] The important thing about the pragmatic protocol of this kind of narration is that it betokens a theoretical identity between each of the narrative's occurrences. This may not in fact be the case [...] [but] the fact remains that what is emphasized is the metrical beat of the narrative occurrences, not each performance's differences in accent. It is in this case that this mode of temporality can be said to be simultaneously evanescent and immemorial.<sup>39</sup>]

There is a marked shift in discursive value: the articulation (Lyotard prefers the word "performance") is what counts, at the expense of a now arbitrary content. It is a new paradigm of style, of appearance, opposed to the old regime because it is no longer *re*-presentation but "presentation" in an ironic sense; ironic, because there is nothing to "present" ("at present"). The postmodern world thus finds its affinity, for example, in the Julien Sorel of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir*, able to recite from memory a Latin translation of the New Testament whilst possessing no idea of what the text actually means.

Lyotard's critique calls for the creation of an "agonistics" of literary analysis. Such a task implies the formation of a new politics of criticism. This strategy has little to do with conventional politics (*la politique*), however. I have no desire to return to a political aesthetics, such as the "socialist realism" of the Stalinist era. What I am interested in is a politics of

representation (putting a new spin on an old phrase) in the field of literature. I have explored Lyotard's analyses at some length because I believe the lessons learnt there should be applied to literary analysis.

Central to this politics of representation is a realization that the critical conception of literature since the beginning of the twentieth century parallels the structures of traditional politics. Literature and politics (or "sociology": the difference, in Lyotard, is not very clear) share the same metaphysical assumptions. Each revolves primarily around a structure in which the key term is agency. Consider the model of political hegemony, described by Thomas Hobbes in his classic *Leviathan*, which reflects Lyotard's first model of representation.

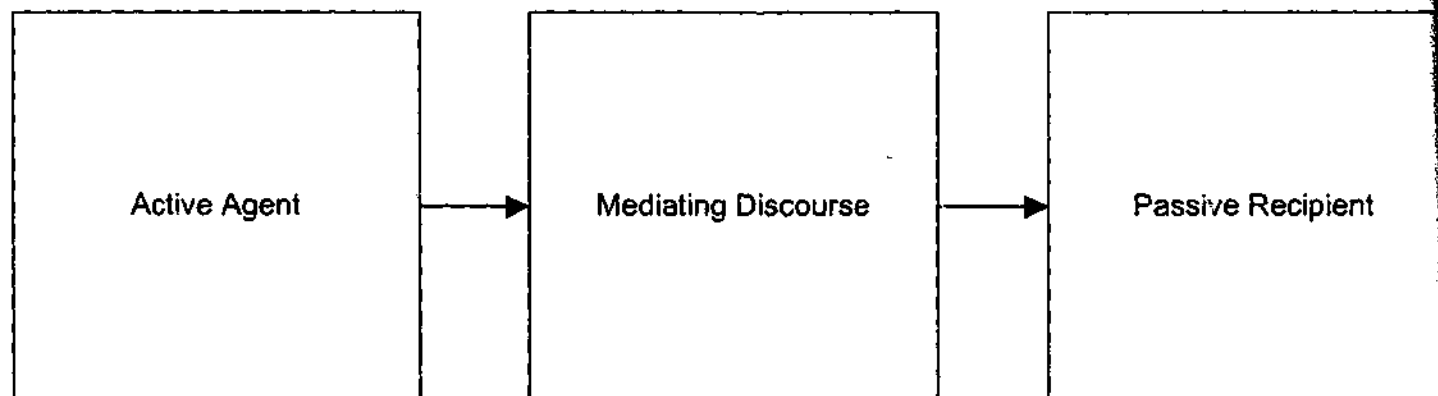


Figure 1.4 – The Tripartite Structure of Representational Discourse

Hobbes' model consists of a trinity of terms (the triptych is a recurring feature of representative models): the sovereign, in whom authority is invested; the citizens, who are subject to the rulings of the sovereign; the social contract, with its double function of enforcing the decrees of the ruler and legitimizing the status of the sovereign, thus mediating between the two players. Marx produces a similar pattern: the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, and the factors of production that mediate them. The representational model

of literature also uses this model: the writer, the reader, and the mediating text.

The importance of subjectivity (in the form of agency) in the representative construction cannot be overemphasized. The rules of its language game are almost exclusively unidirectional. The sovereign rules the kingdom; the writer produces texts. Text and reader are forgotten in their obviousness. Even the "revolutionary" model does not attempt to change or investigate the preeminence of subjectivity, but tries instead to reverse its direction. The problem with agency is its tyrannical predisposition. Agency is the key recourse for the revolutionary *ressentiment* of the underprivileged agent, for example, whose protests, although emitted in the name of justice, are little more than a latent desire to exercise oppression in the place of the ruling class. The new politics is neither "conservative" (a collaboration with the sovereignty of the philosopher-king) nor "revolutionary" (a hypocritical reversal of the status quo). It is neither hagiography (it does not read the text in the shadow of "what the author really meant") nor reception theory. Its interest is fixed, not on the subjectivities that jostle to annex the text for cynical purposes, but on the text itself. Neither does it extol blindly the virtues of the "death of the author". Death, after all, is a sign of semiotic maturity, not discursive resolution.

It is also a politics of suspicion: we should not follow blindly the exoteric statements of any author about his or her work. A great deal of critical carelessness has resulted from these implicit acts of faith. On what basis, for example, should we accept Stendhal's analogy between a mirror and the novel as the key to reading *Le Rouge et le noir*? In recent

Stendhalian criticism, the integrity of this approach has been brought under close scrutiny. In his book *Rendering French Realism*, Lawrence Schehr writes:

"One can say anything with a look, and yet, one can always deny a look, for it cannot be repeated textually." Thus Stendhal is participating in constructing an idea of writing as he asks what can be represented in narrative and how the real is to be transcribed. [...] Just as the position of the lover is metamorphosed into that of the observer producing writing, the theory of this narrative is already ironized by a constantly changing dialectic. The gaps appear even as the writing comes into being [...] Stendhal already sees the truth as that which inherently resists the process of representation that is narrative. [...] Stendhal reaches the startling conclusion that to write it is necessary to separate truth and representation. By separating truth and representation, Stendhal effects what he calls elsewhere "the first step".<sup>40</sup>

Stendhal is thus exposed as an untrustworthy commentator on his own work. This apparent unreliability should not be taken as a sign of naïveté, however. Stendhal's example is one of many similar pieces of meta-text in the realist canon, placed in juxtaposition to the main narrative.

The realists thus employ a strategy that proves directly subversive to the politics of representation. As Schehr points out, there is an implicit separation of truth and representation in the realist text, to the extent that truth itself is an *obstacle* to representation. Realism does not, against all stereotypes, believe in a seamless and illusory simulation of reality. The evidence lies in its fragmented, polyphonic narratives: the repeated interruptions of the textual flow by way of authorial comment (Balzac); the recurring maxim of the heterogeneous intrusion of politics as a "pistol" that suspends the continuity of the text (Stendhal). Realism institutes a shift, in Deleuzian terms, from the molar (that is to say, architectonic) level to the

molecular level, concentrating on the infinite particularities that cannot be bound to a homogeneous totality.

The effects of such a shift undermine the nature of the representational political structure by a process of "multiplication" or "doubling". The realist novel, from this perspective, is not so much a single mirror (as in Stendhal's analogy) but a hall of mirrors, playing and reflecting one against the other. On all sides the reader is presented with an image that appears the same, but is reflected through the matrices of various mirrors (different positions, different levels of distortion). In this sense the text has a labyrinthine quality: each turn looks the same, that makes the wanderer believe he or she is heading in the right direction, but the reality differs markedly from the bewildering array of perceptions on display. The realist text thus breaks away from the tripartite structure of author-reader-text, fragmenting discourse into infinitely small "packets" of narrative that defy generalization.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Prendergast, "Realism, God's Secret, and the Body" in Christopher Prendergast and Margaret Cohen (eds.), *Spectacles of Realism: body, gender, genre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>2</sup> The allusion is to Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), Section 125.

<sup>3</sup> The allusion is to Jacques Derrida's idea of the "revenant".

<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 167.

<sup>6</sup> Fredric Jameson, foreword to Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), viii-ix.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiii.

<sup>9</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiii.

<sup>11</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 24.

<sup>14</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 27.

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- <sup>16</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 12.  
<sup>17</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 27.  
<sup>18</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 12.  
<sup>19</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 28.  
<sup>20</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 13.  
<sup>21</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 30-31.  
<sup>22</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 14-15.  
<sup>23</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 31.  
<sup>24</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 15.  
<sup>25</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 31.  
<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.  
<sup>27</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 15.  
<sup>28</sup> The "celibate machine" is a concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and explored further by Jean Baudrillard in various works. The term appears to have originated with Antonin Artaud.  
<sup>29</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 33.  
<sup>30</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 16.  
<sup>31</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 33.  
<sup>32</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 16.  
<sup>33</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 39.  
<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>35</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 20.  
<sup>36</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 41.  
<sup>37</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 21.  
<sup>38</sup> Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, 41-42.  
<sup>39</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 22.  
<sup>40</sup> Lawrence Schehr, *Rendering French Realism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 29-32.

## CHAPTER TWO

### "DISCONTINUITIES"

*Structural Key:*

*First Discursive Thread*  
- Subthread no. 1 ("Introduction")

*Second Discursive Thread*  
- Subthread no. 2 ("The Importance of Realism to Contemporary Theory")

In the first chapter I discussed, in broad terms, a postmodern mythology, a history of aesthetics in which Western culture is divided into three expansive periods: premodernity, modernity and postmodernity. Realism looms large within this schema, a dominant figure in a string of "isms" that have been used to designate prevailing trends in literature and art as they have metamorphosed over the past two hundred years. The nineteenth century spawned some notable "isms", among them Romanticism, Realism and Naturalism. It is against these doctrines that the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century (in other words, the culmination of modernist culture) saw an explosion of counter-movements, such as Impressionism, Expressionism, Symbolism, Surrealism and Dadaism, to name but a few. Swept together under the overarching title of modernism, they form the first wave of attack against the architectonic nature of premodern thought. The Impressionists, for instance, are a primary example of this anti-realist revolution: their art fragments the representation

of reality in order to highlight the praxis of perception rather than the seamlessness of a reality "in itself". Similarly, the Surrealists moved away from the objective historical milieu of realist art in order to embrace the interiority of the unconscious. If we believe this postmodern mythology, it would seem that the *raison d'être* of the modernist aesthetic was to establish an art of fragmentation as a direct challenge to its premodern, realist predecessors: a note of triumphalism that highlights significant prejudices in this mythology.

Two of these prejudices stand out in particular. The first is the valorization of the present, of what is perceived to be "new". In this scenario it is realism that seems to be "old", a hackneyed, conventional aesthetic. In his essay "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" Fredric Jameson links the "new" (or rather, what is perceived to be "new") with the power to shock. He argues that the modernist period played on the taboos of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, manifest in its passionate repudiation by the Victorian and post-Victorian bourgeoisie, for whom its forms and ethos were received as variously ugly, dissonant, obscure, scandalous, immoral, subversive and generally "anti-social".<sup>1</sup> Modernism's comparative approach to the "new", which draws on the present as the boundary beyond which it must step, breeds its own historical ironies. Relativizing the past also relativizes the power of the "new" to shock. Art gets stuck in the rut of what Kierkegaard refers to sardonically as the need to "go further".<sup>2</sup> The result, as Jameson points out, is the entrance of what used to be art for shock's sake into the mainstream, thus joining the conservative forces of culture it had been designed to challenge. Jameson

labels this switch of allegiance as a regression from modernism into a kind of "realism":

It will be argued here that a mutation in the sphere of culture has rendered such attitudes [i.e., shock] archaic. Not only are Picasso and Joyce no longer ugly; they now strike us, on the whole, as rather "realistic"; and this is the result of a canonization and an academic institutionalization of the modern movement generally, which can be traced back to the 1950s.<sup>3</sup>

The radicalization of artistic forms thus progresses from a relatively gentle critique of realism by the Impressionists to the outer limits of modernist experimentation, from the artistic deserts of Malevich's white canvases to the announcement of the death of art by the Dadaists. Jameson tries to distance himself from the aforementioned mythology by denouncing the paradigm that declares itself to be both the aftermath and inheritor of the modernist apocalypse: postmodernism. Postmodernism calls itself a critique of modernist values, but Jameson sees it merely as the exhaustion of the modernist project and its co-option, like its art, into the conservative mainstream. The modern styles remain, but they are emptied of their critical value in order to serve the capitalist economy. Pointing to the manufacture of wristwatches designed in the manner of Salvador Dalí's painting *The Persistence of Memory* and television variety show sets populated with inflatable plastic sculptures of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, Jameson charts what he calls the rise of "aesthetic populism" – in other words, the "dumbing down" of culture – as the distinguishing feature of the postmodern "cultural dominant".

Jameson's error lies in approaching these aesthetic questions from a comparative historical point of view. This method appears successful only

when confined to specific parameters. The valorization of the new, for instance, is an attribute that has been assigned (by Jameson, Charles Baudelaire, Michel Foucault and others) to modernity. But is not realism also concerned with a "new" literature and a "new" aesthetic? What postmodernism regards as modernism's revolt against realism overlooks completely realism's own historical contingency. The practical aesthetic tasks taken on by realist writers, such as the detailed depiction of everyday life within the fictional narrative, were not only "new", they also possessed a calculated shock value. The canonical fiction of the eighteenth century, for example, frowned on such prosaic (in the sense of "everyday") descriptions. Scenes that appear to be the standard fare of narrative discourse to today's reader were dismissed as unworthy of description. Writers of fiction did not, for example, describe an everyday meal. Writing about Rousseau's classic *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Voltaire mocks the author for mentioning, on one occasion, the food consumed by the characters. The phrase from the novel ("I sent for a chicken") is cited derisively in his *Lettres sur La Nouvelle Héloïse* as a sign of Rousseau's lack of profundity.<sup>4</sup> Thus realism raised its own awkward questions for the literary mainstream of its time. Could the moral character of literature be maintained if an author no longer (theoretically) placed limits on what could be said? The realist movement was neither naïve nor uncontroversial, as the postmodern mythology makes out; it was shocking and confronting. Stendhal's novels were long denounced as "immoral" (by Henry James, to name but one example), and Balzac's so-called "excess of truth" similarly led to warnings of moral decay.

The second notable prejudice of the postmodern mythology is its self-reflexive fixation on the writing process: this "new meta-criticism, which is only about itself", as Taylor Stoehr puts it.<sup>5</sup> Realism drops out of the zone of postmodern interest because, in trying merely to reflect the world, it lacks the quality of self-awareness that characterizes postmodern art. Postmodern thought dates the interest of art in the processes of its own production back to Kant's critiques of reason. In an intertextual blending of discourses, philosophy meets literature on a newly defined field of signification. Since Kantian transcendental philosophy is interested in the form of perception rather than the phenomena or perceptions themselves, it seems natural that literature should begin to ask similar questions about its own construction. The realist aesthetic appears to lose considerable ground when evaluated from this viewpoint. Realism, from the postmodern perspective, is a literary mode that reacts against the modern, post-Kantian trend towards an examination of form, focusing instead on the content of a work. This prejudice that has long generated stereotypes about realism, portraying it as a conservative, reactionary literature at the expense of its most radical and interesting elements. The task at hand, therefore, is to rediscover the revolutionary dimensions of realism.

I shall begin by juxtaposing these radical elements to a conventional understanding of realism, as outlined by Stoehr in his book *Words and Deeds*. Stoehr himself has already begun this process by positing a division between realism and verisimilitude. Realism (and the various "isms" mentioned earlier) denotes a practice of literature, according to Stoehr,

whereas verisimilitude refers to the poetics of representation or, as I have called it, "realology". Stoehr writes:

Most of the theorizing on the subject of mimesis is concerned with a literary manner, realism, rather than with the representation of reality, mimesis – that is, with one means of effecting verisimilitude rather than with verisimilitude itself. The various literary manners – realism, symbolism, naturalism, and so on into those without names – are the different means writers have developed to present experience in words, and the theory of mimesis is the theory of the foundations of all such manners, their common problems, built into the relations of language and life.<sup>6</sup>

Although there are other bones to pick in such a statement, the basic step that Stoehr undertakes is a logical one for my analysis as it moves away from the historical, comparative approach.

Stoehr analyzes with some rigor four properties or categories that he regards as the defining features of realism. The first, familiarity, appears at first to exemplify one of (post)modernism's fundamental objections to realist art and literature. One of the most fiercely contested philosophical battlegrounds of twentieth-century criticism has been (along with such cousins as psychoanalysis) the field of linguistics, in particular the relation between words and things. Just as Kant is seen as the progenitor of modern philosophy, Ferdinand de Saussure's revaluation of linguistic values in *Cours de linguistique générale* heralds the triumph of form over content in the field of language. Saussure says (or rather, in one of the most ironic fusions of expression and logic, is projected by his students to have said) that the most basic propositions of his linguistic theories will shake the foundations of the logic of "une nomenclature, c'est-à-dire une liste de termes correspondant à autant de choses"<sup>7</sup> ["nomenclature: a list of terms

corresponding to a list of things"<sup>8</sup>]. Thus, when Stoehr talks about the property of familiarity growing out of "the referential capabilities of language", the knee-jerk reaction of the (post)modern critic is to launch into the Saussurean arguments about nomenclature.<sup>9</sup> Stoehr again bypasses these programmed responses by separating the issue of linguistics from the debates over verisimilitude:

The representation of reality, insofar as reality consists of the world of physical objects, must partly depend on the availability of words to "stand for" objects. However, it is not clear that "stand for", in the sense of "refer", is equivalent to "represent", a matter of mimesis. [...] if mimetic representation is not a matter of structural correspondences at the referential or propositional levels of language, it nevertheless must depend on them at least to the degree that truth-to-life must be truth-about-life<sup>10</sup>

Stoehr thus retains familiarity as a property of realism whilst at the same time acknowledging the contemporary critiques of nomenclature (his own references are to early Wittgenstein rather than to Saussure).

Having forsaken any attempt to establish the nature of language as a basis for the effects of verisimilitude, Stoehr aims instead to scrutinize the techniques and conventions by which the realist text is structured (and so is recognized as a realist text). Familiarity is therefore not a property of language, according to Stoehr, but is instead a realist *convention* that often highlights the problematic relationship between words and things. The naming of familiar objects as a realist strategy might appear at times to be an attempt to draw attention away from this relation. After all, if something is familiar, then by definition it does not unbalance or bring to attention the world that envelops it. Yet one must always keep in mind the effect of time on notions of familiarity. What appears familiar in one time or world can

seem unfamiliar in another. As such, it must not be forgotten that the realist movement of the nineteenth century follows in the footsteps of the development of the historical novel, which had reached its culmination in the figure of Sir Walter Scott (whom both Stendhal and Balzac read avidly). Although Stendhal later rejected Scott, he nevertheless admired his ability to describe historical details. In a short essay entitled "Sir Walter Scott et la *Princesse de Clèves*" he outlines his objections to Scott's technique. Stendhal describes two poles that define his own brand of realism. His work, he suggests, lay somewhere between the description of historical objects (after the manner of Scott) and his own shibboleth, the task of "décrire [...] les mouvements du cœur humaine"<sup>11</sup> ["describ[ing] the emotions of the human heart"<sup>12</sup>]. Stendhal argues that Scott's fame is founded on a gimmick: his historical details pleased pedants and historians, but he lacked skill as an artist in any meaningful sense. Stendhal writes: "ces derniers ouvrages ont un *mérite historique*. [...] Ce mérite historique a causé un grand plaisir; je ne [le] nie pas, mais c'est ce mérite historique qui se fanera le premier. Le siècle fera un pas vers le genre simple et vrai, et les à-peu-près maniérés de Sir Walter Scott lui déplairont autant que d'abord ils l'avaient charmé"<sup>13</sup> ["The merit of [...] [his] works is *historical*. [...] This *historical merit* gives great pleasure. I do not deny that. But it is the historical merit that will fade the soonest. The century will move toward a more simple and natural style; and it will find Sir Walter Scott's mannered approximations as distasteful as they were charming at first"<sup>14</sup>]. The property of familiarity is therefore already a dynamic concept in Stendhal.

Familiarity pertains to a world, and familiar objects give this world the potential to be as reassuringly intimate as it is alienating.

Stendhal thus brings into question the same fundamental problems about language and verisimilitude that postmodern theory claims as its own. In *Le Rouge et le noir*, for instance, the exemplary familiar object of this "chronicle of the nineteenth century" is the guillotine, a throwback to the French Revolution. The guillotine in turn echoes the beheadings a few centuries earlier of Boniface de la Mole, of John the Baptist, and so on. Familiarity is no longer about the historically true, but about a zone of logical clarity into which historical objects and events are folded. Victor Hugo uses a similar technique in *Notre Dame de Paris*. Although set in the sixteenth century, the superb opening sequence of the play-within-a-novel is clearly a satire of nineteenth-century neoclassicism, and its creator, Pierre Gringoire, is a caricature of the neoclassical artist. Stendhal again highlights the radical dimensions of the realist aesthetic in his essay on Scott:

Tout ouvrage d'art est un *beau mensonge*; tous ceux qui ont écrit le savent bien. Rien de ridicule comme ce conseil donné par les gens du monde: *imitez la nature*. Eh! je le sais bien, morbleu! qu'il faut imiter la nature; mais jusqu'à quel point? voilà toute la question. [...] *Imitez la nature* est donc un conseil vide de sens. Jusqu'à quel point faut-il imiter la nature pour plaire au lecteur? Telle est la grande question.<sup>15</sup>

[Every work of art is a pretty lie. Anyone who has written knows this very well. There is nothing so ridiculous as the advice offered by society people: *imitate life*. Good Lord! I realize that a writer should imitate life. But to what extent? That's the whole question. [...] "imitate life" is a meaningless piece of advice. To what extent must life be disguised in order to please the reader? That is the big question.<sup>16</sup>]

From such a position we can only conclude either that Stendhal is not a realist (a puzzling outcome for literary historians, who have long claimed

him as one of its founders) or that the historical dimensions of his statements are irrefutable proof that the postmodern mythology pertaining to realism is just that: a myth, a narrative that, for all its self-reflexive properties, is still a "grand narrative".

The second property Stoehr assigns to realism is particularity. At first glance there appears to be little difference between familiarity and particularity. Although they share a common ground, the separation of the two properties is justified. Particularity in its most prosaic sense is a literary technique used to ground fiction in reality, to make it "true-to-life" by referring to extra-textual events, objects and people. A subtle use of this technique may be found in Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*, in which the narrative stretches over a period of more than ten years, even though the flow of time is detectable only through references to various historical events (famous trials, politicians, revolutionary upheavals, and so on) that only a contemporary of Flaubert's, or a historian with a detailed knowledge of the period, could recognize. Flaubert thus creates a textual "unconscious" that grounds the novel in historical time. Stendhal also uses the technique in the subtitles of his novels (*Armance* is "quelques scènes d'un salon de Paris en 1827") but by 1830, with the publication of *Le Rouge et le noir*, the subtitle proclaiming it as "a chronicle of the nineteenth century" had become ironic and had less to do with historical references than with a prevailing philosophical outlook, the so-called "*mal du siècle*".

The analysis increases in sophistication when Stoehr introduces a contrast between the property of particularity and the movement towards generalization. The realists, the great writers of particularity, explore the

nature of detail in their work. Details "are the irreducibles of someone's experience, particulars noticed or responded to. Generalizations are patterns attributed to experience, groupings, similarities, relationships which someone apprehends or believes in."<sup>17</sup> Stoehr claims that literary style oscillates between these two poles of particularity and generalization. To illustrate his point, he points to aphasia (famously theorized by Roman Jakobson and Joseph Halle in their chapter on the interlocking functions of metaphor and metonymy), where particularity and generality may be isolated according to the patient's proclivity toward one pole or the other. The same proclivities, he argues, exist in literature. This time, however, Stoehr's distinction is not between postmodernist and realist, but rather it involves a pertinent redefinition of the differences between realism and naturalism.

[T]he ratio of one to the other is an important index of an author's style. [...] realism being a blend that emphasizes the *characteristic* detail [...] and naturalism one that moves from lengthy enumeration of apparently *given* details to generalization by induction, imitating popular conceptions of science in the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

The field of particularity thus lies well beyond that of familiarity. The function of familiarity was to problematize the relationship between words and things. The realists achieved this by playing with the context of the familiar, displacing it into alien environments in order to interrogate what its familiarity had hidden from view. Particularity is the result of this interrogation. Particularity challenges the architectonic form, the generalization, breaking down the field of literary experience into singularities. The fragmentation visible in the (post)modernist counter-

movements is thus only in apparent opposition to the techniques of the realists. Realism is built on details, particularities, singularities, encounters and flows. Modernism and postmodernism follow in the footsteps of this philosophy: "Details are the bits and aspects of experience considered as unique, individuated to the point where nothing else is quite like *this*."<sup>19</sup>

The third property of realism, writes Stoechr, is a combination of plausibility and probability. This feature could be considered the least literary of the realist components. It concerns reader response, in which the enjoyment or otherwise of the work is based on its plausibility – that is, how "realistic" it is. Stoechr highlights the subjective nature of this property:

Whatever is not possible in life cannot be true to life in a fiction. This dictum seems clear enough, but even here there are difficulties [...] Men differ over what they believe possible in real life; even more over what they want to believe possible; and still more over what they are willing to believe, so long as it is put to the test only in fiction. Realism and other literary manners cope differently with plausibility and play variously with the slack between what men do and want to credit.<sup>20</sup>

In effect, we return to the argument about the limits of discourse, of what may be said and how, in a work of fiction. For Stendhal, this was less a problem associated with the realism of his work than a moment of crisis in the midst of the Romantic upheaval. The question of plausibility and probability is therefore featured in the pro-Romantic pamphlet *Racine et Shakspeare*.

At the center of Stendhal's text is a debate about the construction of theatrical tragedies. The argument takes place as a polemic between Neoclassicism and Romanticism, first as a series of short essays, followed by a second pamphlet, an exchange of letters between two representatives of

the opposing positions. The debate centers on what today seems a rather tame aesthetic problem. Stendhal, taking the Romantic side, is arguing against "notre célèbre UNITÉ DE LIEU, la pierre angulaire de tout le système classique"<sup>21</sup> ["our celebrated UNITY OF PLACE – the keystone of the entire classical system"<sup>22</sup>]. Stendhal is referring to a Neoclassical requirement that the narrative space of tragedies be confined to a short period of time – one or two days – on the basis that such a restriction made the unfolding of the plot believable. The short time frame was considered by Neoclassicists as crucial to the process of instilling a sense of perfect theatrical "illusion". Stendhal, presenting his argument as a dialogue between a Romantic and an Academician, challenges the concept of "illusion":

Il est impossible que vous ne conveniez pas que l'illusion que l'on va chercher au théâtre n'est pas une illusion parfaite. [...] les spectateurs savent bien qu'ils sont au théâtre, et qu'ils assistent à la représentation d'un ouvrage de l'art, et non pas à un fait vrai [...] de temps en temps [...] l'illusion soit complète [...] Mais ces moments durent infiniment peu, par exemple une demi-seconde, ou un quart de seconde.<sup>23</sup>

[It is impossible for you not to agree that the illusion one seeks at the theatre is not a complete illusion. [...] the spectators know very well that they are in a theatre and watching a work of art, not a real event. [...] from time to time [...] the illusion is complete [...] But these moments are of infinitely brief duration – for example, a half-second or a quarter-second.<sup>24</sup>]

Stendhal shows here that to be "realistic" in the commonplace sense is not to seek a kind of "objectivity", but is rather a matter of literary convention and fictional construction.

The point becomes explicit in the second argument of *Racine et Shakspeare*. Stendhal is interested in two dimensions of theatrical tragedy.

The first, the poetic mechanisms according to which a play is structured, is a pragmatic problem. The Neoclassicists wish to confine the tragedy to a short period of time in order to create theatrical illusion, hence they adopt Racine as their literary model. Stendhal's practical response is to advocate the production of plays that do not conform to these rigid demands. He writes in bold capital letters: "<< Le Romantisme appliqué au genre tragique, C'EST UNE TRAGÉDIE EN PROSE QUI DURE PLUSIEURS MOIS ET SE PASSE EN DIVERS LIEUX.>>"<sup>25</sup> ["Romanticism as applied to the tragic genre IS A TRAGEDY IN PROSE THAT COVERS SEVERAL MONTHS AND TAKES PLACE IN VARIOUS LOCALES"<sup>26</sup>]. Stendhal cites Shakespeare as one instance (rather than a model) of the Romantic principle at work. The second aspect of *Racine et Shakspeare* is what makes it a work of continuing interest for today, however. Stendhal extends the definition of Romanticism beyond the neat historical boundaries to which it is usually restricted. He begins by defining two varying approaches to art:

Le *Romanticisme* est l'art de présenter aux peuples les œuvres littéraires qui, dans l'état actuel de leurs habitudes et de leurs croyances, sont susceptibles de leur donner le plus de plaisir possible.

Le *classicisme*, au contraire, leur présente la littérature qui donnait le plus grand plaisir à leurs arrière-grands-pères.<sup>27</sup>

[*Romanticism* is the art of presenting to different peoples those literary works which, in the existing state of their habits and beliefs, are capable of giving them the greatest possible pleasure.

*Classicism*, on the contrary, presents to them that literature which gave the greatest possible pleasure to their great-grandfathers.<sup>28</sup>]

Stendhal is not disparaging the art of the past. He does not, for example, deny the greatness of Racine in order to praise Shakespeare. The difference

is philosophical. The Neoclassicists believe there is a literary essence that, having reached its culmination in the plays of Racine, should be copied by the playwrights of the nineteenth century. Stendhal and the Romantics argue that, on the contrary, the criteria for literary pleasure – for what counts as plausible and probable, in this case, and even the very fact that “realism” is sought after as a literary value – vary according to the period in which a work of art is produced. Even more radically, Stendhal then claims a series of great writers as romantic *avant la lettre*: Racine, Shakespeare, Dante, Euripides and Sophocles. They are Romantics, he says, in the sense that they wrote without trying to rigidify their art by adopting principles along classical lines. He concludes: “Imiter aujourd’hui Sophocle et Euripide, et prétendre que ces imitations ne feront pas bâiller le Français du dix-neuvième siècle, c’est du classicisme”<sup>29</sup> [“To imitate Sophocles and Euripides today, and to maintain that these imitations will not cause a Frenchman of the nineteenth century to yawn with boredom, is classicism”].<sup>30</sup>

The arguments put forward in *Racine et Shakespeare* lead into the fourth realist property of simulation and illusion. Stoeckl again attempts to address a marked difference between the conventional understanding of these terms and the relevance they have to realist poetics. In popular terms, realism may be split into two modes. The first is the mode of production. This mode is the task of the author: to labor, to produce a realistic (that is to say, mimetic) text capable of “fooling” the reader into an aura of belief about the events he or she is “describing”. The second is the mode of

consumption, the position of the reader. The reader consumes the text as a "beautiful illusion" in which he or she seeks to be lost.

There is one sense in which we may say that the reader, as he becomes engrossed in the dialogue of a fiction, is actually there, where the characters are. Like all the utterances of the novelist, when they fully command our attention, the expressed thoughts of the characters are our own thoughts; reading them is thinking them, though not thinking them up. [...] Something like this is behind the notion of "identification", another corollary to "illusion".<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Stoehr doubts the conventional understanding of simulation and illusion. The difficulty for the reader, he points out, is that when approaching a text whose machinations are anticipated it becomes increasingly difficult to be swept away by simulation and illusion.

To illustrate this point, let us borrow an example from a different field. In *L'Entretien infini*, Maurice Blanchot questions the future efficacy of Freudian psychoanalysis. The technique is heralded as a revelation when it first appears, and particularly so when the analyst treats patients who have no idea of its conceptual framework. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, Freud has been appropriated into the popular unconscious. To analyze unsuspecting patients is all very well, argues Blanchot, but how would the analyst cope if confronted with an analysand versed in psychoanalysis, who can see past simplistic reductions of his or her personality to the Oedipal triangle? The same tension appears in Stendhal, only this time the position of Freud is taken by Rousseau. By a circuitous example, we thus arrive at Stoehr's point about simulation and illusion. The reader, having been taught how to read a text, knows beforehand what he or she is looking for from the moment a book is

selected for reading. In the opening paragraph of the section about simulation and illusion, Stoehr lists the literary devices used as techniques to underline the "truthfulness" of the narrative – "the autobiographical mode, the epistolary narrative, the quotation of invented (or genuine documents), newspaper articles, manuscripts, letters, poems, and so forth, are among the means which some authors use to convince readers of the truth-to-life of their novels".<sup>32</sup> The list recalls Foucault's lecture "L'ordre du discours", in which he outlines a complex series of discursive implements designed to shape and harness the "truthfulness" of a discourse. Reading Stoehr's and Foucault's lists in tandem banishes any notion of a simple truth that is "unmediated", "out there", a "thing-in-itself". Realist fiction, argues Stoehr, therefore does not in any way aim to simulate life. Rather, it engages in a polemic pertaining to "what life is about":

In the preceding pages formulations like "the impression of life" or "convincing representation" have played some part in the phrasing of the successful mimetic effect. This diction [...] is misleading, though hard to avoid. It is a difficulty rooted in most of our terminology of mimesis, even in such expressions as "lifelike", which also leaves room for the possibility of a fiction attempting only to seem true to life without actually being so. The implication is misleading because, as we saw at the outset, representations of reality are rarely intended to fool the reader in the manner of *trompe l'oeil*. They are intended to convince him that life is precisely as they say it is, an altogether different aim.<sup>33</sup>

Thus the popular conception of the position and task of the author is redefined: the task is to produce a realistic text capable of "convincing" the reader into an aura of belief about (that is, to believe in) the events he or she is "interpreting". The success or failure of a text is therefore not one of

mimetic precision (that is, simulation and illusion) but primarily of ethical engagement.

One example of this engagement is the opening of Balzac's *Illusions perdues*, which begins by interweaving the introduction of the old miser Séchard and his son David with a documentary-style history of the printing press, which is passed on to the next generation via Séchard's sly and morally bankrupt maneuver of extracting money from his son. As well as setting up a powerful symbolic paradigm of the struggle between modernization and the sluggish backwardness of provincial life, the history lesson is crucial to the reader's ethical response to the swindle that follows. This paradigm is reiterated throughout the novel by frequent contrasts between the seedy glamor of Paris and the coarseness of the provinces, although the historical detail throughout is subordinate to an implicit and powerful critique of contemporary decadence. The reader of *Illusions perdues* is not swept away by the intricacy of historical detail (as in Sir Walter Scott) but instead is moved and affected by the ineluctable disillusionment of Lucien de Rubempré, the novel's ambitious hero. Thus the historical detail in this realist novel is a device that pinpoints Lucien and his comical fall from grace as the pivotal "fish out of water" in the ethical critique at the heart of the novel.

A second example comes from Stendhal via Robert Adams' book *Stendhal: Notes on a Novelist*. Adams attaches an appendix to the body of his analysis that lists a series of faults discovered in Stendhal's two most famous novels. Adams makes the following observations about *La Chartreuse de Parme*, for example:

In the year 1815, Fabrizio is advised that he may read the novels of Sir Walter Scott, the first of which came out anonymously in 1814 (Chapter V). In the year 1822, the Duchessa Sanseverina has been reading the *History of Louis XIII* by M. Bazin, which was not published till 1837 (Chapter 24).

A road leading southward from Parma cannot possibly lead to Sacca and the Po, which lie to the north.

In 1815, when he first meets Gina, Conte Mosca is 45 and she is 31; in 1821, when Fabrizio is arrested, she is an arithmetically correct 37, but he is an inexplicable 56 (Chapter 17).<sup>34</sup>

There are other, more minor errors. The consignment of these technicalities to an appendix is consistent with their negligible importance to a reading of the novel. No other critics follow Adams' example: such details are inconsequential to the reading of the text.

The argument that realism engages significantly with ethics does not make it an essentially "moral" or "moralistic" discourse. The European novels of the eighteenth century are notorious for their moralistic, conventional prefaces. Here is a sample of Samuel Richardson's preface to *Pamela*, for example:

If to *divert* and *entertain*, and at the same time to *instruct* and *improve* the mind of the YOUTH of *both sexes*:

If to inculcate *religion* and *morality* in so easy and agreeable a manner, as shall render them equally *delightful* and *profitable*:

If to set for in the most exemplary lights, the *parental*, the *filial*, and the *social* duties:

If to paint VICE in its proper colours, to make it *deservedly odious*; and to set VIRTUE in its own amiable light, to make it look *lovely*.<sup>35</sup>

But already this "instructive" requirement (keeping in mind that the early form of the novel was not the literary paragon it became in the nineteenth century) had come under close scrutiny in the eighteenth century. At the vanguard of this critique was the unlikely figure of Rousseau. He included

two prefaces in *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*. The first opened with the following famous lines:

Il faut des spectacles dans les grandes villes, et des Romans aux peuples corrompus. J'ai vû les mœurs de mon tems, et j'ai publié ces lettres. Que n'ai-je vécu dans un siecle où je dusse les jeter au feu!<sup>36</sup>

[Great cities must have theaters; and corrupt peoples, Novels. I have seen the morals of my times, and I have published these letters. Would I had lived in an age when I should have thrown them into the fire!<sup>37</sup>]

Rousseau's critique of the "instructive" purpose of novels heralds the imminent downfall of this moral convention. Just twenty-one years later, when Choderlos de Laclos published *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, he justified this "monstrosity" by appealing directly to none other than Rousseau's preface. By the time Stendhal and Balzac began publishing their novels (both were great admirers of Rousseau and Laclos) a critique of the moral uses of the novel had long been in place.

From these examples, it should be apparent that the broad categories of postmodern mythology (premodernity, modernity and postmodernity), due to their gross oversimplification, lack the precision necessary for critical analysis. Furthermore, it is clear that the understanding of realism we have inherited is very much a twentieth-century construction. As Prendergast writes:

[T]he history is not simply an archival one. Viewed as a *cultural* history in the broadest sense, it displays the following, somewhat paradoxical, property: if the nineteenth century is the age of the flowering of realism as a set of literary and pictorial practices, it is not the age of its sophisticated conceptual articulation (famously, the nineteenth century, whether in terms of defense or attack, theorized the idea of realism in exceptionally naïve terms). As developed concept, "realism"

belongs rather to the twentieth century, in the form of the abiding, even obsessive returns we have noted.<sup>38</sup>

This temporal inversion is a surprising twist to the traditional grand narrative. Prendergast's implication is that, rather than a move away from realism, the modern and postmodern periods have magnified its discursive importance. There is no teleology here, only a heterogeneous series of "obsessive returns" that ultimately scramble the artificial construction of a topology. Postmodernism is neither the reverse image of realism, nor its ultimate repudiation. Its "continuity" (if we may use the term in the most ironic way) with realism is, in effect, its arbitrary position as the most recent in a series of discontinuous steps that constitute, in the broadest of terms, the history of realology.

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984): 56.

<sup>2</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 41.

<sup>3</sup> Jameson, 56.

<sup>4</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Héloïse* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 668.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor Stoehr, *Words and Deeds* (New York: AMS, 1986), 165.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1965), 97.

<sup>8</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (La Salle: Open Court, 1986), 65.

<sup>9</sup> Stoehr, 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Stendhal, "Walter Scott et la *Princesse de Clèves*" in *Œuvres de Stendhal* (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1968), 306.

<sup>12</sup> Stendhal, "Sir Walter Scott and the *Princesse de Clèves*" in *Racine and Shakespeare* (New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1962), 213.

<sup>13</sup> Stendhal, "Walter Scott et la *Princesse de Clèves*", 307-08.

<sup>14</sup> Stendhal, "Sir Walter Scott and the *Princesse de Clèves*", 213-14.

<sup>15</sup> Stendhal, "Walter Scott et la *Princesse de Clèves*", 308-09.

<sup>16</sup> Stendhal, "Sir Walter Scott and the *Princesse de Clèves*", 214.

<sup>17</sup> Stoehr, 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. Stoehr, in spite of this excellent observation, does revert to a teleological account in which mimesis is increasingly problematized as it moves from realism into naturalism, from naturalism into symbolism, and so on into modernism.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>21</sup> Stendhal, *Racine et Shakespeare* in *Œuvres de Stendhal* (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1968), 68.

<sup>22</sup> Stendhal, *Racine and Shakespeare* (New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1962), 122.

<sup>23</sup> Stendhal, *Racine et Shakespeare*, 19-20.

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- <sup>24</sup> Stendhal, *Racine and Shakespeare*, 23-24.  
<sup>25</sup> Stendhal, *Racine et Shakspeare*, 113.  
<sup>26</sup> Stendhal, *Racine and Shakespeare*, 150.  
<sup>27</sup> Stendhal, *Racine et Shakspeare*, 43.  
<sup>28</sup> Stendhal, *Racine and Shakespeare*, 38.  
<sup>29</sup> Stendhal, *Racine et Shakspeare*, 43-44.  
<sup>30</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>31</sup> Stoechr, 17-18.  
<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 15.  
<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 19.  
<sup>34</sup> Robert Adams, *Stendhal: Notes on a Novelist* (London: Merlin, 1959), 227-28.  
<sup>35</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 31.  
<sup>36</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* in *Œuvres Complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 5. Please note that throughout I have followed the original French spellings from this edition.  
<sup>37</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, 3.  
<sup>38</sup> Prendergast, "Realism, God's Secret, and the Body", 1-2.

## CHAPTER THREE

### "THE CIRCULARITY OF TRANSGRESSION"

#### *Structural Key:*

*First Discursive Thread*  
*- Subthread no. 1 ("Introduction")*

*Second Discursive Thread*  
*- Subthread no. 3 ("Political/Textual Strategies")*

#### **Negation and Affirmation**

It is appropriate to speak about realism in the context of politics because these two discourses, as I indicated in the opening chapter, are intimately entwined. A consideration of politics provides an augmented perspective, for example, on Maurice Blanchot's questioning of the possibility of literature (which, he argues, is a discourse of the impossible). The act of writing is a political act. To remain silent is also a political act: in fact, politics cannot be avoided because, in a twist of Hegelian proportions, the inertia of negation acknowledges (and thus affirms negatively) the object of its denial. Not to write politically: that itself is a choice, a political act. Realism has not been sheltered from these considerations; indeed it possesses its own place in this circular logic of affirmation and negation. A great deal of realism's cultural baggage is tied to its politics, and the (post)modern reaction against realism, I would argue, is based on a subtly

layered series of interpretations designed to repress the rupture it has created.

This state of affairs is echoed, for example, in the title of Christopher Prendergast's influential study, *The Order of Mimesis*. Realism has long been viewed as a highly ordered, rigidly structured form of writing, the literature of an almost feudal hierarchy. If realism appears to retain any such features, they are the effect of an associative confusion between its own project and the forces it attempts to subvert. A predominant feature of the realist text, after all, is not its penchant for order, but its recurring task of tracing the decline of old hierarchies.

Mikhail Bakhtin, in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, theorizes the carnival as a point in time when societal values, for a short, controlled period, could be overturned. Diversely popular as this conception has been in critical circles, the most interesting move has been the extension of Bakhtin's analyses from the chronologically specific event of carnival to its spirit, the carnivalesque. Thus, following Bakhtin's vision, society is a complex, semiotic dance of intertwining values: carnivalesque and productive; irrational and rational; nonsense and meaning; female and male; supernatural and real; revolution and tyranny; belly and head; negative and affirmative.

The task at hand is to map the political territory of realism, to understand its carnivalesque potential and its place in the discourse of transgression. The difficulty is that postmodern mythology obscures this possibility. Jameson, for example, labels the canonization of radical modernist art and literature as degradation by familiarity, by becoming

“realist” – he therefore presumes that, politically, realism is tied to the tyranny of the status quo (in his case, the capitalist system). A further implication of Jameson’s analysis is that, in order for a work of art or literature to be revolutionary, it must self-consciously oppose the capitalist status quo (a conclusion he uses to attack postmodern art and literature, which, he argues, merely simulate the shock value of the modernists). Jameson, on the one hand, fails to appreciate the irony of the postmodernist statement, which stems from the overt self-consciousness attached to revolutionary activities in the postmodern era. Postmodernism can only simulate revolution because the modernist policy of ubiquitous transgression had turned revolt itself into a categorical imperative, thus reproducing the very tyranny it had sought to abolish. On the other hand, Jameson’s depreciation of postmodern culture implies a return to the spontaneity of the modernist revolution – a call that effectively negates any spontaneity by its very articulation.

That realism has been so misunderstood, however, has worked in its favor as a revolutionary force. As Scott Carpenter argues in *Acts of Fiction*, realist literature has a history of “travelling miscognito”. He writes:

In fact, this “rule of ignorance” can be generalized: political discourse, when it becomes so heavy-handed that one can read it only as propaganda, no longer works its subtle magic; in psychoanalysis nothing impedes the transference more than a patient’s awareness of the mechanics of transference; if, as Marx suggested, religion is the opiate of the masses, it becomes distinctly less intoxicating for those who suddenly see it as such. [...] Symbolic solutions need to travel “miscognito”, not just unnoticed, but actually mistaken for something else. [...] Narrative success depends on this manipulation of its audience, for when we learn the mechanics of a symbolic construction, we subtract ourselves from its control; although we may admire the apparatus, we cease to be susceptible to it in the same way. In

short, analysis empowers the reader, but it does so *at the expense of the text*. This is why the most compelling works – that is, those that continue to enthrall us (in every sense of the word) – are those that best resist the critical onslaught, never revealing the entirety of their symbolic functioning.<sup>1</sup>

The argument about realism unfolds as a complicated series of thrusts (affirmations) and parries (negations). For example, the prevalent critical view of Balzac, who actively aids in its propagation, paints him as a vehement conservative. He was, extrinsically, not only a supporter of the *ancien régime* (in the superficial dimension of historical politics) but also a reactionary, as it were, in the politics of semiotics. In the telescopic view of postmodern criticism, Balzac is a Napoleon of the signified. Examining the texts closely, it is critical to ask whether this conservatism is real or just a disguise to preserve the subversive nature of the text. Janet Beizer deftly replaces the signified with the name of the father.

Balzac's discourse (the essays, prefaces, and extradiegetic commentary within the fictions) overtly espouses an ethic based on monarchy, patriarchy, and religion – in short, hierarchy and authority – while his fictions inevitably play out scenes of filial revolt, parricide, and Promethean transgression. [...] The quest for an authentic father and the search for the proper narrative version of this quest are, then, juxtaposed in a self-seeking language that continually puts its own authenticity into question.<sup>2</sup>

Balzac's realism, therefore, works on two levels: an outer shell, which negates the "new ideas" that undermine the values of the old regime, and a submerged affirmation of the revolutionary principles he appears to denounce.

Balzac's example resembles psychoanalytic technique, as outlined in Freud's 1925 essay "Negation".

"You ask who this person in the dream can be. It's *not* my mother." We emend this to: "So it *is* his mother." [...] the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is *negated*. Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed.<sup>3</sup>

Freud's technique is designed, of course, to extract admissions from a passive analysand. But it is also effective as a mechanism of manipulation or social engineering, even (or especially) in the psychoanalytic situation. The patient who is aware of the analyst's method may outsmart them by projecting merely the image of passivity. "It's not my father," the patient may reply instead, throwing a false line of resistance to the analyst. This disingenuous strategy, we shall argue, is crucial to the revolutionary philosophy hidden beneath the complex veil of realism's various negations. "Balzac," writes Carpenter, "will represent the mode of denial."<sup>4</sup>

The guerilla warfare of Balzacian society gives rise to a peculiar form of tactical confusion due to its complicated intermingling of negations and affirmations. It becomes difficult, for example, to designate clearly which characters constitute "the enemy". In the labyrinthine intrigues of Balzac's *Comédie humaine*, for example, there is an intense ambivalence between enemy and friend. In *Les Employés* the reader is privy to an intricate network of spying and double-dealing inside a government department, in which the central character Rabourdin is the king-piece in a shrewd and complicated game of political chess; in *La Cousine Bette*, the eponymous character, regarded as an angel by her rich relations, secretly plots their downfall. Clearly the enemy is no longer the "other", the outsider: the enemy is within, he or she is your friend, your mistress, your business

associate. Another example is the master criminal Vautrin (who, in turn, is betrayed by Mlle Michonneau). Vautrin is the enemy of society, its principle of negation, out to expose "les profondes déceptions du contrat social, comme dit Jean-Jacques, dont je me glorifie d'être l'élève. Enfin, je suis seul contre le gouvernement avec son tas de tribunaux, de gendarmes, de budgets, et je les roule"<sup>5</sup> ["the colossal fraud of the Social Contract. That's what Jean-Jacques Rousseau called it, and I glory in being his pupil. In short, I stand alone against organized authority with its mass of law-courts and police and revenues to back it up, and I beat it hollow"<sup>6</sup>]. The reader is given glimpses into the societal underbelly from which he draws his power.

Collin est la *sorbonne* la plus dangereuse qui jamais se soit trouvée du côté des voleurs. Voilà tout. Les coquins le savent bien; il est leur drapeau, leur soutien, leur Bonaparte enfin; ils l'aiment tous. Ce drôle ne nous laissera jamais sa *tronche* en place de Grève.

Mademoiselle Michonneau ne comprenant pas, Gondureau lui expliqua les deux mots d'argot dont il s'était servi. *Sorbonne* et *tronche* sont deux énergiques expressions du langage des voleurs, qui, les premiers, ont senti la nécessité de considérer la tête humaine sous deux aspects. La *sorbonne* est la tête de l'homme vivant, son conseil, la pensée. La *tronche* est un mot de mépris destiné à exprimer combien la tête devient peu de chose quand elle est coupée.<sup>7</sup>

["Collin's is the most dangerous *Sorbonne* ever known among the criminal classes, that's all. The rascals know it well; he is the flag they rally round, their support and stay, their Napoleon in short; they are all devoted to him. The joker will never leave his *tronche* in the Place de Grève."

As Mademoiselle Michonneau seemed rather bewildered, Gondureau explained the two slang words he had used. *Sorbonne* and *tronche* are forcible expressions from the lingo used by thieves, invented to satisfy the need, which they were the first to feel, to consider the human head under two aspects. The *Sorbonne* is the head of the living man, his brain, his power of advising and directing. *Tronche* is a contemptuous word designed to express the uselessness of a head parted from its body by the executioner.<sup>8</sup>]

Looking closely we discover a strange irony: this rebellion against society is a double, a mirror image of the very system it purports to oppose. The underworld has its own language (*Sorbonne, tronche*), its own leaders (Vautrin, ironically, is a leading underworld "banker"), its own set of values (note, in particular, the way Gondureau's explanations of "*Sorbonne*" and "*tronche*" look forward to the Platonic schema I shall unfold shortly). Thus Vautrin is trapped in a logic of transgression that maintains an implicit, though disavowed, pact with the law. Vautrin needs his enemy to survive in order to maintain the position of power his role as a leader of the underworld bestows on him. Negation does not abolish what it negates: it reaffirms its object, albeit by the most circular of means. Transgression, in the form of Vautrin's resistance, opposes the current system of laws, but it does not abolish the rule of Law. It is hardly surprising, then, that Vautrin, at the conclusion of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, becomes the head of the secret police. Vautrin ends one tyranny by establishing yet another, a prime example of the phenomenon examined in this chapter – namely, that transgression is not the abolition of the Law, only a variation of it.

### The Circularity of Transgression

Théophile Gautier's novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is structured by a dyadic economy of negation and affirmation, but in a world of fluidity and infinite exchange.<sup>9</sup> The protagonist, d'Albert, is an aesthete in search of the ideal mistress. He has an affair with a woman, Rosette, but she fails to satisfy him. It is only when he encounters a young nobleman, Théodore (Madeleine de Maupin in disguise) that he truly falls in love. As the novel

unfolds, we discover that Rosette had met Théodore previously, that "he" was the unrequited love of her life. What ensues is a bizarre love triangle, in which Rosette and d'Albert agonize over the unusual object of their respective affections. D'Albert's hopeless dream is of possession, of mastery, of an exhaustive totalization of the ideal he claims to love. This "maladie [...] [de] l'impossible"<sup>10</sup> ["malady of the impossible"<sup>11</sup>], this obsession with romantic ideals and frequent flights of fantasy appears to separate Gautier's novel from the realist aesthetic. Gautier's novel, however, exemplifies a realological exploration of the world, thus opposing it not to realism but to representation:

Ce pêle-mêle et ce désordre apparents se trouvent, au bout du compte, rendre plus exactement la vie réelle sous ses allures fantasques que le drame de mœurs le plus minutieusement étudié. — Tout homme renferme en soi l'humanité entière, et en écrivant ce qui lui vient à la tête il réussit mieux qu'en copiant à la loupe les objets placés en dehors de lui. [...] J'aime passionnément cette végétation imaginaire, ces fleurs et ces plantes qui n'existent pas dans la réalité, ces forêts d'arbres inconnus où errent des licornes, des caprimules et des cerfs couleur de neige, avec un crucifix d'or entre leurs rameaux, habituellement poursuivis par des chasseurs à barbe rouge et en habits de Sarrasins.<sup>12</sup>

[This apparent jumble and disorder finally render the fantastic ways of reality more exactly than a drama of manners based on the most detailed study. Every man contains within himself the whole of humanity, and, if he writes what comes into his head, he succeeds better than if he takes a magnifying glass and copies the things which are outside him. [...] I passionately love this imaginary vegetation, these flowers and plants which do not exist in reality, these forests of unknown trees in which there wander unicorns, nightjars, and snow-white deer with a golden crucifix between their antlers, generally pursued by huntsmen with red beards and in Saracen dress.<sup>13</sup>]

Everything in d'Albert's world is an attempt to seize an essence that "leaks", an ideal whose entropy causes it to fade insidiously into mere

counterfeit, a reality that has been condensed and overlaid by his ambivalent obsession with Théodore, the puncture from which his grasp on the world bleeds.

Gautier presents a manifestation of desire that, because of its equivocal nature, remains unsatiated (but not necessarily unsatisfied). (When Clélia Conti, in Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*, vows never to see Fabrice again, they resume their affair by making love in the dark – thus desire is displaced and begins anew.) Another feature of this desire – apart from exceptional, privileged moments – is that it is predominantly non-orgasmic; it consists instead of vibrations and collectivities of heterogeneous microscopic intensities. There are disparate strands of “masculine” and “feminine” desire, but they do not form a single, dialectical machine. In *Mademoiselle de Maupin* the fictional world cannot be divided and distributed according to architectonic categories. The characters are fluid in their complexity, even if we only take into account their relativity to the “masculine” and “feminine” mannerisms. What Gautier's realology effectively provides is a revaluation of values, a sweeping inversion of the normative, by understatement, postponement and exaggeration.

The revaluation of values stretches at least as far as Plato. Plato is the first to draw an association between the belly and the appetite (in its metaphorical sense). In his dialogue with Gorgias, for instance, Socrates, as the mouthpiece for Plato, challenges the famous orator by comparing his art to “cookery”.<sup>14</sup> Socrates' primary division, of course, is between the categories of conviction and knowledge. A sophist such as Gorgias, he argues, tries merely to convince people. The art of instilling conviction is

counterfeit, insofar as the speaker does not care whether the opinions he is preaching are true or false; the only goal lies in making the audience believe him. That, and only that, is what counts for Gorgias. Oratory is therefore a hollow simulation of Socrates' (and Plato's) search for the truth, which lies not in opinions but in transcendent knowledge. The connection between oratory and cookery, therefore, is that cookery opposes medicine, the proper training of the body, in the same way that opinions block the progress to knowledge. Plato writes that cookery "is the form of pandering which corresponds to medicine, and in the same way physical training has its counterfeit in beauty—culture, a mischievous, swindling, base, servile trade [...] Now you know my view of the nature of oratory; it is to the soul what cookery is to the body."<sup>15</sup> The parallel is repeated in Book 4 of *The Republic*, where Plato sketches a trio of symbols in order to characterize the conflicting makeup of the human being, and in the *Timaeus*, where Plato explicitly ties his ethical concepts to these corporeal zones.

The part of the soul which is the seat of courage, passion and ambition they located nearer the head [the seat of reason] between midriff and neck; there it would be well-placed to listen to the commands of reason and combine with it in forcibly restraining the appetites when they refused to obey the word of command from the citadel. [...] The appetite for food and drink and other natural needs of the body they located between the midriff and the region of the navel, building in the area a kind of manger for the body's food; and they secured appetite there like a wild beast, which must be fed with the rest of us if mortals were to exist at all.<sup>16</sup>

The mapping of the Platonic soul onto the body is the imposition of reason's tyranny: the situation of reason in the head, the will in the chest and the appetite in the belly suggests a virtual, but nevertheless brutal, form of

Platonic branding. The tripartite soul is a tattoo, a scar, the eternal signature of the tyranny of reason.

Realism's ambiguities pose a fundamental contradiction to the Platonic schema, of course, yet they are perversely logical in an inverted order of things (the loophole in Clélia's promise, for example). The same applies to Gautier's radical critique of "masculinity" and "femininity". D'Albert, an "aesthete" of feminine beauty, is thrown into turmoil when he admits to his confidant Silvio that he has fallen in love with a man. Madeleine, by contrast, with her androgynous appearance, glories in her masculine role, to the extent that even her narrative voice overpowers d'Albert's initial hegemony by the end of the novel. Rosette, too, wavers between the feminine allure that places her at the disposal of d'Albert and the desire she feels for Théodore's "masculine" dimension. Here, masculinity and femininity are symbolized, not so much by the head and the belly, but by phallic substitutes. "I should willingly exchange the mirror for a sword," claims Madeleine.<sup>17</sup> To intertwine further these symbolic inversions, Gautier involves Théodore in a sword fight with Rosette's brother, the meaningfully named Alcibiades.<sup>18</sup> Learning of Rosette's passion for Théodore, he discovers them in bed together and challenges the impersonator to a duel:

- Ici, sur-le-champ, cria Alcibiade ivre de fureur.  
- Y pensez-vous? devant Rosette!  
- Dégaîne, misérable, ou je t'assassine, continua-t-il en brandissant son épée et en l'agitant autour de sa tête.

[...]

Je tirai ma rapière, car il l'aurait fait comme il le disait, et je me contentai d'abord de parer les bottes qu'il me portait.

Rosette fit un effort surhumain pour venir se jeter entre nos épées, car les deux combattants lui étaient également chers;

mais ses forces la trahirent, et elle roula sans connaissance sur le pied du lit.

[...]

Profitant d'une fausse position de son épée, je lui poussai une flanconade si bien liée que je l'atteignis au côté: il fit ho! et tomba en arrière.<sup>19</sup>

["We'll fight here and now!" cried Alcibiades, who was beside himself with rage.

"What are you thinking of? In front of Rosette?"

"Unsheath, you wretch, or I shall murder you," he continued, brandishing his sword and waving it round his head.

[...]

I drew my rapier, because he would have done as he said, and at first I contented myself with parrying the thrusts he made at me.

Rosette made a superhuman effort to come and throw herself between our swords; but her strength failed her, and she fell unconscious on the foot of the bed.

[...]

Taking advantage of the wrong position of his sword, I gave him a flanconade so deftly aimed that I touched his side. He gasped "Ho!", and fell back.<sup>20</sup>]

The symbolism of this scene is thinly veiled. Alcibiades challenges Théodore to "unsheathe", to display her phallic representative so he can dismember her (keeping in mind that the Latin meaning of the word "vagina" is "sheath": to "unsheathe" in this context requires Madeleine to "unsex" herself). Gautier's novel is replete with these ambiguous, floating signifiers, and the characters swerve uncontrollably between activity and passivity, masculinity and femininity, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In the fight scene, Théodore's masculine dimension comes to the fore and she wounds Alcibiades in the "side" (a euphemism, perhaps, for the belly). But in the moments before Alcibiades bursts into the room, it is Rosette who takes the law, the phallus, into her own hands by violating the conventions of seduction in the form of Madeleine's protests: "Rosette, pour toute réponse, laissa tomber sa mante de batiste et ses pantoufles, et se glissa dans

mon lit comme une couleuvre dans une jatte de lait"<sup>21</sup> ["Rosette's only answer was to drop her cambric dressing-gown and her slippers, and to slide into my bed like a snake into a bowl of milk"<sup>22</sup>].

Every value in Gautier's writing is a blockage, a construction of rationality that is, however, shot through with holes. The crucial, implicit thesis of Gautier's work is that these holes do not represent "failures" or "oversights" in the process of ratiocination; they are strategically worked into every logical construction. These "holes" have a regulatory function; they relieve reason in the same way that the carnival is designed to relieve the worker from the tyranny of everyday life. Gautier's fiction shares elements with the carnivalesque: fools are crowned and values are inverted.

In realist texts, then, there are concepts (we must count "masculinity" and "femininity" as the outstanding examples) that cannot and must not be understood conventionally (that is to say, Platonically). A mixture of these semiotic intrusions characterizes the critique of masculinity in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*: the outside or "non-masculine" elements in the heterosexual, masculine aesthetic of d'Albert; the invocation of masculinity by Madeleine. The stability of d'Albert's perspective is possible only when he relieves his fear of homosexuality by an apparently perverse transformation: he turns young Théodore into a "woman". Similarly, Madeleine takes on the forms of masculinity and thus gains for herself a position of power that is purely discursive. These transfers of power are also ambivalent. On the surface they are "ludic" strategies: appearing to subvert the dominant paradigm, they play at being revolutionary, but ultimately serve a conservative purpose. D'Albert's sexual hysteria escalates with the

revelations of Théodore's physical ambiguity. Thus Gautier's manifest subversion of gender roles is only a first step, a primary transgression, in this revaluation of values.

This first step consists of recognizing the ineluctable fluidity of the libido. Rational constructions cannot stem this flow, they can only redirect it. The greater the redirection, the greater the compensating flow required for the return to a status quo. The recognition of this step is crucial to any future critique of values: philosophical thought is so mired in the classical axiomatic of contradiction ("something cannot be and not be at the same time") that it forms a blind spot in our ethical logic. I mentioned earlier the carnivalesque as a moment of revolutionary possibility, for example, but its analogous potential as a conservative force cannot be discounted. It is entirely possible that the carnival is society's own ludic strategy, that it allows its citizens to exorcise its discontent in such a way that society is reaffirmed when the carnival is over.

In his theoretical work *Eroticism*, Georges Bataille argues that transgression, contrary to conventional wisdom, does not "break" or abolish the law, that there are transgressive codes built into the legal fabric. Transgression, within these prescribed limits, is therefore encouraged and even demanded by the law: "Il n'est pas d'interdit qui ne puisse être transgressé. Souvent la transgression est admise, souvent même elle est prescrite"<sup>23</sup> ["There exists no prohibition that cannot be transgressed. Often the transgression is permitted, often it is even prescribed."<sup>24</sup>]. Bataille's work is subversive, and his frequent engagements with the taboos of sex (and death) are politically motivated in the broadest sense. There is a

danger, however, that these literary transgressions may fall within the boundaries of an orchestrated "surplus value".

To speak of Gautier's fiction as a "literature of transgression" is therefore to miss the point, according to Bataille, because all literature (indeed, all discourse) relies on the mechanism of transgression. One of Bataille's primary examples of how the law is transgressed legitimately is the state of war. Society claims that murder is forbidden, argues Bataille, but war creates a circumstance in which the taboo is waived, just as marriage waives the sexual taboo. Murder is considered an irrational act, a moment of madness, an abnormality, but war takes this aggression and, in contradiction to its standard conception, organizes it along rational lines. Bataille writes:

La proposition: << l'interdit est là pour être violé >> doit rendre intelligible le fait que l'interdit du meurtre, encore qu'un universel, ne s'est nulle part opposé à la guerre. Je suis même assuré que, sans l'interdit, la guerre est impossible, inconcevable. [...] La guerre, en un sens, se réduit à l'organisation collective de mouvements d'agressivité. Elle est, comme le travail, collectivement organisée; comme le travail, elle se donne un but, elle répond au projet réfléchi de ceux qui la mènent. Nous ne pouvons dire pour autant que la guerre et la violence s'opposent. Mais la guerre est une violence *organisée*.<sup>25</sup>

[The statement: "The taboo is there to be violated" ought to make sense of the fact that the taboo on murder, universal though it may be, nowhere opposes war. I am even convinced that without the prohibition war would be impossible and inconceivable. [...] War in a way boils down to the collective organisation of aggressive urges. Like work it is organised by the community; like work it has a purpose, it is the answer to the considered intention of those who wage it. We cannot say therefore that war and violence are in conflict. But war is organised violence.<sup>26</sup>]

It is possible to speak, therefore (without fear of appearing paradoxical) of a "legitimate violation" in the case of war. But there is deeper level of

subversion in Bataille, one that goes beyond this first stage of transgression. The second stage of transgression is, in a sense, a "transgression of a transgression": it refuses to adhere to the rules that still bind the legitimized form of legal violation. In approaching this stage, argues Bataille, we can no longer speak of transgression because the dialectic to which it belongs has been transcended. Transgression goes hand in hand with the regulation of the law. But the transcendence of transgression abolishes the law, and what remains is no longer transgression but "Evil". "[L]e Mal n'est pas la transgression" ["Evil is not transgression"] claims Bataille, "c'est la transgression condamnée"<sup>27</sup> ["it is transgression condemned"<sup>28</sup>].

This metaphorical state of war reproduces itself in the realism of the 1830s and 1840s. Of course, the poetic fascination with war, stretching from Homer to Scott and beyond, is hardly a new phenomenon. But the realism witnesses a move away from descriptive or heroic narratives toward the philosophical concept of war that resurfaces in Bataille. There are important historical reasons for this shifting perspective, but the change in the description of war goes beyond such circumstances. Realism marks the end of the grand narrative of war. When war does intrude into the novel (as we shall see in *La Chartreuse de Parme*) events are described, not from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, but from the chaotic jumble of first-hand experience. War continues to exist, but it has become less an actual event than a discourse that disseminates through every sphere of life. ("Plus de Napoléons," we might say, taking advantage of the double sense French gives this statement. "No more Napoleons": there will be no more Napoleons in the old, heroic sense. "More Napoleons": the Napoleonic idea

diffuses through society; there are many "little Napoleons", as Balzac was so fond of pointing out.) Realist literature is symptomatic of a new modernity, a society that replaces events with words, and war is a primary example of this substitution. Warfare becomes a symbolic, discursive activity, and as such, the ritualistic breaking of the murder taboo formulates rules about that transgression. There are rules governing transgression that must be followed in the state of war. They are designed to regulate war, to inject rationality into its uncertain possibilities; they are, in a sense, the inverse of the relation between carnival and society, where carnival is an irrational antidote to the restrictions of everyday, rational life. Transgression does not abolish the law, far from it: it sets up a new set of laws and the possibility of further transgressions. At the abstract level, the state and war complement each other in the same way that law and transgression do. The betrayal of law, paradoxically, is what allows the law and the state to flourish.

### **Subversion: Breaking the Circle**

Rereading realism demonstrates how the ludic nature of transgression has long been misunderstood. Transgression is *not* a necessarily subversive force, and its appearance is laced with the potential for ruse. The contemporary elevation of transgression as a revolutionary, postmodern concept (particularly through a misreading of Bataille and Foucault) has come about only because of a failure to distinguish between the particular form of the law (the ordering principle) and the Law (order in itself). Contenson and his cronies, in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, represent the particular form of the law, but Vautrin's destruction of his

regime does not mean the abolition of the generic Law or the tyrannies that the institution of order requires to maintain its hegemony. Transgression in Balzac is "revolutionary", but only in its most literal sense: the circle closes only to open once again under the leadership of Vautrin. Hence a transgression that is not "transgressive", and a revolution that is not "revolutionary".

There is, however, a "subversive" (this will be the counter-term to the "transgressive") dimension of realism. It is important to question, given the conservatism that is the eventual outcome of transgression, whether all hope for political action is banished with the disenchantment of transgression. These texts demonstrate over and over how transgression of the law serves to maintain the status quo: the appointment of Vautrin as head of the secret police; the loophole in Clélia's promise to the Virgin; the embrace of sexual ambiguity by Mlle de Maupin; the unwelcome appearance of the Red Death. The key characteristic of these stories is their transgression of the law, followed by an eternal return of the same: in other words, they present to the reader, within the boundaries of the narrative, one episode from a repetitive cycle. The circle is the true signature of the transgressive metamorphosis: departing from the law, it always returns to it, whether as the reaffirmation of the old or the instatement of a new regime.

The circle provides a clue to the possibility of subversion in these texts. Only when the circle has been *broken* does the law vanish, overcoming the repetition of the same. This situation presents another difficulty, however: having argued against transgression, how can we "transgress" the law of the circle? This question, however, misunderstands

the nature of subversion. An example of how the circle might be broken is to be found in *Le Rouge et le noir*, in which the tactics of war are imposed on the discourse of love. "Aimer signifie pour Julien Sorel faire son Napoléon, dominer, être le plus fort" ["Loving, for Julien Sorel, means acting like Napoleon, being strongest"] writes Julia Kristeva. "Avec Stendhal, l'amoureux est un amoureux du pouvoir"<sup>29</sup> ["With Stendhal, a lover is a lover of power"<sup>30</sup>]. But Julien differs from the scheming Vautrin because, unlike the wily criminal, his grasp for power is all or nothing. Vautrin appears in several guises in the *Comédie humaine*, but Julien lacks this option through an excess of earnestness. His extremism is reflected not only in his broader ambitions, but appears even in his smallest actions. His (conscious) seduction of Mme de Rênal begins, for example, with two events. The first is the inspiration provided by Napoleon:

Certaines choses que Napoléon dit des femmes, plusieurs discussions sur le mérite des romans à la mode sous son règne lui donnèrent alors, pour la première fois, quelques idées que tout autre jeune homme de son âge aurait eues depuis longtemps.<sup>31</sup>

[Certain of Napoleon's remarks about women, together with one or two of his disquisitions on the merits of novels fashionable in his reign, gave Julien then, for the very first time, a few ideas that any other young man of his age would have thought of long before.<sup>32</sup>]

But these ideas are not enough, they merely provide Julien with a model of courage through which to pursue his designs. The second event, the accidental brush of hands in the garden at Vergy, reveals to Julien the window of opportunity through which to exercise this courage.

Cette main se retira bien vite; mais Julien pensa qu'il était de son *devoir* d'obtenir que l'on ne retirât pas cette main quand il la touchait.

[...]

Ses regards, le lendemain, quand il revit Mme de Rênal, étaient singuliers; il l'observait comme un ennemi avec lequel il va falloir se battre.

[...]

Son unique affaire, toute cette journée, fut de se fortifier par la lecture du livre inspiré [i.e. Napoleon's memoirs] qui retrempait son âme.

[...]

Serai-je aussi tremblant, et malheureux au premier duel qui me viendra? se dit Julien [...] L'affreux combat que le devoir livrait à la timidité était trop pénible pour qu'il fût en état de rien observer hors lui-même. Neuf heures trois quarts venaient de sonner à l'horloge du château, sans qu'il eût encore rien osé. Julien, indigné de sa lâcheté, se dit: Au moment précis où dix heures sonneront, j'exécuterai ce que, pendant toute la journée, je me suis promis de faire ce soir, ou je monterai chez moi me brûler la cervelle.<sup>33</sup>

[This hand was very quickly withdrawn; but Julien felt it his *duty* to manage things so that this hand should not be withdrawn when he touched it.

[...]

Julien looked at Madame de Rênal in a very curious way when he met her the next morning; he was taking stock of her as of an enemy he had to fight...His sole concern throughout the day was to fortify himself by reading that inspired book [i.e. Napoleon's memoirs] which helped to brace his courage.

[...]

Shall I tremble and feel as miserable as this when I have to fight my first duel? Said Julien to himself [...] Duty was waging too terrible a fight with shyness for him to be in a state to notice anything outside himself.

The clock on the house had just struck a quarter to ten, and still he had not dared to do anything. Indignant with his own cowardice Julien said to himself: The moment ten o'clock strikes, I'll carry out what I've been promising myself the whole day long to do this evening, or else I'll go upstairs to my room and blow my brains out.<sup>34</sup>]

But Julien reverses the possibility of reaffirming the law, not by opposing it, but by deleting the transgressive escape clause. He *must* take Mme de Rênal's hand, or face death by his own. This obsession with the absolute permeates the novel. The conception of "devoir" ["duty"] demonstrates a dogged faithfulness to the letter of the law that is subversive of its ulterior,

transgressive nature. Stendhal's subversion of the concept of "devoir" is more seditious than the betrayed integrity, for example, of the Christ-like Rabourdin in Balzac's *Les Employés*. Julien's stand is a parody of a moral cause because his so-called "duty" is to break the law for his own advancement (the very opposite of a virtuous act). This obligation to rebel (the apparently paradoxical categorical imperative of disobedience) recalls the humor of de Sade. But it also evokes a crucial distinction drawn by Carl von Clausewitz in his treatise *On War*. Clausewitz (who, like Julien, is inspired by Napoleon) distinguishes between two states of war: real war and total (or absolute) war. Of our two examples, Vautrin is the political "realist", calculating his strategies and using the transgressive mechanisms of the law to his own ends. Julien, by contrast, evokes the law to its final letter. Glory or annihilation are his only options. Absolute war is ultimately contradictory in its outcome because winning at all costs, even if it means losing oneself in the process, is its conclusion. Julien refuses to transgress, to compromise the law in any way. "L'article 1342 du Code pénal est clair" ["Article 1342 of the Penal Code is quite clear"] says Julien to the astonished magistrate, "je mérite la mort, et je l'attends"<sup>35</sup> ["I deserve death, and I expect it"<sup>36</sup>]. The ideal or absolute war is a subversive logic of the first order because it precludes the idea of winning. It disallows the possibility of an escape clause, the establishment of an alternative law, the founding of a peace that is merely the "continuation of war by other means".<sup>37</sup> To follow through the logic of war, to pursue, as Julien does, the ideal of a "true war", means, at the same time, to put an end to war. After obliteration, war does not, and cannot, continue. Thus, the circle is broken.

The mechanism of transgression is dialectical; it inscribes, with apparently tireless energy, the circular formula of thesis and antithesis. Terms within the dialectic always follow this pattern, unless the dialectic is subverted and the Ixion wheel of transgression is stopped. I have approached these texts by evaluating them according to this criterion of breaking the loop. Terms that are traditionally bound together in a dialectical embrace, such as "masculinity" and "femininity", "head" and "belly", "reason" and "unreason", fail to inscribe the familiar circle and instead crisscross each other in varying patterns of lines and zones. Thus we move beyond the logic of contradiction, beyond the logic of negativity that drives the circularity of transgression.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Carpenter, *Acts of Fiction: Resistance and Resolution from Sade to Baudelaire* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Janet Beizer, *Family Plots: Balzac's Narrative Generations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Negation" in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), 437-38.

<sup>4</sup> Carpenter, 40.

<sup>5</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot* in *Œuvres Complètes*. Vol. 9. (Paris: Bibliophiles de l'Originale, 1966), 464.

<sup>6</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Old Goriot* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951), 223.

<sup>7</sup> Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, 452-53.

<sup>8</sup> Balzac, *Old Goriot*, 208.

<sup>9</sup> Gautier is an arch-romantic and not traditionally regarded as a realist. But, as I argued in the opening chapter, I am using "realism" in a strictly defined sense. The interweaving of the two terms (realism and realology) is deliberate: the classical realists (Balzac, Stendhal) are also realologists but so, in this definition, are Gautier, Dostoevsky and Poe.

<sup>10</sup> Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1994), 179.

<sup>11</sup> Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), 143.

<sup>12</sup> Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 270 & 312-13.

<sup>13</sup> Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (trans.), 228 & 267.

<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Gorgias* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 44.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-48.

<sup>16</sup> Plato, *Timaeus/Critias* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), 97-98.

<sup>17</sup> Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (trans.), 273.

<sup>18</sup> Alcibiades, of course, is most famous for his attempt to seduce Socrates in Plato's *The Symposium*. He is "meaningfully named" in the sense that he recalls the Platonic schema outlined above.

<sup>19</sup> Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 360-61.

<sup>20</sup> Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (trans.), 310-11.

<sup>21</sup> Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 357.

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- <sup>22</sup> Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (trans.), 307.
- <sup>23</sup> Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme* in *Œuvres Complètes* Vol. 10 (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 66.
- <sup>24</sup> Georges Bataille, *Eroticism* (London: Marion Boyars, 1987), 63.
- <sup>25</sup> Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, 67.
- <sup>26</sup> Bataille, *Eroticism*, 64.
- <sup>27</sup> Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, 127.
- <sup>28</sup> Bataille, *Eroticism*, 127.
- <sup>29</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Stendhal et la politique du regard" in *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Denoël, 1983), 321-22.
- <sup>30</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Stendhal and the Politics of the Gaze" in *Tales Of Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 344-45.
- <sup>31</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir: Chronique de 1830* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1997), 60.
- <sup>32</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black: A Chronicle of the Nineteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953), 69.
- <sup>33</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 60-62.
- <sup>34</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 69-71.
- <sup>35</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 455. Ironically, there is no Article 1342: the Penal Code of 1810 has only 484 articles. Julien thus insists on the enforcement of a law that does not even exist.
- <sup>36</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 455.
- <sup>37</sup> This phrase, of course, is an adaptation of Clausewitz's celebrated formula that "war is a continuation of politics by other means".

Part 2:

Transparency -  
The Masquerade  
of Absence as a  
Realist Strategy

## CHAPTER FOUR

### "APHANISIS"

#### *Structural Key:*

##### *First Discursive Thread*

- Subthread no. 2 ("*Transparency: the Masquerade of Absence as a Realist Strategy*")

##### *Second Discursive Thread*

- Subthread no. 1 ("*The Problem of the 'Real' in Realism*")

#### **Phenomenon 1 (Aphanisis of the Author)**

"The author is dead." Barthes's arguments in "La Mort de l'auteur" are alien to the thematic criticism of realism. The details of the author's life and personality have traditionally been seen as the key to interpretation (as well as an important part of the canonizing process). For example, Stendhal is a combination of wit, physical ugliness and romantic sensitivity; Balzac is machine-like in the intensity of his monumental task; Poe is a man lost in depression and alcoholism; Dostoevsky is a tortured existentialist inspired by an intense mixture of madness and religion. I argued in the opening chapter that reading texts through the biographical details of the author reproduces a dyadic, representational structure. Representation places the author in a cause-effect relation to the text. This genetic approach not only assigns a questionable primacy to an author's biography, it also disregards key features of the discursive process. Before proceeding, I wish to qualify

Barthes's rhetoric: what we witness, in acts of literary creation, is not the death of the author but a disappearance, an aphanisis.

Barthes begins his essay with a pastiche of the genetic approach. Taking a sentence from Balzac's short story "Sarrasine", he asks a typical formal question: who is speaking? He gives several suggestions as to how the sentence may be interpreted, but although these interpretations are logically structured they are inconclusive to the point of being farcical.

Dans sa nouvelle *Sarrasine*, Balzac, parlant d'un castrat déguisé en femme, écrit cette phrase: << C'était la femme, avec ses peurs soudaines, ses caprices sans raison, ses troubles instinctifs, ses audaces sans cause, ses bravades et sa délicieuse finesse de sentiments. >> Qui parle ainsi? Est-ce le héros de la nouvelle, intéressé à ignorer le castrat qui se cache sous la femme? Est-ce l'individu Balzac, pourvu par son expérience personnelle d'une philosophie de la femme? Est-ce l'auteur Balzac, professant des idées << littéraires >> sur la féminité? Est-ce la sagesse universelle? La psychologie romantique? Il sera à tout jamais impossible de le savoir.<sup>1</sup>

[In his story *Sarrasine* Balzac, describing a castrato disguised as a woman, writes the following sentence: "*This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility.*" Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author professing "literary" ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? We shall never know.<sup>2</sup>]

Using this rhetorical device, Barthes highlights the ambiguity and anonymity of the production of discourse: "l'écriture est destruction de toute voix, de toute origine. L'écriture, c'est ce neutre, ce composite, cet oblique où fuit notre sujet, le noir-et-blanc où vient se perdre toute identité, à commencer par celle-là même du corps qui écrit"<sup>3</sup> ["writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral,

composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing"<sup>4</sup>]. Of course "Sarrasine" was written by a concrete author, but for the reader the text is *effectively* anonymous. Barthes's pastiche reveals the text as a kind of semiotic mask, capable of providing clues about its wearer but equally capable of misleading.

From this launching point, Barthes attacks the primary importance literary criticism has traditionally attributed to the author. Given the functional anonymity of the literary text, interpretation in terms of the author is risible. Barthes writes:

[D]ès qu'un fait est *raconté*, à des fins intransitives, et non plus pour agir directement sur le réel, c'est-à-dire finalement hors de toute fonction autre que l'exercice même du symbole, ce décrochage se produit, la voix perd son origine, l'auteur entre dans sa propre mort, l'écriture commence.<sup>5</sup>

[As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.<sup>6</sup>]

A tangible split occurs between the concrete author and the text, cutting off the author from the reader.

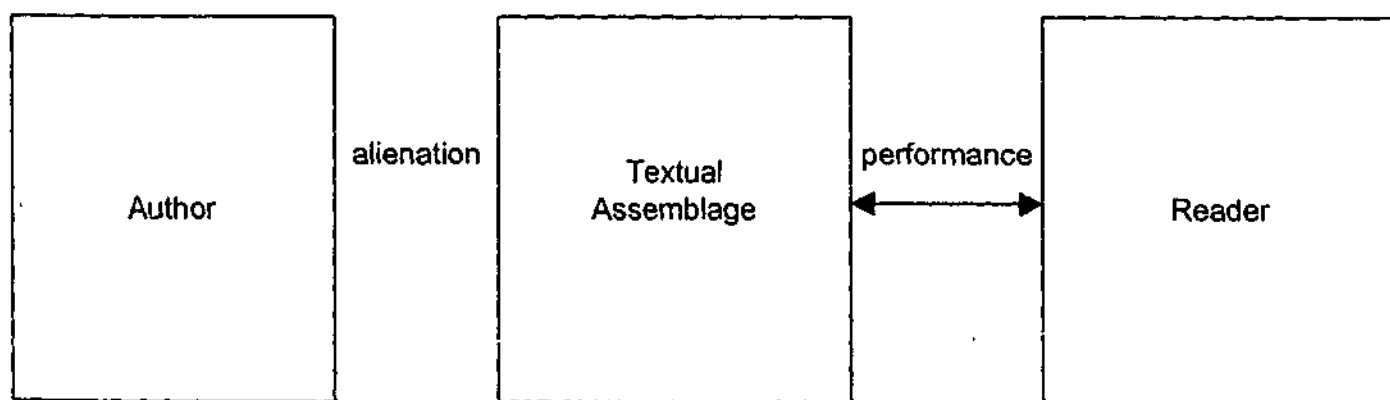


Figure 4.1 – The Death of the Author

The author's intention, life, neuroses and social position are marginal to the text itself. For the reader, argues Barthes, explanations and causal links to the author's personal experience are the concern of biography, not literary criticism. For Barthes the sovereignty of the author is swept aside – the author is decentered – by the very nature and structure of the writing process. Mallarmé, he argues, is the champion of this new aesthetic, where “c'est le langage qui parle, ce n'est pas l'auteur [...] ce point où le langage agit, <<performe>>, et non <<moi>>”<sup>7</sup> [“it is language that speaks, not the author [...] only language acts, ‘performs’, and not ‘me’”<sup>8</sup>]; Proust, too, who ends his project of writing at the moment he renders it “possible”; and the Surrealists, with their experiments in automatic writing and the other techniques designed to manifest the “unconscious” of language. But for Barthes it is Balzac who remains the leading example of this philosophical seam shared by the literary realists (Balzac), the modernists (Mallarmé, Proust) and postmodernism.

In reading a text, argues Barthes, the reader is placed within the machine-like structure of language, causing an inevitable “<<distancement>>”<sup>9</sup> [“distancing”<sup>10</sup>] to take place. Each reading of the text takes on a “performatif”<sup>11</sup> [“performative”<sup>12</sup>] aspect. The text is not a thing-in-itself, it is closer to the infinitely variable interpretations of a dramatic play than a process of literary revelation. It is played out in the reading-performance of the reader, who appropriates the text from the author in this sense. The author is absent from the work even as a point of origin: the work “n'a d'autre origine que le langage lui-même, c'est-à-dire cela même qui sans cesse remet en cause toute origine”<sup>13</sup> [“has no other origin than

language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins<sup>14</sup>]. Where, then, does the text come from? Certainly it is not the expression of the interiority of a godlike author. Barthes argues instead that the author borrows, consciously and unconsciously, in order to weave a text:

Nous savons maintenant qu'un texte n'est pas fait d'une ligne de mots, dégageant un sens unique, en quelque sorte théologique (qui serait le << message >> de l'Auteur-Dieu), mais un espace à dimensions multiples, où se marient et se contestent des écritures variées, dont aucune n'est originelle: le texte est un tissu de citations, issues des mille foyers de la culture.<sup>15</sup>

[We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.<sup>16</sup>]

The reading process is thus an impersonal process, a tangled myriad of quotations, bundled together in a "tissu de signes"<sup>17</sup> ["tissue of signs"<sup>18</sup>], a structure that Barthes compares to consulting a dictionary in pursuit of a ceaselessly deferred meaning. With the aphanisis of the author, the reader comes to the fore.

[L]e lecteur est l'espace même où s'inscrivent, sans qu'aucune ne se perde, toutes les citations dont est faite une écriture; l'unité d'un texte n'est pas dans son origine, mais dans sa destination, mais cette destination ne peut plus être personnelle: le lecteur est un homme sans histoire, sans biographie, sans psychologie; il est seulement ce *quelqu'un* qui tient rassemblées dans un même champ toutes les traces dont est constitué l'écrit. [...] la naissance du lecteur doit se payer de la mort de l'Auteur.<sup>19</sup>

[The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the

written text is constituted. [...] the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.<sup>20]</sup>

But the reader does not replace the author: the reader, in turn, may be "read" just like any text. Thus we are privy to an infinite reversibility of perspective. I shall examine this technique at work by investigating two further cases of aphanisis, each of which links directly back to this first posture.

### **Phenomenon 2 (Aphanisis of the Character)**

The kernel of Jacques Lacan's thought is, in his own words, the "real". Lacan theorizes, for example, that every discourse is structured logically in relation to three registers: the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. The symbolic register is the domain of signification (especially but not only language), and is formed by the subject in relation to the interplay between the trauma of the real and the delusion of the imaginary. The three registers are meshed together inevitably in a mutated, dialectical form, in which the symbolic register plays the mediating role.

Lacan invites us, like Freud before him, to apply the psychoanalytic paradigm to all discourses (Lacan himself utilizes the work of such diverse writers as Plotinus, Molière and Poe). Even more interesting is a claim that appears unexpectedly in *Le Séminaire XI*. Lacan is analyzing a famous dream from Freud's *Traumdeutung* when he remarks: "Car la véritable formule de l'athéisme n'est pas que *Dieu est mort* [...] la véritable formule de l'athéisme, c'est que *Dieu est inconscient*."<sup>21</sup> ["For the true formula of atheism is not *God is dead* [...] the true formula of atheism is *God is unconscious*."<sup>22</sup>] The reference points to a discussion earlier in that seminar

in which Lacan is outlining the function of the real in the formation of discourse. He claims that

il s'agit de ce que le *Ich* est sous la plume de Freud, depuis le début jusqu'à la fin [...] le lieu complet, total, du réseau des signifiants, c'est-à-dire le sujet, *là où c'était*, depuis toujours, le rêve. [...] Mais le sujet, lui, est là pour s'y retrouver, *là où c'était* – j'anticipe – le réel. [...] *les dieux sont du champ du réel*. [...] pour savoir qu'on y est, il n'y a qu'une seule méthode, c'est de repérer le réseau [...] C'est là le lieu où se joue l'affaire du sujet de l'inconscient. [...] Le sujet chez soi, la remémoralisation de la biographie, tout ça ne marche que jusqu'à une certaine limite qui s'appelle le réel.<sup>23</sup>

[the fact is that throughout Freud's work [...] the *Ich* is the complete, total locus of the network of signifiers, that is to say, the subject, *where it was*, where it has always been, the dream. [...] But the subject is there to rediscover *where it was* - I anticipate - the real. [...] *The gods belong to the field of the real*. [...] there is only one method of knowing that one is here, namely, to map the network. [...] This is the locus where the affair of the subject of the unconscious is played out. [...] The subject in himself, the recalling of his biography, all this goes only to a certain limit, which is known as the real.<sup>24</sup>]

The text italicizes the phrase "*là où c'était*" ["*where it was*"] because it is a direct quote from Freud: "*Wo es war, soll Ich werden*" ["Where the id was, there the ego must become"]. Lacan is postulating, in other words, the conception of a "real" whose significance only reaches the subject in the form of a distant echo. The analyst draws closer, discovers footprints and traces, but the real flees inexorably before it can be articulated. Its line of flight, argues Lacan, is never arbitrary and the task of the analyst, as such, is not to confront the "real" (akin to exploring the totality of the unconscious, which is impossible) but to map this flight.

Lacan's most celebrated literary example is a discussion of Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter". Poe, of course, is famous as the pioneer of the detective story, a genre that echoes the language of pursuit used by Lacan:

the detective's task is to map the line of flight from the scene of the crime to its perpetrator. At first glance Lacan seems to be reentering the territory of traditional empiricism but, as he points out, Poe's story has characteristics that subvert this conclusion. For a start, the narrative is layered in a way that confounds the simplicity of applying epistemological method to experience. Poe creates a division, for example, between the subject who *looks* and the subject who *recognizes*. When one looks, what is seen and recognized depends greatly on what is being looked for. To understand this phenomenon is a powerful tool in itself, as evidenced by the shifting fortunes of the characters in Poe's story. Its principle is used in three distinct clusters, giving the plot twists a tripartite structure. These clusters are: the Queen "concealing" the letter from the King; the minister "hiding" the letter from the police; Dupin's switching of the letters at the end of the tale.

The thread running through the three layers, however, is not a person but an "object", the letter itself. Indeed, Lacan goes on to argue that, more than a mere object, it constitutes a fourth actor in each cluster (for example: cluster one revolves around the Queen (the recognizing subject), the

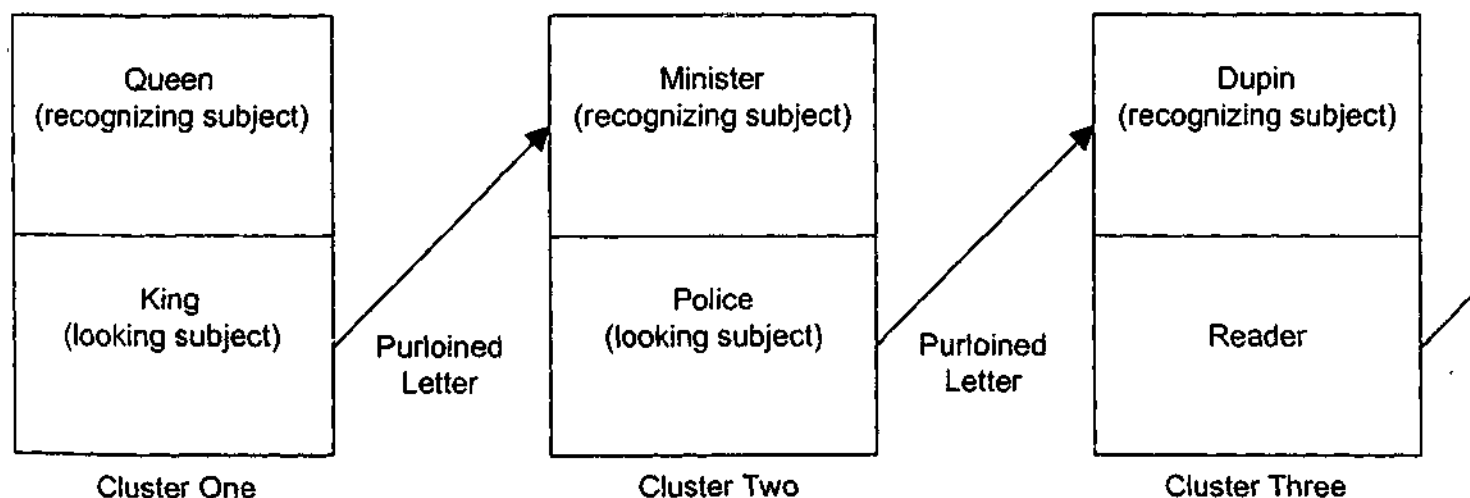


Figure 4.2 – The Line of Flight of the Purloined Letter

King (the looking subject), the minister (the layered recognizing subject, since he exceeds the cluster in order to form his own, separate layer) and the purloined letter (the line of flight)). Lacan argues:

Partons de la première scène. Il y a quatre personnages – le roi, la reine, le ministre, et le quatrième, qui est-ce?

M. GUÉNINCHAULT: *La lettre.*

Mais oui, la lettre et non pas celui qui l'envoie. Encore que son nom soit prononcé sur la fin du roman, il n'a vraiment qu'une importance fictive, tandis que la lettre est en effet un personnage. [...] La lettre est ici synonyme du sujet initial, radical.<sup>25</sup>

[Let us begin with the first scene. There are four characters - the King, the Queen, the minister, and the fourth, who is it?

M. GUÉNINCHAULT: *The letter.*

Yes, of course, the letter and not the person who sends it. Although his name is given towards the end of the novel, he has only a fictional importance, whereas the letter is indeed a character. [...] The letter here is synonymous with the original, radical, subject.<sup>26</sup>]

Several important characteristics come to the surface in this passage. The first is the effective aphanisis of subjectivity in the signification process, to the point where what drives the narrative is not a particular subjectivity (such as a protagonist) but the play of the symbolic (the letter) as it mediates between real and imaginary. The second is the manner in which language is stripped of its referential properties: what matters are the dual processes of possession and position, which are determined, not by a fixed point (as in the referential model of representation), but by the floating signifier of the purloined letter.

Il s'agit du symbole se déplaçant à l'état pur, auquel on ne peut pas toucher sans être aussitôt pris dans son jeu. Ainsi, ce que signifie le conte de la *Lettre volée*, c'est que le destin, ou la causalité, n'est rien qui puisse se définir en fonction de l'existence. On peut dire que, quand les personnages s'emparent de cette lettre, quelque chose les prend et les entraîne qui

domine de beaucoup leurs particularités individuelles. Quels ils soient, à chaque étape de la transformation symbolique de la lettre, ils seront définis uniquement par leur position envers ce sujet radical [...] Cette position n'est pas fixe. Pour autant qu'ils sont entrés dans la nécessité, dans le mouvement propre à la lettre, ils deviennent chacun, au cours des scènes successives, fonctionnellement différents par rapport à la réalité essentielle qu'elle constitue. En d'autres termes, à prendre cette histoire sous son jour exemplaire, pour chacun la lettre est son inconscient. C'est son inconscient avec toutes ses conséquences, c'est-à-dire qu'à chaque moment du circuit symbolique, chacun devient un autre homme.<sup>27</sup>

[What we find here is the symbol being displaced in its pure state, which one cannot come into contact with without being immediately caught in its play. Thus, the tale of *The Purloined Letter* signifies that there's nothing in destiny, or causality, which can be defined as a function of existence. One can say that, when the characters get hold of the letter, something gets a hold over them and carries them along and this something clearly has dominion over their individual idiosyncrasies. Whoever they might be, at this stage of the symbolic transformation of the letter, they will be defined solely by their position in relation to this radical subject [...] This position isn't fixed. In so far as they have entered into the necessity, into the movement peculiar to the letter, they each become, in the course of successive scenes, functionally different in relation to the essential reality which it constitutes. In other words, to take this story up again in its exemplary form, for each of them the letter is his unconscious. It is his unconscious with all of its consequences, that is to say that at each point in the symbolic circuit, each of them becomes someone else.<sup>28</sup>]

As Lacan points out, there is no "character" or "agency", either within fictional or psychoanalytic narrative. What occurs is a "layering" of discourse in which the function of analysis is to understand the process itself.

It is for this reason that the reader is never privy (apart from a vague summary) to the contents of the purloined letter. The contents are unimportant because what really matters is the semiotic play of the letter's possession. Further, it should not be believed that Dupin, super sleuth that

he is, brings about the end of semiotic play. Nothing, not even Dupin, can pin down the movement of the real. Dupin knows his detective work is a logical game (hence his example of the schoolboys playing "odd and even"), that his influence lies, not in the horizon of the real, but in his psychological mastery of the imaginary register. In Poe's detective stories, the role of Dupin is not to discover the truth (he never "investigates" in a physical sense, but in every tale relies on the accounts of others – he deduces on the basis of newspaper reports in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", for example) but to provide the most convincing explanation of the course of events. Dupin's self-consciousness of this state of affairs is confirmed by the conclusion of "The Purloined Letter". Dupin switches the letter in the minister's apartment for a counterfeit that contains several pointed lines from Crébillon. The story thus actually bypasses resolution: Dupin's final act adds another loop to the semiotic chain. What Poe offers the reader is only the promise of resolution, a glimpse of the horizon of the "real". It is within reach, he implies, but only if Dupin is correct - only if we, too, are convinced by his deductive imagination, this logic that is literally abductive.

### **Phenomenon 3 (Aphanisis of the Event)**

In a famous section of *Les Misérables*, the narrator returns to the battlefields of Waterloo. As he wanders across the landscape, where grass has covered the fading scars of that famous battle, the arenas of war function like a Proustian memory-trace and its scenes come to life once more. But Victor Hugo's description quickly leaves behind the limitations of personal perspective. "Retournons en arrière, c'est un des droits du

narrateur, et remplaçons-nous en l'année 1815" ["We must use the privilege of the chronicler to turn back to the year 1815"] writes Hugo, "[pour] se figurer nettement la bataille de Waterloo"<sup>29</sup> ["[in order to] form a clear idea of the Battle of Waterloo"<sup>30</sup>]. There is a stark contrast between the clarity of Hugo's account and the singularly chaotic sketches that appear in Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*.

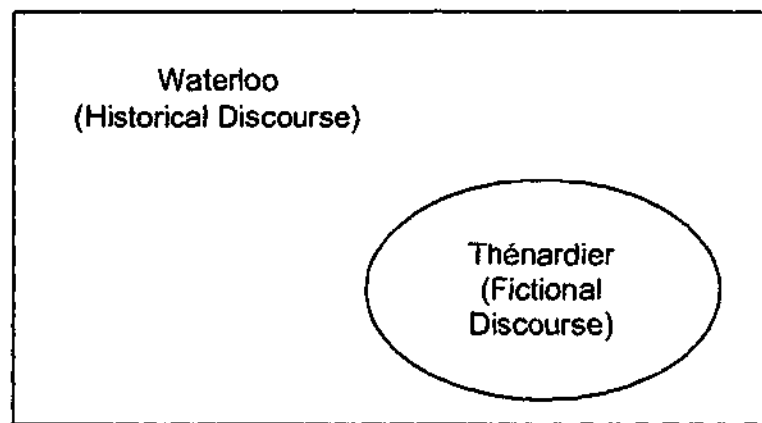


Figure 4.3 – The Interpenetration of Discourses in *Les Misérables*

Hugo is impeccable in conveying to the reader the events in the form of a history lesson, told with the imperturbable calmness allowed by temporal distance. The illusion of historical completeness is elided only when the account intersects with the novel again in the last few paragraphs of that section. Whereas we can say that the description in *Les Misérables* belongs to an imposing and seemingly omnipotent narrator, the figure of Fabrice at Waterloo is small and insignificant. Stendhal in no way paints a realist picture, neither in the sense of a historical narrative (such as Hugo's), nor even in the sense of psychological realism, since Fabrice is oblivious to the monumental event taking place around him. Stendhal thus draws the reader into a whirlwind of chaotic events.

The most important moment of the Waterloo sequence in *La Chartreuse de Parme* is when Napoleon happens, supposedly, to pass by. Fabrice, drunk on the brandy the soldiers have been passing around, fails to see him:

Tout à coup le maréchal des logis cria à ses hommes:  
- Vous ne voyez donc pas l'Empereur, s--! Sur-le-champ l'escorte cria *vive l'Empereur!* à tue-tête. On peut penser si notre héros regarda de tous ses yeux, mais il ne vit que des généraux qui galopaient, suivis, eux aussi, d'une escorte. Les longues crinières pendantes que portaient à leurs casques les dragons de la suite l'empêchèrent de distinguer les figures.

[...]  
- C'est donc l'Empereur qui a passé là? dit-il à son voisin.<sup>31</sup>

[Suddenly the sergeant called out to his men: "Can't you see the Emperor, you blasted fools?" Whereupon the escort shouted, "Long live the Emperor!" at the top of their voices. It can well be imagined that our hero stared till his eyes started out of his head, but all he saw was some generals galloping, also followed by an escort. The long floating plumes of horse-hair which the dragoons of the bodyguard wore on their helmets prevented him from distinguishing their faces.

[...]  
"So that really was the Emperor who went by just then?" he asked the man beside him.<sup>32</sup>]

Fabrice is assured by the soldier that it was indeed Napoleon, "celui qui n'avait pas d'habit brodé"<sup>33</sup> ["the one who had no braid on his coat"<sup>34</sup>]. This confirmation sends Fabrice into a flight of heroic fantasy, and he dreams of chasing the entourage in order to serve his hero at close range.

Stendhal's comical depiction of this implausible event situates Napoleon at the level of what Lacan calls the "*tychic*". The term "*tuché*" (and its counterpart, "*automaton*") are from Aristotle's *Physics*:

D'abord la *tuché*, que nous avons emprunté [...] au vocabulaire d'Aristote en quête de sa recherche de la cause. Nous l'avons traduit par *la rencontre du réel*. Le réel est au-delà de l'*automaton*, du retour, de la revenue, de l'insistance des signes

à quoi nous nous voyons commandés par leur principe du plaisir.<sup>35</sup>

[First, the *tuché*, which we have borrowed [...] from Aristotle, who uses it in his search for cause. We have translated it as *the encounter with the real*. The real is beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle.<sup>36</sup>]

The appearance of Napoleon is *tychic* because it creates an encounter between fiction (located at the imaginary level of the pleasure principle)

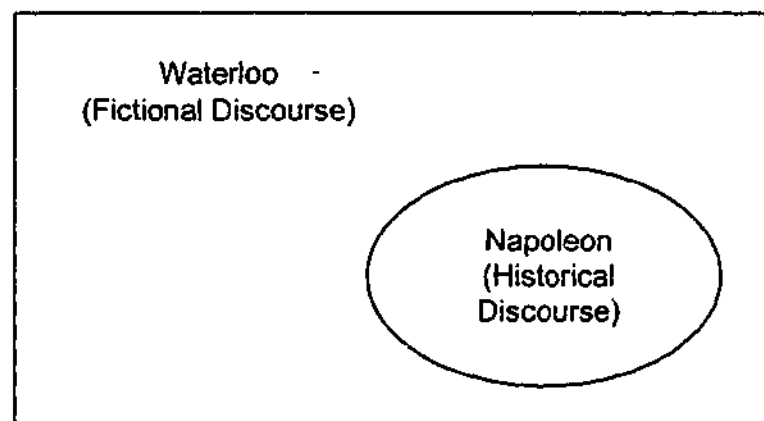


Figure 4.4 – The Interpenetration of Discourses in *La Chartreuse de Parme*

and the real (the historical person of Napoleon). The narrative intersection between event and fiction is thus inverted from Stendhal to Hugo. Whereas Hugo moves from memory to fiction, Stendhal jolts the reader by forcing his idealistic hero into an encounter with the real.

The trouble with applying this logic to *La Chartreuse de Parme* is that the boundary between the imaginary and the real, and hence between *tuché* and *automaton*, is not clearly demarcated, and is therefore subject to a textual play between the two registers. Hugo and Stendhal do not take up opposing positions with regard to Waterloo. They merely approach from different ends the logic of an encounter between fiction and "reality". Stendhal, by focusing on the subjective perspective of Fabrice, designates

him as the *automaton* of the text. The diegetic space of *La Chartreuse de Parme* commandeers the logic of historical discourse that surrounds the Battle of Waterloo and hence a *tychic* moment emerges when the historical discourse breaks into the fictional text. Stendhal uses this technique as a deliberate strategy, evidenced by his frequently repeated maxim about the intrusion of politics (that is, the "real") into a work of art:

La politique dans un œuvre littéraire, c'est un coup de pistolet au milieu d'un concert, quelque chose de grossier et auquel pourtant il n'est pas possible de refuser son attention.<sup>37</sup>

[Politics, in a literary work, are like a pistol-shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and out of place, yet something all the same to which we cannot refuse to pay attention.<sup>38</sup>]

If the fictional can encounter the historical, the reverse process is also possible. Hugo employs this technique in his depiction of Waterloo, where history is the *automaton* and the appearance of Thénardier at the end is the *tychic* moment. Just because the narrative gives apparent precedence to the fictional presence of Fabrice does not mean that the position of the *tuché* is fixed. The play between discourses is infinitely reversible from the point of view of interpretation. A fruitful reading may be made, for example, by considering the *tychic* nature of Fabrice within the logical space of Waterloo.

Lacan's own example of perspectival reversibility is a painting by Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, which depicts two richly dressed men leaning on either side of a dresser on top of which are piled miscellaneous symbolic objects. Lacan, however, is less interested in the background than in an elongated mark that stretches across from the bottom of the painting:

Quel est-il, cet objet étrange, suspendu, oblique, au premier plan en avant de ces deux personnages? [...] C'est alors que, vous retournant en partant [...] vous saisissez sous cette forme quoi? – une tête de mort. [...] Holbein nous rend ici visible quelque chose qui n'est rien d'autre que le sujet comme néantisé [...] l'incarnation imagée du *moins-phi*  $(-\Phi)$  de la castration [...] Nous verrons alors se dessiner [...] non point le symbole phallique, le fantôme anamorphique, mais le regard comme tel [...] Ce tableau n'est rien d'autre que ce que tout tableau est, un piège à regard. Dans quelque tableau que ce soit c'est précisément à chercher le regard en chacun de ses points que vous le verrez disparaître.<sup>39</sup>

[What is this strange, suspended, oblique object in the foreground in front of these two figures? [...] It is then that, turning around as you leave [...] you apprehend in this form [...] What? A skull. [...] Holbein makes visible for us here something that is simply the subject as annihilated [...] the imaged embodiment of the minus-phi  $(-\Phi)$  of castration [...] We shall then see emerging [...] not the phallic symbol, the anamorphic ghost, but the gaze as such [...] This picture is simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze. In any picture, it is precisely in seeking the gaze in each of its points that you will see it disappear.<sup>40</sup>]

The appearance of Napoleon in the field of Fabrice's vision could be read as the "anamorphic ghost" at whom Fabrice "stared until his eyes started out of his head".

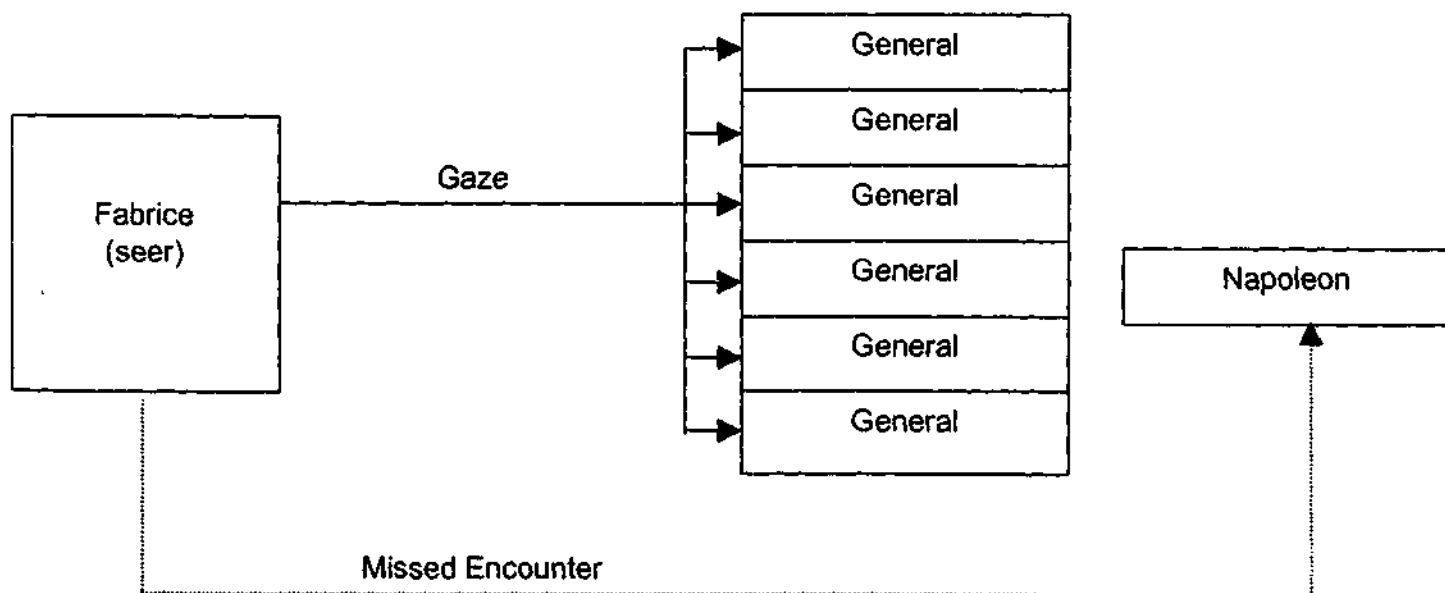


Figure 4.5 – The Seer's "Shoot"

Fabrice's failure to see Napoleon establishes the procession of generals as a *trompe-l'oeil* in which the paradigm of the gaze is revealed through his (i.e. Napoleon's) disappearance.

On closer inspection, however, it is not clear that Napoleon is necessarily the only "anamorphic ghost" in this scene. The original perspective of analysis moves in a line from the possessor of the gaze (Fabrice) to the object of the gaze (Napoleon). But, in addition to what Lacan designates as the spectator's "pousse" ["shoot"] (in other words, the gaze) he adds the reversible dimension of the "donné-à-voir" ["given-to-be-seen"].<sup>41</sup> Thus the trademark Lacanian dialectic is established between the gaze (active) and the given-to-be-seen (passive).

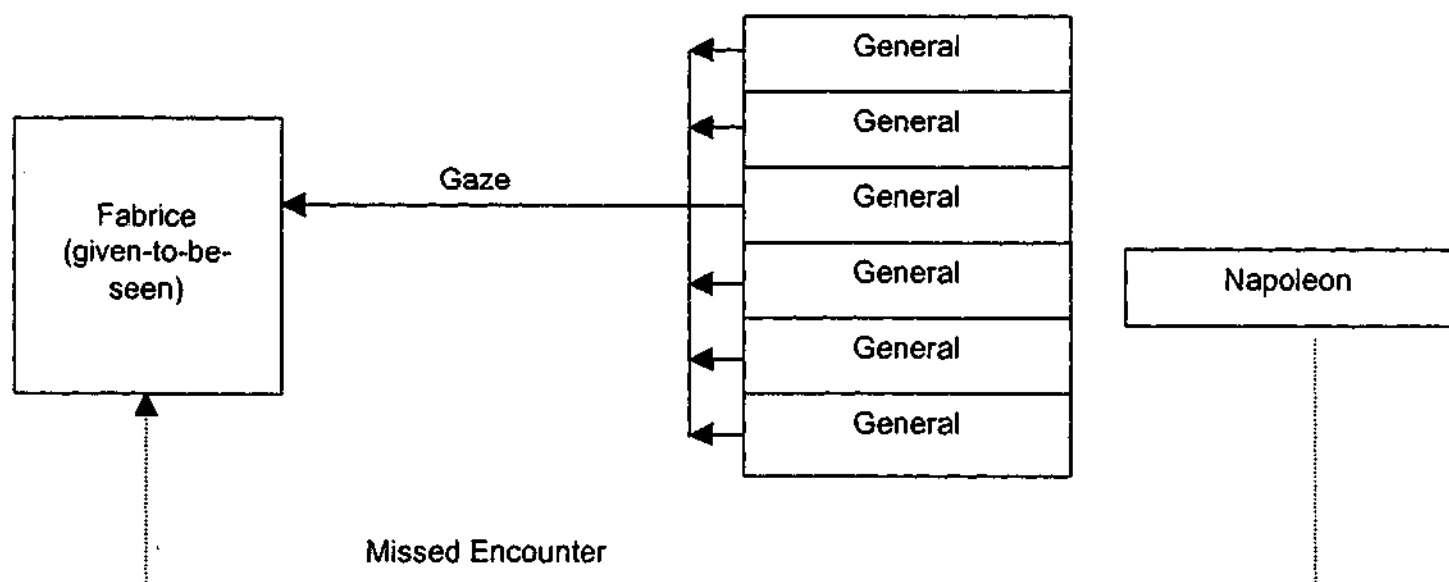


Figure 4.6 – The "Given-to-be-Seen"

This complex process is illustrated comically by an anecdote from Lacan's youth:

[Étant] jeune intellectuel, je n'avais d'autre souci que d'aller ailleurs [...] j'étais sur un petit bateau, avec quelques personnes, membres d'une famille de pêcheurs [...] le nommé Petit-Jean, nous l'appellerons ainsi [...] me montre un quelque-chose qui flottait à la surface des vagues. C'était une petite boîte, et même,

précisons, une boîte à sardines. [...] Et Petit-Jean me dit – *Tu vois, cette boîte? Tu la vois? Eh bien, elle, elle te voit pas!*<sup>42</sup>

[Being a young intellectual, I wanted [...] to see something different [...] I was on a small boat, with a few people from a family of fishermen [...] an individual known as Petit-Jean [...] pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can. [...] And Petit-Jean said to me - *You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!*<sup>43</sup>]

Lacan takes Petit-Jean's comments to mean that he, a "young intellectual", is a *tychic* anomaly in that context. "I was rather out of place in the picture," says Lacan. Thus what counted was not only Lacan's gaze (he sees the world of the fishermen as "something different"), but the gaze that the world sends back to him as a given-to-be-seen (in which Lacan, in return, is given-to-be-seen by the world of the fishermen as "something different"). When this logic of reversibility is applied to the encounter between Fabrice and Napoleon, the same reversible phenomenon occurs. If Petit-Jean had been there when the sergeant shouted, "Can't you see the Emperor, you blasted fools?", one could well imagine him calling back "Well, he can't see you!".

The two worlds, the world of the seer and the world of the given-to-be-seen, brush against each other but never touch. That is why, although I speak of an encounter between Fabrice and Napoleon, there is really no encounter as such. Rather, there is a failed encounter, a missed encounter, which according to Lacan constitutes the very nature of the *tuché*.

La fonction de la *tuché*, du réel comme rencontre – la rencontre en tant qu'elle peut être manquée, qu'essentiellement elle est la rencontre manquée – s'est d'abord présentée [...] [comme le] traumatisme.<sup>44</sup>

[The function of the *tuché*, of the real as encounter - the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is

essentially the missed encounter - first presented itself [...] [as] trauma.<sup>45]</sup>

It is the first time, from a psychoanalytic point of view, that Fabrice "encounters" the "real" in the novel – precisely by brushing against the horizon of its absence.

The "missed encounter" with the real, argues Lacan, is what structures desire. He gives the example of Choang-tsu's famous dream about being transformed into a butterfly. On waking Choang-tsu wonders if he, in his human form, is not the reciprocal dream of a butterfly. Lacan translates Choang-tsu's story into the Wolf Man case, with the wolves replaced by butterflies:

C'est pour cela que le papillon peut – si le sujet n'est pas Tchoang-tseu, mais l'homme aux loups – lui inspirer la terreur phobique de reconnaître que le battement des petites ailes n'est pas tellement loin du battement de la causation, de la rayure primitive marquant son être atteint pour la première fois par la grille du désir.<sup>46]</sup>

[This is why the butterfly may - if the subject is not Choang-tsu, but the Wolf Man - inspire in him the phobic terror of recognizing that the beating of little wings is not so very far from the beating of causation, of the primal stripe marking his being for the first time with the grid of desire.<sup>47]</sup>

*La Chartreuse de Parme* has its own animal symbolism: the bird. Later in the novel, for example, when Fabrice is in prison, his lover Clélia Conti parallels her care of the caged hero with that of her caged birds. But more importantly, the birds tie into Fabrice's obsession with divination, and one bird in particular stands out: the eagle, the bird of Napoleon. The missed encounter at Waterloo occurs in the third chapter of the novel, but Napoleon, in symbolic form, looms large from the very beginning. Fabrice's

decision in the second chapter to join the French army is prompted by the appearance of an eagle:

Tout à coup, à une hauteur immense et à ma droite j'ai vu un aigle, l'oiseau de Napoléon; il volait majestueusement se dirigeant vers la Suisse, et par conséquent vers Paris. Et moi aussi, me suis-je dit à l'instant, je traverserai la Suisse avec la rapidité de l'aigle, et j'irai offrir à ce grand homme bien peu de chose, mais enfin tout ce que je puis offrir, le secours de mon faible bras.<sup>48</sup>

[Suddenly, at an immense height in the sky and to my right, I saw an eagle, Napoleon's bird. He was flying majestically past on his way to Switzerland and consequently towards Paris. "And I too," I said to myself there and then, "I will cross Switzerland with the speed of an eagle, and I will go to offer that great man a very little thing, but after all, the only thing I have to offer, the support of my feeble arm."<sup>49</sup>]

The divination code used by Fabrice does not derive from just anywhere.

Stendhal's pointed reference is to Homer's *The Iliad*, establishing Fabrice's story firmly in the category of the mock-heroic epic. (An eagle flying high on the left was an unlucky omen to the ancients, and appears to the Trojan Hector in Book XII to signify his ultimate defeat.<sup>50</sup> By contrast, the lucky omen of an eagle flying to their right is noted by the Greeks in Book XIII.<sup>51</sup>)

A further important connection is the invasion of Milan by Napoleon in 1796. Stendhal opens the novel with this event, which predates the birth of the novel's hero. F.W.J. Hemmings detects the following ambiguity regarding the legitimacy of Fabrice's birth.

Though the book opens with the entry into Milan of the victorious French troops in 1796, these foreign liberators soon depart. One of them, the young Lieutenant Robert, wins the heart of the Marchesa del Dongo whose hateful husband had fled for safety to his country estate. Fabrice is the fruit of this union; but the French blood that flows in his veins hardly shows as he grows up, and Stendhal never refers to him except as an Italian. [...] Thereafter we are allowed to forget France; or

reminded only of the French for the purpose of ironic confrontation.<sup>52</sup>

Hemmings takes Fabrice's illegitimate parentage as given, ignoring the ambiguity of the evidence. The theme of ambiguous parentage is prevalent in Stendhal's other writings, such as the *Vie de Henry Brulard* and in particular *Le Rouge et le noir*, where the name of the father is called repeatedly into question. But Stendhal always hints in such a way that a decisive assumption in the same manner as Hemmings is simply not plausible. There are regular clues dropped by the narrator, but nothing substantial. For example, the reader is told in the first chapter that Fabrice's older brother Ascanio is "le digne portrait de son père"<sup>53</sup> ["the worthy image of his father"<sup>54</sup>]. Ascanio is later described as having a "grosse figure blafarde"<sup>55</sup> ["fat, pasty face"<sup>56</sup>], echoing the description of his father in the first chapter. By contrast, Canon Borda describes Fabrice as:

plein de grâces, grand, bien fait, une figure toujours riante... et, mieux que cela, un certain regard chargé de douce volupté... une physiognomie à la Corrège<sup>57</sup>

[full of charm, tall, well-built, and always with a smile on his face... and better still a delightfully voluptuous expression in his eye... like one of Correggio's faces<sup>58</sup>]

The suggestion that Fabrice is the surreptitious offspring of one of Napoleon's officers remains enticing, however. Immediately after the missed encounter with Napoleon the alternative father, Lieutenant Robert, makes a cameo reappearance:

Il remarqua en sortant du chemin creux que l'escorte n'était plus avec le maréchal Ney; le général qu'ils suivaient était grand, mince, et avait la figure sèche et l'œil terrible.

Ce général n'était autre que le comte d'A- le lieutenant Robert du 15 mai 1796. Quel bonheur il eût trouvé à voir Fabrice del Dongo!<sup>59</sup>

[He noticed on leaving the sunken road that the escort was no longer with Marshal Ney; the general they were following was tall and thin, with a severe expression and an awe-inspiring eye. This general was none other than Comte d'A-, the Lieutenant Robert of 15 May 1796. How delighted he would have been to meet Fabrizio del Dongo!<sup>60</sup>]

It lends to the Waterloo encounter a quality as ambiguously "innocent" as the encounter between Oedipus and his father in *Oedipus Rex*. Napoleon is presented as the incarnation of heroism, but on closer inspection it is Napoleon's officers that Fabrice really admires:

Le maréchal s'arrêta, et regarda de nouveau avec sa lorgnette. Fabrice, cette fois, put le voir tout à son aise; il le trouva très blond, avec une grosse tête rouge. Nous n'avons point des figures comme celle-là en Italie, se dit-il. Jamais, moi qui suis si pâle et qui ai des cheveux châtons, je ne serai comme ça, ajoutait-il avec tristesse. Pour lui ces paroles voulaient dire: Jamais je ne serai un héros.<sup>61</sup>

[The Marshal halted and took another look through his glasses. This time Fabrizio could examine him at his leisure. He found him to be fair, with a huge red face. "We haven't any faces like that in Italy," he said to himself. "With my pale cheeks and my auburn hair, I shall never look like that," he added sadly. To him these words implied: "I shall never be a hero."<sup>62</sup>]

In a Lacanian reading of the text, then, the Napoleonic thread provides the structure of Fabrice's desire. These attempts to locate the "rencontre première, le réel, que nous pouvons affirmer derrière le fantasme"<sup>63</sup> ["first encounter, the real, that lies behind the phantasy"<sup>64</sup>] that constitute this obsession parallel Freud's detective work in the Wolf Man case, in which he traces the dream of the wolves back to the primal scene, back to the father. Lacan presents us with what he calls a "névrose de destinée, ou le névrose d'échec"<sup>65</sup> ["neurosis of destiny or neurosis of failure"<sup>66</sup>] (an apt phrase to

describe both the missed encounter with Napoleon and the novel as a whole)

in which the subject encounters the resistance of the real:

Ce qui est manqué n'est pas l'adaptation, mais *tuché*, la rencontre. [...] il est nécessaire de fonder d'abord cette répétition [through transference] dans le schize même qui se produit dans le sujet à l'endroit de la rencontre. Cette schize [...] nous fait appréhender le réel, dans son incidence dialectique, comme originellement malvenu. [...] Il s'agit dans l'expérience analytique de partir de ceci que si la scène primitive est traumatique, ce n'est pas l'empathie sexuelle qui soutient les modulations de l'analysable, *mais un fait factice*. Un fait factice, comme celui qui apparaît dans la scène si farouchement traquée dans l'expérience de l'*Homme aux loups* – l'étrangeté de la disparition et de la réapparition du pénis.<sup>67</sup>

[What is missed is not adaptation, but *tuché*, the encounter. [...] it is necessary to ground this repetition [through transference] first of all in the very split that occurs in the subject in relation to the encounter. This split [...] enables us to apprehend the real, in its dialectic effects, as originally unwelcome. [...] In analytic experience, it is a question of setting out from the fact that the primal scene is traumatic; it is not sexual empathy that sustains the modulations of the analysable, *but a factitious fact*. A factitious fact, like that which appears in the scene so fiercely tracked down in the experience of the Wolf Man - the strangeness of the disappearance and the reappearance of the penis.<sup>68</sup>]

Lacan's contention thus echoes realism's pursuit of the real. Realism is a narrative, not of the "real", but of its aphanisis, and the "factitious facts" that constitute its semiotic substitutes.

I wish to reverse perspectives again in order to consider Fabrice, by contrast, as a given-to-be-seen. Fabrice does not "see" Napoleon because he is an indeterminate figure in the procession of generals. In other words, he does "see" Napoleon but he is not able to distinguish him. When the gaze is reversed, however, the identity of Fabrice is almost as nebulous. I refer here not only to the illegitimacy thesis, which is subtle and could easily be overlooked, but also to an incident that concludes the second chapter. On his

way to Waterloo Fabrice is arrested as a spy and thrown into jail. He is released partly through the sympathy of the jailer's wife and partly because of his amateurish attempts to bribe his way out. In order to disguise his escape she fits him out as a hussar who had earlier died in prison.

Dès que Fabrice fut sorti de la petite ville, marchant gaillardement le sabre de hussard sous le bras, il lui vint un scrupule. Me voici, se dit-il, avec l'habit et la feuille de route d'un hussard mort en prison [...] j'ai pour ainsi dire succédé à son être...et cela sans le vouloir ni le pouvoir en aucune manière!<sup>69</sup>

[As soon as Fabrizio had left the little town, marching jauntily along with the hussar's sabre under his arm, he began to feel some qualms. "Here am I," he said to himself, "with the uniform and the marching orders of a hussar who died in prison [...] I have, so to speak, inherited his identity [...] and that without wishing it or expecting it in any way!"<sup>70</sup>]

This sets in motion a chain of misrecognitions as the missed encounter with Napoleon approaches. At the beginning of the third chapter he meets a "cantinière" ["supply woman"] who, out of sympathy for his youth, befriends him. Looking him over in his newly acquired hussar's uniform, she believes she can guess his position:

Je vois le fin mot, s'écria-t-elle enfin d'un air de triomphe: vous êtes un jeune bourgeois amoureux de la femme de quelque capitaine du 4<sup>e</sup> de hussards. Votre amoureuse vous aura fait cadeau de l'uniforme que vous portez, et vous courez après elle.<sup>71</sup>

["I see what it is," she exclaimed at length with an air of triumph. "You're a young civilian who has fallen in love with the wife of some captain in the 4th Hussars. Your lady-love will have made you a present of the uniform you're wearing and you're hurrying after her."<sup>72</sup>]

Fabrice, keen to join Napoleon's soldiers and taste the reality of battle, soon leaves the supply woman and approaches a sergeant. He attempts to pass himself off as the brother of a captain's wife.

Quel nom français dirai-je? pensait-il. Enfin il se rappela le nom du maître de l'hôtel où il avait logé à Paris; il rapprocha son cheval de celui du maréchal des logis, et lui cria de toutes ses forces:

- Le capitaine Meunier! L'autre, entendant mal à cause du roulement du canon, lui répondit: - Ah! le capitaine Teulier? Eh bien! il a été tué. Bravo! se dit Fabrice. Le capitaine Teulier; il faut faire l'affligé. - Ah, mon Dieu! cria-t-il; et il prit une mine piteuse.<sup>73</sup>

["What French name shall I say?" he wondered. At length he remembered the name of the proprietor of the hotel in which he had stayed in Paris. He brought his horse close up to the sergeant's, and shouted to him at the top of his voice: "Captain Meunier!". The other, not hearing properly on account of the roar of the guns, replied: "Ah! Captain Teulier. Well, he's been killed." "Three cheers!" said Fabrizio to himself. "Captain Teulier. I must play the mourner. Dear, dear!" he exclaimed, assuming a mournful expression.<sup>74</sup>]

It is shortly after this exchange that the brandy is passed amongst the soldiers, Fabrice gets tipsy and misses the encounter with Napoleon. As a parallel to the procession of generals in Fabrice's field of vision, then, the reader is presented with a procession of Fabrices, the question of whose authenticity is placed in suspension (under repression?) by the missed encounter with Lieutenant Robert. The *tychic* encounters in *La Chartreuse de Parme* shift continually between fiction and reality, seer and given-to-be-seen, thus retaining their indeterminable qualities.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lacan writes in *Écrits*: "La notion d'un glissement incessant du signifié sous le signifiant s'impose"<sup>75</sup> ["We are forced...to accept the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier"<sup>76</sup>]. Any attempt to delineate an experience of the real, in other words, is transformed (since the "real" itself cannot be grasped other than through the signifier, through language) into the task of mapping its line of flight. Realism perceives the

"real" as a limit-phenomenon, a semiotic rupture, the experience of its own negation: "Et c'est au cœur de cette disparition du sujet [...] que le langage [...] s'avance comme en un labyrinthe, non pour le retrouver, mais pour en éprouver (et par le langage même) la perte jusqu'à la limite, c'est-à-dire jusqu'à cette ouverture où son être surgit, mais perdu déjà, entièrement répandu hors de lui-même, vidé de soi jusqu'au vide absolu"<sup>77</sup> ["And it is at the center of the subject's disappearance that...language proceeds as if through a labyrinth, not to recapture him, but to test (and through language itself) the extremity of its loss. That is, it proceeds to the limit and to this opening where its being surges forth, but where it is already completely lost, completely overflowing itself, emptied of itself to the point where it becomes an absolute void"<sup>78</sup>]. The problem of the "real" in realism, therefore, is not one of "*mimesis*" or representation, but the inexorable elision of this mythical "real".

<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, "La Mort de l'auteur" in *Œuvres Complètes* Vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 491.

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana, 1982), 142.

<sup>3</sup> Barthes, "La Mort de l'auteur", 491.

<sup>4</sup> Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 142.

<sup>5</sup> Barthes, "La Mort de l'auteur", 491.

<sup>6</sup> Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 142.

<sup>7</sup> Barthes, "La Mort de l'auteur", 492.

<sup>8</sup> Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 143.

<sup>9</sup> Barthes, "La Mort de l'auteur", 493.

<sup>10</sup> Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 145.

<sup>11</sup> Barthes, "La Mort de l'auteur", 493.

<sup>12</sup> Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 145.

<sup>13</sup> Barthes, "La Mort de l'auteur", 493.

<sup>14</sup> Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 146.

<sup>15</sup> Barthes, "La Mort de l'auteur", 493-94.

<sup>16</sup> Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 146.

<sup>17</sup> Barthes, "La Mort de l'auteur", 494.

<sup>18</sup> Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 147.

<sup>19</sup> Barthes, "La Mort de l'auteur", 495.

<sup>20</sup> Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 148.

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire XI: Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 58.

- <sup>22</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994), 59.
- <sup>23</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire XI*, 45-48.
- <sup>24</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 44-49.
- <sup>25</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire II: Le Moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 230-31.
- <sup>26</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 196.
- <sup>27</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire II*, 231.
- <sup>28</sup> Lacan, *Seminar II*, 196-97.
- <sup>29</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (Paris: Pocket, 1992), 339-41.
- <sup>30</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), 285-87.
- <sup>31</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme* (Paris: Garnier, 1961), 46.
- <sup>32</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958), 62.
- <sup>33</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 46.
- <sup>34</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, 62.
- <sup>35</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire XI*, pp.53-54
- <sup>36</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 53-54.
- <sup>37</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 389. Variants of the same maxim appear in *Racine et Shakespeare* and *Le Rouge et le Noir*.
- <sup>38</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, 401.
- <sup>39</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire XI*, 82-83.
- <sup>40</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 88-89.
- <sup>41</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire XI*, 97.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.
- <sup>43</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 95.
- <sup>44</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire XI*, 54.
- <sup>45</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 55.
- <sup>46</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire XI*, 73.
- <sup>47</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 76.
- <sup>48</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 27.
- <sup>49</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, 43.
- <sup>50</sup> Homer, *The Iliad* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), 226.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.
- <sup>52</sup> F.W.J. Hemmings, *Stendhal: A Study of his Novels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 163.
- <sup>53</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 11.
- <sup>54</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, 27.
- <sup>55</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 24. Stendhal describes the marquis del Dongo as having "le gros visage blême, le sourire faux et la haine sans bornes pour les idées nouvelles" (11).
- <sup>56</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, 40.
- <sup>57</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 86.
- <sup>58</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, 101-02.
- <sup>59</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 47.
- <sup>60</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, 63.
- <sup>61</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 43.
- <sup>62</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, 59.
- <sup>63</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire XI*, 54.
- <sup>64</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 54.
- <sup>65</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire XI*, 66.
- <sup>66</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 69.
- <sup>67</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire XI*, 66-67, my italics.
- <sup>68</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 69-70.
- <sup>69</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 33.
- <sup>70</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, 49.
- <sup>71</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 35.

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<sup>72</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, 51.

<sup>73</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 44.

<sup>74</sup> Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, 60.

<sup>75</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 502.

<sup>76</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* (London: Routledge, 1977), 154.

<sup>77</sup> Michel Foucault, "Préface à la transgression" in *Dits et écrits: 1954-1988* Vol.1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 243.

<sup>78</sup> Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 43.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### "A LANGUAGE OF THE SIMULACRUM"

#### *Structural Key:*

##### *First Discursive Thread*

- Subthread no. 2 (*"Transparency: the Masquerade of Absence as a Realist Strategy"*)

##### *Second Discursive Thread*

- Subthread no. 2 (*"The Importance of Realism to Contemporary Theory"*)

In the previous chapter I described three phenomena in realist literature, each of which branched from a central process: the disappearances that constitute semiotic practice. Whilst realist literature encounters this aphanisis in a self-conscious manner, it echoes a larger problem aligned to the history of realology. In this chapter, therefore, I wish to take a broader perspective in order to consider realism's place in the historical discourse of realology. There are several important issues to examine, the foremost being the philosophical context of these disappearances. This move will necessitate a detour through some of the more theoretical dimensions surrounding realism. Not wishing to move too far from the consideration of realist literature at the heart of the thesis, however, I shall proceed from a philosophical discussion to an examination of how these principles are executed in the realist texts of Stendhal. It should be noted that this delineation is a double process. Stendhal, serving as the exemplary realist for the purposes of this chapter, highlights self-

consciously the incidence of aphanisis in his textual productions. But the process is, as always, reversible, and far from giving Stendhal a kind of self-conscious "mastery" over his work, I will analyze how Stendhal himself disappears into the discursive horizon. Thus aphanisis has two dimensions: the textual self-conscious and the textual unconscious.

### Constructing Simulacra

I shall not attempt to draw a linear history of realology, but will instead sketch a rather oddly shaped triangle that stretches between our two current apexes, realism and postmodernism, and the formalization of Western philosophy in the teachings of Plato. These points will constitute the basic analytical space of this thesis. What joins these heterogeneous points is the artificial mirror of realology. Each discourse represents, like Stendhal's crystallized branch, a cluster of texts concerned with a particular realological stance. Plato's importance lies in the fact that he writes the grammar, and as such the rules, for all future debates. His assertion of the division between form and simulacrum, for example, is central to any empirical theorization without regard for its philosophical proclivity.

Realism, consistent with its habit of being misinterpreted, appears strongly Platonic. It seems, on the surface, to be an art form that reaffirms the superiority of the form over the simulacrum. However, this perception means not only overlooking the textual strategies employed by realist texts, but also ignoring its historical emergence. It is important to note the Neoclassical tradition from which realism emerges, at least in France. Obviously realism was not the premier force opposing Neoclassicism (that was the role of Romanticism) but the two discourses overlap to the extent

that some of their most influential thinkers belong to both traditions. This particular factor is why I have chosen to focus on Stendhal (the other obvious choice being Victor Hugo) in the latter parts of this chapter, since he was heavily involved in both the Romantic debates of the 1820s and the establishment of realism in the 1830s. Neoclassicism was not, of course, absolutely equivalent to strict classicism: its masters included not only the Roman and Greek classics, but also later models in Molière, Corneille and Racine, the doyens of French theater who (Racine in particular) employed a classicism of their own. That realism emerges alongside Romanticism as a force *against* the prevailing Neoclassicism of the academy provides a significant preliminary clue about its stance towards Platonism.

The position of thinkers in the postmodern era is less ambiguous. "La tâche de la philosophie moderne a été définie: renversement du platonisme"<sup>1</sup> ["The task of modern philosophy has been defined: to overturn Platonism"<sup>2</sup>] writes Deleuze in *Différence et répétition*. Deleuze's sentiments are echoed by contemporary intellectuals such as Foucault (in his paper "Theatrum Philosophicum", a commentary on Deleuze's work) and Jacques Derrida (in *La Dissémination*, for example). At stake is not so much a direct refutation of the historical Plato as a philosophical construction of ideas or, as Deleuze calls it in that same book, an "image de la pensée" ["image of thought"]. It is a construction of classical logic whose downfall is mapped by Derrida across various discourses. In *De la grammatologie*, for instance, he outlines its deconstruction in the works of Saussure and Rousseau; in *La Dissémination*, in the work of Plato himself, demonstrating that even in these "seminal" texts the movement of dissemination announces itself as

philosophical dissonance. This process, I will argue, forms the intellectual background for the anti-Platonic realological positions of both realism and postmodernism.

In his studies of Plato, Rousseau and Saussure, Derrida uncovers a logical parapraxis, a textual unconscious that undermines the manifest meaning of the work. Derrida seizes on key moments of resonance in the text that have become shorthand for this deconstructive process. Plato's use of the word "*pharmakon*", for example, given its ambiguous rendering as both "poison" and "medicine", subverts the meaning of the text at various crucial moments. Similarly, Rousseau's denunciation of masturbation as "that dangerous supplement" in the *Confessions* conceals a larger problematic of his search for the origin in the realm of the natural. The word "supplement" also has a double meaning: it connotes something in excess of the original or, alternatively, its substitute. These two words, "*pharmakon*" and "supplement", give a foretaste of the "duplicity", as it were, of realism's attempts to paint the world.

Plato does not try to define a genus or single species (that is the task of Aristotle), but makes instead a selection, an attempt to gather a pure group from amongst a "confused species". His explicit task, in other words, is to end such duplicity. "La différence n'est pas spécifique, entre deux déterminations du genre" ["Difference is not between species, between two determinations of a genus"] writes Deleuze on Platonism, "mais tout entière d'un côté, dans la lignée qu'on sélectionne: non plus les contraires d'un même genre, mais le pur et l'impur, le bon et le mauvais, l'authentique et l'inauthentique, dans un mixte qui forme une grosse espèce"<sup>3</sup> ["but entirely

on one side, within the chosen line of descent: there are no longer contraries within a single genus, but pure and impure, good and bad, authentic and inauthentic, in a mixture which gives rise to a large species."<sup>4</sup>] The division between "authentic" and "inauthentic" is the key example: the "true" claimant must undergo the *agon* of the Platonic contest, to be affirmed by success or to die by failure. The task of the Platonic philosopher is therefore to divide between things-in-themselves (authentic) and their simulacra (inauthentic).

The ultimate outcome from this division is well known: Plato drives the artists and the poets out of the Republic. Socrates asserts that the division between original and simulacrum extends to, and in fact conditions, epistemology. True knowledge contemplates the original, whereas opinion produces simulacra. Opinion is therefore ungrounded and useless for true philosophical thought. Socrates thus sets up three hierarchical levels of meaning.

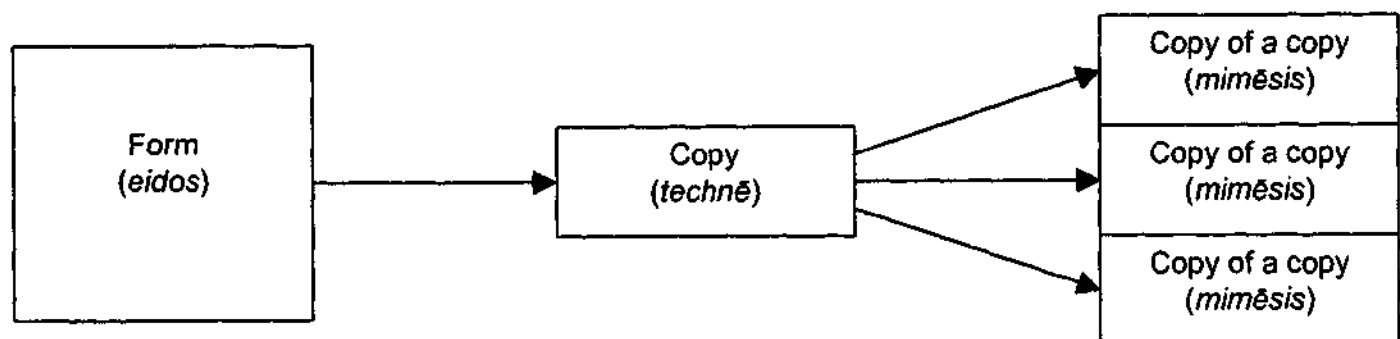


Figure 5.1 – Hierarchical Dissemination in Plato

The first is the Form, the original, the primary model for everything. The second is the authenticated copy, which is achieved through a contemplation of the Form. In material terms, therefore, the work of the master craftsman is authentic because it takes its point of reference directly from the Form.

The third level imitates the copies. A master craftsman may legitimately create a chair because it is a contemplation of the Form, but the artist who writes a poem about the copy of the Form of the chair, or who paints a picture of the copy of the Form of the chair, does so without reference to the Forms and is therefore inauthentic.

At a glance, the rationalization of Plato's division is straightforward. On the one hand, there is an apparently utilitarian value attached to the authenticated copy made by the master craftsman. The crafted product is good by virtue of its usefulness. On the other hand, the work of art, even if it moves the spectator, is functionally "useless". Its uselessness reflects its ungrounded origin. The artist fails to see, perhaps even refuses to see, the Form: the work of art is a simulacrum. Art, according to Plato, is equivalent to the production of opinion: it fails to grasp fundamental philosophical truths, leading its followers into error rather than into the light of truth. There is a sense, however, in which the moral overlay Plato attributes to his epistemology amounts to a smokescreen for a larger problem.

The problem is that, whatever the moral or utilitarian divisions separating the work of the craftsman and the artist, the fact remains that both engage in creative acts that require an imitative technique. This congruity of productive modes prompts the divisions made by Socrates and Plato. The anxiety of Platonic philosophy stems from the potential for undetected intermingling of authenticated copies and simulacra. Poets and artists are not only to be disdained, they are to be feared, for they cheat us by creating alternative realities. Given the ambiguous validity of even Socrates himself (is he speaking for himself or as Plato's mouthpiece?),

Plato's fear is justified. Plato's task is to separate his master, the sage who, with the aid of his daemon, engages with the Forms, from the sophists, the purveyors of counterfeit wisdom. The most interesting battles are those in which Plato organizes his forces in direct, open conflict with the enemy. Socrates argues that right and wrong can only be determined in reference to truth, to the Forms, but his vehement rejection of sophism and its rhetoric is perpetually in danger of achieving victory by the very means it purports to destroy. His triumph over Gorgias, for example, is achieved through a brilliant mixture of guile and wit: in other words, Socrates wins the argument, not so much because his arguments align with the eternal Ideas, but because he employs his rhetorical genius in their defense. It is a method of logical self-contradiction whose irony frequently seems lost on Plato.

The form of this logic is contradictory, always the last resort for Socrates' philosophical dagger-thrusts. "Something cannot be and not be at the same time," is its basic formula. Rhetoric is not founded in truth, for example, and therefore it is not philosophical. Rhetoric is not good, it is "cooking", it cannot be true if it is based on a lie. Socrates structures all his arguments (with the exception, perhaps, of *The Symposium*) around this principle. Destroying this principle undermines the entire Platonic edifice, for the fundamental task of his philosophy is to combat this problem of identity. It is a supremely ironic undertaking because how, in the first place, can the reader draw the line between Plato and his mouthpiece Socrates? Or indeed, between Socrates and his mouthpiece Plato? Surely, we might ask, one cannot be and not be Plato at the same time? Platonic philosophy thus

fails its own rigid test of authenticity – but this failure is precisely what continues to make it so irresistibly seductive as a philosophical gesture.

Socrates' great fear is that the simulacrum could be mistaken for the real thing. But this logic, at some point, is doomed to self-contradiction once it moves beyond mere abstract differences. Plato wants to distinguish the original from the simulacrum, arguing that the qualities of truth and virtue are invested in the former. But the process of division can only be deductive; it must begin from perceptible properties in order to deduce whether something is true or counterfeit. It becomes a question of whether the status of the object as original or simulacrum matters more than its properties. For Plato this is rarely a problem, since he banishes those most likely to complicate his system, the artists and the poets. The shadow of the doppelganger (ever present in the ambiguity of the Socrates/Plato dyad) haunts this logic: what if the test should fail? What if the counterfeit is mistaken for the original? Surely it does not matter, if its properties fulfill the requirements of the test. These questions are what drive philosophy in the post-Platonic era, as it plunges deeper into the abjection of the simulacrum.

Postmodernism, of course, makes a show of reclaiming the simulacrum for its own. Believing it can overcome Platonism by the wholesale embrace of its arch-enemy, the creation of postmodern simulacra involves the provocative construction of overt illusions. Although postmodern art and literature push the limits of their various discourses, folding back on themselves with self-reflexive irony, there is a powerful sense in which these attempts at being revolutionary are also tainted by an

aura of self-defeat. Postmodern art-works are constructed deliberately as illusions, as simulacra. But this so-called illusion simultaneously conceals and announces itself: within the space of the illusion, the mechanism of disillusionment trumpets the constructed, unnatural "presence" of the work. Certainly this denaturalization of reception is one way of opposing the Platonic theory of Forms. At the same time, however, postmodernism's triumph may cause it to overlook alternatives to this tactic, as if the only way to think outside the natural were to become grotesquely and blatantly "unnatural". It is far more dangerous, and more effective, to engage in the duplicity of the realists. Postmodernism too often links realism to the kind of nomenclature or nominalism that is the defining characteristic of classical Platonism. But examined more closely, both realism and postmodernism attack the same target, albeit in contrasting styles, by establishing a language of the simulacrum.

#### **Simulacra and Aphanisis (The Textual Self-Conscious)**

The first piece of evidence of this joint attack comes from a consideration of Stendhal's use of the guillotine as an icon. Stendhal makes it exceed its historical symbolism by assigning to it a "second voice" that equivocates its status within the text. He regards the installation of the guillotine, an instrument made infamous by the ruthless cruelty of the revolutionary extremists, alongside the slogan "*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*" (the "first voice") as not only a legal irony, but also as a designated limit of discourse: in the act of beheading, the guillotine removes its victim beyond the limits of life, law and language. This movement of aphanisis is mapped by the words ostensibly spoken by Danton: "la veille de sa mort, Danton

disait avec sa grosse voix: C'est singulier, le verbe guillotiner ne peut pas se conjuguer dans tous ses temps; on peut bien dire: Je serai guillotiné, tu seras guillotiné, main on ne dit pas: J'ai été guillotiné"<sup>5</sup> ["on the eve of his death, Danton remarked in his booming voice: 'It's a curious thing, the verb "to guillotine" cannot be conjugated in all its tenses. One can say: I shall be guillotined, thou wilt be guillotined, but one does not say: I have been guillotined'"<sup>6</sup>].

Stendhal's famously terse description of Julien Sorel's execution ("Tout se passa simplement, convenablement, et de sa part sans aucune affectation."<sup>7</sup> ["Everything passed off simply and decently, with no trace of affectation on his part."<sup>8</sup>]) accentuates the apparent simultaneity between the disconnection of the law and the silence of language. The association is disrupted, however, when Julien discovers a note in the church at Verrières that foretells his death in coded form: "Louis Jenrel" is, of course, an anagram of "Julien Sorel". From this perspective, *Le Rouge et le noir* resembles the short story "Les Cenci", in which Stendhal details the circumstances leading to the death of Béatrix Cenci. Unlike "Les Cenci", however, in which the narrator is at pains to present an "authorized version" of events, *Le Rouge et le noir* possesses a kind of "double voice": the subtle moments of prescience are veiled cleverly by the main narrative. It is the "authorized version" that, in contrast to the short story, delays the presentation of the "*habeas corpus*" until the end of the novel, thus recontextualizing the various clues and hints about Julien's ultimate fate. Stendhal, in a sense, cheats the guillotine and desecrates the silence of

death: *Le Rouge et le noir* is a story told from beyond the grave, a semiotically inscribed tale of aphanisis.

The difficulty of distinguishing Stendhal's textual subversions arises from his frequent use of polyphony to conceal the revelation of disappearance. With a veiled sense of irony, for example, Stendhal proclaims in the first preface that *De l'amour* is "[un] livre qui [...] explique simplement, raisonnablement, mathématiquement, pour ainsi dire, les divers sentiments qui se succèdent les uns aux autres, et dont l'ensemble s'appelle la passion de l'amour"<sup>9</sup> "[a] book that [...] explains simply, rationally, and, as it were, mathematically, the various feelings which succeed each other to become, in their entirety, the passion called love"<sup>10</sup>]. Critics have usually taken this at face value. *De l'amour*, according to these critics, is Stendhal's rather idiosyncratic attempt to put into practice the sensualist philosophies that influenced him in his youth. In his journals and letters, Stendhal mentions particularly the eighteenth century thinker Claude Helvétius, a follower of the empirical philosopher David Hume, and Stendhal's own friend and contemporary Destutt de Tracy. Stendhal makes occasional reference to de Tracy's "ideological" philosophy in *De l'amour*. In a famous and frequently quoted footnote, Stendhal writes:

J'ai appelé cet essai un livre d'idéologie. [...] Je demande pardon aux philosophes d'avoir pris le mot *idéologie* [...] Si l'idéologie est une description détaillée des idées et minutieuse de tous les sentiments qui composent la passion nommée l'*amour*. Ensuite je tire quelques conséquences de cette description [...] Je ne connais pas de mot pour dire, en grec, discours sur les sentiments, comme idéologie indique discours sur les idées.<sup>11</sup>

[I have called this essay a book of ideology. [...] I beg the forgiveness of the philosophers for having chosen the word

ideology [...] if ideology be a detailed description of ideas and of all the parts into which those ideas can be analysed, this book is a detailed and painstaking description of all the feelings which make up the passion called love. I then draw certain conclusions from this description [...] I know of no word derived from Greek that would indicate discourse upon feelings, as ideology indicates discourse upon ideas.<sup>12]</sup>

It is questionable, however, to what extent Stendhal ever engages in a serious application of de Tracy's philosophy. Apart from the first few pages of *De l'amour*, Stendhal never comes close to a rigorous dissection of passion, and the book fragments into a heterogeneous collection of observations and anecdotes: in other words, love, as a subject to be examined, disappears from the metaphorical operating table.

The fragmentation of *De l'amour* is often perceived as Stendhal's failure to follow through these philosophical principles. Synchronous with this perception is a widespread misunderstanding of the "double voice" (an effect, I will argue, of the simulacrum) in Stendhal's writings. *De l'amour* is seen as a failure insofar as its fragmentation affirms Stendhal's inability to provide a coherent (that is to say, homogeneous) interpretation of love. Critics point repeatedly to Stendhal's flirtations with Helvétius and de Tracy, and in so doing they drown out the textual clue provided by the "second voice": his early passion for mathematics. In the *Vie de Henry Brulard*, Stendhal relates how, like Descartes, he envisioned that the apodictic certainty of mathematics could serve as the foundation for a method of discovering truth and certainty.

Les mathématiques ne considèrent qu'un petit coin des objets (leur quantité), mais sur ce point elles ont l'agrément de ne dire que des choses sûres, que la vérité, et presque toute la vérité.

Je me figurais à quatorze ans, en 1797, que les hautes mathématiques, celles que je n'ai jamais vues, comprenaient tous ou à peu près tous les côtés des objets, qu'ainsi, en avançant, je parviendrais à savoir des choses sûres, indubitables, et que je pourrais me prouver à volonté, *sur toutes choses*.<sup>13</sup>

[Mathematics take into account only one small corner of objects (their quality [trans. error: should read "quantity"]), but are pleasing thereby for saying about it only things which are certain, only the truth, and almost the whole truth.

At the age of fourteen, in 1797, I imagined that higher mathematics, which I have never known, contained every or almost every aspect of objects so that by going on I would come to know certain, indubitable things, which I could prove to myself whenever I wanted, about everything.<sup>14</sup>]

Stendhal recounts that doubts arose because of the highhanded manner in which mathematics was taught, that his teachers indoctrinated their pupils like priests expounding on the scriptures. He recalls a fellow student named Paul-Émile Teisseire who, although he failed to understand the principles of mathematics, succeeded because of his ability to memorize examples and outcomes:

[T]ous était plus ou moins comme Paul-Émile Teisseire et apprenaient par coeur. Je leur voyais dire souvent au tableau à la fin des démonstrations:

<< *Il est donc évident* >>, etc.

Rien n'est moins évident pour vous, pensais-je.<sup>15</sup>

[They were all more or less like Paul-Émile Teisseire and learnt by rote.

I often watched them up at the blackboard after a demonstration saying:

"It's evident therefore that, etc."

"Nothing could be less evident for you," I thought.<sup>16</sup>]

Mathematical principles therefore remained "mysteries", "absences", correct not because of the force of their logic but because "*en employant à chaque instant cette règle dans le calcul, on arrive à des résultats vrais et indubitables*"<sup>17</sup> ["by continually applying this rule in calculation, you end up

with results that are true and indisputable"<sup>18</sup>], a kind of "inerrancy" of mathematical logic. There is an emptiness at the core of mathematical logic that echoes Stendhal's literary endeavors. From this perspective, the significance of his prefatory remarks about approaching the subject of love "mathematically" are reopened to interpretation. Stendhal explores, in *De l'amour* and throughout his writings, what I will designate as the "double voice" of discourse, an echo or simulacrum of the text's manifest meaning. This technique of presenting itself as one thing while being and doing something completely other is the primary means of the realist work for concealing its latent semiotic aphanisis.

The great Stendhalian discourses on love and interpretation provide an auto-critique, through polyphonic redoubling, of their traditional legislative function. In the case of interpretation, for example, criticism usually directs itself towards the determination and signification of textual symbols, the meaning of scenes, and intratextual and intertextual references: in other words, its purpose lies in deciding whether a particular reading of a text is either valid or invalid. Similarly in "The Salzburg Bough", a short story that appears in the appendix to *De l'amour*, an unnamed character remarks "on aime ou l'on n'aime pas"<sup>19</sup> ["one either loves or does not love"]<sup>20</sup>. That is to say, love in Stendhal cannot be separated from the process of interpretation: *De l'amour* constitutes the question of whether one is in love or not as exclusively a matter of interpretation, and therefore of judgment. The legislative authority of these discourses is undermined, however, by the "double voice", whose function is both to conceal and reveal the hollow center of interpretation. Stendhal writes in *De l'amour*, for example, that

"en amour, posséder n'est rien, c'est jouir qui fait tout"<sup>21</sup> ["in love possession is nothing, only enjoyment matters"<sup>22</sup>]. In other words, the object of love is absent, it has disappeared, and what must be enjoyed instead are the discourses surrounding that aphanisis. Later in the book, the secondary voice makes its mocking reply to this statement. Stendhal examines the character of Don Juan, the lover who values pleasure above all else but whose actual pleasure and proximity to love, according to the "contradiction au fond"<sup>23</sup> ["fundamental contradiction"<sup>24</sup>] of his role, fades in proportion to his ability to seduce. Don Juan reformulates the discarded maxim of "The Salzburg Bough" along Platonic lines: "One either has pleasure, or one does not".

The structure of this logic is classical, reanimating the principle of contradiction at the heart of Platonic philosophy. The Socrates-Plato nexus is one of the great symbols of monological, legislative discourse, and it is hardly surprising that Julien Sorel's trial, for instance, is allusively compared to its Socratic precursor. Julien's trial functions as an echo, a second voice that commentates on both itself and its precursor. Julien and Socrates each begin their apologies by pointing out that the charges laid against them are superficial, that they are being charged because of an ulterior, political motive. Apart from this thematic resonance, Stendhal adds various other, more tangible similarities to his text. The second mark of parallelism, for instance, is a predilection for improvisation.

- N'étais-je pas beau hier quand j'ai pris la parole?  
répondit Julien. J'improvisais, et pour la première fois de ma  
vie!<sup>25</sup>

["Wasn't I fine yesterday when I stood up to speak?" was Julien's reply. "I was improvising for the first time in my life!"<sup>26</sup>]

[W]hat you will hear will be improvised thoughts in the first words that occur to me, confident as I am in the justice of my cause<sup>27</sup>

Another point of resemblance is the jury's verdict. Socrates is sentenced to commit suicide by drinking a cupful of hemlock. M. de Frilair, because of Julien's defiance, describes his sentence as "*une sorte de suicide*"<sup>28</sup> ["a sort of *suicide*"<sup>29</sup>]. Socrates' friend Crito tries to persuade him to attempt an escape made possible by bribery.<sup>30</sup> Julien's friend Fouqué visits him in jail with the same idea.<sup>31</sup> The dissimilarity would seem to be their age: Socrates is an old man of seventy and Julien a precocious twenty-three year old. By means of this contrast, however, Stendhal plays ironically with the original material. One of the charges brought against Socrates was that he corrupted the youth of his day. Julien embodies the conflict between the decadence of his contemporary culture and the nobility he cherishes secretly in figures such as Napoleon. Stendhal thus inverts the original situation. Whereas Socrates is charged with using his teaching to corrupt youths (first voice), Julien is the corrupt youth condemned for his Socratic attack on the jury (second voice).

Stendhal's implicit demolition of the dictum "that one either loves or does not love" is aimed against this model of classical contradiction. His rejection of its logic is not explicit, as usual, operating instead at the level of textual symbolism. As I argued in Chapter 3, the sheer magnitude of Plato's influence has transformed his metaphors into a conventional symbolic code. He outlines their meanings in Book 4 of *The Republic*, in which Socrates

sketches a trio of symbols designed to map various human faculties onto zones of the body. He describes these metaphors in detail in the *Timaeus*: the head stands for "reason", the chest for "will", and the belly for "appetite". Given this legend, the realist critique begins to emerge. It is the powerful metaphor of the guillotine, a recurring motif in Stendhal's writings, which again provides the counter-image, the second voice or simulacrum.

If the head symbolizes reason, the domain of the philosopher-king, then the guillotine is the metaphor for revolutionary madness, not in the sense that madness has usurped the place of reason, but that reason itself bears the hallmarks of an endemic form of insanity. The guillotine appears as a parody of a medical procedure, akin to the Platonic *pharmakon*, whose function is to amputate the diseased part. (It is without surprise that we recall that Julien's first surrogate father was a veteran of the Napoleonic campaigns and, significantly, a former army surgeon.) Reason is no longer separate from the ravenous "wild beast" of appetite: it is just as capable of creating its own self-professed "monster" in Julien Sorel. At the center of reason, in other words, is madness, the *disappearance* of reason, which only the guillotine may cure through a metaphorical amputation. The surgeon, at his death, leaves to Julien "thirty or forty books": food, in other words, for the head, not the belly.<sup>32</sup> The displacement is accentuated in the following chapter by Julien's refusal to take his meals with the servants.

Cette horreur pour manger avec des domestiques n'était pas naturelle à Julien, il eût fait, pour arriver à la fortune, des choses bien autrement pénibles. Il puisait cette répugnance dans les *Confessions* de Rousseau. C'était le seul livre à l'aide duquel son imagination se figurait le monde. Le recueil des bulletins de

la Grande Armée et le *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* complétaient son Coran.<sup>33</sup>

[This horror of eating with the servants was not a natural instinct with Julien. He would have done far harder things to make his way in the world. He drew his repugnance from Rousseau's *Confessions*, the only book that had helped his imagination to form a picture of society. This work, together with a collection of bulletins of the Grand Army and the *Mémorial de Saint[e]-Hélène*, comprised his manual of conduct.<sup>34</sup>]

Julien's bookish delicacy reflects a kind of madness. Even though he is an ambitious young man, his values and his "energy", as Stendhal puts it, are comically out of place in the nineteenth century: they are the symptoms of an era that has long since disappeared.

In "The Novel and the Guillotine", Peter Brooks claims that the double voice of *Le Rouge et le noir* is essentially an Oedipal discourse, in which the celebrated intrigue surrounding Julien's paternity is linked directly to the discourse of the text's own self-legitimization. "It is through misinterpretation and the postulation of concealment – of what is 'really', as far as we know, the absence of anything to be concealed – that Julien's noble illegitimacy begins to achieve textual status, to acquire an authorship based on a gratuitous play of substitutes for the origin."<sup>35</sup> Brooks thus sets up an interplay between the hero-son and the narrator-father in which, true to the Oedipal prototype, the text rebels against itself in the novel's shock ending. Julien is a parricide, a "monster" who "figures the out-of-place, the unclassifiable, the transgressive, the seductive".<sup>36</sup> But Julien's "monstrosity" is not exposed until the end of the novel and, in a last defiant act, he in turn exposes another monstrosity: the emptiness of the writing process. Brooks notes how, in the final chapters of *Le Rouge et le noir*,

intrusions by the narrative voice are diminished in contrast to the body of the novel, as if Julien's fatal action has resulted in "a denuding of the very act of narrative invention".<sup>37</sup> Brooks concludes that it is precisely the condition of being a character, of being narratable, that places Julien in an irredeemable and inevitable position of Oedipal guilt.

The monster is the figure of displacement, transgression, desire, deviance, instability, the figure of Julien's project for himself, of his projective plot. [...] [Julien moves] beyond paternal authority and the plotted novel. [...] the extranovelistic perspective of its closing chapters serves to underline the disjuncture between plot and life, between Julien's novel and Stendhal's, between authoritative meaning and the subversion of meaning. [...] To read a novel – and to write one – means to be caught up in the seductive coils of a deviance: to seduce, of course, is to lead from the straight path, to create deviance and transgression. [...] The novel rejects not only specific fathers and authorities but the very model of authority, refusing to subscribe to paternity as an authorizing figure of novelistic relationships. Ultimately, this refusal may indicate why Stendhal has to collapse his novels as they near their endings: the figure of the narrator as father threatens domination, threatens to offer an authorized version. He too must be guillotined.<sup>38</sup>

The source of "monstrosity" is explicit: it springs from the head, unrelenting in the force of its terrible logic. Julien claims, after all, that his behavior proceeded not from some irrational urge but from "la puissante idée du *devoir* [...] je n'étais pas emporté"<sup>39</sup> ["the compelling thought of duty...I was not carried away"<sup>40</sup>]. But a duty to what? To nothing – and that is precisely the point.

### Simulacra and Aphanisis (The Textual Unconscious)

The focus of the analysis in this chapter has so far been on the head: the belly does not seem to share its position as a prominent motif, at least in Stendhal's writings. For the previous section, this appears entirely appropriate, with Stendhal masterfully directing the disillusionment of the

narrative process. However, in a memorable piece of textual criticism, Carol Mossman reveals how, at an unconscious level, the belly emerges as another subversive discourse, which draws Stendhal into his own aphanisis. Since the advent of psychoanalysis there has been no shortage of commentary about Stendhal's Oedipus complex. His vehement hatred of his father and intense love for his mother are described vividly in the *Vie de Henry Brulard*. And yet – Brooks is a classic example of this phenomenon – it is the father who inevitably claims the center of attention. Mossman unveils the belly as a second voice: not, this time, as a symbol of appetite, but as a narrative of birth. "Making visible is the first step," she writes, "toward exposing a narratological mastery of production based precisely on the absent maternal function."<sup>41</sup> Mossman contrasts the conventional Oedipal reading of Stendhal's relationship with his mother – namely, that Henriette Beyle, as the object of the young Henri's love, is the catalyst and trigger for Stendhal's hatred of his father – with a perspective revealed by a close consideration of Chapter 32 of the *Vie*. Her approach to Stendhal's memoir is refreshing: using the same analytical tools as those deployed in literary analysis, she considers the text as a work of narrative rather than as a programmatic piece of psychological deployment.

Chapter 32 of *Vie de Henry Brulard* unfolds as a triptych of scenes, placed side by side without any apparent link. In the first, Stendhal tells of his earliest hunting experience. His excursion meets with quick success when he kills two thrushes. He then misses a fox, and finally kills another bird. The second scene describes a strange childhood conspiracy conducted by Stendhal and some friends, who carry out an attack on the Tree of Fra-

ternity, one of a trio of symbols set up by the Revolutionary upheaval. One of them takes a shot at the tree. Chased by the city guards, they take refuge with a pair of old women who lie in order to protect the boys. The third and final scene tells of Stendhal's presence at the execution, by guillotine, of a parricide named Jomard. The connection between these three scenes, argues Mossman, is the uncanny sensation provoked each time by a missed encounter. Stendhal dwells at length on his inability to hit the fox, for example, and frames it between his two successful shots. "Two acts whose violence haunts him to this very day surround a miss whose inexplicability HB [Henry Brulard] strongly insists upon."<sup>42</sup> The attack on the Tree of Fraternity is especially extraordinary: Stendhal's contempt for the *ancien régime* is a celebrated indicator of his intense hatred for his conservative, despotic father. At the time of writing in 1836, this attack on his own political values appears to Stendhal as both absurd and inexplicable. Furthermore, although he was the instigator of the episode, Stendhal is surprised that he cannot remember who it was that pulled the trigger. A shot is fired, nevertheless, and the boys take flight. The motif of the shot disappears in the third scene, and is replaced by the falling of the guillotine blade.

One Jomard, the parricide, was guillotined on August 23, 1797. With horror Henry observed the "drops of blood forming all along the blade before falling". However, the reader is not privy to the fatal severance. The narrator spares us that final violence in a sort of textual black-out reminiscent, for that matter, of Julien Sorel's decapitation, also an ellipsis. It is as if the text, in its refusal to recount, were miming that definitive loss of consciousness which is, par excellence, a beheading. In fact, to return to this syncope which closes chapter 32, one realizes that it is neither the blade which falls nor the head: "I was so near that after the execution I saw the drops of blood forming all

along the blade before falling." Whether it was the drops of blood or the horrified young spectator that fell remains open to question.<sup>43</sup>

All three scenes therefore share this "attack" or "hunt" motif whose conclusion is elided by the textual erasure of the lethal moment.

The third scene provides Mossman with the decisive theme of parricide: Stendhal, she argues, uses the descriptions of the hunt and the conspiracy to frame his unconscious reaction to the crime that constitutes his own barely veiled fantasy of murder. The three scenes together constitute a fragmented and yet thematically coherent defensive strategy. In the first place, the young Henri Beyle shoots and kills some thrushes. His guilt at this violence is minimized: he has merely killed small, harmless creatures, and "did he not miss the object of a real hunt, the fox? True, HB did pull the trigger, but he missed".<sup>44</sup>

But wait – he did not pull the trigger after all! This is what the conspiracy episode is at pains to demonstrate, even though a crime might have taken place. The gun, it turns out, is an associative device whose function is to link the hunt to the conspiracy, but it is perhaps the conspiracy episode which will reveal what has in fact transpired. At some level, an equation is being made between pulling the trigger and missing, and hitting the target without pulling the trigger. Combining the two, one is confronted with a simultaneous admission and denial, a yes-and-no, that is, a (de)negation.<sup>45</sup>

The appearance of the parricide Jomard at the end of the chapter accentuates Stendhal's painstaking separation of himself from the crime: the guillotine's scaffold marks a physical limit between his unrealized fantasies and Jomard's concrete actions.

The movement of Chapter 32, in which Stendhal conceals his murderous impulses behind a triptych of defensive narratives, still begs one

crucial question: against whom is this aggression directed? The text points emphatically at Chérubin Beyle, "the sly fox who 'cheated' his only son out of rightful inheritance", and the Jesuitical tutor M. Raillane, an alternative "father" in young Henri's life.<sup>46</sup> It is Raillane, after all, who callously claims "<< Mon ami, ceci vient de Dieu >>"<sup>47</sup> ["My friend, this comes from God"<sup>48</sup>] at the death of Henriette Beyle. It is at this point that Mossman chooses to make her revelation. Stendhal's hatred for the paternal – for Chérubin Beyle, for M. Raillane, for God – is a secondary reaction to an event that precedes it: an unspoken, repressed death wish against his mother. Her conclusion is drawn from a complicated, triangular structure of desire and guilt. Mossman points to a letter from Stendhal to Sainte-Beuve, for example, in which he writes that he believes in God, if only so that when he dies he can chastise Him for His cruelty. God, the symbol of paternity, is the second gunman: it is He, as it were, who fires the mysterious shot that strikes down Henriette Beyle (whom Stendhal describes, as if linking her with the hunting scene, as being "quick and agile as a hind").<sup>49</sup> In Mossman's structure, Stendhal attributes the carrying out of the murderous act to the paternal trinity (God, Chérubin, Raillane), which provides the cause of his manifest hatred, at the same time bearing an unconscious burden of guilt for his own matricidal fantasy.

With respect to Chapter 32, then, it might be supposed that the wishing of death upon the father functions as a sort of screen which points to and away from the other scene – that of the matricide. [...] It is not the fox, after all, but the doe which was the hunter's real target. And the strategy has been brilliant, it must be conceded: the hunter-narrator had flaunted his paternal hostility as a sort of decoy to divert the reader's interest away from the real object of interest, Henriette Beyle. Only the

overloud protestations of ignorance (read as denial) give him away...<sup>50</sup>

Ample evidence exists to back Mossman's claim. There is, for instance, a notably sharp division between the two mother figures of Henriette and Séraphie. Henriette is portrayed as an ideal woman, who managed to govern her household benevolently while "lisant souvent dans l'original la *Divine Comédie* de Dante"<sup>51</sup> ["reading Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the original"<sup>52</sup>]; Séraphie, by contrast, is remembered as nothing short of demonic. It is precisely this overstatement of sentiment that Mossman finds suspicious. The reader is given a truer glimpse into the situation, perhaps, in the notable confrontation between Henri and Séraphie in which Stendhal realizes, to his astonishment, that in spite of his hatred against this maternal usurper he nevertheless lusts after her. Mossman returns also to consider the parricide Jomard. Jomard killed his father-in-law, but Stendhal's *Vie* remains silent about his equally criminal acts against women. In addition, Jomard killed his mother-in-law, with whom he had conducted an affair, prompting Mossman to pose the pointed question: "Which, if either, of these two parricides takes precedence? Here once again the silence of the text speaks its truth."<sup>53</sup> In the same episode, a parricide named Mingrat is mentioned; once again, Stendhal spells out the act of parricide while remaining silent on Mingrat's violation and murder of a woman.

Stendhal's unconscious death wish against his mother, Mossman concludes, is not an arbitrary hatred since it is triggered, on each occasion, by the pregnancy of Henriette Beyle. She locates two more instances of this anti-maternal aggression in a pair of infantile attacks on women carried out

by the young Henri. She speculates that these attacks, recounted at the beginning of Chapter 3, not only occurred when Henriette was pregnant with siblings – rivals, in other words, for Henri's love – but that "they are both screen memories at once summarizing and masking the circumstances surrounding Henriette Beyle's death", a death that was brought about, of course, not by Stendhal's hand (that fantasy, like all the nuclei of Stendhal's neurotic focuses, vanishes) but by childbirth.<sup>54</sup> If Mossman is correct, then the overturning of the Platonic structure and the articulation of the double voice or simulacrum is complete. Mossman unfolds a remarkable layering of textual meaning, of which Stendhal appears to be both master and victim. Just as Plato is subject to the irony of his own texts, so also is Stendhal, consciously and, if Mossman is correct, unconsciously. Where is the matricide in the text? Quite simply, nowhere. It does not exist except as a discursive construction, that is to say, a simulacrum.

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Postmodernism and realism thus share a common strategy, the production of simulacra, inspired by a common anti-Platonic stance. How should we admire the "realism" of a realist text? Only at the level of its descriptions, which are produced in order to highlight, by their superfluity, the focus of the realist text on the production of simulacra. Realism's aim, therefore, is to instill in its readers a culture of distrust in the production of textuality. We are to "read for the plot", to borrow Brooks' phrase, in the twofold sense that we not only focus on the simulacra of the text rather than its historical padding, but also that we read for the "plot", the conspiracy that is the kernel of the discursive exercise. Of course, this process is a *mise*

en abyme, understanding that this nucleus is itself a play of shadows, a semiotic aphanisis.

- <sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 82.
- <sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Athlone, 1994), 59.
- <sup>3</sup> Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, 84.
- <sup>4</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 60.
- <sup>5</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 485.
- <sup>6</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 487.
- <sup>7</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 505.
- <sup>8</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 508.
- <sup>9</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour* (Paris: Garnier, 1959), 325.
- <sup>10</sup> Stendhal, *Love* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 28.
- <sup>11</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 13.
- <sup>12</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 49.
- <sup>13</sup> Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard* (Paris: Garnier, 1961), 312-13.
- <sup>14</sup> Stendhal, *The Life of Henry Brulard* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995), 357-58.
- <sup>15</sup> Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, 312.
- <sup>16</sup> Stendhal, *The Life of Henry Brulard*, 357.
- <sup>17</sup> Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, 313.
- <sup>18</sup> Stendhal, *The Life of Henry Brulard*, 358.
- <sup>19</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 347.
- <sup>20</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 289.
- <sup>21</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 107.
- <sup>22</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 112.
- <sup>23</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 235.
- <sup>24</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 208.
- <sup>25</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 486.
- <sup>26</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 488.
- <sup>27</sup> Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993), 37.
- <sup>28</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 495.
- <sup>29</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 497.
- <sup>30</sup> Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, 78-79.
- <sup>31</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, 462.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.
- <sup>33</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 29.
- <sup>34</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 40.
- <sup>35</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 74.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-87.
- <sup>39</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 499-500.
- <sup>40</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 502.
- <sup>41</sup> Carol Mossman, *Politics and Narratives of Birth: Gynocolonization from Rousseau to Zola* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 17.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. The "stolen" inheritance refers to "a certain law of the 13th of Germinal" (29).
- <sup>47</sup> Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, 34.
- <sup>48</sup> Stendhal, *The Life of Henry Brulard*, 35.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.
- <sup>50</sup> Mossman, *Politics and Narratives of Birth*, 32-33.

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- <sup>51</sup> Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, 29  
<sup>52</sup> Stendhal, *The Life of Henry Brulard*, 29  
<sup>53</sup> Mossman, *Politics and Narratives of Birth*, 32  
<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

## CHAPTER SIX

### "ECONOMIES OF THE COUNTERFEIT"

#### *Structural Key:*

##### *First Discursive Thread*

- Subthread no. 2 ("*Transparency: the Masquerade of Absence as a Realist Strategy*")

##### *Second Discursive Thread*

- Subthread no. 3 ("*Political/Textual Strategies*")

The economy of the counterfeit was touched on in the earlier discussion of the circularity – or rather, circulation – of transgression. This chapter explores the meaning of realism as counterfeit, and more broadly, its participation in a discourse of forgery. The postmodern text has a habit of revealing both itself and its constructions, of insisting on its status as, ultimately, a simulacrum. Realism, by contrast, insists on its own veracity. The postmodern mythology suggests that a textual revolution has taken place, in which modernism and postmodernism have lifted the veil so that we may realize the ultimate hypocrisy of the construction of meaning. To believe in this mythology would be to overlook the crucial irony underlying the realist discourse of the counterfeit.

The postmodern text insists that it is a fake, a simulacrum. But, on the basis of these assertions, the reader is expected to engage in the very activity being deconstructed: the text demands that the reader *believe* in the textual skepticism it generates through a self-reflexive discourse. The reader, in

other words, is asked to form a belief about the postmodern text's *lack* of belief in the sovereignty of its textuality. The realist text, by contrast, on one level, insists on its absolute veracity that, unlike the postmodern text, conveys an air of authority and authenticity. This stance does not undermine its status as counterfeit. On the contrary – and here is the great irony of the counterfeit – the forged text *must* insist on its own veracity if it is to become a part of both the general economy and the economy of the counterfeit. The efficacy of the counterfeit coin lies precisely in not being recognized for what it is. Like the realist text, it is bound to insist on its veracity, even though this “truth” is a *trompe-l'oeil*.

### Rousseau

Rousseau is a thinker and novelist whose influence permeates the writings of the realist authors in question: Balzac, Stendhal and, to a lesser extent, Poe and Dostoevsky. The springboard for my reading of Rousseau is Derrida's “Nature, Culture, Écriture”, an extended essay on Rousseau that constitutes the second part of his *De la grammatologie*. Derrida's early work introduces a new economy of meaning that will become crucial to realism's use of the Rousseauist grammar in its construction of the counterfeit.

Rousseau's indictment of literature in the preface to *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* introduces an ethical double bind. It underlines the operation of “evil” or “immoral” forces in the text. In Rousseau's novel, for example, the hero and heroine conduct a love affair that, if we follow the elusive hints, leads to fornication (or at least to temptation). The dilemma for the author is that, in order to lead the reader to an appropriately virtuous

conclusion, it is necessary to invoke immorality. The greatness of virtue can lie only in the overcoming of an analogous evil. In this logic we glimpse an ambiguous, conservative economy of virtue at once disavowed and perpetuated by Rousseau.

It is especially interesting how Rousseau tries to escape from the double bind: he disavows responsibility for the evil he generates whilst embracing virtue. In so doing he "purges" evil from the novel, obscuring it with an opaque morality that refuses to acknowledge its evil roots. Derrida ties this to a more general fear, a fear of writing, which is generated by a privileging of the "natural" semiotic of speech. Writing, like evil, is justified by obscuring its fundamental links to speech. Derrida writes:

Or en quoi consistent la *justesse* et l'*exactitude* du langage, ce logement de l'écriture? Avant tout dans la *propriété*. Un langage just et exact devrait être absolument univoque et propre: non-métaphorique. La langue s'écrit, pro-régresse à mesure qu'elle maîtrise ou efface en soi la figure.

C'est-à-dire son origine. Car le langage est originairement métaphorique.<sup>1</sup>

[In what consists the *precision* and the *exactitude* of language, that lodging of writing? Above all in *literalness* [*propriété*]. A precise and exact language should be absolutely univocal and literal [*propre*]: nonmetaphorical. The language is written, and pro-[re]gresses, to the extent that it masters or effaces the figure in itself.

Effaces, that is, its origin. For language is originarily metaphorical.<sup>2</sup>]

Derrida plays on the word "propre", which in the original French echoes several intertwining meanings. In the context of linguistics, "propre" translates as "literal". Language that is "propre" would operate in a regime of perfectly exchanged signs. The economy of meaning works by exchanging an original referent ("nature", for example) for a simulation

("society" or "culture"). Rousseau's reputation is built on his analysis of the perversion and distortion of nature by society's appropriation of it. The step from speech to writing is thus yet another degradation, according to Rousseau, which takes us away from nature.

Even more interesting are Rousseau's attempts to "trace" the origins of humanity's emergence out of the state of nature and into civilized decadence (the "origins of language", the "origins of inequality", and so on).

L'écriture est le mal de la répétition représentative, le double ouvrant le désir et re-gardant la jouissance. L'écriture littéraire, les traces des *Confessions* disent ce doublement de la présence. Rousseau condamne le mal d'écriture et cherche un salut dans l'écriture.<sup>3</sup>

[Writing is the evil of representative repetition, the double that opens desire and contemplates and binds [*re-garde*] enjoyment. Literary writing, the traces of the *Confessions*, speak that doubling of presence. Rousseau condemns the evil of writing and looks for a haven within writing.<sup>4</sup>]

Derrida demonstrates the inherent impossibilities of the task Rousseau sets himself: a "propre" language, a "literal" language, impossible to obtain from a signification whose construction, Derrida claims, confronts "différance", quotation and "déjà-dit". The application of this logic to morality is just as problematic. If humanity has betrayed the innocence it possessed in the state of nature, the question for Rousseau is how to recapture that innocence. When a person is no longer innocent, it is not possible to act "innocently". He or she can only *appear* to be acting "innocently" by suppressing their knowledge or guilt. This paradox will form the core of the realist engagement with Rousseau.

The second meaning of "propre" is "clean", in a material and, more pertinently, a moral sense. Both of these nuances are important to Rousseau,

because the pairing of "order" (conceptual) and "cleanliness" (physical) is a natural combination in the paradigm of his thought. Rousseau's economy is a system that dreams of perfect exchange and thus bemoans the entropy of "reality". (Derrida no doubt means "propre" to have a third meaning, its possessive sense, as an allusion to the Heideggerean ethics of *Sein und Zeit* – for example, "conscience, in its basis and in its essence, is *in each case mine*" – thus tying Rousseau back to the (post)phenomenological spine of Derrida's oeuvre.<sup>5</sup>)

Rousseau's solution to the double bind of the moral novel is remarkable. The novel opens with a disavowal of itself as a decadent genre. The implication is, of course, that Rousseau will not follow the decadence of his time. He will instead furnish the reader with "un roman propre", purged of its immorality. This disavowal is the first step in an elusive game of logical acrobatics. Rousseau first disavows the novel form, then proceeds further to renounce even his responsibility for its authorship in the second paragraph of the first preface:

Quoique je ne porte ici que le titre d'Editeur, j'ai travaillé moi-même à ce livre, et je ne m'en cache pas. Ai-je fait le tout, et la correspondance entière est-elle une fiction? Gens du monde, que vous importe? C'est sûrement une fiction pour vous.<sup>6</sup>

[Although I bear the title of Editor here, I have myself had a hand in this book, and I do not disguise this. Have I done the whole thing, and is the entire correspondence a fiction? Worldly people, what matters it to you? It is surely a fiction for you.<sup>7</sup>]

Rousseau's claim that he is merely the Editor of the letters is meant to undermine the certainty of origin that informs his own investigations. By placing his own authorship "under erasure", he ruptures the integrity of the text. Rousseau thus excuses the book's style, its linguistic errors, its

banalities (he claims they are not his, after all) as well as downplaying any coolness in its anticipated reception (the novel, in reality, was a phenomenal bestseller).

*N.* Quand je vous demande si vous êtes l'auteur de ces lettres, pourquoi donc éludez-vous ma question?

*R.* Pour cela même que je ne veux pas dire un mensonge.

*N.* Mais vous refusez de dire la vérité?

*R.* C'est encore lui rendre honneur que de déclarer qu'on la veut taire: Vous auriez meilleur marché d'un homme qui voudrait mentir. D'ailleurs les gens de goût se trompent-ils sur la plume des Auteurs? Comment osez-vous faire une question que c'est à vous de résoudre?

[...]

*N.* Je ne conclus pas; je doute, et je ne saurois vous dire, combien ce doute m'a tourmenté durant la lecture de ces lettres. Certainement, si tout cela n'est que fiction, vous avez fait un mauvais livre: mais dites que ces deux femmes ont existé; et je relis ce Recueil tous les ans jusqu'à la fin de ma vie.<sup>8</sup>

[*N:* When I ask you whether you are the author of these Letters, why then do you elude my question?

*R:* For the very reason that I do not wish to tell a lie.

*N:* But you also refuse to tell the truth?

*R:* To declare that one wishes to keep truth unspoken is still to honor it. You would have an easier time with a man who was willing to lie. Besides, do people of taste mistake Authors' pens? How dare you ask a question that it is for you to decide?

[...]

*N:* I do not conclude; I doubt, and I cannot tell you how much that doubt has tormented me during the reading of these letters. Certainly, if it is just fiction, you have made a bad book: but say that these two women have existed; and I shall reread this Collection every year for the rest of my life.<sup>9</sup>]

At the same time, he claims credit, and full responsibility, for the book:

"Tout honnête homme doit avouer les livres qu'il publie. Je me nomme donc à la tête de ce recueil, non pour me l'approprier, mais pour en répondre"<sup>10</sup> ["Every honorable man must acknowledge the books he publishes. I therefore put my name at the head of this collection, not to appropriate it, but to be answerable for it"<sup>11</sup>].

One of the most striking images in Rousseau's novel is the de Wolmar's garden. It is a reworking of the Biblical garden of Eden, the garden of Genesis: that is, of the origin. Rousseau's reworking is exemplary of the contradictions explored by Derrida. When St Preux enters the garden he is struck by its wild, jungle-like state, and "spontaneously" compares it to the exotic isles he visited on his travels. Julie reminds him:

C'est ici le même verger où vous vous êtes promené autrefois [...] Vous savez que l'herbe y étoit assés aride, les arbres assés clair-semés, donnant assés peu d'ombre, et qu'il n'y avoit point d'eau. Le voila maintenant frais, verd, habillé, paré, fleuri, arrosé: que pensez-vous qu'il m'en a couté pour le mettre dans l'état où il est? Car il est bon de vous dire que j'en suis la surintendante et que mon mari m'en laisse l'entiere disposition. Ma foi, lui dis-je [St Preux], il ne vous en a coûté que de la négligence. Ce lieu est charmant, il est vrai, mais agreste et abandonné; je n'y vois point de travail humain. [...] l'eau est venue je ne sais comment; la nature seule a fait tout le reste et vous-même n'eussiez jamais sù faire aussie bien qu'elle.<sup>12</sup>

[This is the same orchard where you once went walking [...]  
You know that the grass here was rather dry, the trees rather sparse, offering rather little shade, and that there was no water. Now you see it is cool, verdant, lush, decked out, covered with flowers, watered: what do you think it cost me to put it in its present state? For I should tell you that I am its superintendent and that my husband leaves it entirely to me. My goodness, I [St Preux:] said, it cost you nothing but neglect. This place is enchanting, it is true, but rustic and wild; I see no human labor here. [...] water came along I know not how; nature alone did the rest and you yourself could never have managed to do as well.<sup>13</sup>]

Rousseau attempts paradoxically to merge "nature" (unconditioned, wild, untamed) with "garden" (by definition cultivated and conditioned). Here is Julie's reply to St Preux: "It is true, she said, that nature did it all, but under my direction, and there is nothing here that I have not designed."<sup>14</sup> The garden confounds the standard binary opposition (nature is good, society is evil) because the two terms work together to create a "natural" garden.

Nevertheless, the cooperation is not discussed freely – Julie's revelations to St Preux about the garden's creation and maintenance are a kind of covert initiation, a secret that is hidden securely by erasure:

Il y a pourtant ici, continuai-je, une chose que je ne puis comprendre. C'est qu'un lieu si différent de ce qu'il étoit ne peut être devenu ce qu'il est qu'avec de la culture et du soin; cependant je ne vois nulle part la moindre trace de culture. Tout est verdoyant, frais, vigoureux, et la main du jardinier ne se montre point: rien ne dément l'idée d'une Isle déserte qui m'est venue en entrant, et je n'apperçois aucuns pas d'hommes. Ah! dit M. de Wolmar, c'est qu'on a pris grand soin de les effacer.<sup>15</sup>

[Yet, I continued, there is something here I cannot understand. It is that a place so different from what it was could have become what it is only through cultivation and upkeep; yet nowhere do I see the slightest trace of cultivation. Everything is verdant, fresh, vigorous, and the gardener's hand is not to be seen: nothing belies the idea of a desert Island which came to my mind as I entered, and I see no human footprints. Ah! said M. de Wolmar, that is because we have taken great care to erase them.<sup>16</sup>]

The garden in Rousseau is "un désert artificiel" ["an artificial paradise"], watered by "sources artificielles" ["artificial springs"], arranged by Julie according to "le plaisir de la recherche et du choix" ["the pleasure of seeking and selecting"].<sup>17</sup> Rousseau's "natural" garden is a counterfeit of nature. The efforts to conceal the counterfeit, to erase its footprints, manifests itself as a peculiar fear, an anxiety that, as Pascal writes, "Il n'y a rien qu'on ne rende naturel"<sup>18</sup> ["There is nothing that cannot be made natural"<sup>19</sup>]. And to be "made natural" is, of course, a paradox, *the* paradox of the counterfeit.

### **Balzac**

Alongside his personal financial woes, Balzac's literary obsession with monetary details is notorious. The preeminent characters in this sphere range from powerful bankers to the lowest paupers. But the system of power

and exchange is not limited to financial prowess. Balzac introduces the reader to an intricate system of "black economies" that co-exist with the societal set of rules and conditions. Thus, although many of Balzac's characters are defined by their financial affairs (the Baron de Nucingen, the banker; Gobseck, the moneylender; Grandet, the miser) they also belong to other, less tangible "economies": in the field of politics (Malin, the double-dealing politician of *Une Ténébreuse affaire*; Bixiou, the public servant; Desroches, the lawyer), for example, or, in an even murkier instance, the secret societies that Balzac loved to describe (the infamous "Thirteen"; the "Knights of Idleness" in *La Rabouilleuse*). These black economies drive Balzac's narratives in their presentation of the play of the counterfeit.

Balzac implicates himself in the economy of the counterfeit at precisely the moment he appears to be embracing its other, namely, the pronouncement of the *Comédie humaine* as a coherent project. This event, which has vastly influenced the interpretation of his fictional writings, is nothing more than a clever (and, one must admit, supremely successful) ruse. In that famous announcement, Balzac appoints himself the "secretary" of French society, asserting that the intention of the *Comédie humaine* is to paint a picture of France during the first half of the nineteenth century. With this announcement, Balzac creates a kind of "contract" with his readers, a written statement of purpose to which he has signed his name: "de Balzac".

Balzac delivers his promise of depicting French society not, as we might logically assume, by writing a history of France, but by authoring a series of fictions. He presents his readers with the paradox of writing fiction (which, however historically accurate, are inadmissible as documents of

historical record) in place of the "truth" he promises in the space of the contract. Balzac's announcement of the *Comédie humaine* therefore performs a sleight-of-hand substitution that undermines the status of the contract. This is a contract that revolves around what Prendergast calls "the drama of the *signature*".<sup>20</sup> By what right, after all, does Balzac confer on himself the aristocratic particle "de" with which he signs his name? For all the grandiose pronouncements of the *Comédie humaine*, the reader is left with little more than a dubious contract and a counterfeit signature.

The economy of the counterfeit echoes the aesthetic of the Balzacian text. The comparison of the act of reading with a contract is hardly new, but Prendergast highlights its application with renewed force. Balzac's texts, argues Prendergast, are narrative contracts whose validity is ruptured by the counterfeit. He writes:

Deals, pacts, contracts are thus shadowed by the spectre of forgery [...] Above all, the plots of both novels [*Illusions perdues*, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*] revolve in large measure around the phenomenon of the *forged* signature [...] the signature, guarantee of contract, here guarantees nothing. It founds a process of circulation and exchange in which things are not as they appear, not what they *represent*. The forged signature [...] points to that problematical relation between origin and representation, identity and sign, of which the whole of the Rubempré cycle is an extended exploration. The signature poses a problem of "legibility", the difficulty of distinguishing between the true and the false, a problem of *assessment*.<sup>21</sup>

The problem, in other words, of the counterfeit. Balzac is dealing in the "real", selling it to his readers, at a black market price that ensures all kinds of impurities are thrown into the mix.

At the center of the "Rubempré cycle", of course, is the diabolical figure of Vautrin. Probably Balzac's most notorious character, Vautrin's

position as purveyor of the economy of the counterfeit is masterfully overdetermined. First, he is the "banker" of the criminal underworld, administering illicit cash on behalf of jailed colleagues. Second, his own original prison sentence, committed under his birth name of Jacques Collin, was for forgery. Third, Vautrin is a master of disguise and deception, appearing in various assumed roles in order to outwit and outplay his enemies. Even his name, remarks Prendergast, echoes his aptitude for the counterfeit: "'Vautrin – vaurien – vaut-rien'".<sup>22</sup>

In the character of Vautrin, Balzac combines the transgression of the law (he is a criminal) with false compliance to its demands (the counterfeit). In other words, as Vautrin puts it, he has recourse to the law when it suits his interests. In a startling pronouncement, he attributes his pragmatic stance to the grammar of the counterfeit laid down by Rousseau. Vautrin's observations about the fraudulence of the Social Contract return us to the earlier discussion of transgression. The Social Contract (in other words, the Law) is a counterfeit construction that actively veils the criminal intentions of those who know how to manipulate it. This collusion is nowhere better illustrated than at the conclusion of *Splendeurs et misères*, when Vautrin "gives up" his role of master criminal to take over as chief of the secret police.

Vautrin's villainy lies at one extreme of this economy of the counterfeit. But, just as an excess of transgression leads to banality, so too the counterfeit enters the world of the everyday economy. The ambiguous interpenetration of the counterfeit into the general economy is explored in *La Rabouilleuse*, for example. The novel plays off the brothers, the two

main characters, against each other. Ambiguity is generated by their presentation as two sides of the same metaphorical coin: Philippe is fair and attractive, but unscrupulous and leads the family into ruin; Joseph is dark and sinister-looking, yet he is honest, hardworking and stands by his mother. This contrast is the starting point for the dominant theme of the novel: the effects and complications of the process of copying. In his training as a painter, for example, Joseph is commissioned to create copies (counterfeits) of works by famous masters. In one sequence, for example, he is asked to duplicate a painting by Rubens:

C'est ça? dit Philippe en regardant le tableau de Rubens posé sur un chevalet.

Oui, répondit Joseph. Cela vaut vingt mille francs. Voilà ce que peut le génie. Il y a des morceaux de toile qui valent des cent mille francs.

Moi, j'aime mieux ta copie, dit le dragon.

Elle est plus jeune, dit Joseph en riant; mais ma copie ne vaut que mille francs. Il me faut demain pour lui donner tous les tons de l'original et la vieillir afin qu'on ne les reconnaisse pas.

[...]

Le lendemain, Élie Magus devait venir chercher sa copie. Un ami de Joseph, qui travaillait pour ce marchand, Pierre Grassou, voulut voir cette copie finie. Pour lui jouer un tour, en l'entendant frapper, Joseph Bridau mit sa copie vernie avec un vernis particulier à la place de l'original, et plaça l'original sur son chevalet. Il mystifia complètement Pierre Grassou de Fougères, qui fut émerveillé de ce tour de force.<sup>23</sup>

["Is that it?" Philippe asked, looking at the Rubens, which stood propped up on an easel.

"Yes," Joseph replies. "It's worth 20,000 francs. That's what genius can do. Some bits of canvas are worth hundreds of thousands of francs."

"I prefer your copy."

"It's newer," said Joseph laughing, "but my copy is only worth 1,000 francs. I need to work on it tomorrow to give it the same tones as the original and age it so that people can't distinguish between them."

[...]

The following day, Élie Magus was due to come and pick up his copy. A friend of Joseph's, Pierre Grassou, who worked

for this dealer, wanted to see the finished copy. On hearing him knock at the door, Joseph – to play a trick on him – put his copy, which he had varnished with a special presentation, in the original's place, standing the original on his easel. He completely hoaxed Pierre Grassou de Fougères, who was amazed by his achievement.<sup>24]</sup>

Balzac plays gleefully with these duplicitous inversions. Philippe, rascal that he is, steals the Rubens, but in a masterful twist he inadvertently steals the counterfeit painting thanks to Joseph's trick on Grassou. It is precisely this kind of "slippage" that allows the counterfeit uses to invade "truthful" discourses. The narrative thread of the counterfeit painting is inverted famously in the second half of *La Rabouilleuse*. Jean-Jacques Rouget, uncle to Philippe and Joseph, wishes to deny them a part in his inheritance. When Joseph and his mother visit Rouget, therefore, he attempts to buy them off by offering Joseph his family's private collection of paintings without realizing their true value.

Les Descoings avaient trié ces richesses dans trois cents tableaux d'église, sans en connaître la valeur, et en les choisissant uniquement d'après leur conservation. Plusieurs avaient non seulement des cadres magnifiques, mais encore quelques-uns étaient sous verre. Ce fut à cause de la beauté des cadres et de la valeur que les vitres semblaient annoncer que les Descoings gardèrent ces toiles.<sup>25</sup>

[The Descoings had chosen these treasures from three hundred religious paintings, without having any idea of their value, and with the paintings' state of preservation as their one criterion. Not only did several have magnificent frames; a few were even protected by glass. It was because of the beauty of the frames and the value which these panes seemed to indicate that the Descoings had kept these canvases.<sup>26]</sup>

Because of his vocation, Joseph recognizes their value as originals, even though they are framed within a discourse of apparent worthlessness.

This potential for inversion brings us back to the matter of "truthfulness" in Balzac's texts. Near the opening of *Le Père Goriot*, Balzac writes these famous words: "Ah! sachez-le: ce drame n'est ni une fiction, ni un roman. *All is true*, il est si véritable, que chacun peut en reconnaître les éléments chez soi, dans son cœur peut-être"<sup>27</sup> ["But you may be certain that this drama is neither fiction nor romance. *All is true*, so true that everyone can recognize the elements of the tragedy in his own household, in his own heart perhaps"<sup>28</sup>]. Balzac leaves open no doubt about the key phrase in this passage, underscoring the "*All is true*" by writing it in English. Its appearance in Balzac's most famous novel appears to confirm the common assumption that he is making a statement about realist poetics. *Le Père Goriot*, he seems to be saying, is a production of the highest verisimilitude: "All is true".

But it is unclear what Balzac means by claiming that "All is true". Is he asserting that *everything* is true? Is truth no longer defined in contrast to the untrue, to the false? Following blindly the conventional reading of this phrase, we overlook the hyperbolic, and therefore parodic, function of its logic. Balzac's humor is characterized by a penchant for overstatement. His schema is frequently operative: the typical Balzacian plot involves a morally ambivalent hero torn between the forces of good and evil. This recourse to formula is a deliberately subversive approach. Balzac's assertion that "All is true" is symptomatic of his humor: gross overstatement designed to construct a site for satirical critique.

Balzac writes "All is true" at the beginning of *Le Père Goriot*, but he also makes a crucial recontextualization of the statement's significance by

repeating it near the end of the novel. The scene occurs as follows:

Bianchon and Rastignac are attempting to treat the moribund Goriot, but his condition is hopeless, and Bianchon declares finally that the patient is beyond help. Rastignac, sick with the double grief of his love for the old man and the cruelty of Goriot's daughters, declares to his friend:

Mon ami, lui dit Eugène [...] poursuis la destinée modeste à laquelle tu bornes tes désirs. Moi, je suis en enfer, et il faut que j'y reste. Quelque mal que l'on te dise du monde, *crois-le!* il n'y a pas de Juvénal qui puisse en peindre l'horreur couverte d'or et de pierreries.<sup>29</sup>

["Dear Bianchon," he said, "you are right to be content to stick to the modest career you have marked out for yourself; don't turn aside from it. I am in hell, and must stay there. Believe whatever evil you may hear about the world, *it's all true!* No Juvenal could adequately paint its gilded and bejewelled horror."<sup>30</sup>]

This second version of "All is true" demands a reexamination of the first. In the first version, Balzac's assertion that "All is true" appears indistinct because it fails to specify the mode of truth in discussion. Does Balzac mean, as it has been traditionally understood, that the story he is presenting to the reader is historically – that is to say, factually – "true"? Alternatively, is he asserting, beyond the mere details of the novel, that *Le Père Goriot* is a text that articulates an ontological, ethical "truth"? The second version of "All is true", by contrast, is less ambiguous: Balzac is presenting a moral truth – the world is "evil" – which recaptures the sense of overstated humor I spoke of earlier.

The traditional misreading of the first version occurs because of a parallel failure to appreciate the comparison that structures the "All is true" statement. In the first version, Balzac makes a contrast between his novel *Le*

*Père Goriot* and other works of "fiction" and "romance". The error lies in the assumption that Balzac is rejecting the writing of fictional texts. This misreading lays the foundation for the complementary presumption that Balzac is writing a "nonfictional" novel: in other words, a "realist" text. But these conclusions fail to read closely the first version of "All is true", which is constructed with great care. He begins with a disavowal of "fiction" and "romance" in the first sentence, then opens the second with the statement that "All is true". It is crucial to take into account the remainder of the second sentence in order to capture adequately the sense of Balzac's utterance. In the fullness of the "All is true" pronouncement, Balzac calls *Le Père Goriot*, not a work of historical fact, nor a production of verisimilitude, but a "tragedy". Balzac, in much the same way as he attempts to gather the disparate strands of the *Comédie humaine*, is trying to compress his work into the inadequate boundaries of genre. Of course, this point is illuminated by the editor: "all is true" is an allusion to Shakespeare's play of the same name. The phrase "All is true" is thus a semiotic maze: it contains a reference to a historical drama (Shakespeare), a work of fiction, inside a work of fiction (Balzac) that is posing as a historical drama.

### Stendhal

"Tout commence à Rousseau ou à un rousseauisme" ["Everything begins with Rousseau or with a Rousseau-ism"] writes Michel Crouzet.<sup>31</sup> Crouzet, the most prolific contemporary critic of Stendhal, structures the twin volumes of his "révolte romantique" around this theme. Crouzet argues that it is Stendhal's ambivalence, his love-hate relationship, which places Rousseau at the forefront of any consideration of his work: "Stendhal

voudra-t-il se défaire de cette fascination, il dira se << dérousseautiser >>, donnant par cet hommage négatif la première place à Rousseau" ["Stendhal wishes to tear himself away from this fascination, he says that he wants to 'de-Rousseautize' himself, awarding pride of place to Rousseau by this negative homage"].<sup>32</sup> Not that Stendhal writes a great deal about Rousseau's works as books of philosophy or fiction (he never engages in a sustained analysis of specific texts) but Crouzet argues that the parameters of his thought, their internal logic, are permeated by the unfolding and the refolding of Rousseauist concepts (in particular the opposition between "nature" and "society", as the title of the first volume of Crouzet's "révolte romantique" implies). Crouzet writes:

Il y a un état de nature pour Stendhal, c'est-à-dire quelque chose de plus pur en l'homme qui perce sous l'homme factice, et se garde à grande peine dans les relations << compliquées >> et aliénantes de la vie moderne. Anti ou anté-sociale, il y a chez Stendhal une *nature* plus simple et plus drue, un état d'existence qui se révèle par sa discordance avec l'être convenu des sociétés. Au début et à la fin de notre étude se trouve le problème de la civilisation: entre Rousseau et la dénaturation, et Nietzsche et le << rabougrissement >> moderne, s'étend l'œuvre de Stendhal.<sup>33</sup>

[There is a state of nature for Stendhal, that is to say, something purer that pierces beneath the façade of a person and maintains itself with great difficulty in the complicated and alienating relationships of modern life. Anti- or ante-social, there exists in Stendhal a *nature* that is simpler and more fundamental, a state of existence that reveals itself by its discordance with the lifestyle typical of society. At the beginning and end of our study we find the problem of civilization: between Rousseau and denaturation, and between Nietzsche and modern "pusillanimity", lies the work of Stendhal.]

By highlighting the impact of Rousseau on Stendhal, Crouzet throws us back into the problem of the "original" (nature) and the "simulacrum" (society): the problem, in other words, of the counterfeit.

There are several counterfeit coins in Stendhal's purse, most of them minted by Rousseau. Julien Sorel, for example, plays the role of counterfeit hero to perfection. He styles himself as a pale simulation of the literary and historical figures that precede him: Napoleon, of course, and St Preux, and the Rousseau of the *Confessions*. He buys success in a society that is well beyond his means; the extent of his scholarly knowledge (counterfeit) secures him a tutorial position; an aristocratic name (counterfeit) grants him permission to marry above his lowly social position. But throughout the novel it is the preeminent figures of Napoleon and Rousseau that are evoked explicitly as master counterfeiters. When he arrives at Besançon, for instance, Julien visits a café. He attempts to seduce the girl behind the counter, Amanda Binet, by quoting to her a few passages from Rousseau:

Amanda le regarda d'un air étonné; ce regard changea le courage de Julien en témérité; cependant il rougit beaucoup en lui disant:

- Je sens que je vous aime de l'amour le plus violent.
- Parlez donc plus bas, lui dit-elle d'un air effrayé.

Julien songeait à se rappeler les phrases d'un volume dépareillé de *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, qu'il avait trouvé à Vergy. Sa mémoire le servit bien; depuis dix minutes, il récitait *La Nouvelle Héloïse* à Mlle Amanda, ravie.<sup>34</sup>

[Amanda looked at him in amazement; her glance turned Julien's courage into boldness; all the same he blushed deeply as he said to her: "I feel I've fallen most violently in love with you."

"Please speak a little lower, then," she said.

Julien thought of recalling some phrases from an odd volume of the *Nouvelle Héloïse* to Mademoiselle Amanda, who was thrilled.<sup>35</sup>]

The reader of *Le Rouge et le noir* who is unfamiliar with Rousseau is likely to miss the depth of subversion enacted by Julien's quotation. It is necessary

to return to Rousseau's novel in order to appreciate fully Stendhal's irony.

St Preux writes to Julie from Paris:

Les Romans son peut-être la dernière instruction qu'il reste à donner à un peuple assés corrompu pour que toute autre lui soit inutile; je voudrais qu'alors la composition de ces sortes de livres ne fut permise qu'à des gens honnêtes mais sensibles dont le cœur se peignit dans leurs écrits, à des auteurs qui ne fussent pas au dessus des foiblesses de l'humanité, qui ne montrassent pas tout d'un coup la vertu dans le Ciel hors de la portée des hommes, mais qui la leur fissent aimer en la peignant d'abord moins austere, et puis du sein du vice les y sussent conduire insensiblement.<sup>36</sup>

[Novels are perhaps the ultimate kind of instruction remaining to be offered to a people so corrupt that any other is useless; then I would wish that the composition of these sorts of books be permitted only to honest but sensible persons whose hearts would depict themselves in their writings, to authors who would not be above human frailties, who would not from the very start display virtue in Heaven beyond the reach of men, but induce us to love it by depicting it at first less austere, and then from the lap of vice know the art of leading men imperceptibly towards it.<sup>37</sup>]

Julien uses Rousseau's novel, a book that preaches virtue, in order to seduce a woman, although not just any woman. Amanda is a woman unfamiliar with literature, so she attributes St Preux's words as belonging authentically to Julien. The narrator, by turn, undermines Julien's authenticity by letting the reader know that his seductive speech is counterfeit, that he is putting himself forward as a counterfeit St Preux. Julien appropriates Rousseau's writings as a kind of "second nature". Amanda Binet, illiterate shop assistant that she is, "credits" Julien's counterfeit speech. Encouraged by this early success, he applies the same strategy to Mathilde de la Mole: "Il eut recours à sa mémoire, comme jadis à Besançon auprès d'Amanda Binet, et récita plusieurs des plus belles phrase de *La Nouvelle Héloïse*"<sup>38</sup> ["He had recourse to his memory, as once, a good while ago, with Amanda Binet in

Besançon, and quoted several of the finest phrases from the *Nouvelle Héloïse*<sup>39</sup>]. But Mathilde is an aristocrat who, like the young Henri Beyle, steals volumes of literature and philosophy from her father's library. She immediately recognizes these counterfeit phrases as worthless and brushes aside his hopes for an easy conquest. "Tu as un cœur d'homme"<sup>40</sup> ["You have a man's heart"<sup>41</sup>] she replies, echoing Mme Gherardi's speech in "The Salzburg Bough".

The quotations from Rousseau are one example of the counterfeit chosen from many in *Le Rouge et le noir*. Others include, for instance, the seduction of Mme de Rênal, apparently inspired by Julien's reading of Napoleon's war diaries; also, the correspondence with Mme de Fervaques in which Julien, as a strategy to draw away attention from his interest in Mathilde, sends letters copied from prototypes to Mme de Fervaques. Observing this caricature of seduction, Ann Jefferson links the themes of love back to the problems of realist poetics:

[A]s conceived by Stendhal, both the lover and the novelist share the same vulnerability to the repetitions of the century of platitude. In the face of a culture of imitation it is as hard for the lover to guarantee the authenticity of his passion as it is for the novelist to keep his hold on the real. Both aspire to an originality and an authenticity of feeling and expression in a context which is saturated with already-spoken and already-written versions of love and reality.<sup>42</sup>

Stendhal both provokes and criticizes the counterfeit. He simultaneously exploits it (Julien quotes from Rousseau) and criticizes it (Julien is subsequently shown up by Mathilde as worthless, counterfeit).

In *Reading Realism in Stendhal*, Jefferson expands this thesis by arguing that Stendhal's evocation of the counterfeit is part of an exploration

of the difficulty confronting every struggle for artistic creativity: the problem of repetition. The realist author was supposed to "reflect" the social context in which he or she lived and moved, but this same context threatened to intrude on the ability of the writer to stand at a distance, to be a detached observer. The author was therefore supposed to be detached on two accounts. Firstly, to rid himself or herself of subjectivity, to reflect the world "objectively". Secondly (and this step is even more problematic) the author had to divest himself or herself of repetition, of the mere regurgitation of cultural and literary clichés, which are equally a betrayal of "objectivity". The world Stendhal observed was "a world in which any utterance and any representation was liable either to be a repetition of previous utterances and existing representations [...] it was a world in which imitation in the sense of mimesis was constantly under threat of sabotage from imitation in its other sense of plagiarism or emulation".<sup>43</sup> The literary process was endangered, in other words, by the play of the counterfeit.

Jefferson's first move is to highlight Stendhal's two great analogies of reading, the novel as mirror (from *Le Rouge et le noir*) and the novel as a bow that plays upon the soul of the reader (from the *Vie de Henry Brulard*). These two comparisons, she argues, whilst they suggest a logical divergence (the mirror as objective, the bow as subjective) are complementary mechanisms in Stendhal's work. In other words, Stendhal is able to distance himself from the idea of realism while passing himself off as a realist writer.

One of Jefferson's most powerful examples is her analysis of the epigraphs in *Le Rouge et le noir*, which demonstrate the permeation of the counterfeit into the structure of the text. Stendhal makes extensive use of

epigraphs in that novel. They appear at the beginning of every chapter apart from the final four. Jefferson argues that one of the main functions of an epigraph is to lend authority to the text, indicating a displacement of legitimacy from the original, cited text to the new text. Working from a theory of Antoine Compagnon's, she sets up a distinction between "allégation", in which the quoting text remains subservient to the quoted text, and "citation", where the quotation is swallowed up by the movement of the quoting text.<sup>44</sup> Texts steeped in a tradition of authority, such as the Bible, are cited regularly in the case of "allégation", for instance. Jefferson points out, however, that although Stendhal's sources appear to the modern reader as eminent thinkers and artists, they have really only proved their importance since Stendhal's lifetime.

The texts cited by Stendhal in his epigraphs do not include the Bible, nor indeed any of the authoritative texts of his culture. Lacking any inherent authority, they are therefore instances of *citation* as opposed to *allégation*. [...] But distinguished though they might be in retrospect, in 1830 their prestige is likely to have been less than minimal among a readership many of whom feared nothing more than a recurrence of the events of 1789. All in all, then, Stendhal's repertory of authors is unlikely to have commanded respect and assent of the readers of his day.<sup>45</sup>

A quick perusal of some of the names – Shakespeare (a relative newcomer to French theatre, which had long been dominated by the seventeenth century's dramatic triumvirate of Corneille, Racine and Molière), Schiller, Lord Byron and Prosper Mérimée (Stendhal was an acquaintance of Byron's and a friend of Mérimée's) – shows that Stendhal's choice of now famous sources was made without the aid of more than a century of canonization. Jefferson demonstrates that even among the more famous contemporary sources (Diderot, Beaumarchais, Sterne, Kant, Mozart) had died within

Stendhal's lifetime.<sup>46</sup> The rest of the quotations are almost exclusively referred back to relatively undistinguished sources.

Jefferson not only brings out an anti-authoritarian principle underlying the choice of sources (the distinction between "allégation" and "citation" is a technique that could be applied to any text), but makes other startling revelations about the singularity of Stendhal's treatment. The reader who is intimate with the quoted sources, she contends, is unlikely to come any closer to Stendhal's novel than the reader who is not. This is because most of the quotations are either incorrectly cited or quite simply made up.

Jefferson notes:

Of the seventy-three epigraphs in the novel, only fifteen are correctly attributed. Moreover, of these fifteen, two are inaccurately reproduced. The disjunction between text and author that occurs in the misattributions of the majority of the epigraphs strips them even further of any of the genre's traditional authority, and so makes them doubly citational: these authors are themselves presented as speaking the language of another – although who that other actually is remains in most cases a mystery.<sup>47</sup>

Stendhal thus further undermines the authority of the epigraph by rendering counterfeit his citations. It does not stop there: the juxtaposition between these epigraphs and the realist poetics of the text is another crucial point of reference. The opening epigraph, "La vérité, l'âpre vérité"<sup>48</sup> ["Truth – Truth in all her rugged harshness"<sup>49</sup>], falsely attributed to Danton, becomes deeply subversive, a prime example of Stendhal's irony. Here is a realist text, supposedly a true and artistic reflection of the world "as it really is", which begins by uttering a platitude about the "bitter truth" – and yet this platitude (or "truth") is a counterfeit. The false quotation from Danton is the first hint in *Le Rouge et le noir* that the realist text is not as "naïve" as it makes out to

be. Nor is this falsification an isolated incident. Jefferson refers us to the "avertissement de l'éditeur", Stendhal's commentary on the novel in which he hints that *Le Rouge et le noir*, which purports to be a "chronique de 1830" ["Chronicle of 1830"], was in fact written three years before. Similarly, the famous epigraph to Part 1, Chapter 13 – "Un roman: c'est un miroir qu'on promène le long d'un chemin"<sup>50</sup> ["A novel is a mirror passing down a road"<sup>51</sup>], is another false attribution, this time to Saint-Réal. That particular epigraph is further twisted to Stendhal's ends in the body of the text, where Saint-Réal disappears even though the epigraph attributed to him is repeated, this time by the narrator. Jefferson thus demonstrates that the function of the epigraphs in *Le Rouge et le noir* presents a direct parallel to the postmodern simulacrum by means of "this self-quoting strategy [which] makes it impossible to decide whether the text quotes the epigraph or the epigraph the text. But either way the net result is a high degree of citationality all round – enough, in fact, to produce the most confusing bathmological giddiness".<sup>52</sup> As Jefferson also points out, Stendhal reverts to the apologetic technique employed by his young hero after an embarrassing speech about Napoleon in Mme de Rênal's presence: he claims he was merely quoting.<sup>53</sup> Jefferson has a particular term to designate the play of the novelistic "sliding scale": bathmology.

These questions affect and potentially undermine nearly every sentence of the Stendhalian novel. In reading, one is never sure how far any utterance is endorsed and how far it is purely citational. For Stendhal is a past-master of the art that Barthes calls "bathmology", i.e. the play of the various degrees of involvement or distance from one's own language and utterances. As a writer Stendhal is always at one (or more) removes from his utterances, and seems to make a point of

suggesting that he never speaks in his own voice or with full intentionality.<sup>54</sup>

Bathmology reaches its culmination, she argues, in relation to Stendhal's distaste for authors who write with a certain "emphase", writers such as Chateaubriand whose prose style tends towards the hyperbolic (which in the Stendhalian lexicon is a signpost for hypocrisy). We should always keep in mind Julien Sorel's strategy when reading realist fiction: he is always quoting, these are never his true words. "Whatever Stendhal may say here about the unmistakeable colour of truth," writes Jefferson, "there is in fact no truth in his world that is exempt from bathmological falsification of this kind."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 382.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 271.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 440.

<sup>4</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 312.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 323, §57. See also Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1995), 35-52, where Derrida unfolds this idea with explicit reference to Heidegger's work.

<sup>6</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 27-29.

<sup>9</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, 20-21.

<sup>10</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 471-72.

<sup>13</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, 387-88.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 388.

<sup>15</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 478-79.

<sup>16</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, 393.

<sup>17</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 474.

<sup>18</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), 200.

<sup>19</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 124.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 88.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>23</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *La Rabouilleuse* in *Œuvres Complètes* Vol. 6 (Paris: Bibliophiles de l'Originale, 1966), 136.

<sup>24</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *The Black Sheep* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 116.

<sup>25</sup> Balzac, *La Rabouilleuse*, 174.

<sup>26</sup> Balzac, *The Black Sheep*, 165.

<sup>27</sup> Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, 304.

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- <sup>28</sup> Balzac, *Old Goriot*, 28.  
<sup>29</sup> Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, 509-510, my emphasis.  
<sup>30</sup> Balzac, *Old Goriot*, 278.  
<sup>31</sup> Michel Crouzet, *Nature et société chez Stendhal: La Révolte romantique* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1985), 21.  
<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.  
<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.  
<sup>34</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 168.  
<sup>35</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 180.  
<sup>36</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 277.  
<sup>37</sup> Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Heloise*, 227.  
<sup>38</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 345.  
<sup>39</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 351.  
<sup>40</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 345.  
<sup>41</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 351.  
<sup>42</sup> Ann Jefferson, *Reading Realism in Stendhal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 45.  
<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.  
<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.  
<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109.  
<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.  
<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>48</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 9.  
<sup>49</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 21.  
<sup>50</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 81.  
<sup>51</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 93.  
<sup>52</sup> Jefferson, 111.  
<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.  
<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.  
<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

**Part 3:**  
**Multiplicity –**  
**Excess as a**  
**Realist Strategy**

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### "RADICAL INCLUSIVITY"

*Structural Key:*

*First Discursive Thread*  
- Subthread no. 3 (*"Multiplicity: Excess as a Realist Strategy"*)

*Second Discursive Thread*  
- Subthread no. 1 (*"The Problem of the 'Real' in Realism"*)

"Mais tout dire," ["But to say everything,"] writes Maurice Blanchot, "c'est aussi tout réduire à rien, et ainsi, à l'intersection de l'existence et du néant, s'affirme une sorte de force énigmatique, capable, pendant qu'elle résume tout << en une vierge absence éparse >>, de persister encore pour achever sa tâche, puis de se résorber elle-même dans le vide qu'elle a appelé"<sup>1</sup> ["is also to reduce everything to nothing, and thus, at the intersection of existence and nothingness, a kind of enigmatic force is asserted, capable, while it summarizes everything 'in a virgin scattered absence', of still persisting to complete its task, then of being resorbed into the emptiness called into being"<sup>2</sup>]. The importance of the "myth of Mallarmé", for Blanchot, lies not so much in the works of the nineteenth-century poet, but in his mythical vision of the Book. The "myth of Mallarmé" constitutes the foremost example of what Blanchot calls the "task of literature". Placing Mallarmé in this perspective (that is, in the field of writing rather than the topologies of literary analysis) allows us to

approach the "myth of Mallarmé" as a concept of multiplicity that manifests itself in the task of literature without engaging in a directly comparative study of Mallarmé and Balzac, Poe, Stendhal, Dostoevsky and others. In other words, the myth itself may be divorced from Mallarmé's writing, if necessary, in order to consider more broadly the problem of writing. Such a step is possible because the object in question is not Mallarmé and his work but the task of literature itself.

I began with the paradox that the realist objective of capturing the world (that is to say, the "real") through writing leads to, first of all, an aphanisis, through language, of that world. Blanchot's interrogation of literature unleashes an avalanche of such contradictions. For example: "What does it mean to think?" asks Blanchot. "La pensée, c'est-à-dire la possibilité d'être présent aux choses en s'en éloignant d'une distance infinie, est fonction de la seule réalité des mots"<sup>3</sup> ["Thought, that is to say, the possibility of being present to things while infinitely distancing oneself from them, is a function of the only reality of words"<sup>4</sup>]. Thinking involves the intimate consideration of an object, but this situation is paradoxical: the object of a thought can only be considered *intimately* when it is at a *distance*. Thinking the world, writing it down, placing it in the field of literature: these are realist techniques. Their purpose is neither to reconstitute the world, nor to reveal an underlying metaphysical structure. The process of writing, in its contemplation of the world, does not bring it closer: it pushes it away.

Writing leads, not to an abolition of the real, but to a proliferation of "realities". It is this proliferation, writes Blanchot, that leads to the greatest

paradox of all: "Tout proférer, c'est aussi proférer la silence"<sup>5</sup> ["To utter everything is also to utter silence"<sup>6</sup>]. In the first place, this paradox means that the establishment of realism as a literary aesthetic was not based on a belief in the fundamental metaphysical truth of reality, but because of a *loss* of faith in metaphysics. The need to affirm belief in the existence of reality projects an aura of doubt, according to Baudrillard's critique of belief:

Si quelque chose n'existe pas, il faut bien y croire. La croyance n'est pas le reflet de l'existence, *elle est là pour l'existence*, tout comme le langage n'est pas le reflet du sens, il est là à la place du sens.

Croire à Dieu, c'est donc douter de son existence, de son évidence, de sa présence. C'est avoir besoin de le solliciter, de le produire, d'en témoigner subjectivement – or qu'a-t-il besoin de notre témoignage, s'il existe?

[...]

La croyance est superflue [...] Insondable dédale de la croyance, aujourd'hui dissoute par la dispersion de la notion même de réalité. Aujourd'hui, il n'est plus question de croire ou de ne pas croire aux images qui passent devant nos yeux. Nous réfractons indifféremment la réalité et les signes sans y croire. Ce n'est même pas de l'incrédulité: nos images transitent simplement dans nos cervelles sans passer par la case << croyance >>, comme nous transitons dans l'espace politique sans passer par la case << représentation >>. Nous ne faisons que réfracter l'illusion du politique, comme l'information ne fait que réfracter l'illusion médiatique des événements (elle n'y croit pas elle-même), comme le miroir ne fait que réfracter votre image, sans y croire.<sup>7</sup>

[If something does not exist, you have to believe in it. Belief is not the reflection of existence, *it is there for existence*, just as language is not the reflection of meaning, it is there in place of meaning.

To believe in God is, therefore, to doubt his existence, his manifestness, his presence. It is to have a need to appeal to him, to produce him, to bear subjective witness to him. Now why, if he exists, does he need our witness?

[...]

Belief is superfluous [...] Impenetrable labyrinth of belief, today broken down by the dissipation of the very notion of reality. It is no longer a question today of believing or not believing in the images which pass before our eyes. We refract reality and signs indifferently without believing in them. This is

not even incredulity: our images pass through our brains without landing on the square marked "belief", just as we pass through the political space without landing on the square marked "representation". We merely refract the illusion of the political, in the same way as news merely refracts the media illusion of events (it does not, itself, believe in them), or as a mirror merely refracts your image without believing in it.<sup>8]</sup>

Secondly, this collapse of faith does not signal the abolition of *claims* to be true or real. Rather than the abolition or the negation of truth (a dialectical solution which allows the covert reentry of truth), Baudrillard observes an extravagant promulgation of truths. The form of subversive logic is no longer negative ("there is no real", "there is no truth") but undertakes instead a path of radical positivity ("everything is real", "everything is true"), a phrase in which we hear the distinct echo of Balzac in *Le Père Goriot*. Blanchot's observation that "to utter everything is to utter silence" follows this pattern, it is the definitive idea behind the "myth of Mallarmé". Silence is negative, it reigns in the *absence* of sound. In the space of silence, nothing can be heard. The articulation of a single sound - a distant cry, the rustling of leaves in the wind - and the silence is broken. To utter everything: this is another kind of silence, a positive silence, a silence of excess. The jumbled mass of utterances banishes silence, but its effect remains: nothing can be heard. To utter everything, therefore, is not a negative act, since it draws its effect from an *excess* of sound. And, unlike silence, it cannot be combated dialectically by a negation of a negation. To construct an utterance against this background of white noise is merely to add to the cacophony.

### The Well of Truth

In Balzac's novel *Illusions perdues* we encounter the literary equivalent of white noise, the blank (or white) page. "Dans le repli du blanc sur le blanc" ["In the recoiling of the blank upon the blank"] writes Derrida, "le blanc se colore lui-même, devient à lui-même, de lui-même, s'affectant à l'infini, son propre fond incolore, toujours plus invisible"<sup>9</sup> ["the blank colors itself, becomes – for itself, of itself, affecting itself ad infinitum – its own colorless, ever more invisible, ground"<sup>10</sup>]. In the process of writing – in the seminal act of "production" – the text has already begun the double movement of erasure and dissemination. The blank page appears throughout Balzac's novel, from the historical descriptions of the printing press (a writing machine) that open the narrative, to Lucien's publishing and journalism ventures, to David's frantic attempts to invent a new kind of paper. These larger sequences of the plot are reproduced at smaller and more intricate levels. Lucien signs blank pieces of paper with his brother-in-law's name in order to embezzle money, for example; Vautrin, who makes an anonymous cameo appearance as the bishop Carlos Herrera at the end of the novel, was once jailed for the crime of forgery; all these moments tie into a broader economic movement of the counterfeit, which we examined in the previous chapter.

The tides of "blanc sur le blanc" ["blank upon blank"] swirl around and through the figure of Lucien. This naïve young man from the provinces heads to Paris in order to further his writing career (amongst other things). But in Paris the roles are reversed, and the writer becomes the written. Lucien himself is a blank page and, although he begins life as a poet and

author, he stops writing once he is swept away in the mechanical rhythms of Parisian society. The irony at the heart of *Illusions perdues* is that a loss of illusions does not lead to any "truth" as such. Belief in the existence of truth is one of the illusions Lucien must overcome. The loss of illusions is achieved through the camouflage of opinion, the designer weapon of the Parisian classes. Lucien's aspirations to the dizzy heights of social success and literary recognition are qualified by the pragmatics of everyday life. Unlike d'Arthez and his friends in the Cénacle circle, Lucien abandons the route of hard labor and trudges the grubby road of journalism.

This decision gives Balzac an occasion for launching a devastating parody of Lucien's search for hermeneutical "truth". Journalism, as d'Arthez points out, will be the death of Lucien as an artist for art's sake. In the pay of men with powerful political and financial interests, he must sway in the wind of their favoritism. In order to sell himself, he must abandon the good conscience of the true poet. Lucien must, in other words, sell his illusions, for the world of journalism is the business of selling opinions dressed up as truths, as he quickly discovers. The production of "truth" becomes a concrete metaphor in *Illusions perdues*, opening as it does with a history of the printing press, for the text is far less concerned with particular truths than with its construction. There are many instances of such production in *Illusions perdues*, but the most striking example occurs in Chapters 25 to 27. Lucien, who has recently joined the journalistic ranks, submits the *Marguérites*, a collection of his youthful poetry, to the publisher Dauriat. Dauriat, seeking to play on the innocence of the young poet, rejects the manuscript whilst making conciliatory expressions of regret to its

author. When Lucien's journalist friends shatter his illusions by proving that Dauriat rejected his poetry without even reading it, he decides to take his revenge through the means afforded him by his new position. Étienne Lousteau urges him to attack the second edition of a book by Lucien's acquaintance, Nathan, which had just been published by Dauriat. Lucien, still wrapped up in his illusions, tells Lousteau he cannot possibly write a scathing review of a book that he admires. Lousteau thus introduces him to the "acrobatics" of journalism, Balzac's caricature of the "truth-making" process.

Tu commenceras par trouver l'œuvre belle, et tu peux t'amuser à écrire alors ce que tu en penses. Le public se dira: Ce critique est sans jalousie, il sera sans doute impartial. [...] Ici, tu places, pour le bourgeois, un éloge de Voltaire, de Rousseau, de Diderot, de Montesquieu, de Buffon. [...] Tu lâcheras des axiomes, comme: Un grand écrivain en France est toujours un grand homme, il est tenu par la langue à toujours penser [...] tu lances un mot qui résume et explique aux niais le système de nos hommes de génie du dernier siècle, en appelant leur littérature une *littérature idée*. [...] Le grand style serré du dix-huitième siècle manque à son livre, tu prouveras que l'auteur y a substitué les événemens aux sentiments. Le mouvement n'est pas la vie, le tableau n'est pas l'idée! Lâche de ces sentences-là, le public les répète.<sup>11</sup>

[You'll begin by saying that it's a fine work: after that you can enjoy yourself saying what you like about it. The public will say: "This critic isn't jealous, he'll certainly be impartial." [...] slip in – for the bourgeois reader – some praise for Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Buffon [...] [and] maxims like this: in France a great writer is always a great man; his native tongue always constrains him to think [...] launch an aphorism which sums up and explains for halfwits the system of our eighteenth century men of genius by calling their literature a *literature of ideas* [...] His book lacks the great, closely-woven style of the eighteenth century; and you'll show that the author has put events in the place of feelings. Life is not merely movement; ideas are not merely pictures! Reel off maxims like that and the public will repeat them.<sup>12</sup>]

But this mode of literary criticism is not only a skill of cant; it also demands knowledge in the art of recantation. The political fallout of Lucien's attack requires him to write another article, this time in praise of the book.

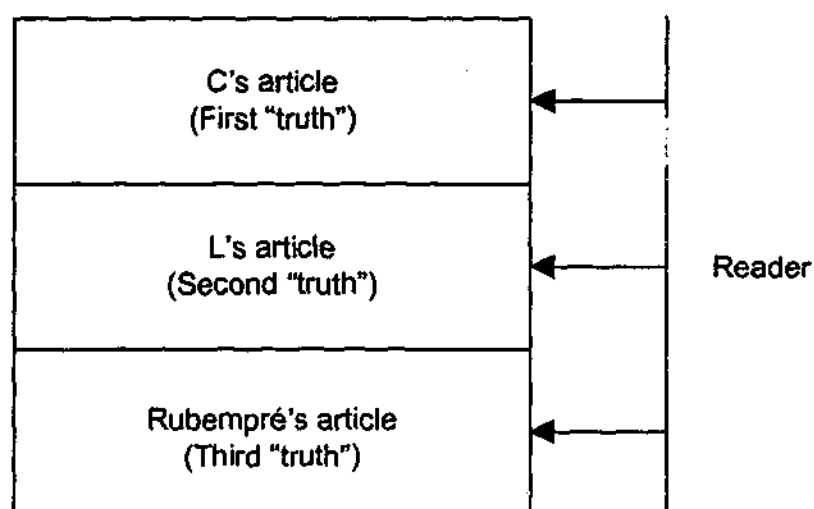


Figure 7.1 – The "Well of Truth"

Lucien, naïve as he is, has swallowed his own lies: before he could see nothing against the book, now he can see nothing in its favor. Balzac's parody resembles a snake biting its own tail: Lucien writes a mirror image of his previous article, in which he now condemns the coldness of the eighteenth century and praises the "imagery" of the nineteenth.

One of the most comical aspects of these satires is the accuracy with which they anticipate the discourse surrounding Balzac's own texts. The various "scenes" that constitute the *Comédie humaine* parallel the "literature of imagery" Balzac engages when in full descriptive mode. At the same time his work is informed by a "literature of ideas", evidenced by the philosophical tales such as *La Peau de chagrin* or *La Recherche de l'absolu*. Balzac's texts are endlessly self-reflexive, aware as they are of their ambivalent and contradictory status. The merciless parodies of the publishing industry, for example, are ensured success only by the industry

they are attacking. Like Lucien, all Balzac leaves to the reader are "buckets of truth":

Les gens sensés donneront raison ou à C. ou à L. ou à Rubempré, peut-être à tous les trois! La mythologie, qui certes est une des plus grandes inventions humaines, a mis la Vérité dans le fond d'un puits, ne faut-il pas des seaux pour l'en tirer? tu en auras donné trois pour un au public<sup>13</sup>

[People will agree with C. or L. or Rubempré, perhaps with all three! Mythology, certainly one of the greatest human inventions, placed Truth at the bottom of a well: doesn't one need a bucket to pull it out? You'll have given the public three buckets instead of one.<sup>14</sup>]

Lucien sets out each time in search of a transcendent "truth", but spends all his time either eluding it, or investing in illusory substitutions. Reading Balzac's text is a limit-experience: in search of the absolute that, when it reaches the beyond, realizes that something more lies over the horizon. We would do well to remember that the loss of illusions does not lead to truth. Balzac reveals, after all, that the belief that one has lost one's illusions is yet another illusion.

### Crystallization of the Multiple

The story of "Le Rameau de Salzburg" in Stendhal's *De l'amour* is a finely woven piece of fiction, teeming with cross-references and intertwining stories. I would like to experiment, to offer a pastiche of a reading of this text, one that follows in the steps of the "naïve" realism recounted in the opening chapter. The impression is that the story, pretty as it is, rightly belongs to the book's appendix, as an afterthought. It seems redundant because Stendhal, in the second chapter of *De l'amour*, introduces a preemptive, abbreviated version of the episode in order to establish the central analytical phenomenon of "cristallisation". He mentions

the branch being thrown into the salt mines, followed by a definition of "cristallisation": "Ce que j'appelle cristallisation, c'est l'opération de l'esprit, qui tire de tout ce qui se présente la découverte que l'objet aimé a de nouvelles perfections"<sup>15</sup> ["What I have called crystallization is a mental process which draws from everything that happens new proofs of the perfection of the loved one"<sup>16</sup>]. On a first reading, therefore, the imaginary process of crystallization would probably be transplanted back to a "realistic" grounding by locating it amongst Stendhal's semi-autobiographical writings.

Read as a piece of naive realism, then, "Le Rameau de Salzburg" appears at once pretty and superfluous. Putting aside these prejudgments and reading the text as a piece of fiction leads to new insights and complexities. The naïve picture of realism implies a mirror-like flatness, a polished textual surface that produces an impenetrable simulation of reality. "Le Rameau de Salzburg", by contrast, is composed of a series of fits and starts, a mixture of intertwining and overlapping fragments of narratives. Roland Barthes finds this same highly contrived device at work in Balzac's story "Sarrasine". In his analysis of that text, Barthes puts forward two important points about reading these "classical" texts. The first is the tyranny of the reading process. The naïve interpretation of Stendhal's story is an example of such tyranny, in which the approach to the text is overwhelmed by a dominant hermeneutical regime. The second aspect involves the mechanisms employed by the text in order simultaneously to manipulate and entertain the reader. At the general level of reading, for example, Barthes identifies five textual codes that emerge from a critical

reading: hermeneutical codes (the textual mechanisms operating at the level of the plot), semes (signifiers which, it would appear, designate certain qualities, such as "femininity" in Balzac's story), symbolic groupings (motifs such as light and dark, for example), proairetic codes (praxes or actions) and cultural codes (allusions to discourses outside the diegetic space of the current narrative).

Les cinq codes forment une espèce de réseau, de topos à travers quoi tout le texte passe (ou plutôt: en y passant, il se fait texte). [...] Latéralement à chaque énoncé, on dirait en effet que des voix *off* se font entendre: ce sont les codes: en se tressant, eux dont l'origine << se perd >> dans la masse perspective du *déjà-écrit*, ils désorientent l'énonciation: le concours des voix (des codes) devient l'écriture, espace stéréographique où se croisent les cinq codes, les cinq voix<sup>17</sup>

[The five codes create a kind of a network, a *topos* through which the entire text passes (or rather, in passing, becomes text). [...] Alongside each utterance, one might say that off-stage voice can be heard: they are the codes: in their interweaving these voices (whose origin is "lost" in the vast perspective of the *already-written*) de-originate the utterance: the convergence of the voices (the codes) becomes *writing*, a stereophonic space where the five codes, the five voices, intersect<sup>18</sup>]

Barthes thus completely undermines the possibility for a naive reading of "Le Rameau de Salzburg". Even if the story is rooted in a personal experience of Stendhal's, even if he visited the Salzburg mine on some occasion, the piece of literature that may have emerged from that encounter is as different from the experience as the dead bough is from its crystallized counterpart.

At the most basic level, Stendhal interweaves four stories. The first, the common thread that sustains the narrative, is the relationship between Filippo, the narrator, and Mme Gherardi. These two characters seem to stand aloof from the action around them, and it is this separation that allows

Stendhal to use them simultaneously as actors and commentators: Filippo describes the unfolding of events, Mme Gherardi develops the thematic structure of the "physiology of love".

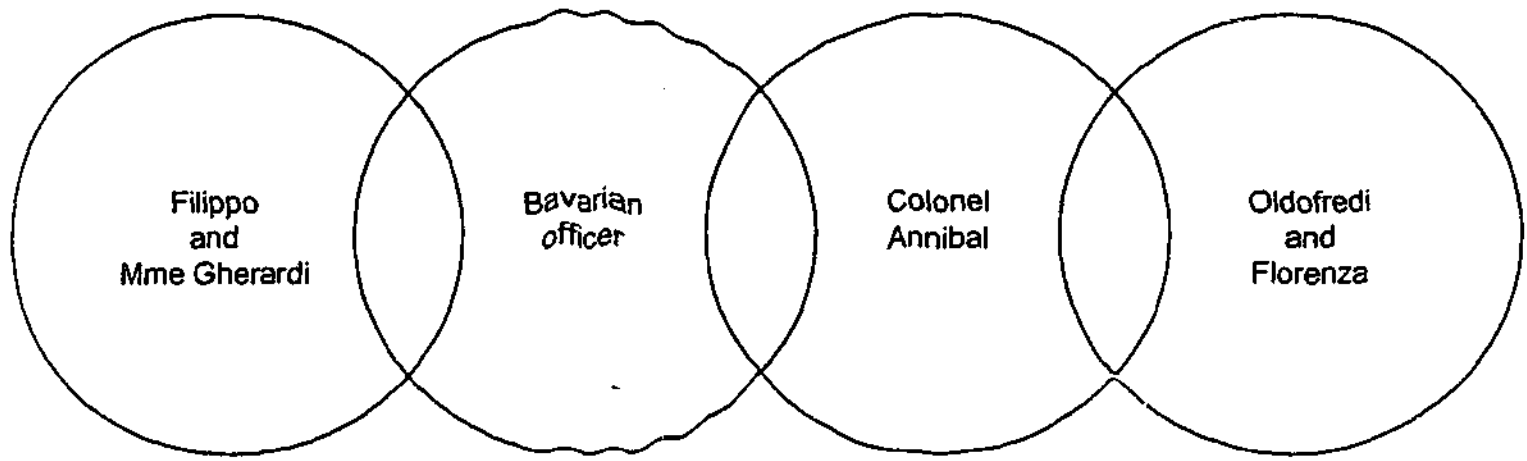


Figure 7.2 – Four intertwining stories in "The Salzburg Bough"

The ambivalence of this relationship and Filippo's reticence are two important elements to which I shall return. Revolving around the nucleus of this central story are two interlocking stories, of the Bavarian officer whom they encounter at the Salzburg mine, and of his rival for Mme Gherardi's love in Colonel Annibal. Incidental to the narrative, but crucial to the completion of the thematic discussion, is the romance between the painter Oldofredi and his two candidates for marriage in Florenza and Princess Lafranchi, which rounds off Mme Gherardi's commentary upon the "physiology of love".

The aim of this analysis is to uncover the flows of the text, to "trace its lines" in a Deleuzian sense. A careful reading of the text would reveal to us that there is a "unifying thematic form" to the text: Stendhal's step-by-step process of falling in love or "crystallization". The seven steps accord the narrative a linear projection through time. The process is recounted

retrospectively after the encounter between Mme Gherardi and the Bavarian officer.

1. Admiration
2. Fancy
3. Hope
4. Love (a step Stendhal includes in the body of the book but excludes in the story in question)
5. First crystallization

To this point, the process is outlined explicitly. The final two stages are implied in the commentary on the fourth story (Oldofredi/Florenza). Filippo says:

Oldofredi doit avoir souvent des doutes cruels; il ne peut pas être sûr d'être aimé de la Florenza [...] il doit avoir des moments de malheur affreux; il se dit: << Mais, est-ce que'elle m'aime? >>.<sup>19</sup>

[He must be a prey to cruel doubts; he can't be so sure that Florenza loves him [...] he must be experiencing moments of frightful unhappiness, and asking himself: "But does she love me?"<sup>20</sup>]

Mme Gherardi replies to this observation:

[Q]uand la réponse qu'on se fait à soi-même est satisfaisante, il y a des moments de bonheur divin et tels que peut-être rien au monde ne peut leur être comparé. C'est là sans doute ce qu'il y a de mieux dans la vie.<sup>21</sup>

[When one gives oneself a satisfactory answer to that question there are moments of sublime happiness unlike anything else in the world. They are probably the best thing in life.<sup>22</sup>]

The earlier "physiology of love" is thus completed by the apparently extraneous fourth story, revealing the final two steps of doubt and secondary crystallization. Such a reading of the text is entirely valid, but remains both superficial and somewhat redundant.

Barthes draws a comparison between the linearity of the "readerly" text and a musical score. Love (particularly in its most spontaneous form of

"amour-passion") becomes reduced to a formula, with occasional dissonances (Colonel Annibal's anger, for instance) that coalesce with tradition through conventional resolution. Just as we have been taught how to listen to music, argues Barthes, the "readerly" text teaches us how to read; or rather, it demands that we read in a particular way:

L'espace du texte (lisible) est en tout point comparable à une partition musicale (classique). [...] le texte lisible est une *texte tonale* (dont l'habitude produit une lecture tout aussi conditionnée que notre audition [...] en sorte que désapprendre la lisibilité est du même ordre que désapprendre la tonalité) et l'unité tonale y dépend essentiellement de [...] l'ordre progressif de la mélodie et [...] tout aussi progressif, de la séquence narrative. Or c'est précisément cette contrainte qui réduit le *pluriel du texte classique*.<sup>23</sup>

[The area of the (readerly) text is comparable at every point to a (classical) musical score. [...] the readerly text is a *tonal* text (for which habit creates a reading process just as conditioned as our hearing [...] so that to unlearn the readerly would be the same as to unlearn the tonal), and its tonal unity is basically dependent on...the gradual order of melody and [...] the equally gradual order of the narrative sequence. Now, it is precisely this *constraint which reduces the plural of the classic text*.<sup>24</sup>]

The "readerly" text would thus be shattered by an interpretation that does not depend on a linear progression. Stendhal creates this possibility in "Le Rameau de Salzburg". The story allows an interpretation that jettisons the constraints of time by taking up the minutely constructed use of space throughout the story.

At first glance a spatial analysis appears possible, but not free from the restrictions of the "readerly" text. In the body of *De l'amour*, for instance, Stendhal delineates the association between nationality and amorous temperament. Here Stendhal appears to hark back to the eighteenth century, to the discourses of the Enlightenment. It was Montesquieu, in *De*

*l'esprit des lois*, who made the first famous attempt to establish a causal pattern between environment and character. Rousseau, influenced by this methodology, adapts it to his own purposes. In *Du Contrat social*, for instance, he recommends a political system as suitable to a particular place according to such geographical considerations as population density and the nature of the terrain. In his text on the origin of languages, Rousseau preempts Barthes's comparison of the text to music by contrasting the musical styles of north and south. The influence of this environmental analysis on Stendhal should be approached with caution. In the first place, the associations Stendhal draws between national stereotypes appear to be drawn not from "scientific research" but rather from samples of national literature, art and philosophy. One can therefore easily identify the associations between Stendhal's favorite pieces of literature and his characterizations of national stereotypes. The German is a Werther, the Spaniard a Don Quixote, the Frenchman a St Preux, the Englishman a Don Juan (in the Byronic manifestation) and the Arab a Scheherezade. The Italian stereotype is complicated because of the sheer diversity of what Stendhal sees as the Italian genius. He mentions his admiration for the poetry of Dante and Ariosto. He prizes the composer Cimarosa alongside Mozart. He writes a critique of Italian painting (*Histoire de la peinture en Italie*), two Italian travel books (*Rome, Naples et Florence* and *Promenades dans Rome*), adapts a series of Italian stories (*Chroniques italiennes*) and sets a major novel (*La Chartreuse de Parme*) in Italy as part of this obsession. Stendhal also lived in Italy for extended periods, and the famous enduring love of his life was an Italian woman, Mélite Dembowska.

Stendhal does not set out to privilege one national stereotype over another.

All the models – Werther, Quixote, St Preux, Don Juan – are to be loved and admired.

What appears to separate Italy from the rest is precisely this lack of a model or ideal. At the beginning of *De l'amour* Stendhal distinguishes between four kinds of love. There is passionate love, mannered love, physical love and vain love.<sup>25</sup> In effect, however, there are only two kinds of love: passionate love (amour-passion) and simulated or counterfeit love (the three other varieties). Love that lives in the shadow of a model is prone to simulation, to losing its spontaneity and authenticity by repetition. Once Werther has killed himself for Charlotte's love, for example, the authenticity of the would-be imitators who follow his example becomes questionable. Stendhal is as suspicious of the sources for these models (Rousseau especially) as he is of their uncritical repetition. Italy is Stendhal's preferred stereotype precisely because it possesses no fixed ideal. Thus, he tells us in a note at the end of "Le Rameau de Salzburg", "Tout est opposé entre la France et l'Italie"<sup>26</sup> ["France and Italy are in complete contrast with each other in every detail"<sup>27</sup>]. What Stendhal also privileges here is a Rousseau-like contrast between decadent culture (epitomized by France and especially Paris) and a people enjoying the benefits of a more "natural" lifestyle. Where Rousseau gives us "l'homme naturel", such as the people of Valais in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Stendhal gives us "la femme naturelle" in the form of Mme Gherardi.

À Rome, à Bologne, à Venise, une jole femme est reine absolue; rien ne peut être plus complet que le despotisme qu'elle exerce dans sa société. À Paris, une jolie femme a toujours peur de

l'opinion et du bourreau de l'opinion: le *ridicule*. [...] Une Italienne trouverait bien ridicule cette autorité limitée dans son salon. À la lettre, elle est toute-puissante sur les hommes qui l'approchent.<sup>28</sup>

[At Rome, Bologna, or Venice a pretty woman is an absolute queen; nothing could be more absolute than the despotism she exercises over her circle. A pretty woman in Paris is always afraid of public opinion, and of public opinion's executioner: *ridicule*. [...] To an Italian woman the limited authority a Parisian woman can wield in her own drawing-room would seem quite absurd. The former is literally all-powerful over the men who surround her.<sup>29</sup>]

Italy is the principle of activity that countermands the French passivity to literary and other cultural models.

What prevents these nationalist stereotypes from becoming fixed and idealized is what I have called, after Barthes, the principle of "reversibility". One's national stereotype is like a name and, as Jean Starobinski shows in his essay "Stendhal pseudonyme", Stendhal is a master at subverting both national and nominal paradigms. Starobinski writes:

Stendhal, par exemple, est le nom d'une ville prussienne. D'autre part, le bonheur ne peut s'épanouir qu'en Italie, et l'imagination du jeune Henri Beyle construira toute une généalogie italienne du côté de sa famille maternelle. [...] Ainsi, à chaque voyage hors de France, Stendhal aura le sentiment de rejoindre son vrai monde, et il se plaira à vivre hors de son pays comme il aime à vivre hors de son nom. [...] le plaisir des fugues sont chez lui parfaitement superposables à la pseudonymie.<sup>30</sup>

[Stendhal, for instance, is the name of a Prussian town. On the other hand, happiness cannot blossom other than in Italy, and the imagination of the young Henri Beyle constructed a complete Italian genealogy on his mother's side. [...] In the same way, on every journey outside France, Stendhal feels as if he is rejoining his true people, and it pleases him to live outside his country in the same way that he likes to live outside his name. [...] the pleasure of these flights is, for him, perfectly superimposed by the use of a pseudonym.]

Stendhal thus severs the national stereotype from its aetiological roots. The stereotypes signify different variations of love, a kind of connoisseur's guide to passion, indistinguishable to "ces malheureux auxquels il semble que tous les rossignols rendent les mêmes sons"<sup>31</sup> ["those poor unfortunates for whom all nightingales sing the same song"<sup>32</sup>]. The lover is free to move between them, to metamorphose. Stendhal writes in his *Souvenirs d'égotisme* that his "souverain plaisir serait de me changer en un long Allemand blond et de me promener dans Paris" ["greatest pleasure would be to transform myself into a tall blond German and take a walk through Paris"].<sup>33</sup> In "Le Rameau de Salzburg", Stendhal fulfills his dream: through his fiction he "becomes" Filippo, the young Italian companion of Mme Gherardi.

The use of space to designate passion is not limited to national stereotypes. Stendhal sets up an internal spatial logic that is used subtly to designate states of affect. The narrative revolves around three different cities, for example. The title draws the reader's attention to the first of these. Stendhal's choice of Salzburg resonates in several directions. First, it ties in with the German national stereotype, and the young Bavarian officer is the Werther-like prey of Mme Gherardi. At the same time, Salzburg is the birthplace of Mozart, one of Stendhal's favorite composers. The implicit allusion is to one work in particular, to *Don Giovanni* (Don Juan), which is regularly invoked by Stendhal.



Figure 7.3 – The conflicting symbolism of Salzburg

In *Lucien Leuwen*, for example, the musicians who play on the lawns at The Green Huntsman play pieces from Mozart's opera. Salzburg as a textual symbol therefore possesses two conflicting meanings:

Ce qui me fait croire que les Werther plus heureux, c'est que don Juan réduit l'amour à n'être qu'une affaire ordinaire. Au lieu d'avoir comme Werther des réalités qui se modèlent sur ses désirs, il a des désirs imparfaitement satisfaits par la froide réalité, comme dans l'ambition, l'avarice et les autres passions. Au lieu de se perdre dans les rêveries enchanteresses de la cristallisation, il pense comme un général au succès de ses manœuvres, et en un mot tue l'amour au lieu d'en jouir plus qu'un autre, comme croit le vulgaire.<sup>34</sup>

[What leads me to believe that the Werthers are the happier is that Don Juan reduces love to the level of an ordinary affair. Unlike Werther, for whom realities are shaped by his desires, Don Juan's desires are imperfectly satisfied by cold reality, as in ambition, avarice, and the other passions. Instead of losing himself in the bewitching reveries of crystallization his attitude is that of a general to the success of his tactics, and in brief he destroys love instead of enjoying it more than others, as is commonly believed.<sup>35</sup>]

This contrast between Werther and Don Juan, set up in the body of *De l'amour*, reiterates the clash between the Bavarian Officer and Colonel Annibal (quite clearly the Don Juan "general" from the previous quotation, who also accompanied Mme Gherardi to Salzburg), but also more generally between amour-passion and mere simulation. Salzburg thus seems to

epitomize the tragic Romantic principle, the clash between Dionysian and Apollinian embodied in the early work of Nietzsche, for example.

But this is precluded by the other spatial contrast present in "Le Rameau de Salzburg". This is set up in Mme Gherardi's discussion of the condition of being in love. One interlocutor wants to introduce a binary distinction between love and indifference. Mme Gherardi retorts:

Vous autres, hommes grossiers, vous ne voyez qu'une chose dans la naissance de l'amour: on aime ou l'on n'aime pas. C'est ainsi que le vulgaire s' imagine que le chant de tous les rossignols se ressemble; mais nous, qui prenons plaisir à l'entendre, savons qu'il y a pourtant dix nuances différentes de rossignol à rossignol. – Il me semble pourtant, madame, dit quelqu'un, qu'on aime ou l'on n'aime pas.<sup>36</sup>

["You coarse males see only one thing in the birth of love; either one loves or one does not love. In just the same way common people imagine that all nightingales sing the same song, but we who take pleasure in listening to them, realize that there are in fact ten varying nuances from one nightingale to another."

"It seems to me nevertheless, Madame," said someone, "that one either loves or does not love."<sup>37</sup>]

In her reply, Mme Gherardi again affirms multiplicity in the face of the traditional dichotomy.

Pas du tout, monsieur; c'est tout comme si vous disiez qu'un homme qui part de Bologne pour aller à Rome est déjà arrivé aux portes de Rome quand, du haut de l'Appenin, il voit encore notre tour Garisenda. Il y a loin de l'une de ces deux villes à l'autre, et l'on peut être au quart du chemin, à la moitié, aux trois quarts, sans pour cela être arrivé à Rome, et cependant l'on n'est plus à Bologne. – Dans cette belle comparaison, dis-je, Bologne représente apparemment l'indifférence et Rome l'amour parfait.<sup>38</sup>

["Nothing of the sort, Sir; that is like saying that a man who leaves Bologna on his way to Rome has already arrived at the gates of Rome when from the crest of the Apennines he can still see our tower of Garisenda. It's a long way from one town to the other, and the traveller may be a quarter, or a half, or three

quarters of the way there without on that account having reached Rome, although he has certainly left Bologna."

"In that fine comparison," I said, "Bologna apparently represents *indifference* and Rome *perfect love*."<sup>39]</sup>

On the one hand, therefore, both the process of love and the narrative of "Le Rameau de Salzburg" appear to begin from binary opposites. Love seems to emerge as the antithesis to indifference. In the same way, the narrative begins as a departure from Bologna:

Quand nous sommes à Bologne, reprit M<sup>me</sup> Gherardi, nous sommes tout à fait indifférents [...] comme nous disions à Hallein [the location of the mines near Salzburg], la cristallisation n'a pas encore commencé.<sup>40</sup>

["When we are at Bologna," continued Mme Gherardi, "we are entirely indifferent [...] as we used to say at Hallein, *crystallization* has not yet begun."<sup>41]</sup>

But this apparently binary origin is subverted by the way in which the narrative plays out.

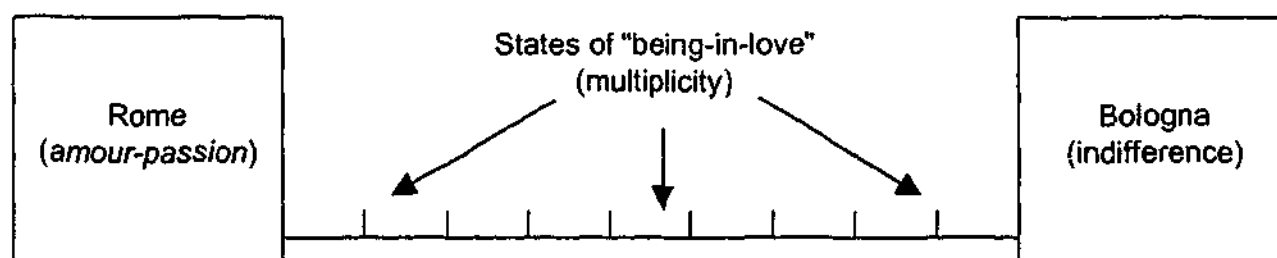


Figure 7.4 – A Lover's Discourse

Like Mme Gherardi's example of the traveler between Bologna and Rome, the narrative itself never actually touches these extremities but rather exhausts itself in a quasi-nomadic journey through the spaces in between.

The Bologna/Rome paradigm performs a dual function within the narrative. The first is to qualify the earlier contrast between Don Juan and Werther. On the one hand, the love of the Bavarian officer, the Werther of this story, retains a purely virtual status. The officer does not desire to

follow Mme Gherardi through the encoded space to either Rome or Bologna; he remains at Salzburg. In other words, he is besotted, not with the outcome of love, but rather with its crystallization process. He is in love with love, not an object. It is the Don Juan in Colonel Annibal who desires to take this step toward the object, to elope with Mme Gherardi to a symbolic Rome. Stendhal here employs a nuanced historical allusion. Colonel Annibal is not only a Don Juan figure, his name is also a reference to the historical Hannibal (the "h" is silent in French) who attempted to conquer Rome by force around 218 B.C., as recounted famously by the Roman historian Livy. Stendhal writes:

L'on arrive au quatrième [étage de l'amour] quand on s'exagère avec délices la beauté et les mérites de la femme qu'on aime. C'est ce que, nous autres adeptes, nous apelons du mot de *cristallisation*, qui met Carthage en fuite.<sup>42</sup>

[One arrives at the fourth stage [of love] when one delights in overrating the beauty and merit of the woman one loves. This is what we the initiated call by the word *crystallization*, which puts Carthage to flight.<sup>43</sup>]

Thus the extremities of Rome and Bologna lie outside of the text and of love. The crystallization of the Bavarian officer does not require them at all, whereas the ruthlessness of Colonel Annibal makes the mistake of desiring them and in so doing misunderstands completely the process of love, rendering his project of conquering "Rome" a failure.

The second function of the paradigm is to define the boundaries of the narrative. The birth of the narrative derives from the departure by the leading characters from the city of Bologna. Concurrent with this event is the birth of a crystallization that will drive the narrative: it appears that the

narrator, Filippo, seeing Mme Gherardi outside of the indifference of their everyday surroundings, develops a strong attachment to her.

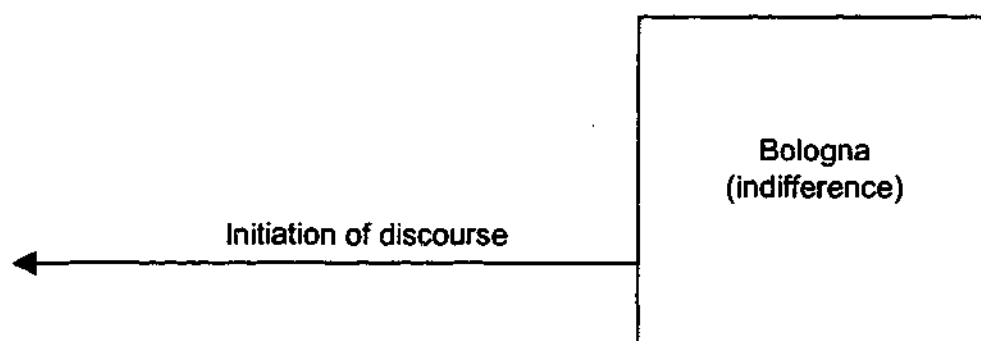


Figure 7.5 – Initiation of the Narrative (The departure from Bologna)

It is to her that he awards primacy of importance in the text, and the reader is exposed repeatedly to sequences that demonstrate both her beauty and her magnificently sharp wit. Thus the reader becomes privy to an unspoken but keenly felt intimacy between the two that replicates the unconscious crystallization which Filippo himself undergoes.

Nous avons le bonheur de voir tous les jours de la vie M<sup>me</sup> Gherardi; une intimité parfaite régnait dans cette société; on s'y comprenait à demi-mot; souvent j'y ai vu rire de plaisanteries qui n'avaient pas eu besoin de la parole pour se faire entendre: un coup d'œil avait tout dit.<sup>44</sup>

[We had the good fortune to see Madame Gherardi every day; our circle was on terms of perfect intimacy and we understood one another's slightest hints; I have often noticed laughter at jokes where never a word had been spoken in the telling: a mere glance had given the whole story.<sup>45</sup>]

This too has an ulterior function. By displaying Mme Gherardi in all her glory, the narrator also undertakes to seduce the reader.

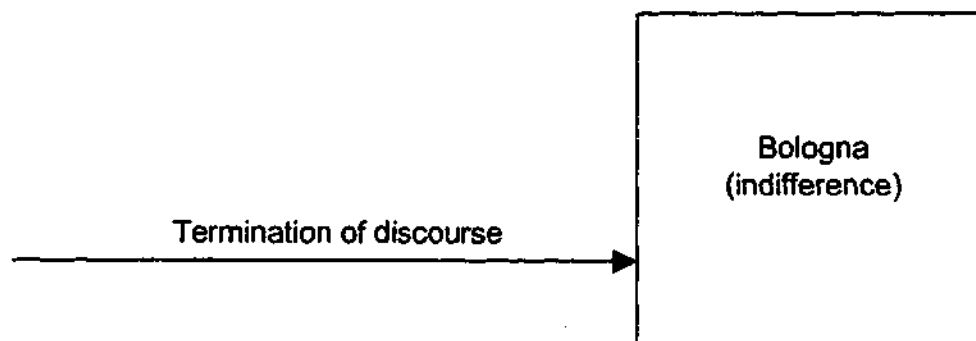


Figure 7.6 – Termination of the Narrative (*The Return to Bologna*)

The contrast is highlighted brilliantly in the closing paragraph of the story when Filippo and Mme Gherardi return to Bologna (and hence to the silence of symbolic indifference): “Je laissai peu à peu mon cheval s’éloigner de celui de M<sup>me</sup> Gherardi. Nous fîmes les trois milles qui nous séparaient de Bologne sans dire une seule parole, pratiquant la vertu nommée discrétion”<sup>46</sup> [“Little by little I edged my horse further from Madame Gherardi’s. We covered the three miles that separated us from Bologna in complete silence, practising the virtue known as discretion”<sup>47</sup>].

\* \* \* \* \*

The incorporation of Blanchot’s definition of the “task of literature” highlights a twofold strategy at work in the realist text. The first is a masquerade of absence, a disappearing act that replicates the *différance* of the real (leaving the text as its remainder, its trace). The second involves a performance of the discovery of a “real”, not as representation or even presentation, but a caricature of that possibility. The extrinsic task of realism, by definition, would be to write the “real”. But if the symbolic (that is to say, writing) makes this proposition an oxymoron (because writing the “real” is as paradoxical as capturing the “present”, since any mode of recording implies a historical dimension) then the tactic of realist parody

would be to declare that "everything is 'real'" or "everything is 'true'".

Radical inclusivity simulates the production of hermeneutical "truth": by repetition, by doubling, by *mimesis*, it apes the artificial singularity of the "truthful" discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Blanchot, "Le Mythe de Mallarmé" in *La Part du Feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Blanchot, "The Myth of Mallarmé" in *The Work of Fire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 36.

<sup>3</sup> Blanchot, "Le Mythe de Mallarmé", 39.

<sup>4</sup> Blanchot, "The Myth of Mallarmé", 32.

<sup>5</sup> Blanchot, "Le Mythe de Mallarmé", 43.

<sup>6</sup> Blanchot, "The Myth of Mallarmé", 36.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *L'Illusion de la fin* (Paris: Galilée, 1992), 132-34.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 92-93.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 297.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 265.

<sup>11</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Illusions perdues* in *Œuvres Complètes* Vol. 9 (Paris: Bibliophiles de l'Originale, 1966), 202-03.

<sup>12</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Lost Illusions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 357.

<sup>13</sup> Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, 309.

<sup>14</sup> Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 376.

<sup>15</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 45.

<sup>17</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z* in *Œuvres Complètes* Vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 568.

<sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 20-21.

<sup>19</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 350-51.

<sup>20</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 292.

<sup>21</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 351.

<sup>22</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 292.

<sup>23</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 573-74.

<sup>24</sup> Barthes, *S/Z* (trans.), 28-30.

<sup>25</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 350.

<sup>27</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 292.

<sup>28</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 350.

<sup>29</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 291.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Starobinski, "Stendhal pseudonyme" in *L'Œil vivant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 193-94.

<sup>31</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 349.

<sup>32</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 290.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Starobinski, 201.

<sup>34</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 232-33.

<sup>35</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 206.

<sup>36</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 347.

<sup>37</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 289.

<sup>38</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 347.

<sup>39</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 289.

<sup>40</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 347-48.

<sup>41</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 289.

<sup>42</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 349.

<sup>43</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 290.

<sup>44</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 349.

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<sup>45</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 291.

<sup>46</sup> Stendhal, *De l'amour*, 351.

<sup>47</sup> Stendhal, *Love*, 292.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### "REALISM: 'A PAST TO COME'"

#### *Structural Key:*

##### *First Discursive Thread*

- Subthread no. 3 (*"Multiplicity: Excess as a Realist Strategy"*)

##### *Second Discursive Thread*

- Subthread no. 2 (*"The Importance of Realism to Contemporary Theory"*)

In the context of postmodern theory, a crucial, underlying question lingers about the status of realism. Why must we consider realism *now*, at this point in time? What interest do these texts hold for us at the beginning of the twenty-first century and beyond? The answer, perhaps strangely, lies in a questioning of temporality. The very name "postmodernism" implies a temporal reference, an allusion to a movement "beyond" the boundaries of the modernist aesthetic. Whether postmodernism represents the culmination of modernism, or its repudiation, or even its debasement, is impossible to determine. These are complicated questions that inevitably defy the possibility of a definitive solution. That is, perhaps, unless we view them as offshoots of different philosophies of time.

In a famous lecture, Michel Foucault reconsider's Kant's question: "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?" ["What is Enlightenment?"]. Foucault argues that contemporary historians and philosophers have become entangled in endless debates over historical periodization, when what matters is not so

much historical time as an attitude or mannerism, a way of being-in-the-world:

Je sais qu'on parle souvent de la modernité comme d'une époque ou en tous cas comme d'un ensemble de traits caractéristiques d'une époque; on la situe sur un calendrier où elle serait précédée d'une prémodernité, plus ou moins naïve ou archaïque et suivie d'une énigmatique et inquiétante << postmodernité >>. Et on s'interroge alors pour savoir si la modernité constitue la suite de l'*Aufklärung* et son développement [...] je me demande si on ne peut pas envisager la modernité plutôt comme une attitude que comme une période de l'histoire. Par attitude, je veux dire un mode de relation à l'égard de l'actualité; un choix volontaire qui est fait par certains; enfin, une manière de penser et de sentir, une manière aussi d'agir et de se conduire qui, tout à la fois, marque une appartenance et se présente comme une tâche. Un peu, sans doute, comme ce que les Grecs appelaient un *êthos*. Par conséquent, plutôt que de vouloir distinguer la << période moderne >> des époques << pré >> ou << post-moderne >>, je crois qu'il vaudrait mieux chercher comment l'attitude de modernité, depuis qu'elle s'est formée, s'est trouvée en lutte avec des attitudes de << contre-modernité >>.<sup>1</sup>

[I know that modernity is often spoken of as an epoch, or at least as a set of features characteristic of an epoch; situated on a calendar, it would be preceded by a more or less naïve or archaic premodernity, and followed by an enigmatic and troubling "postmodernity". And then we find ourselves asking whether modernity constitutes the sequel to the Enlightenment and its development [...] I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history. And by "attitude", I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. A bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an *ethos*. And consequently, rather than seeking to distinguish the "modern era" from the "premodern" or "postmodern", I think it would be more useful to try to find out how the attitude of modernity, ever since its foundation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of "countermaternity".<sup>2</sup>]

Foucault seems to be arguing for an end to the philosophical and historical fascination with the division of time. I would argue, by contrast, that he is calling instead for a reconsideration of the critical attitude towards time.

What has failed traditional philosophical and literary logic is not so much "time itself" (if I may be allowed this conceptual absurdity) as the discourses attached to time (a time which, of course, only "exists" through the proliferation of these discourses).

There are two traditional configurations in the field of temporal discourse, although with different variations. The first, perhaps the less common of the two in Western discourse, is a model of time that moves in a circular pattern. This paradigm is found, for example, in Plato's *Republic*, in his description of life after death. In fact, this circular conception of time is regularly tied to such cycles: death and life, birth and death, rising and setting. The second model of time charts temporality as a linear movement. The Greeks again provide a famous example, believing that time flows regressively from the glories of the Golden Age to the heroics of the Silver Age, and so on. This regressive, linear theory of time survived in Greek thought alongside the circular conception of time (which we observe not only in Plato but also in the myths of the Underworld: the punishments of Sisyphus, Prometheus, Tantalus and Ixion, for example). That these two conceptions of time are not mutually exclusive is a point whose importance will become clear shortly. By far the most celebrated form of temporality, however, is a variation of the linear paradigm. I speak, of course, of the "philosophy of history", "historicism", or temporal progression. The tradition of this paradigm is rich: in the Bible, St John foretells the end of the world in the book of Revelation; St Augustine remodels the biblical prophecies into his own mythology about the progression of the world toward the City of God; finally, for the contemporary theorist, it is Hegel

who outlines the movement of the historical World Spirit that builds history step by step towards its rational climax.

The proliferation of postmodern forms complicates the matter of determining which model of temporality belongs to the contemporary world. But the task at hand is not to fit postmodernity (or realism) into a neat categorical template. Rather, we come to understand that the subject has been constructed traditionally as a historical being. Both realism and postmodernism not only recognize this fact, they also seek to question its position as a philosophical presupposition. It is a question of whether the human subject, or indeed the entire world, has to be constructed temporally. What emerges from this consideration is not another endlessly dialectic debate about which model of temporality best describes a particular era, but a questioning of the very nature of temporality. We are left with four differing paradigms for judging the nature of time: the circular, in which things return and repeat; the two forms of linear time (progressive and regressive); and the atemporal, a subversion of the subject as a historical given.

### **The Construction of Postmodern Temporality**

The variations of postmodern temporality are built on the foundations of at least two crucial thinkers: Hegel, whom I have already mentioned, and Nietzsche. Hegel, of course, presents a philosophy in which time moves forward, a progressive, linear flow that culminates, theoretically, with the end of history.

Spirit is in this way only *imagined* into existence; this imagining is the visionary dreaming which insinuates into both Nature and history, into the world [...] another, esoteric meaning than that

which lies on the surface [...] Our *own* act here has been simply to *gather together* the separate moments, each of which in principle exhibits the life of Spirit in its entirety, and also to stick to the Notion in the form of the Notion, the content of which would already have yielded itself in those moments and in the form of a *shape of consciousness*. This last shape of Spirit [...] this is absolute knowing [...] Time is the Notion itself that *is there* and which presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition; for this reason, Spirit necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure Notion, i.e. has not annulled Time.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the movement of Spirit (which is pegged to knowledge in its various forms: philosophy, religion, science) unfolds the pathway of History toward its final manifestation: self-consciousness.

Nietzsche, by contrast, outlines what, on the surface, appears to be a radically different theory of temporality: the Eternal Return. It forms one of the great motifs of his masterpiece, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In contrast to the linearity of the Hegelian dialectic, Nietzsche gives his own discourse a mythical twist that recalls the Greek legends. "Everything goes, everything returns; the wheel of existence rolls for ever. Everything dies, everything blooms anew; the year of existence runs on for ever. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of existence builds itself for ever. Everything departs, everything meets again; the ring of existence is true to itself for ever."<sup>4</sup> The origins of postmodern thought are thus complicated by these heterogeneous approaches to temporality: the linearity of Hegel on the one hand, the circularity of Nietzsche's Eternal Return on the other.

This "difference at the origin" leads postmodernism to its atemporal stance. Naturally these preliminary sketches of the Hegelian and Nietzschean philosophies need to be developed by further investigation. Furthermore, the relevance of these concepts to the analysis of realism, at

this stage, is somewhat oblique. This is because we have not yet asked realism the question of temporality. The critical consensus seems to be that realism contributes little to the debates about temporality. Since it is "naïve" enough to partake of a poetics of representation, it naturally also takes on the most naïve form of temporality. Realism is therefore associated with a straightforward, linear mode of temporality: a temporal paradigm, in other words, that reflects appropriately its supposed lack of philosophical sophistication.

We have yet to define, however, what atemporality means, or whether it is even possible to construct subjectivity outside the boundaries of temporality. Although postmodernism claims both Hegel and Nietzsche as its philosophical precursors, there is a definite sense of a shift *away* from the former to the latter. Not that Hegel is a representative of the old being swept away by a Nietzschean revolution, a postmodern "revaluation of all values". Hegel is, as Foucault argues in "L'Ordre du discours", the touchstone for a postmodern line of flight characterized by its engagement with Hegelian philosophy.

[T]out notre époque, que ce soit par la logique ou par l'épistémologie, que ce soit par Marx ou par Nietzsche, essaie d'échapper à Hegel [...] Mais échapper réellement à Hegel suppose d'apprécier exactement ce qu'il en coûte de se détacher de lui; cela suppose de savoir, dans ce qui nous permet de penser contre Hegel, ce qui est encore hégélien; et de mesurer quoi notre recours contre lui est encore peut-être une ruse qu'il nous oppose et au terme de laquelle il nous attend, immobile et ailleurs. [...] Une philosophie peut-elle encore exister et qui ne soit plus hégélienne?<sup>5</sup>

[Our age, whether through logic or epistemology, whether through Marx or Nietzsche, is attempting to flee Hegel [...] But truly to escape Hegel involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him. It assumes that we

are aware of the extent to which Hegel, insidiously perhaps, is close to us; it implies a knowledge, in that which permits us to think against Hegel, of that which remains Hegelian. We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us. [...] Can any philosophy exist that is no longer Hegelian?<sup>6</sup>]

Hegel is thus a crisis point in the discourse of Western philosophy, manifest in the problem of temporality that pervades his writings. Hegelian philosophy, of course, is not only a historical discourse (in the form of a specific temporal narrative, outlined in his lecture series *The Philosophy of History*) but also a meta-historical discourse, a characteristic that links it directly to postmodern constructions. In other words, Hegel ensures that we understand history not only as a set of empirical facts, but as a specific historical *process*. History happens, and its events are generated according to both a (sufficient) reason as well as a holistic, absolute Reason that drives the logic of events. At the core of these molecular historical events, Hegel places what amounts to a machine, a defragmentary process that draws the pieces of history into a neat monolithic whole.

As Foucault points out, the challenges to Hegelian philosophy have met with a singular lack of success. The dialectic is wonderfully insidious: its repetitive movement of negativity and sublation suggests a suicidal tendency in its own logic. Hegelian philosophy will pass away, but in the process of being subsumed its philosophical structure survives intact. It returns forever, always in a new form (perhaps even in forms that oppose the dialectic directly, but in so doing fulfill its logic of negation), a ghost [*Geist*] in the machine of history. It is in this sense that we live after the end of history, after the downfall of Hegelian philosophy. According to Hegel,

we have outlived ourselves. The end has been transcended, just as all ends will be transcended.

Hegel presents to us a whole: history as a single, perfect circle. The Eternal Return, by contrast, suggests a proliferation of historical circles. Was Nietzsche the first to see past the end, to see that history would continue past its conclusion and thus, in this manner, start again (with a new beginning and a new apocalypse)? These interpretations lead us back into the rhetoric of temporality. One circle or many, it hardly matters, in the end they are all dialectical. It is to Nietzsche, however, who ends the play of dialectics, and with it temporality. The Eternal Return is not a proliferation of historical circles, it is a parody, a caricature by means of overstatement. Time expands, it alternates, it runs parallel to itself, opening itself to the heterogeneity such multiplicity brings. A logic of doubling is transplanted not only into spatiality (how can Dostoevsky's Golyadkin be in two *places*?) but also temporality (how can Golyadkin be in two places at the same *time*?).

Hegelian philosophy inscribes a historical circle. The Eternal Return, by contrast, suggests a concatenation of circles, looped together, edges touching, so that history passes smoothly from one cycle to the next. Nietzsche calls it the model of the Eternal Return, but it remains unclear as to which circle is actually returning, and in which direction. The word "return" implies a linear model (this was what happened before, this is what happened after: the latter is a "return" of the former). Thus we encounter again a logic of doubling. No historical loop has the foundation from which it can truly claim precedence. Like Golyadkin, like William Wilson, time

partakes of the uncanny. Nietzsche's concatenation of historical circles, far from affirming the Hegelian model, destabilizes it radically. No circle can legitimately claim precedence, just as no double can claim originality.

Indeed, if we line up the circles of time next to each other, the flow of time is no longer necessarily (only potentially – and then only artificially) linear. We think of time moving forward in the same way that, for example, we read from left to right: by the arbitrariness of convention. Just as writing that is read from right to left (dare we say “backwards”? does Hebrew read “backwards”, for instance?) reveals to the reader a new, potential meaning (we might think here of M. Colleville's prophetic anagrams in Balzac's *Les Employés*), so does the reading of time from future to past (time that runs “backwards”). The great problem with the Eternal Return has been the assumption of a unidirectional nature of time. Nietzsche's Eternal Return has always been considered in the context of a linear movement (even though, paradoxically, it is a circular linearity) in such a way that the Eternal Return operates no differently from a temporal “return of the repressed”, in which the future is an endlessly displaced repetition of an infantile past.

The overlap of temporal directions (future as return of the past, past as return of the future) is aporetic. Where, in all this, lies the ever-elusive moment of presence? Can we think of time as a series of atomic moments, units of presence that constitute drops in the tidal wave of temporality? But this mode of thinking is as arbitrary as the very concept of “the moment”. We might ask, in the first place, what a moment consists of. Does it have a quantifiable being? Is a moment a week, an hour, a second, less than a second? The word “moment” suggests something infinitesimally small, yet

we may speak, for example, of the French Revolution as a crucial "moment" in world history. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the Eternal Return signifies less a circular movement of linear time than the announcement of temporal fluidity. In Part 3, Zarathustra breaks out of time by flying into the future:

Thus from out of me cried and laughed my wise desire,  
which was born on the mountains, a wild wisdom, in truth! – my  
great desire with rushing wings.

And often it tore me forth and up and away and in the  
midst of laughter: and then indeed I flew, an arrow, quivering  
with sun-intoxicated rapture:

Out into the distant future, which no dream has yet seen,  
into warmer Souths than artists have ever dreamed of, there  
where gods, dancing, are ashamed of all clothes –

[...]

Where all time seemed to me a blissful mocker of  
moments, where necessity was freedom itself, which blissfully  
played with the goad of freedom.<sup>7</sup>

Within the Eternal Return, the proliferation of circles is not pure repetition but rather an ironic and problematic redoubling. The Eternal Return brings to the fore, in the discourse of temporality, the same paradoxes imminent in the physical double. Together with a parallel universe (a doubling of space) we encounter a parallel time, a temporal doubling, that scrambles the neatly ordered codes of the traditional chronotope. Perfect repetition is impossible. In a chess game, for example, the players might "repeat" the same moves, but each game is subject to a radical difference. Even if the same game were to be repeated step by step, the repetition would not be perfect but ironic. Furthermore, it would not be a game of chess (since the players, by following a set pattern, are not thinking strategically, only mechanically) but a game of repetition. Repetition cannot lose its irony even by a marvelous act of exhaustive and illusory reconstruction. The Eternal Return, by abolishing the possibility of perfect repetition, thus presents a critical

challenge for mimetic representation. Platonic philosophy, for example, is founded on the notion of copying, both legitimately (the labor of the master craftsman, who copies the Forms) and illegitimately (the poet or artist, the creator of simulacra). With the doubling of time, however, it is impossible to prioritize any given "moment" over any other. Copying is rendered impossible: when two acts occur, identical doubles of each other, we can no longer speak of an act of mimesis, since the act of copying requires a time lag. The process moves (in time and space) from the priority of the original to the secondary copy. In the Eternal Return, however, each circle of history possesses only a functional originality. For example, consider historical circles b and c. Within the concatenations of history, we might assert that circle c is the copy of its preceding original, which is circle b. Broadening the scope of our example, however, we see that circle b is not original at all: it merely carries this function for the circles that follow it. In fact, circle b is itself a copy of an earlier model (circle a), and so on. In the same way, circle c is not only a copy of circle b, it becomes the master copy on which another (circle d) is based. The Eternal Return thus provides us with a history that is strictly neither future nor past. Each moment possesses this Janus-like feature of being simultaneously past and future, original and copy.

Our language possesses such a register: the future perfect. It is a mode of expression rarely used in English, but which possesses a special form in French. The French language uses the future perfect (this conglomerate of temporal modes) as a rhetorical device. It is used to declare a future state of affairs: in other words (and we must keep in mind the Nietzschean context of the discussion) the future perfect has a prophetic function. "*Je ne sais*

*pas*" [*"I do not know"*] writes Maurice Blanchot, "*mais je sais que je vais avoir su*"<sup>8</sup> [*"but I know that I am going to have known"*]<sup>9</sup>. (A sentence with an astounding structure: "I do not know" (present tense, negative); "but I know that" (present tense, positive) "I am going to" (immediate future) "have known" (past).) The Eternal Return thus strips away the illusion of the present, of the moment that travels through history. Blanchot goes on:

Soit un passé, soit un avenir, sans rien qui permettrait de l'un à l'autre le passage, de telle sorte que la ligne de démarcation les démarquait d'autant plus qu'elle resterait invisible: espérance d'un passé, révolu d'un avenir. Seule, alors, du temps resterait cette ligne à franchir, toujours déjà franchie, cependant infranchissable et, par rapport à << moi >>, non situable. L'impossibilité de situer cette ligne, c'est peut-être cela seulement que nous nommerions le << présent >>.

La loi du retour supposant que << tout >> reviendrait, semble poser le temps comme achevé: le cercle hors circulation de tous cercles; mais, pour autant qu'elle rompt l'anneau en son milieu, elle propose un temps non pas accompli, fini au contraire, sauf en ce point actuel que nous croyons détenir seul et qui, manquant, introduit la rupture d'infinité, nous obligeant à vivre comme en état de mort perpétuelle.<sup>10</sup>

[Let there be a past, let there be a future, with nothing that would allow the passage from one to the other, such that the line of demarcation would unmark them the more, the more it remained invisible: hope of a past, complete of a future. All that would remain of time, then, would be this line to cross, always already crossed, although not crossable, and, in relation to "me", unsuitable. Perhaps what we would call the "present" is only the impossibility of situating this line.

The law of the return supposing that "everything" would come again, seems to take time as completed: the circle of circulation of all circles; but, in as much as it breaks the ring in its middle, it proposes a time not uncompleted, but, on the contrary, finite, except in the present point that alone we think we hold, and that, lacking, introduces rupture into infinity, making us live as in a state of perpetual death.<sup>11</sup>]

We can no longer even speak of history, only of an intermingled future-past that has cannibalized the present. It is in this sense that temporality overcomes itself. The postmodern uptake of the Eternal Return incorporates

this ironic twist in the logic of time: a temporal model in which the "moment" no longer exists as such. It is as perspicacious a joke as the literature of realism (which lacks entirely any kind of "real").

The Eternal Return presents to us a history devoid of moments (a past and a future, but we are forever waiting on the present) and actors (many events, but lacking the legitimizing power of agency – effects without causes, as Baudrillard puts it). There is a sense in which this state of affairs is true already of Hegelian philosophy: it survives as a powerful meta-discourse, but its function, for the contemporary theorist, has changed radically. Although Hegel structures his theory ultimately toward a practical, historical realization, the true value of his work today lies in its critique of subjectivity. Once we have transcended everything, once we have come to the end of history, what then? The metaphors in Hegel suggest circularity, a recommencement of the movement of history. His lectures on *The Philosophy of History*, for example, trace the historical development of world culture, whose path toward the light of reason replicates symbolically the movement of the sun. Thus the morning of civilization dawns in China and India (the east) and sets in Europe (the west). The process is implicitly circular: with the end of this age, history will start again, forming yet another chain in the loop of the Eternal Return.

A parallel process occurs if we examine the structure of any event or action, no matter how small or insignificant. For example: in the act of a kiss, my lips (I, the past) touch her lips (she, the future). The agency of the sentence may be reversed: thus, her lips touch mine in the act of kissing. The conventions of linear temporality (and the rigid separation of subject

and object, active and passive) are thus embedded in the structure of language. At the same time, language subverts the very structure of temporality. This event (the kiss) occurs at a single historical moment. Language, however, diverges from this overarching historical perspective. Subjectivity demands a doubling of the historical moment: "I kiss her and she kisses me" or "she kisses me and I kiss her". The historical moment (a homogenizing gloss, as suspected) is split into two moments (my action, her action) whose agency language can only express (leaving aside collective pronouns) by acknowledging the intertwining of *two* moments in a single historical occurrence. Herein lies the conflict: history attempts to capture events in a universalized paradigm. Subjectivity, by contrast, remains bound within the scope of the particular. Paradox is inevitable, since time only has significance for beings that are conscious of its passing - yet we place history outside the boundaries of subjectivity (unless we consider the ideal of a universal subject). But subjectivity is similarly prey to the doubling of logic. The inadequacy of language to both subjectivity *and* temporality is revealed by an impossible, unanswerable question: are my lips touching hers, or are her lips touching mine, in that moment of intimacy?

This question opens onto what Blanchot calls the "neuter", a non-concept that we can approximate only crudely through a notion of reciprocity. Thus we may attempt an answer: "I am kissing her while she is kissing me" or "we are kissing each other". To approach the neuter, however, we ought to say instead: "kissing" (as a present participle) or, even better, the French infinitive "embrasser". The infinitive frees language from the constraints of time and subjectivity. The kiss we should think of is

portrayed in Gustav Klimt's famous painting: past and future meet in a kiss without beginning, without end: without time. We must no longer speak of events, therefore, except in jest. The "death of God" is such a non-event. To decide whether God died a billion years ago, or will die at some point in an indeterminate future, is a question trapped within the rhetoric of temporality.

### **Poe: The Segmentation of Time**

Atemporality, in realist fiction, leads to a shift away from linearity towards a textual formation shaped by the Eternal Return. The realist text, in other words, presents an episode from amongst an infinitude of returns. These returns are not circular, they return without repeating. The signature of these stories is a resistance to textual closure, foreshadowing a new, imminent return. In "The Colloquy of Monos and Una", for instance, Poe creates a dialogue between two mystical beings that subverts the flow of traditional narrative, highlighted by the epigraph from Sophocles ("These things are in the near future"). The epigraph captures the operative tense of the piece: the future perfect. "Born again?" exclaims Una at the outset.<sup>12</sup> But this rebirth, which anchors the beginning of the narrative, lies beyond the text in a logico-temporal sense. Una's exclamation acts as a chronotopic jump from Monos' return to a description of his death, which constitutes the remainder of the dialogue. It is precisely that death which develops in Monos the possibility for these shifts, alerting him to his own temporality.

And now, from the wreck and the chaos of the usual senses, there appeared to have arisen within me a sixth, all perfect. [...] Motion in the animal frame had fully ceased. [...] But there seemed to have sprung up in the brain, *that* of which no words could convey to the merely human intelligence even an

indistinct conception. Let me term it a mental pendulous pulsation. It was the moral embodiment of man's abstract idea of *Time*. [...] And this – this keen, perfect, self-existing sentiment of *duration* – this sentiment existing (as man could not possibly have conceived it to exist) independently of any succession of events – this idea – this sixth sense, upspringing from the ashes of the rest, was the first obvious and certain step of the intemporal soul upon the threshold of the temporal Eternity.<sup>13</sup>

In death, Monos is exposed to a temporality without events, a bizarre pulsation that, in the same movement, leads him beyond death and temporality. His death frees him from “the autocrats *Place* and *Time*”, allowing him, and the discourse, to move arbitrarily along the temporal spectrum.<sup>14</sup>

Poe repeats this subversion in the apparent circularity of the tale “Morella”. The story involves a man (the narrator) who is drawn to the eponymous heroine, a strange woman who studies ancient philosophy. The narrator reveals that, despite his fascination with Morella, whom he makes his wife, he cannot love her, and so treats her cruelly. Morella calls her husband to her bedside one day and tells him, “I am dying, yet shall I live.” She dies after giving birth to a baby girl. The intertwining of death and temporality (and indeed, rebirth) forms a common link between these two stories by Poe. Time, in each story, is swept away by a pulsation: for Monos, it was a mysterious internal throbbing; for the narrator of “Morella”, it was repetition of his former wife's name in the rhythms of nature:

Distinct, coldly, calmly distinct, fell those few simple sounds within my ear, and thence like molten lead, rolled hissing into my brain. Years – years may pass away, but the memory of that epoch – never! Nor was I indeed ignorant of the flowers and the vine – but the hemlock and the cypress overshadowed me night and day. And I kept no reckoning of time or place, and the stars of my fate faded from heaven, and therefore the earth grew dark,

and its figures passed by me, like flitting shadows, and among them all I beheld only – Morella. The winds of the firmament breathed but one sound within my ears, and the ripples upon the sea murmured evermore – Morella.<sup>15</sup>

But the return of Morella is more than semiotic overdetermination. Not only does the narrator, as if by compulsion, christen his child “Morella”: when she dies, he makes a bizarre discovery. “But she died; and with my own hands I bore her to her tomb; and I laughed with a long and bitter laugh as I found no traces of the first, in the charnel where I laid the second, Morella.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, like Monos, Morella’s death allows her to subvert time through a cabalistic process of rebirth.

Poe induces atemporality, not circularity, by the segmentation of time into a series of repetitive parts. In so doing, he reconstructs the pulse of the Eternal Return. In “The Pit and the Pendulum”, for example, the narrator looks towards the ceiling of his prison and observes what he believes to be a painting.

Looking upward, I surveyed the ceiling of my prison....In one of its panels a very singular figure riveted my whole attention. It was the painted figure of Time as he is commonly represented, save that, in lieu of a scythe, he held what, at first glance, I supposed to be the picture image of a huge pendulum, such as we see on antique clocks. [...] While I gazed directly upward at it [...] I fancied that I saw it in motion. In an instant afterward the fancy was confirmed. Its sweep was brief, but of course slow. I watched it for some minutes somewhat in fear, but more in wonder.<sup>17</sup>

The story itself takes place outside of the temporal flow. The prison cell lies outside the dimensions of time, and the exploration of its structure by the narrator creates a powerful sense of spatiality. Poe compacts space and time by placing them into symbolic containers, which represent the either/or of the prisoner’s demise: the hidden pit (the abyss of space, into which the

narrator narrowly avoids falling to his death) and the inescapable swing of the deadly pendulum (the measured swing of time). Time (as history) only punctuates the narrative at two points: the beginning (the narrator's trial) and the end (the overthrow of the Inquisition). This temporal segmentation is repeated in "The Masque of the Red Death". Inside the walls of the Prince's shelter there is an ebony clock that chimed so singularly that, every hour, the revelers would pause to hear its notes:

To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these – the dreams – writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away – they have endured but an instant – and a light, half-subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever, taking hue from the many-tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods.<sup>18</sup>

The chimes of the clock break up time into intervals, but in a location (a "great fête" – carnival, in other words) in which time does not exist. The clock strikes, but its function is not to record time as much as to punctuate it, to mark the arbitrary transition from one return to the next.

#### Stendhal: The "Glissement" of Closure

*Le Rouge et le noir*, haunted by the mysterious shadow of Louis Jenrel, is another example of a non-event. The death of Julien, like the death of God, is the writing of "a past to come". In her book *The Narrative Matrix*, Carol Mossman delves into the connection between this death, the plot structure of Stendhal's novel, and its subversion of temporality. She argues that the abruptness of Julien's crime is a rupture that cuts away the

conventional bonds of fiction in "a raw exposure of the narrative machine".<sup>19</sup> This fracture in the text, writes Mossman, recurs as a "slippage" and thus a deferral of meaning in the text:

To say that the function of ending lies in bringing the latent sense(s) of a plot to completion is to reiterate one of the cherished propositions of orthodox narratology. Let me now volunteer a corollary: any ambiguity as to the whereabouts of a narrative's telos willy nilly carries with it a slippage of meaning. Now, rare is the traditional narrative which risks jeopardizing that finale towards which it has been striving ever since opening, though plots can, and indeed should, for suspense's sake, entertain some free play in the course of their unfolding. But the liberties stop there: a conclusion which wavers is subversive of the very plot it intends to conclude.<sup>20</sup>

The allusion, of course, is to Jacques Lacan's famous theorization of "glissement" or "slippage" as a rupture in the chain of signification. Lacan outlines this theory, for example, in his early paper "Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je", in which the term "méconnaissance" is substituted for "glissement" in order to emphasize the predominance of the visual in this essay.

As Mossman points out, "metaphors of optics abound in Stendhaliana", most notably in his celebrated analogy of the novel as a mirror.<sup>21</sup> The optical field is constructed as a tool of proof, and is therefore crucial to the establishment of a final interpretation or "truth". The facts are paraded before us, for example, by Dupin; we see them and believe them. But nowhere is this less true than in Stendhal's writings. His irony is driven by the repeated contrast he makes between the epistemological expectations of his characters (that they can believe what they see) and the blinker effect their desire has on them (that they see what they want to believe). Examples abound, but few are as pointed as the closure of the first section of *Lucien*

*Leuwen*, when Lucien is concealed in his lover's bedroom. There he witnesses what he believes to be his betrayal: it appears that Mme de Chasteller gives birth to another's child. The event is a counterfeit, of course, stage-managed by the local doctor, M. Du Poirier, as a revenge for Lucien's social success. Lucien is plied with rumors that Mme de Chasteller is pretending to be sick in order to conceal her pregnancy and so, like another Othello, he eagerly swallows the crudely simulated birth scene; in his innocence he fails to notice, for instance, that the baby, "au lieu de quelques minutes de vie" ["instead of being a few minutes old"] is already "un mois ou deux"<sup>22</sup> ["one or two months"<sup>23</sup>] when it is briefly waved across the field of his gaze. A few pages later, Stendhal accentuates the irony by having Lucien's father advise him: "Ne croyez rien, mon ami, que ce que vous aurez vu, et vous en serez plus sage"<sup>24</sup> ["Believe nothing, mon ami, but what you have seen, and you will be a good deal wiser"<sup>25</sup>]. But "truth" in Stendhal is not only manipulated externally by deceiving others. The epistemological technique can also be used for the purposes of willful self-deception, as in Mathilde de la Mole's infamous "amour de tête" for Julien (the conventional translation would be "intellectual love", but literally it means "love of the head", an allusion to her emulation of Marguerite de Navarre at the end of the novel). In a scene that precedes the famous mirror analogy by only a few paragraphs, she sits and bemoans the impasse of her love affair with Julien: "En faisant ces réflexions, Mathilde traçait au hasard des traits de crayon sur une feuille de son album. Un des profils qu'elle venait d'achever l'étonna, la ravit: il ressemblait à Julien d'une manière frappante. C'est la voix du ciel! voilà un des miracles de

l'amour, s'écria-t-elle avec transport: sans m'en douter je fais son portrait"<sup>26</sup>

["As she made these reflections, Mathilde's pencil was tracing lines at random on a page of her album. One of the profiles she had just completed amazed and delighted her; it was strikingly like Julien. It's the voice of heaven! Here's one of the miracles of love! she cried in rapture. Quite unconsciously I've drawn his portrait"<sup>27</sup>].

By this same technique, Mossman contends, the reader or critic of Stendhal's writings, in particular of *Le Rouge et le noir*, is blinkered into expecting a conventional narrative format, a linear temporality in which the text moves from a beginning to a middle to an end that "make[s] possible such concepts of pattern as 'first' and 'finally', of sameness and difference, of repetition which at once harks back to a beginning and yearns for cessation".<sup>28</sup> But the extreme discomfort provoked by the conclusion of *Le Rouge et le noir*, as well as the hole it shoots through the reader's expectations, are signs that Stendhal is playing with the conventions of fictional narrative.

But if in some cases the reader's hopes have strayed towards comic resolution (that is, towards the fulfillment of Julien's manifest aspirations in the form of marriage and social legitimation), it must be because the possibility of such a reading has been inscribed in the text. [...] It may be that this novel is masquerading under a false form and that we, as readers, respond to the promises adhering to other conventions. That a reader believes him- or herself to be reading one kind of novel would explain how it has been possible to overlook indicators portending another resolution.<sup>29</sup>

Mossman argues that the way we usually read a text, and especially when it is reread critically, causes us to frame each textual occurrence in relation to the text as a whole. In a work such as Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, for

example, the episode in which Vronsky rides his horse to death is framed by its position as an allegory of the novel as a whole (Vronsky pushes Anna to the point of her inglorious death). The problem with applying this interpretive approach to a text such as *Le Rouge et le noir*, by contrast, “exists in ascertaining which plot it is that frames the other(s)”.<sup>30</sup> We must keep in mind that the narrative is multi-layered in such a way that, for example, Mathilde’s fantasy of recreating the history of Boniface de la Mole and Marguerite de Navarre interweaves with the main storyline. The analysis of the four church scenes (each of which, Mossman notes, is followed by a shift in time) is a memorable moment in her book, in which specific complications arise. The first church scene at Besançon, in which we encounter the mysterious Louis Jenrel, has a qualitatively different function from Vronsky’s ride in *Anna Karenina*. The horse’s death is a warning, a premonition of what *might* happen later in the novel: it is a metaphorical fork in the road for Vronsky, an opportunity to change before it is too late. Compare this to the church scene at Besançon, where the death of the hero is not foretold as a warning, but is passed before the reader’s eyes as a *fait accompli*: “a past time come” (Blanchot). The scrap of newspaper that Julien discovers does not foretell his death, it indicates that *it has already taken place*. It does not make sense to inscribe this moment as a warning, since Julien has not yet even taken up his position as tutor to the de Rênal household, and therefore has had no opportunity to transgress any moral codes. This event in the novel, and others like it, upsets the “sliding scale” of interpretation, and contrasts sharply with the surface of the narrative, which appears to progress in a simple linear progression.<sup>31</sup> These

narrative ruptures relativize and radicalize the possibility of measuring the text. "Extend the linear distance ever so little by displacing the end," writes Mossman, "and the salient points realign themselves to fit a new calibration. The importance of the still-existent former markers has undergone a radical alteration. [...] *Le Rouge* takes the measure, as it were, of the incongruity of two superimposed calibrations."<sup>32</sup> It is precisely this "'glissement' of perspective" in Mossman that separates her analysis from the traditional linear readings of realist texts.<sup>33</sup> The infinitely shifting boundaries of the work make a mockery of interpretive closure, and it is against this aporia that Mossman sets her own reading of Stendhal. "This present analysis will continue the movement of ending's deferral," she says, in contrast to the plethora of critics who strive to abort the text through closure.<sup>34</sup> In other words, every step is a "first step"; a paradox in the same way that Julien has died as the novel begins, yet his rebirth is imminent in Mathilde's womb as the last chapter closes.

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The postmodern appropriation of the Eternal Return, and a parallel (I would say "anterior", but that adjective seems to have lost its meaning) subversion of linear narrative in various realist texts, is characterized by an implosion of time itself. These atemporal constructions interlace past and future: the "event", the "moment", the ever-elusive "present" always happen elsewhere. Blanchot writes:

L'exigence du retour serait donc l'exigence d'un temps sans présent, temps qui serait aussi celui de l'écriture, temps futur, temps passé, que la radicale disjonction (en l'absence de tout présent) de l'un et de l'autre, fussent-ils les mêmes,

empêche d'identifier autrement que comme la différence que porte la répétition.

Entre passé, futur, la plus grande différence est donnée en ceci que l'un répéterait l'autre sans la commune mesure d'un présent: comme si entre passé et futur régnait l'absence de présent sous la forme simplifiée de l'oubli.

Qu'est-ce qui reviendra? Tout, *sauf* le présent, la possibilité d'une présence.<sup>35</sup>

[The demand of the return would then be the demand of a time without present, time that would also be that of writing, future time, past time, that the radical disjunction (in the absence of any present) of one from the other, even if they are the same, prevents us from identifying other than as the difference that repetition carries.

Between past, future, the greatest difference in that the one would repeat the other without the common measure of a present: as if between past and future the absence of present ruled in the simplified form of forgetfulness.

What will come again? Everything, *save* the present, the possibility of a presence.<sup>36</sup>]

Blanchot argues that since the moment of presence never arrives in the first place, the concept of the Eternal Return in Nietzsche is a caricature. If something never arrives in the first place, how can we speak of its return? For Blanchot, this perspective on time identifies the fundamental task of literature: "Toute notre écriture – à tous et si elle était jamais écriture de tous – serait ainsi: le souci de ce qui ne fut jamais écrit au présent, mais dans un passé à venir"<sup>37</sup> ["All our writing – for everyone and if it were ever writing of everyone – would be this: the anxious search for what was never written in the present, but in a past to come"<sup>38</sup>].

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?" in *Dits et écrits: 1954-1988* Vol. 4. (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 568.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), 39.

<sup>3</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 457 & 487.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 234.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 74-76.

- <sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language" in *The Archaeology Of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 235-36.
- <sup>7</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 215.
- <sup>8</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *Le Pas au-delà* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 170.
- <sup>9</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 106.
- <sup>10</sup> Blanchot, *Le Pas au-delà*, 22.
- <sup>11</sup> Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, 12.
- <sup>12</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), 444.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 450-51.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 670-71.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 671.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.
- <sup>19</sup> Carol Mossman, *The Narrative Matrix: Stendhal's Le Rouge et le Noir* (Lexington: French Forum, 1984), 19.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>22</sup> Stendhal, *Lucien Leuwen* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1982), 1:379.
- <sup>23</sup> Stendhal, *Lucien Leuwen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), 271.
- <sup>24</sup> Stendhal, *Lucien Leuwen*, 2:17.
- <sup>25</sup> Stendhal, *Lucien Leuwen* (trans.), 280.
- <sup>26</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 360.
- <sup>27</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet And Black*, 364. An almost identical incident occurs in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin* (Part 5, Chapter 10) when the painter Mihailov accidentally creates the effect he wants by means of a stain on the canvas.
- <sup>28</sup> Mossman, *The Narrative Matrix*, 24.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>35</sup> Blanchot, *Le Pas au-delà*, 27.
- <sup>36</sup> Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, 16.
- <sup>37</sup> Blanchot, *Le Pas au-delà*, 28.
- <sup>38</sup> Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, 17.

## CHAPTER NINE

### "LITERATURE AND ITS DOUBLES"

#### Structural Key:

*First Discursive Thread*  
- Subthread no. 3 – "Multiplicity: Excess as a Realist Strategy"

*Second Discursive Thread*  
- Subthread no. 3 – "Political/Textual Strategies"

The question is not of *the* double, and hence of a return to the Platonic division between original and copy, form and simulacrum, primary and secondary, but of literature and its *doubles*. Although the outstanding examples of realism are found in the French canon, I shall cast the net further in this chapter to consider its impact across Western literature, notably in the writings of Poe and Dostoevsky. The most conspicuous work in Dostoevsky's oeuvre to engage with this conception is his early novel *The Double*. The importance of French realism and other European literary movements to the formation of this text cannot be underestimated. The nightmarish qualities of some of Dostoevsky's early fiction – *The Landlady* and *The Double* in particular – might be traced back to the tales of the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann, for example.

But it is well known that Dostoevsky's interests, apart from encompassing such fellow Russians as Pushkin and Gogol, were focused on the great French writers of the early nineteenth century. I point once again to

Stendhal and Balzac (Dostoevsky worked on translations of Balzac's work), as well as Poe (Dostoevsky wrote a preface for a Russian translation of three of his tales). Poe's impact is ubiquitous in *The Double*. There are allusions, for example, to Poe's story "The Purloined Letter" in Chapter 13:

But to his astonishment the letter was not in his pocket. [...] Mr Golyadkin began to tremble like a leaf at the thought that his undeserving twin, having somehow got wind of the letter from Mr Goldyakin's enemies, had flung his coat over his head with the express purpose of purloining it. "What's more, he's purloining it as evidence," thought our hero, "but why evidence?"<sup>1</sup>

When facing his superior in Olsufi Ivanovich a few pages later, the narrator once again tells us that the "thought of the purloined letter came into his mind".<sup>2</sup>

Poe himself is a pioneer of the doppelganger story: his tale "William Wilson", for example, tells of a man haunted by his exact double. Poe explores this theme further in his brief tale "The Oval Portrait". In that story an unnamed narrator and his valet break into an abandoned castle, driven by circumstances to take shelter there. This abode, having been abandoned only recently, is furnished lavishly. The small, oval-shaped painting of a beautiful woman catches the eye of the narrator: "I had found the spell of the picture in an absolute *life-likeness* of expression, which, at first startling, finally confounded, subdued, and appalled me."<sup>3</sup> The attraction of the painting lies in its aesthetic presentation: the beauty of the woman (the content) is secondary to the construction of the painting itself (the form). The narrator discovers a book, a commentary in which the painting's history is revealed. The owner of the castle, a painter, married a beautiful woman. She adored him but detested his painting, regarding it as a rival to her

attentions. The painter decided one day to combine his two loves by painting a portrait of his wife. In his single-minded desire to capture her true essence, he failed to notice the impact his work was having on her health.

And when many weeks had passed, and but little remained to do, save one brush upon the mouth and one tint upon the eye, the spirit of the lady again flickered up as the flame within the socket of the lamp. And then the brush was given, and then the tint was placed; and, for one moment, the painter stood entranced before the work which he had wrought; but in the next, while he yet gazed, he grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast, and crying with a loud voice, "This is indeed *Life* itself!" turned suddenly to regard his beloved: - *She was dead!*<sup>4</sup>

However, "The Oval Portrait", with its calculated satire of mimesis, is not aimed at realism. In *Différence and répétition*, Deleuze argues that Platonism operates on a negative mechanism of authentication. Its logic is deductive and exclusive: something cannot be and not be at the same time, according to the principle of contradiction that Socrates repeats numerous times. The coincidence in Poe's story between perfect mimesis and the woman's death, with its wonderfully overstated fortuitousness, is a parody of this logic. The double disappears, repressed apart from a brief revelation: the cry, the moment in which the painter recognizes his mimetic skill.

In the story "William Wilson", by contrast, the double makes an ambiguous and inexplicable appearance. The Williams are paraded before the reader in the uneasy, coincidental atmosphere of a "double-'you'":

His cue, which was to perfect an imitation of myself, lay both in words and in actions; and most admirably did he play his part. My dress it was an easy matter to copy; my gait and general manner were without difficulty, appropriated; in spite of his constitutional defect, even my voice did not escape him. My louder tones were, of course, unattempted, but then the key, - it was identical; *and his singular whisper, it grew the very echo of my own.*<sup>5</sup>

The humor behind this redoubling is its "singularity": the Williams share not only a common physical appearance, but also names, birthdays and, as the story recounts, pivotal events in their lives. Poe elevates his story beyond forgery by overstating the *perfection* of his heroic duplication. Perfection abolishes imitation: how can original and copy be divided when each entity exists as a synchronous and yet independent singularity? The act of copying requires a temporal delay that does not exist either in Poe or Dostoevsky. In these texts the Platonic conception of *the* double, a relation between first and second, mutates into an infinite, labyrinthine process of doubling and redoubling. "There was really no end to its windings – to its incomprehensible subdivisions," says William of the schoolhouse in which he first encounters his double. "It was difficult, at any given time, to say with certainty upon which of its two stories one happened to be. From each room to every other there were sure to be found three or four steps either in ascent or descent. Then the lateral branches were innumerable – inconceivable – and so returning in upon themselves, that our most exact ideas in regard to the whole mansion were not very far different from those with which we pondered upon infinity."<sup>6</sup>

The touchstone for these texts is the analogy of the mirror. "A large mirror [...] now stood where none had been perceptible before," writes Poe at the end of "William Wilson", "[...] mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait".<sup>7</sup> In *Le Rouge et le noir*, Stendhal writes famously that "un roman est un miroir qui se promène sur une grande route"<sup>8</sup> ["a novel is a mirror journeying down the high road"<sup>9</sup>]. Its echo is heard in Dostoevsky's first

novel *Poor Folk*, in which Devushkin writes: "Literature is a picture, or rather in a certain sense both a picture and a mirror".<sup>10</sup> The mirror, of course, introduces the concept of the double, and on the very first page Golyadkin, blissfully ignorant of what is about to befall him, checks his reflection:

As soon as he sprung out of bed he ran to the small round mirror standing on his chest-of-drawers. Although the sleepy, short-sighted, rather bald figure reflected in the glass was of such an insignificant character that nobody at all would have found it in the least remarkable at first glance, its owner was evidently quite satisfied with what he saw there. "It would be a fine thing if something was wrong with me today, if a pimple had suddenly appeared out of the blue, for example, or something else disastrous had happened; however, for the moment, it's all right, for the moment everything is going well."<sup>11</sup>

Golyadkin's moment of prescience is paralleled in Stendhal's novel. On his way to the mayor's house to take up his tutorial position, Julien Sorel stops at the local church.

Sur le prie-Dieu, Julien remarqua un morceau de papier imprimé, étalé là comme pour être lu. Il y porta les yeux et vit:

*Détails de l'exécution et des derniers moments de Louis Jenrel, exécuté à Besançon, le...*

Le papier était déchiré. Au revers on lisait les deux premiers mots d'une ligne, c'étaient: *Le premier pas*.

Qui a pu mettre ce papier là, dit Julien ? Pauvre malheureux, ajouta-t-il avec un soupir, son nom finit come le mien...<sup>12</sup>

[On the ledge of the *prie-dieu*, Julien noticed a scrap of paper, with printing on it, lying there flat as if it were meant to be read. He cast a glance at it and saw the following words:

*Details of the execution and last moments of Louis Jenrel, executed at Besançon on...*

The paper was torn. On the other side were the first words of a line which read: *The first step...*

Who could have put this paper there? thought Julien. Poor wretch! he added with a sigh, his name ends just like mine...<sup>13</sup>]

Julien heralds his imminent downfall just as Golyadkin does. "Louis Jenrel" does not merely sound like "Julien Sorel", they are in fact scrambled versions of each other: Louis Jenrel is the double of Julien Sorel.

It is difficult to appreciate the idea of the double from the perspective of the nineteenth century: that is, as a moment of the fantastical, a lingering and malignant manifestation of the dark side of the soul. Between postmodernity and the nineteenth century lies psychoanalysis, in which the romantic interpretation of the double undergoes its ultimate disenchantment. Freud incorporates the double into the field of rational thought, into the consciousness that loses its way in the labyrinth of the realist narrative. A significant example is the dream of Irma's injection, the most famous dream of modern times. Freud dreams of not one, but three doubles:

*I at once called Dr M., and he repeated the examination and confirmed it...Dr M. looked quite different from usual; he was very pale, he walked with a limp and his chin was clean-shaven...My friend Otto was now standing beside her [Irma, that is], and my friend Leopold was percussing her through her bodice and saying: "She has a dull area low down on the left".<sup>14</sup>*

As Freud explains, Irma is one of his psychoanalytic patients. The three other doctors who perform the medical examination and proceed to inject her with a dirty needle are, he claims, displacements of his own ego. Freud bases this theory on the thesis that the function of dreams is to fulfill unconscious wishes. Freud argues that the dream of Irma's injection represents an unconscious fantasy that her continuing troubles are not related to a failure of his psychoanalytic technique, but are instead the result of a medical condition. The three doubles in the dream – Dr M., Otto and Leopold – ensure this by injecting her with a dirty needle.

The heterogeneity of these texts lies in deciding whether there is only one double, or several. In *The Double*, for example, the reader is presented with two manifestations, distinguished by the narrator as Golyadkin "senior" and "junior". But as the dream of Irma's injection shows, the double is capable of multiplication and fragmentation. The Wolf Man's dream, for example, increases the figure to a sum of six or seven wolves (or doubles). In *Mille plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari press the question beyond the naïve task of fixing a number. They point the reader to Freud's extended essay, "The Unconscious", published in 1915, a year after the Wolf Man case. In that essay, Freud explores the differing psychological structures that characterize the clinical conditions of psychosis and neurosis. In the case of neurosis, he claims, the patient is able to understand the difference between a metaphor (Deleuze and Guattari's example is a sock) and its deeper psychological meaning (its hole-like shape suggests a vagina, pointing back to the neurotic's Oedipal desire for the mother). The psychotic, by contrast, grasps the metaphor not as *the* sock, but as a "multiplicité de mailles" ["multiplicity of stitches"], an entire "champs de vagins"<sup>15</sup> ["field of vaginas"<sup>16</sup>].

Comparer une chaussette à un vagin, ça va encore, on le fait tous les jours, mais un ensemble de mailles à un champ de vagins, il faut quand même être fou: c'est ce que dit Freud. [...] A peine a-t-il découvert le plus grand art de l'inconscient, cet art des multiplicités moléculaires, que Freud n'a de cesse de revenir aux unités molaires, et retrouver ses thèmes familiers, *le* père, *le* pénis, *le* vagin, *la* castration..., etc. (Tout près de découvrir un rhizome, Freud en revient toujours à de simples racines.)<sup>17</sup>

[Comparing a sock to a vagina is OK, it's done all the time, but you'd have to be insane to compare a pure aggregate of stitches to a field of vaginas: that's what Freud says. [...] No sooner does Freud discover the great art of the unconscious, this art of

molecular multiplicities, than we find him tirelessly at work bringing back molar unities, reverting to his familiar themes of *the father, the penis, the vagina*, Castration with a capital C... (On the verge of discovering a rhizome, Freud always returns to mere roots.)<sup>18]</sup>

When broaching the question of *the double*, then, Deleuze and Guattari's criticism points us away from the idea of a simplistic interplay between a dyad of terms. Indeed, in Dostoevsky's novel the fragmentation has already taken place, but it remains barely noticeable without a closer examination of the text.

When Golyadkin first encounters his double, he chances on not one but three strangers on his crazed flight home from the scene of his humiliation. The first simply comes towards him and passes by, then disappears into the snowstorm. A few moments later, another – who cannot, by his proximity to the first, be identical to him – approaches Golyadkin:

In front of him, about fifteen yards away, the small black figure of a man hastening towards him was again visible. The man was hurrying, scurrying, almost running; the distance between them rapidly decreased. Mr Golyadkin was even able to examine the new belated passer-by closely – and when he did so, he exclaimed aloud in horrified bewilderment; his knees shook. It was the same pedestrian, the one already known to him, the one he had made way for ten minutes earlier, who had now suddenly and startlingly appeared in front of him again.<sup>19</sup>

Golyadkin, approaching this second figure, tries to pursue him through the city streets, but succeeds only in attracting yet another double. Again, this third manifestation points to another double rather than to the reappearance of the first two, since after Golyadkin has chased the second double the third appears running in the *same* direction as the hero, as if he, too, is chasing these other doubles. Dostoevsky therefore makes it possible from the very beginning that there is more than one double, and the only thing to obscure

this multiplicity is the unfolding of the story from the privileged perspective of Mr Golyadkin "senior".

The appearance of the three doubles, of course, confounds a conventional psychoanalytic reading of *the double*. One strategy might be to consult Freud's paper "The Uncanny" (an essay that, fittingly, looks at Hoffmann's fiction). Freud's central argument is that the uncanny is experienced by the subject as something familiar, which reappears differently because it has undergone repression. The repressed object has sneaked past the guard of the superego, imbuing it with an eroticism that is at once seductive and horrifying. Here are the famous closing sentences of Chapter 5 of *The Double*:

The unknown, also still in hat and overcoat, was sitting before him, on his own bed, with a slight smile on his lips; narrowing his eyes a little, he gave him a friendly nod. Mr Golyadkin wanted to cry out but could not, to make some sort of protest but his strength failed him. His hair stood on end and he collapsed into a chair, insensible with horror. Mr Golyadkin had recognized his nocturnal acquaintance. Mr Golyadkin's nocturnal acquaintance was none other than himself, Mr Golyadkin himself, another Mr Golyadkin, but exactly the same as himself – in short, in every respect what is called his double<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the three "others" he encounters on his return journey, Golyadkin meets a fourth double on returning home. Perhaps he meets the same double four times, although the narrative suggests this is improbable. A psychoanalytic interpretation, therefore, would have to argue that, in order for there to be four doubles, the reality of the narrative is not a concrete reality but a psychical "reality", that the episodes Golyadkin experiences take place in a "virtual reality" and, as such, are hallucinations.

The double is thus presented as the feature of Golyadkin's neurosis, the repetitive symptom that ultimately points back to the death drive.

In Descartes, in Kant, and again in Freud, the concept of repetition lies in returning to an original source, a pragmatic Platonism in which the "latent content" is substituted for the "Form". But, according to a Deleuzian reading, there is no such "form" in Dostoevsky's novel. Events fold into one another in a manner that defies the classical notion of sufficient reason. The multiple Golyadkins are like gremlins, molecular devils, in the machinery of the plot. The reader is subjected regularly to the same bewilderment as Golyadkin, a deductive aporia in which events unfold during the course of the novel whose motivation remains opaque. For instance, the subplot concerning the German woman, whom Golyadkin is supposed to have seduced at some point, is conducted in complete obscurity from the reader. The novel often possesses Kafkaesque overtones; when talking to his manservant Petrushka about hiring a carriage, Golyadkin is astonished that his plans for a secret rendezvous are already known. "The world is full of rumours," replies Petrushka, "We know everything, sir".<sup>21</sup> Just as telling are Dostoevsky's ironic references to the cultural status of the novel as an art form. The novel in the eighteenth century was synonymous with decadence and loose morality, and the French word "romanesque" ["novelistic"] was equated with a form of ludicrous romanticism. Rousseau and his novel *Julie, or The New Heloise* became an icon of this double standard during the nineteenth century, and authors such as Balzac delighted in parodying him in the same way Cervantes had caricatured the romantic code of chivalry two hundred years earlier. Thus Golyadkin rails against what he sees as the

negative influence of the romanesque on the attitudes of the German woman:

Would you have me behave like somebody in a silly novel, come to some near-by hill-slope, dissolve in tears at the sight of the cold indifferent walls that imprison you, and finally follow the example of certain bad German poets and novelists, and die, is that it, madam? But first allow me to tell you, as a friend, that that's not the way things happen, and secondly you, and your parents too, would be soundly whipped if I had my way, for giving you French novels to read: for you learn nothing good from French novels. They are poison, rank poison [...] nowadays, in our individual age, madam, tender words are not in fashion; the days of Jean-Jacques Rousseau are past.<sup>22</sup>

The irony of paradox with which Dostoevsky imbues the narrative is foregrounded by Golyadkin's claim, as the novel's protagonist, that he is not acting like a character in a fiction. *The Double*, in this sense, has all the hallmarks of a (post)modern anti-novel. Echoing similarly sardonic statements by the French realists about the verisimilitude of the text (such as Stendhal's counterclaim, in his essay on Sir Walter Scott, that "art is a pretty lie"), the narrator of *The Double* asserts repeatedly that his is an "utterly veracious story".<sup>23</sup> Moreover Golyadkin is referred to throughout as "our hero", another Quixote-like parody, since Golyadkin possesses no heroic qualities whatsoever. His passivity makes him one of the most "unheroic heroes" (to use Raymond Giraud's designation) in canonical literature.

Golyadkin's protest against the romanesque as both a cultural cliché and an illusion ("that's not the way things happen") is further undercut by his own recourse to hackneyed shibboleths about justice and submission to authority. When he appeals to his colleague Anton Antonovich, for example, he spouts an almost incoherent stream of conservative clichés: "I'm not a free thinker of any kind, Anton Antonovich, I shun all kinds of

free thought [...] this is right thinking, really good, and you will like to hear it [...] I am far from a free-thinker. I accept the benevolent authorities as a father to me. The benevolent authorities, it's said, make this or that statement, it's said, and you, it's said, must... a young man must do his duty...".<sup>24</sup> Faced with a new, explosive moment of heterogeneity, Golyadkin falls prey to hysteria and attempts at every turn to homogenize the emerging multiplicity.

The narrative technique of distinguishing Golyadkin "senior" and "junior" tends to veil this multiplicity, although its duplicity is more obscured than hidden. Dostoevsky's distinction functions like a mask, which conceals the identity of its wearer while failing to hide that an act of concealment is taking place. Golyadkin "junior" stands for a potentially infinite field of doubles, but at the same time his existence unravels the false psychological unity of the "original" Golyadkin. This interplay between original and counterfeit drives the novel. At the beginning Golyadkin is anchored firmly to his world and, although an "insignificant character", he is nevertheless "quite satisfied".<sup>25</sup> In spite of this, numerous hints are made about the ambiguity and fluidity of his identity even before the appearance of the doubles in Chapter 5: the division between the dream world and the actual world, for example; the careful grooming of himself in the mirror; the prescient musings about "not being himself" that day. When out in his carriage, he crosses paths with Andrey Philippovich and avoids speaking to him, thinking that he can pass off the snub as if "it's not me but somebody else strikingly like me".<sup>26</sup> As the tables are being turned, Golyadkin asks: "[B]ut which is the fowler here and which is the bird? That's another

question, gentlemen!".<sup>27</sup> The ambiguity emerges into the open when the

Golyadkins face each "other" off at work:

[T]his was another Golyadkin, a completely different one, and yet at the same time very like the other – of the same height and build, dressed in the same way and with the same bald patch – in short, nothing, absolutely nothing, was lacking to complete the resemblance, so that if they were taken and placed side by side nobody, absolutely nobody, would have taken it upon himself to say which was the old and which the new, which was the original and which the copy.<sup>28</sup>

The logical totality of the narrative, wobbling precariously since the novel's opening, fragments at this point. The sign "Golyadkin" is fluid (one might say "leaky") in the sense that the entropy of his signifier leaves behind an infinite and forever multiplying field of doubles. Golyadkin replays the scenario of the sorcerer's apprentice, only this time the chopping action is directed against himself, and the reader is told several times of the "annihilation" of Mr Golyadkin, who nevertheless, impossibly, continues to live and act.

The action of *The Double* takes place in a hallucinatory field, the field of the unconscious, but the appearances of these doubles do not constitute a repetition in the sense of a return of the same. Deleuze and Guattari argue that Freud makes this mistake by failing to recognize the multiplicity of the unconscious; where there is a crowd of doubles, he hears only a single person.<sup>29</sup> The critique of repetition as a return of the same, for instance, is the central thesis of *Différence et répétition*. There Deleuze distinguishes "deux types de répétition, l'un concernant seulement l'effet total abstrait, l'autre, la cause agissante. L'une est une répétition statique, l'autre, dynamique. L'une résulte de l'œuvre, mais l'autre est comme

<< l'évolution >> du geste. [...] dans l'ordre dynamique, il n'y a plus ni concept représentatif, ni figure représentée dans un espace préexistant. Il y a une Idée, et un pur dynamisme créateur d'espace correspondant"<sup>30</sup> ["two types of repetition: one which concerns only the overall, abstract effect, and the other which concerns the acting cause. One is a static repetition, the other is dynamic. One results from the work, but the other is like the 'evolution' of a bodily movement. [...] in the dynamic order there is no representative concept, nor any figure represented in a pre-existing space. There is an Idea, and a pure dynamism which creates a corresponding space"<sup>31</sup>]. He seeks to repudiate the notion that repetition is simply a recurrence, an identity, by proposing a new way of conceiving difference as "pure difference". Pure difference shifts repetition from an eternal recurrence of the same to the Eternal Return of the different.

The idea of pure difference is explored further in *Le Pli*, Deleuze's study of Leibniz. There pure difference is broached in the context of theology. Deleuze refutes the stereotypical view of Leibnizian theology, popularized and vulgarized by the much quoted "God chooses the best of all possible worlds". A more productive way of looking at Leibniz's theology, he argues, is to look at how it responds to the increasingly powerful attacks on both classical reason and the proofs for the existence of God which proceed from that controversy. Leibniz differs from previous and subsequent defenders of the existence of God. In contrast to Descartes and Kant, Leibniz does not resort to a single, transcendental principle in order to accomplish his theistic rescue mission. In fact, argues Deleuze, he does the

opposite. In the Leibnizian mode of thought, he writes, there is a radical agglomeration of principles.

Les vrais caractères du jeu leibnizien [...] c'est d'abord la prolifération des principes: on joue par excès et non par manque de principes, le jeu est celui des principes eux-mêmes, d'invention des principes. C'est donc un jeu de réflexion, échecs ou dames, où l'adresse (non pas le hasard) remplace la vieille sagesse et la vieille prudence. [...] c'est un jeu de remplissement, où l'on conjure le vide et ne rend plus rien à l'absence [...] on ne s'empare pas de l'adversaire pour le rendre à l'absence, on encerne la présence pour le neutraliser, le rendre impossible, lui imposer la divergence. C'est cela, le Baroque, avant que le monde ne perde ses principes: le splendide moment où l'on maintient Quelque chose plutôt que rien, et où l'on répond à la misère du monde par un excès de principes, une hybris des principes, une hybris propre aux principes.<sup>32</sup>

[The true character of the Leibnizian game [...] is first of all a proliferation of principles: play is executed through excess and not a lack of principles; the game is that of principles themselves, of inventing principles. It is thus a game of reflection, of chess or checkers, where skill (not chance) replaces old gifts of wisdom or prudence. [...] it is a game of filling holes, in which emptiness is imagined and where players refuse to give way to absence [...] You don't capture your adversary in order to reduce him to absence, you encircle his presence to neutralize him, to make him impossible, to impose divergence upon him. The Baroque is just that, at a time just before the world loses its principles. It is the splendid moment when Some Thing is kept rather than nothing, and where response to the world's misery is made through an excess of principles, a hubris of principles, and a hubris inherent to principles.<sup>33</sup>]

This infinite multiplication of principles constitutes pure difference.

Repetition of the same is precluded because repetition is, at every point, a new, idiosyncratic beginning-again, a singularity that has never appeared before but takes its place from among an infinite set of compossible variations or "folds". Deleuze's example of chess is a good one, in so far as the chess player *repeats* a set of structured rules during the course of every game. However, in the midst of this repetition, pure difference is at play

within the "body without organs" of the chessboard; no two games of chess are alike, and even if a repetition of the same were attempted by mechanically retracing the moves of a previous game, this would itself constitute a recontextualization and hence an implicit difference and distancing from the "original".

The line of intersection between Deleuze's philosophy and *The Double* is the conceptualization of subjectivity (or, more correctly, subjectivities) that proceeds from pure difference. When Deleuze writes in *Le Pli* about "having a body", his thought connects with Dostoevsky's own about "having a fictional character". Deleuze talks about the body as a "zone claire" ["zone of clarity"], a vague and inexhaustible space that is constituted by an infinitude of bodies.<sup>34</sup> These parts, these other bodies, are made in turn of a multiplicity of bodies, "foules de monades" ["crowds of monads"], which retreat into infinity like the magnifications of a Mandelbrot set.<sup>35</sup>

[I]l faut distinguer les monades qui ont un corps, auxquels un corps appartient, et les monades qui sont les requisits spécifiques de ce corps, ou qui appartiennent aux parties de ce corps. Et ces secondes monades, ces monades de corps, ont elles-mêmes un corps qui leur appartient, corps spécifiquement autre que celui dont elles sont les requisits, et dont les parties possèdent à leur tour des foules de monades tierces. Et ces monades tierces...<sup>36</sup>

[Monads that have a body must be distinguished, and monads that are the specific requisites of this body, or that belong to parts of this body. And these second monads, these monads of bodies, themselves possess a body that belongs to them, a body specifically other than that whose requisites are, and whose parts in their turn possess crowds of tertiary monads. And these tertiary monads...<sup>37</sup>]

The state of "having a body" is constituted, argues Deleuze, by a notion of possession. Things swim in and out of the zone of clarity, and these define the body as a singularity. The problem, however, is that "il est très difficile à chacun de nous de faire la liste de ses propres possessions. Il n'est pas facile de savoir ce qui nous appartient, et pour combien de temps. La phénoménologie n'y suffit pas"<sup>38</sup> ["it is very difficult for every one of us to make a list of our own belongings. It is not easy to know what we own, and for what length of time. Phenomenology does not suffice"<sup>39</sup>]. It is from this point of trying to define the body that we come to perhaps the most radical and interesting idea in *Le Pli*: compossibility and impossibility.

We may speak of worlds – and there is an infinity of singular worlds, brought about by the multiplication of principles I spoke of earlier – and we can define these worlds in the same manner as we try to define the body. The world comes into its unique world-hood through these attributes. In one world, for example, we know that "Adam sinned". Compossible with this fact is one of Leibniz's other famous examples, that "Caesar crossed the Rubicon". Now, a second world might be a world in which Adam does not sin. Clearly this world is impossible with the first, since it would be paradoxical to have a world in which Adam is both a sinner and not a sinner. A third world might consist of both an Adam who does not sin and a Caesar who does not cross the Rubicon, and so on. The point of this logical game, for Leibniz, is to prove that we live in the best of all possible worlds. From this conclusion proceeds his theistic argument that God exists, since the best of all possible worlds and atheism are, according to Leibniz, impossible.

Although Deleuze does much to salvage Leibnizian philosophy and the Baroque sensibility, he recognizes this limit of the impossible, visible here in Leibniz's theological proof, which ultimately presents a barrier to multiplicity. Deleuze argues, however, that the revolutionary nature of the Baroque is not lost, but reemerges continually in subsequent literature and philosophy in the form of a neo-Baroque sensibility. Deleuze does not mean that these new formations necessarily look back to the historical Baroque, but that they engage with its philosophical questions. Thus the nineteenth century French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, according to Deleuze, is exemplary of the neo-Baroque. Alongside Mallarmé, Deleuze places Samuel Beckett, and I cannot but add to this list Dostoevsky, Poe, Stendhal, Balzac and Gautier.

The point of contention between the Baroque and the neo-Baroque is the notion of the impossible. Leibniz uses it, in the end, as a tool to block multiplicity by turning it into a theological proof. But it is here that pure difference gives us its most cogent examples. Mallarmé's poem *Un Coup de dés* (once again, closer to an anti-poem), for example, is made up of words and small phrases, apparently chosen at random (by a throw of the dice), scattered across the page. *Un Coup de dés* represents a collapse of the impossible: instead of being thrown once in a singular and exclusive gesture, the arbitrariness of language crowds together as a multivalent difference in itself.

Dostoevsky's novel performs a similarly radical critique of the impossible. Let us recall one of Leibniz's examples: Adam sinned in this world (the best of all possible worlds), and therefore an Adam cannot

simultaneously exist in this world that did not sin. Parallel to this example is the figure of Golyadkin in *The Double*. Golyadkin regards his double as a teratology, a monstrous perversity of nature, and appeals to the natural order in the same way as he appeals to the "benevolence" of the authorities: Golyadkin "junior" should not exist. This underground narcissism is betrayed in the awful moment of the "Judas kiss" when, in a bizarre gesture of friendship, the Golyadkins embrace in front of their colleagues: "There was a ringing in Mr Golyadkin's ears and darkness before his eyes: he imagined that an endless string of Golyadkins all exactly alike were bursting in through all the doors of the room; but it was too late... The resounding treacherous kiss had been given".<sup>40</sup> The "Judas kiss" is prefigured earlier in the novel by Golyadkin's dream:

[W]ith every step he took, every time his foot struck the pavement, there sprang up, as if from under the ground, another exactly and completely identical Mr Golyadkin, revolting in his depravity. And all these complete replicas, as soon as they appeared, began running along behind the other, stretching out in a long file like a line of geese and scurrying after Mr Golyadkin, so that there was no escaping perfect counterparts of himself, so that horror deprived the much-to-be-pitied Mr Golyadkin of breath, so that finally there had sprung up a terrible multitude of perfect replicas, so that at length the whole capital was clogged with perfect replicas and a policeman, seeing such a disturbance of the peace, was obliged to take all the perfect replicas by the collar and put them in a lock-up that happened to be handy...<sup>41</sup>

Golyadkin's dream, is a stunning example of this fragmentation, of the emerging multiplicity in Dostoevsky's text. "Our hero" seems finally to "fold in" on himself, to remove at last his hands (if only for a few moments) from his ears so as to take in the full scope of the polyphonic choir.

There is an explosion of new perspectives, weaving in and out of the fabric of the realist text. The double exists not as a once-off freak of nature, but as an entire field of doubles, Golyadkins who are never quite sure, in their state of being a fictional character, what "belongings" they possess. In the conclusion to *Le Pli*, Deleuze heralds the collapse of the impossible, the dawn of a new set of movements and moments of capture, and the shift from a Leibnizian "monadologie" ["monadology"] to "nomadologie"<sup>42</sup> ["nomadology"<sup>43</sup>]. "Nous découvrons de nouvelles manières de plier comme de nouvelles enveloppes" ["We are discovering new ways of folding, akin to new envelopements"] writes Deleuze, "mais nous restons leibniziens parce qu'il s'agit toujours de plier, déplier, replier"<sup>44</sup> ["but we all remain Leibnizian because what always matters is folding, unfolding, refolding"<sup>45</sup>]. It is in this sense we are bringing realist literature "into the fold", no longer in the Christic connotation of the word but in this new, Deleuzian perspective: not a single fold, but several.

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<sup>1</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from the Underground/The Double* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 274.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>3</sup> Poe, *The Complete Tales and Poems*, 291.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 632.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 628.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 641.

<sup>8</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 362.

<sup>9</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 365.

<sup>10</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Poor Folk and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), 52.

<sup>11</sup> Dostoyevsky, *Notes from the Underground/The Double*, 127-28.

<sup>12</sup> Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*, 45.

<sup>14</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), 182.

<sup>15</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 39-40.

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 27.

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- <sup>19</sup> Dostoyevsky, *Notes from the Underground/The Double*, 169-70.  
<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 173.  
<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 262.  
<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 276-77.  
<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 157.  
<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 246.  
<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 127.  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 132.  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 148.  
<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 177.  
<sup>29</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 40-43.  
<sup>30</sup> Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, 32.  
<sup>31</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 20.  
<sup>32</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), 91-92.  
<sup>33</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: Athlone, 1993), 67-68.  
<sup>34</sup> Deleuze, *Le Pli*, 144.  
<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 145.  
<sup>36</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>37</sup> Deleuze, *The Fold*, 108.  
<sup>38</sup> Deleuze, *Le Pli*, 146-47.  
<sup>39</sup> Deleuze, *The Fold*, 109.  
<sup>40</sup> Dostoyevsky, *Notes from the Underground/The Double*, 284.  
<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 230-231.  
<sup>42</sup> Deleuze, *Le Pli*, 189.  
<sup>43</sup> Deleuze, *The Fold*, 137.  
<sup>44</sup> Deleuze, *Le Pli*, 189.  
<sup>45</sup> Deleuze, *The Fold*, 137.

# Conclusion

## CHAPTER TEN

### CONCLUSION: STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The movement of the thesis has been toward a specified outcome: the development of a series of textual strategies. These strategies are the combined result of two currents of thought. The first is a critical integration, as well as a reassessment, of postmodern theory. The second involves the refinement of these textual strategies through an analysis of literary realism. Rather than providing a summary of the thesis, therefore, I wish to present the outcome of this research: four major tactical directions.

#### 1. Mythology

There is a traditional dichotomy between reason, on the one hand, and myth on the other. This dyadic construction is foregrounded by the Enlightenment, which posited reason's power to penetrate reality "as it is". The supremacy of reason was its ability, in other words, to penetrate the veil of mythical discourse, to unmask it, with the ultimate aim of abolishing it altogether. In a scathing attack on this argument, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer write in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

Since reason posits no substantial goals, all affects are equally removed from its governance, and are purely natural. The principle by which reason is merely set over against all that is unreasonable, is the basis of the true antithesis of enlightenment and mythology. Mythology recognizes spirit only as immersed in nature, as natural power. Like the powers without, inward impulses appear as living powers of divine or demonic origin. Enlightenment, on the other hand, puts back coherence, meaning and life into subjectivity, which is properly constituted only in this process. For subjectivity, reason is the chemical agent which absorbs the individual substance of things and volatilizes them

in the mere autonomy of reason. In order to escape the superstitious fear of nature, it wholly transformed objective effective entities and forms into the mere veils of a chaotic matter, and anathematized their influence on humanity as slavery, until the ideal form of the subject was no more than unique, unrestricted, through vacuous authority.<sup>1</sup>

The disenchantment of the world is achieved through the abolition of myth.

Reason is able to establish itself, argue Adorno and Horkheimer, by a display of rationalist legitimacy. It colonizes the space occupied formerly by mythology through a kind of tyranny, a logical authoritarianism that rejects all dissent (if something does not proceed from reason it must be "irrational" and therefore "illegitimate"). Literary realism is frequently viewed as a consequence, a scientific byproduct, of this perceptual disenchantment. Realism is a "reasonable" literature (or a literature made "reasonable") by its situation within discourses that have been colonized by reason. In this way, realist literature is bounded by its appeals to, for instance, history, classical logic and science.

Postmodern thought has tended to locate itself within a variation of this post-mythical thesis. Whereas the Enlightenment championed the abolition of myth through reason (the achievement of which would have been, of course, yet another myth), postmodernity posits an inexorable dialectic between these two terms. Thus, the postmodernist must undertake two apparently contradictory tasks. The first is a continuation of the Enlightenment project. Myth must not rein supreme, it must be unmasked for the "grand narrative" that it is. The second task, by contrast, is to generate myths, or the proliferation of simulacra, as I mentioned earlier. These myths deconstruct themselves by hinting (or in other cases,

proclaiming) to the reader their fabricated nature. The analysis of mythology is central to my examination of realism for two reasons. In the opening paragraph of the thesis I described how realism has been shrouded, by both modern and postmodern theorists, within a particular *mythos*. The first task of the thesis, therefore, involved an "unveiling", a "deconstruction", of the myth surrounding realism.

Roland Barthes's book *Mythologies* undertakes a "seminalysis" of the concept of mythology. Barthes draws his inspiration from three main sources: Saussure (myth as a semiology or system of signs), Freud (myth as an expression of the unconscious) and Marx (myth as an ideological construction). The danger of constructing a representative schema, in which each myth is posited as a fabrication by an underlying entity (language, the unconscious, the state), is obvious. Barthes avoids such a regression by arguing that myth does not conceal its intentions. On the contrary, he writes: "Le mythe ne cache rien et il n'affiche rien: il déforme; le mythe n'est ni un mensonge ni un aveu: c'est une inflexion"<sup>2</sup> ["Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion"<sup>3</sup>]. The form of this inflexion, however, is not an arbitrarily determined form of persuasion. Barthes argues that the construction of myth requires a particular kind of discursive transformation: it must be made "natural".

Nous sommes ici au principe même du mythe; il transforme l'histoire en nature. On comprend maintenant pourquoi, *aux yeux du consommateur de mythes*, l'intention, l'adhomination du concept peut rester manifeste sans paraître pourtant intéressée: la cause qui fait proférer la parole mythique est parfaitement explicite, mais elle est aussitôt transie dans une nature; elle n'est pas lue comme mobile, mais comme raison. [...] la naturalisation

du concept [...] [est] la fonction essentielle du mythe [...] C'est pour cela que le mythe est vécu comme une parole innocente: non parce que ses intentions sont cachées: si elles étaient cachées, elles ne pourraient être efficaces; mais parce qu'elles sont naturalisées. [...] tout système sémiologique est un système de valeurs; or le consommateur du mythe prend la signification pour un système de faits: le mythe est lu comme un système factuel qu'il n'est qu'un système sémiologique.<sup>4</sup>

[We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature. We now understand why, *in the eyes of the myth-consumer*, the intention, the adhomination of the concept can remain manifest without however appearing to have an interest in the matter: what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason. [...] the naturalization of the concept [...] [is] the essential function of myth [...] This is why myth is experienced as innocent speech: not because its intentions are hidden – if they were hidden, they could not be efficacious – but because they are naturalized. [...] any semiological system is a system of values; now the myth-consumer takes the signification for a system of facts: myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system.<sup>5</sup>]

In describing the construction of myth, Barthes echoes the mechanisms I have attributed to the development of realist fiction. Realism, in other words, is a realological meta-discourse about the construction of myth. Realist fiction constructs itself through a sort of "reverse engineering", recreating self-consciously the mechanisms of mythology inside its own diegetic space for the purpose of deconstructing them.

Barthes argues that the most anti-mythical form of language lies, not in the prose of realist literature, but in the field of poetry. The danger of being directly anti-mythical, however, is that it gives rise to the insidious problem of reappropriation by myth. Barthes writes:

Alors que le mythe vise à une ultra-signification [...] la poésie au contraire tente de retrouver une infra-signification, un état présémiologique du langage; bref, elle s'efforce de retransformer le signe et le sens: son idéal – tendanciel – serait

d'atteindre non au sens des mots, mais au sens des choses mêmes. [...] C'est pourquoi notre poésie moderne s'affirme toujours comme un meurtre du langage, une sorte d'analogue spatial, sensible, du silence. La poésie occupe la position du mythe [...] Mais ici encore [...] c'est la résistance même de la poésie qui en fait une proie idéale pour le mythe: le désordre apparent des signes, face poétique d'un ordre essentiel, est capturé par le mythe, transformé en signifiant vide, qui servira à *signifier* la poésie. Ceci explique le caractère *improbable* de la poésie moderne: en refusant farouchement le mythe, la poésie se livre à lui pieds et poings liés.<sup>6</sup>

[Whereas myth aims at an ultra-signification [...] poetry, on the contrary, attempts to regain an infra-signification, a pre-semiological state of language; in short, it tries to transform the sign back into meaning: its ideal, ultimately, would be to reach not the meaning of words, but the meaning of things themselves. [...] This is why our modern poetry always asserts itself as a murder of language, a kind of spatial, tangible analogue of silence. Poetry occupies a position which is the reverse of that of myth [...] But here again [...] the very resistance offered by poetry makes it an ideal prey for myth: the apparent lack of order of signs, which is the poetic facet of an essential order, is captured by myth, and transformed into an empty signifier, which will serve to *signify* poetry. This explains the *improbable* character of modern poetry: by fiercely refusing myth, poetry surrenders to it bound hand and foot.<sup>7</sup>]

This caveat does not, however, exhaust the usefulness (or the problematic nature) of the mythological strategy. The demythologization of the Enlightenment consists of recognizing the triumph of reason as a myth; postmodernism combats the power of myth by a dual operation of disenchantment and mythical generation: in each case, therefore, the power of myth is combated, not by its disappearance, but by its proliferation and dissemination. Barthes comes to a similar conclusion:

Il apparaît donc extrêmement difficile de réduire le mythe de l'intérieur, car ce mouvement même que l'on fait pour s'en dégager, le voilà qui devient à son tour proie du mythe: le mythe peut toujours en dernière instance signifier la résistance qu'on lui oppose. À vrai dire, la meilleure arme contre le mythe, c'est peut-être de le mythifier à son tour, c'est de produire un *mythe artificiel*: et ce mythe reconstitué sera une véritable mythologie.

Puisque le mythe vole du langage, pourquoi ne pas voler le mythe?<sup>8</sup>

[It thus appears that it is extremely difficult to vanquish myth from the inside: for the very effort one makes in order to escape its stranglehold becomes in its turn the prey of myth: myth can always, as a last resort, signify the resistance which is brought to bear against it. Truth to tell, the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology. Since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth?<sup>9</sup>]

It is precisely this "mythifying in its turn" that characterizes the strategy of the realist text. Having posited the "real" as myth, it proliferates the myth of "real-ism", a counter-myth that is, nevertheless, couched in the discourse of mythology. It is within this strategic zone that we must locate our own critique.

## 2. Auto-critique

From the opening chapter I made "realism" a flexible term, a double-edged tool for the purposes of my analysis (in the same way that the "politics of representation", in the context of a politico-literary reading, has a double meaning). Realism, in its conventional sense, incorporates the masters of early nineteenth century literary realism, such as Balzac and Stendhal. But in the course of the thesis I have opened its scope to a second, quasi-etymological definition of the term: "real-ism", a "study" or "doctrine" of the "real". My work has thus alternated between broadening the horizon of literary realism (I have analyzed texts by Poe, Gautier and Dostoevsky: all were written at the historical culmination of the realist period, but none are strictly considered part of its canon) in the context of a newly defined philosophical "real-ism", and bringing it into the wider

critical sphere, whose contemporary framework is currently built on postmodern thought.

At no point should we lose sight of the political nature of this debate. At the same time, it must not be couched in terms of morality, party politics, class struggle or any other dialectical form. We must follow this condition since the debate does not involve values in a political structure, but rather the political structure itself, which is dialectical in nature. True to their postmodern derivations, the political questions at stake are eminently self-reflexive: in considering the politics of realism, I also engage the philosophical twist of calling into question the validity (or legitimacy, to use Lyotard's term) of political discourse. The results of such a strategy are twofold. First, politics is freed from the narrowness of its traditional restrictions. The postmodern condition witnesses instead the rise of meta-politics, an application of political self-reflexivity that attempts to free itself from the pettiness of dialectics. The second outcome is the necessary hybridization of discourses. Already we have witnessed the politicization of literature. This mode of dissemination extends not only to the "narrativization" (the "becoming-literary") of politics but also to the "threading" of multifarious discourses in the postmodern tapestry of signification.

I take this stance in a critical scene in which literary realism is usually dismissed as a failed pre-modern experiment. Ann Jefferson best sums up this sentiment:

Until very recently realism has appeared as a rather tedious topic on the critical agenda, and there has been little in either contemporary literature or critical thinking to enhance or enliven

a view of literature as "the objective representation of contemporary social reality" [...] The hatred of realism which Flaubert claimed as the inspiration of his own writing has continued to flourish in the fiction of the twentieth century [...] The only fiction that critics find critically interesting is *metafiction* [...] The novelist who merely seeks to provide an objective representation of contemporary social reality is a decidedly dull dog; and worse, a creature of bad faith whose lack of self-consciousness permits an unspoken and ideologically undesirable connivance with the forms of bourgeois culture.<sup>10</sup>

But, as Jefferson's comments show, there is a growing wave of critical interest in realism's value to contemporary thought. A notable feature of these dissonant voices is that, although a large share of the blame for realism's neglect must lie at the feet of postmodern prejudice, their agenda is rarely reactive (in both a philosophical and political sense). Critics such as Jefferson, Prendergast, Beizer, Schehr and Mossman, to name but a few, have attempted instead to bridge the two paradigms, to play their reflections one against the other. In this way, we end up with not only a postmodern analysis of literary realism, but also a strategic realist "reading" of postmodernism. In a sense, postmodernism meets its double, its "perverted" reverse perspective.

Viewing the problem from the perspective of "real-ism" opens the way for mapping of the strategic techniques and philosophical questions underlying these paradigms. Both realism and postmodernism deal with the same set of philosophical questions, but they are distinguished by their textual strategies. For example, postmodernism, despite Jameson's contentions, retains the modernist proclivity for shock, jarring the fabric of "reality" with its discursive caricatures. Realism, by contrast, prefers to employ a kind of deadpan irony whose darts are barely visible to the reader

unaware that he or she is being aimed at. Each strategy is the complement of the other. I regard with concern those texts that mistake the postmodern condition for a call to blind sedition against the principles of realism. "Roland Barthes," argues Catherine Belsey in her book *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*, "has emphatically taught us to renounce classical realism in favour of more disturbing, anarchic, discontinuous and thus blissful postmodern writing".<sup>11</sup> Belsey qualifies this statement somewhat by noting that "Barthes himself acknowledges that there is (on certain conditions) the possibility of finding excitement (and not merely contentment) in classical narrative". Her error, in my view, is to malign one strategic technique over another. Even more puzzling is the fact that Belsey refers earlier in her book to Barthes's *S/Z*. Her later claim thus overlooks the fact that Barthes is analyzing a "classical" text ("Sarrasine"), or that, as such, Balzac is being held up by Barthes as exemplary of the "modern" as opposed to the "classical". Indeed, Barthes does not argue for postmodern literature as opposed to the classic realism precisely because he understands there are a multiplicity of literary and philosophical techniques that may be used to address a set of philosophical questions. The ostentation of postmodern "play" is one strategy among many.

My position on realism is thus political in two senses. First, I am arguing that the decision to exclude or denigrate realism in contemporary literary criticism has itself been largely political, and has little to do with the validity or otherwise of realism. Indeed, the prevailing interpretation of realism – namely, what I have distinguished as "representation" – is a revisionist construction designed to promote the tools of (post)modernism.

Representation is linked inexorably to the model of subjectivity inherited from the Cartesian tradition. I am not in the business of blindly denigrating postmodern theory (it forms the basis for our own approach, after all) but I am nevertheless critical of its shortcomings. The second sense in which my position is political is its self-reflexive commentary on the nature of postmodern politics. The heterogeneity of this approach means that it is not possible to hide behind a façade of "objectivity". Literary interpretation is tied to political thought in the same way that politics employs narrative strategies to its own ends.

One inspiration for tracing the morphology of realism (in its traditional sense) into "real-ism" was an analogous transformation in the work of Gilles Deleuze. One of Deleuze's main concerns, for example, is the penetration of idealism into contemporary thought. Deleuze labels the interpretations spawned by this tradition as "rationalist". "In so-called rationalist philosophies, the abstract is given the task of explaining, and it is the abstract that is realized in the concrete. One starts with abstracts such as the One, the Whole, the Subject, and one looks for the process by which they are embodied in a world which they make conform to their requirements."<sup>12</sup> In other words, the goal of interpretation is to provide a homogenizing key into which the text can be neatly bundled, precisely what we accuse the poetics of representation of trying to do. Deleuze thus adopts the familiar philosophical dyad of rationalism and empiricism, radicalizing their meanings in line with his pluralist textual politics:

In a multiplicity what counts are not the terms or elements but what there is "between", the between, a set of relations which are not separable from each other. [...] To extract the concepts

which correspond to a multiplicity is to trace the lines of which it is made up, to determine the nature of these lines, to see how they become entangled, connect, bifurcate, avoid or fail to avoid the foci. [...] The concept exists just as much in empiricism as in rationalism, but it has a completely different use and a completely different nature: it is a being-multiple, instead of a being-one, a being-whole or being as subject. Empiricism is fundamentally linked to a logic - a logic of multiplicities.<sup>13</sup>

Terminological rejuvenation is an excellent critical technique. It complements the philosophical principle of "doubling": analysis uses the same term (realism, empiricism) to generate a double (multiple) meaning.

It is also the legacy of (post)modern thought. Heidegger uses it implicitly throughout his work, a large part of which involves the "uncovering" (*alatheia*) of philosophical terminology. Heidegger's etymologies, in my view, as much a search for an original meaning as an attempt to show the historical "play" of meaning. Whereas Heidegger reaches into the past in search of a critical terminology, postmodernism has tended to coin its own terminology. Derrida is the main proponent of this technique, inventing neologisms at will. In a famous essay from *L'Écriture et la différence*, Derrida explains in detail the justification of his technique. A curious problem arises, argues Derrida, when philosophy attempts to establish a mode of critical discourse. The problem lies in the positioning of the discourse in relation to its object. The discourse is traditionally seen to lie outside, or to be an extension of, its concrete examples. A critical discourse is thus given a privileged domain outside its own logic, and does not take itself for an object. Derrida diagnoses this privilege as a philosophical blind spot, taking structuralism as his example. He writes:

[L]a structuralité de la structure, bien qu'elle ait toujours été à l'œuvre, s'est toujours trouvée neutralisée, réduite: par un geste

qui consistait à lui donner un centre, à la rapporter à un point de présence, à une origine fixe. Ce centre avait pour fonction non seulement d'orienter et d'équilibrer, d'organiser la structure – on ne peut en effet penser une structure inorganisée – mais de faire surtout que le principe d'organisation de la structure limite ce que nous pourrions appeler le *jeu* de la structure. Sans doute le centre d'une structure, en orientant et en organisant la cohérence du système, permet-il le jeu des éléments à l'intérieur de la forme totale. [...] Pourtant le centre ferme aussi le jeu qu'il ouvre et rend possible.<sup>14</sup>

[The structurality of structure – although it has always been at work, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure – one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure – but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure. By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of the structure permits of the play of its elements inside the total form. [...] Nevertheless, the center also closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible.<sup>15</sup>]

There is already “play” within the structure, argues Derrida, but the move of using criticism against itself unleashes “play” in its full force. It is from this so-called “auto-critique” that we glimpse the two major strategies that emerged in the body of the thesis: the transparency of the self-reflexive term and the multiplicity of meaning generated through excess.

It is because of this auto-critical process that we must not lose sight of the word “realism”. Derrida’s example shows that we must perform criticism from “inside” the text, as it were. He therefore exhorts us not to cast aside the tools of a critical discourse, but to reshape them to suit the new tasks at hand. Derrida, drawing on the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, labels this technique “bricolage”:

[L]e langage porte en soi la nécessité de sa propre critique. [...] [il] consisterait [...] à conserver, en en dénonçant ici ou là les limites, tous ces vieux concepts: comme des outils qui peuvent

encore servir. On ne leur prête plus aucune valeur de vérité, ni aucune signification rigoureuse, on serait prêt à les abandonner à l'occasion si d'autres instruments paraissaient plus commodes. En attendant, on en exploite l'efficacité relative et on les utilise pour détruire l'ancienne machine à laquelle ils appartiennent et dont ils sont eux-mêmes des pièces. C'est ainsi que se critique le langage des sciences humaines. [...] Le bricoleur [...] est celui qui utilise << les moyens du bord >>, c'est-à-dire les instruments qu'il trouve à sa disposition autour de lui, qui sont déjà là, qui n'étaient pas spécialement conçus en vue de l'opération à laquelle on les fait servir et à laquelle on essaie par tâtonnements de les adapter [...] même si leur origine et leur forme sont hétérogènes, etc. Il y a donc une critique du langage dans la forme du bricolage et on a même pu dire que le bricolage était le langage critique lui-même.

[Language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique. [...] [it] consists in conserving all these old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used. No longer is any truth value attributed to them; there is a readiness to abandon them, if necessary, should other instruments appear more useful. In the meantime, their relative efficacy is exploited, and they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces. This is how the language of the social sciences criticizes *itself*. [...] The *bricoleur* [...] is someone who uses "the means at hand", that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them [...] even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous - and so forth. There is a critique of language in the form of *bricolage*, and it has even been said that *bricolage* is critical language itself.<sup>16]</sup>

Realism, therefore, requires a form of "auto-critique" that is willing to push its limits. Such has been the role of postmodern theory throughout my thesis: it provides a "supplement" (in Derrida's ambiguous sense of both an addition to and a substitute for) to the (dis)seminal discourse of realism. Whether the initialization of the term "real-ism" will survive matters very little. It is a tool, a piece of bricolage that will either continue by critical adoption or be discarded in favor of better tools. What matters, in the end, is

the task at hand - and that task is ongoing, since it lacks the truth-value that would allow us to label it a "conclusion".

### 3. Disengagement

There is something Machiavellian about telling the truth. Of course, to do so is exonerated as the highest, most honorable course of action. But this elevation is problematic and, as a rule, hypocritical. Telling the truth is virtuous as long as its tacit contract (namely, that it is preached about but never practiced) is adhered to. Hence the scandal of realism, a literature that promised to tell all, exposing the pharisaic standards so brilliantly satirized in works such as *Lucien Leuwen* and *Les Employés*. That realism's strategy opened an entirely different set of problems is evidenced by the reactions it provoked. The more cynical dimensions of the "truths" it told, for example, were long denigrated as scandalous. Realism thus ensnared its critics in a vicious paradox: not to tell the truth was "immoral", but candor led inevitably to its denunciation. The moral defense of truth was itself a lie.

The postmodern condition, in my view, is inspired by a mutation of realism's transparent qualities. Jean Baudrillard sees transparency as the paradigm for contemporary thought, political thought in particular. He writes:

Ce à quoi nous assistons, au-delà du matérialisme marchand, c'est à une sémiurgie de toute chose à travers la publicité, les médias, les images. Même le plus marginal et le plus banal, même le plus obscène s'esthétise, se culturalise, se muséalise. Tout se dit, tout s'exprime, tout prend force ou manière de signe. Le système fonctionne moins à la plus-value de la marchandise qu'à la plus-value esthétique du signe.

On parle de dématérialisation de l'art, avec l'art minimal, l'art conceptuel, l'art éphémère, l'anti-art, toute une esthétique de la transparence, de la disparition et de la désincarnation, mais en réalité c'est l'esthétique que s'est matérialisée partout sous

forme opérationnelle. C'est pour cela d'ailleurs que l'art est forcé de se faire minimal, de jouer sa propre disparition.<sup>17</sup>

[What we are witnessing, beyond the materialist rule of the commodity, is a semio-urgy of everything by means of advertising, the media, or images. No matter how marginal, or banal, or even obscene it may be, everything is subject to aestheticization, culturalization, museumification. Everything is said, everything is exposed, everything acquires the force, or the manner, of a sign. The system runs less on the surplus-value of the commodity than on the aesthetic surplus-value of the sign.

There is much talk of a dematerialization of art, as evidenced, supposedly, by minimalism, conceptual art, ephemeral art, anti-art and a whole aesthetic of transparency, disappearance and disembodiment. In reality, however, what has occurred is a *materialization* of aesthetics everywhere under an operational form. It is indeed because of this that art has been obliged to minimize itself, to mime its own disappearance.<sup>18]</sup>

Baudrillard, popularly misconceived as a champion of postmodernism, expresses his dismay about its political implications. Transparency metamorphoses from a critical tool designed to reveal truth (the act of moral exposure, for example) to a ruthless means of stripping away the protective layers of privacy. It is one thing to laugh at the emperor's lack of clothes, another when he decrees that everyone must follow his example. Transparency is thus an ambiguous political tool. It brings to light the inherent moral decay of any system through exposure, but simultaneously unleashes the potential for self-destruction. As Baudrillard puts it, "le mal équivaut simplement, sous toutes ses formes, à la règle fondamentale de réversibilité"<sup>19</sup> ["evil is equivalent, in all its forms, to the fundamental rule of reversibility"<sup>20</sup>].

*La Transparence du Mal* has two functions. In the first place, it belongs to the diagnostic genre propagated by the postmodern elite (a tradition inspired by Nietzsche, from Foucault's *Histoire de la folie* to

Deleuze's *Critique et clinique*). Secondly, it is a "call to arms" (although the analogy is anachronistic) for the postmodern age. Baudrillard's concern with postmodernism is not its lack of transparency, as we have seen, but its unconditional propagation of transparency as political currency. The political discourses of subversion and critique therefore need to reinvent themselves in this new economy of discourse. The favored tactics of institutional critique, from the Enlightenment philosophes to Sartre, consisted of two main weapons: exposure and engagement. These instruments have been blunted (or more correctly, compromised) by the mutation of their political targets, whose uptake of postmodern counter-tactics has been swift.

One technique of counter-attack has been to employ the principle of reversibility against one's critics. This tactic is particularly useful for blocking the effectiveness of exposure, since it allows the accused to redeploy that tactic against the accuser. In this scenario, the institution is exposed, so the institution in turn exposes its attacker, and the political process becomes mired in a game of accusations without conclusion. This mode of contestation draws the accuser and accused into an interminable struggle over integrity, effectively paralyzing criticism. A second, more subtle method is the voluntary transparency of an institution. It is particularly advantageous because self-exposure allows the institution to enact three further strategies. Firstly, it can deliberately provoke contestation as a decoy to mask its other nefarious activities. Secondly, a perception of self-transparency gives it a platform to demand transparency of its enemies, in a sort of preemptive strike. Thirdly, self-transparency may

lure its enemies into the ruse of cooperation. The weapons of exposure and engagement are therefore compromised by the postmodern strategy of transparency, leading to the deferential tactics of contestation and cooperation. The political machine has mutated to such an extent that it feeds on, solicits and engineers these forms of political protest to its own purposes.

For Baudrillard, the old tactics are ineffective because no matter how vehemently the institution is attacked, the rules of engagement dictate they must negotiate with the enemy. Any critic is therefore dependent on his or her target for the purposes of self-definition (negative or positive, it hardly matters). This form of unspoken collusion taints every major political counter-movement: feminism *needs* patriarchy; communism *needs* capitalism; their strategies require not only the deconstruction of their political targets, but of their own power structure once the task is achieved. These negotiations point to what Baudrillard labels as the birth of the "interactive being":

L'être interactif n'est donc pas né d'une forme nouvelle de l'échange, mais d'une disparition du social et de l'altérité. C'est l'autre d'après la mort de l'Autre, et qui n'est plus du tout le même. C'est l'autre qui résulte de la dénégation de différence. Mais l'altérité n'est pas la différence. On peut même penser que c'est la différence qui tue l'altérité. [...] L'implication des êtres et des choses n'est pas celle de la différence structurale. L'ordre symbolique implique des formes duelles et complexes qui ne relèvent pas la distinction du moi et de l'autre. Le paria n'est pas l'autre du brahmane – *leur destin et autre*. Ils ne sont pas différenciés à l'intérieur d'une même échelle de valeurs, ils sont solidaires dans un ordre immuable, dans un cycle réversible [...] *Car la différence est un utopie*, dans son rêve de départager les termes, et son rêve ultérieur de les réunifier.<sup>21</sup>

[The interactive being is therefore born not through a new form of exchange but through the disappearance of the social, the

disappearance of otherness. This being is the other after the death of the Other - not the same other at all: the other that results from the denial of the Other. [...] These days everything is described in terms of difference, but otherness is not the same thing as difference. One might even say that difference is what destroys otherness. [...] The way in which beings and things relate to each other is not a matter of structural difference. The symbolic order implies dual and complex forms that are not dependent on the distinction between ego and other. The Pariah is not the other to the Brahmin: rather, *their destinies are different*. The two are not differentiated along a single scale of values: rather, they are mutually reinforcing aspects of an immutable order, parts of a reversible cycle [...] *For difference is itself a utopia*: the idea that such pairs of terms can be split up is a dream - and the idea of subsequently reuniting them is another.<sup>22]</sup>

Baudrillard's challenge, therefore, is to find a way out of this philosophical circle. Such a task requires the construction of a critical discourse that can effect political change without being co-opted into the existing power structures.

It is to this end that I have drawn on realism. The strategies I have outlined throughout the thesis are just that: political tactics designed to address the problems put forward by the postmodern condition. I have therefore been careful to avoid placing postmodernism and realism into the differential relation of which Baudrillard is so critical. Realism is not the "other" of postmodernism, or vice versa. The reason for bringing them together is not to achieve a dialectical play of differences, but to release the otherness of each discursive thread. It is from this perspective that I reject any kind of "reconciliation" between realism and postmodernism. They are, after all, a utopian pair. Balzac and Stendhal are founders of realism, for example, but on what basis can we label them as the "same"? In what sense could we claim such a thing even about *La Peau de chagrin* and *Le Père*

*Goriot?* We cannot: any serious penetration of literary topology reveals inherent prejudices and inconsistencies, a discursive utopia. I am aware of this vaporous quality, yet I must hold onto the old tools: they have not quite finished serving their (my) purposes.

The strategy of the realists, which I have gathered under the rubric of "disengagement", is an incipient solution to the political problem of the postmodern condition. The problem with engagement was that it demanded a certain degree of surrender. It was an admission that one needed one's enemy. Furthermore, it could seduce revolutionary power with the promise of institutional power, a chance to be promoted into the established hierarchy, thus displacing a potentially seditious agenda by finding it a place within the institution. The institution could thus compromise and transform its enemies by means of engagement. Engagement became entrapment: to achieve one's aims meant disappearing as a revolutionary force. The rules of disengagement address the cynicism of the institution by practicing a form of reverse entrapment. This time it is the institution that must be seduced, even to the point of abolishing itself. Disengagement works by presenting its victim with a decoy. By concealing its purposes it gains access to the highest levels. In this context discourse does not "disappear" so much as it "un-appears", chameleon-like in its ability to divert attention from itself. The primary example of this phenomenon in realist literature, of course, is the widespread use of disguise. This strategy is a game of evil against evil, as Baudrillard points out, in which the necessary first step consists of lying to the liar (or in *Stendhal*: displaying hypocrisy to the hypocritical, and so on). This strategy has worked

remarkably well. After all, did we not assume for many years that realism equated to belief in a "real"?

#### 4. Multiplicity

Beyond the auspices of liberal pluralism, the new champion of postmodern thought is the concept of "multiplicity". This term has gained popularity in recent times because of its centrality, for example, to the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Its use is a response, like Baudrillard's, to the politics of "difference" and its ties to both metaphysics and dialectical reasoning. But exactly what "multiplicity" is, appropriately enough, is as multifarious and difficult to grasp as its name implies. Multiplicity, to summarize with crude brevity, is a philosophy of radical differences.

This contention forms the basis of Deleuze's *Différence et répétition*, which I touched on in the previous chapter. There I examined Deleuze's theorization of "pure difference", leaving aside the question of repetition. But there has been an implied examination of repetition throughout, particularly in the paradox of the Eternal Return. In speaking of repetition, it is necessary to highlight again the figure of the double. The double is not instituted by or exclusive to realist fiction, but is used more than ever as a political statement and a gesture of philosophical excess. This strategy disrupts the text in order to tear aside the veil of the "real" (in order to reveal, in the most playful of moves, yet another "real", another behind that, and so on).

What appear to be metaphors of the mimetic process (doubles, mirror images) are more complex than critics have traditionally cared to believe.

This complexity is driven by the pure difference generated by this new conception of repetition:

Nous sommes en droit de parler de répétition, quand nous nous trouvons devant des éléments identiques ayant absolument le même concept. Mais de ces éléments discrets, de ces objets répétés, nous devons distinguer un sujet secret qui se répète à travers eux, véritable sujet de la répétition. [...] nous devons distinguer deux formes de répétition. [...] dans un cas, la différence est seulement posée comme extérieure au concept, différence entre objets représentés sous le même concept [...] Dans l'autre cas, la différence est intérieure à l'Idée. La première répétition est répétition du Même, qui s'explique par l'identité du concept ou de la représentation; la seconde est celle qui comprend la différence, et se comprend elle-même dans l'altérité de l'Idée, dans l'hétérogénéité d'une << appréhension >>.<sup>23</sup>

[We are right to speak of repetition when we find ourselves confronted by identical elements with exactly the same concept. However, we must distinguish between these discrete elements, these repeated objects, and a secret subject, the real subject of repetition, which repeats itself through them. [...] we must distinguish two forms of repetition [...] in one case, the difference is taken to be only external to the concept; it is a difference between objects represented by the same concept [...] In the other case, the difference is internal to the Idea; it unfolds as pure movement, creative of a dynamic space and time which correspond to the Idea. The first repetition is repetition of the Same, explained by the identity of the concept or representation; the second includes difference and includes itself in the alterity of the Idea, in the heterogeneity of an "a-presentation".<sup>24</sup>]

This force makes the double a powerful political weapon. It can be used to "ghost" itself, to spawn its own double(s). In so doing it acts as a kind of Trojan horse, a privileged host that carries the destabilizing parasite of critique. Postmodern thought is viral, a comparison which has endured from Poe ("The Masque of the Red Death") to Antonin Artaud ("The Theater and the Plague") to Baudrillard ("Viral Hospitality").

Poe's example is particularly powerful. In "The Masque of the Red Death", the Prince creates a replica of his kingdom (repetition) with the

intention of avoiding the disastrous consequences of the Red Death (difference). As such he is open to the subversive power of a discursive unconscious by reproducing the double mode of repetition outlined by Deleuze. Indeed, the boundaries of the internal and external are concretized in Poe's story:

Les deux répétitions ne sont pas indépendantes. L'une est le sujet singulier, le cœur et l'intériorité de l'autre [...] L'autre est seulement l'enveloppe extérieure, l'effet abstrait. La répétition de dissymétrie se cache dans les ensembles ou les effets symétriques [...] c'est le masque, le déguisé, le travesti qui se trouve être la vérité du nu. Nécessairement, puisque la répétition n'est pas cachée par autre chose, mais se forme en se déguisant, ne préexiste pas à ses propres déguisements, et, en se formant, constitue la répétition nue dans laquelle elle s'enveloppe. Les conséquences en sont importantes. Lorsque nous nous trouvons en présence d'une répétition qui s'avance masquée, ou bien qui comporte des déplacements, des précipitations, des ralentissements, des variantes, des différences capables à la limite de nous entraîner fort loin du point de départ, nous avons tendance à y voir un état mixte où la répétition n'est pas pure, mais seulement approximative [...] L'intérieur de la répétition est toujours affecté d'un ordre de différence.<sup>25</sup>

[The two repetitions are not independent. One is the singular subject, the interiority and the heart of the other [...] The other is only the external envelope, the abstract effect. The repetition of dissymmetry is hidden within the symmetrical ensembles or effects [...] it is the masked, the disguised or the costumed which turns out to be the truth of the uncovered. Necessarily, since this repetition is not hidden by something else but forms itself by disguising itself; it does not pre-exist its own disguises and, in forming itself, constitutes the bare repetition within which it becomes enveloped. Important consequences follow from this. When we are confronted by a repetition which proceeds masked, or comprises displacements, slowdowns, variants or differences which are ultimately capable of leading us far away from the point of departure, we tend to see a mixed state in which repetition is not pure but only approximative [...] The interior of repetition is always affected by an order of difference.<sup>26</sup>]

The Prince's act of isolation concentrates the power of the Red Death. By retiring with his court to the rarefied sanctity of the abbey, he creates a

prophylactic space. As long as disease is kept outside of that space, protection is ensured. At the same time, however, it concentrates the power of the disease beyond control if, or rather when, it penetrates the protective shield. This situation is the central theme of Baudrillard's vision of the postmodern condition: the hopeless sequestering of discourses in an attempt to maintain their purity leads to devastation when their prophylactic shield is breached. More than a discursive metaphor, it describes exactly the stealth strategy of postmodern subversion, which uses the loopholes of any host to spread its "nefarious" broadcasts. This theory holds true whether we are talking about disease (AIDS, the postmodern plague), politics (terrorism, the postmodern enemy, no longer an outside state but an invisible, internal force), vandalism (computer viruses) and any other dimension.

The politics of microscopic excess, which today is the grammar of postmodern revolution, is thus drawn from the literary realism of the nineteenth century. In fact, the art of doubling is the culmination of the tripartite structure that makes up the overall political strategy developed in the thesis. We begin by recognizing the nature of the task at hand, insofar as the literary realism of the nineteenth century provides important tools for the postmodern revolutionary. In that step we realize that, as such, our institutional target is a metaphorical fortress waiting to be breached; not by storming it (the failed specter of the French Revolution still haunts us) but by undermining it, finding its holes, infiltrating and poisoning it from the inside. Secondly, we need to conceal ourselves from the prying eyes of the enemy. Victories must be feats of stealth rather than strength. Thirdly, and finally, we must keep the enemy occupied while launching an attack from

the flank. Hence the need for doubles, who are "spawned" or "ghosted" for just such a purpose.

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I wish to resist the idea of closure, to refuse the idea that, by convention, I must somehow form a "conclusion" to the analysis of realism. The aim of the thesis, after all, is not to provide a "last word" on the subject.<sup>27</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche conceives of his philosophy as a succession of arrows shot into the distance, which future philosophers will either discard or pick up and shoot still further. Nietzsche's metaphor summarizes the task of the contemporary critic: to provide a set of tools, a series of strategic directions, whose usefulness can be determined only by the readers and critics of the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1986), 89-90.

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, "Le Mythe, aujourd'hui" in *Œuvres Complètes* Vol. 1. (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 697-98.

<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 129.

<sup>4</sup> Barthes, "Le Mythe, aujourd'hui", 698-99.

<sup>5</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 129-31.

<sup>6</sup> Barthes, "Le mythe, aujourd'hui", 700-01.

<sup>7</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 133-34.

<sup>8</sup> Barthes, "Le Mythe, aujourd'hui", 702.

<sup>9</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 135.

<sup>10</sup> Jefferson, *Reading Realism in Stendhal*, xi

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 35.

<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (London: Athlone, 1987), vii. The quotes are from Deleuze's preface to the English translation.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 409.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 278-79.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 284-85.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *La Transparence du Mal: Essai sur les phénomènes extrêmes* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 24.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil* (London: Verso, 1993), 16.

<sup>19</sup> Baudrillard, *La Transparence du Mal*, 72.

<sup>20</sup> Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, 65.

<sup>21</sup> Baudrillard, *La Transparence du Mal*, 130-132.

<sup>22</sup> Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, 126-28.

<sup>23</sup> Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, 36.

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<sup>24</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 23-24.

<sup>25</sup> Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, 37-38.

<sup>26</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 24-25.

<sup>27</sup> The reference to "the last word" is to Maurice Blanchot's *L'Amitié*.

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