A Journal of International Literature and the Arts
American Beauty by David Hostetler
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MUNDUS ARTIUM

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Golden Girl by David Hostetler
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POEMA

el día hace su poema blanco
mueve un ocre en la hoja
inclina el rojo de la flor sobre el agua
añade un verde al vasto largo verde
del bosque que crea su propia sombra

el río cruza sonando
una muchacha mira como junta
un sol una casa y un camino

cubren las mariposas
un día al año al cielo
brotan secretamente
de árboles oscuros
atraviesan el mediodía
como nubes vivientes
y con alas verdes
se van a la montaña

son rayos de un mismo sol
las que horizontales llueven
las que entre todas van
la Mariposa

el canto bajo la bruma
alumbra en su vuelo
un camino
Homero Aridjis

POEM

the day makes its white poem
an ocher moves in the leaf
the flower’s red leans over water
adds a green to the vast broad green
of the forest which makes its own shadow

the river crosses echoing by

a girl looks at how a sun
joins a house and a road

butterflies one day
a year cover the sky
issue secretly
from dark trees

cross the noon
like living clouds

and with green wings
go off to the mountain

rays of one sun are those
who rain down horizontal

those who slip among the others
the Butterfly

singing under a haze
floods a road
in its flight
el alba
abre en el nido de un ave
la luz
el sol
mira el poema
ya vivo
mírala
el fruto
tiene peso
mueve su sombra
en el árbol

pájaros
tienen el color de la sangre
el color de la sombra
se desprenden hacia arriba
como frutos maduros de la rama
si uno extiende el brazo
son atravesados sin ruido
pero azules y blancos
se mueven en la mano

el fruto amanece en el árbol
lleno de silencios de vida
en su humedad asoma
algo semejante a este sueño
bajo el sol
solo y colgante y luminoso espera
jugo invisible está en su jugo
dawn
opens light in a bird's
nest

sun
looks at the now living
poem

looked at
the fruit
is heavy

its shadow moves
in a tree

birds
are the color of blood
the color of shadow

break loose upward
like ripe fruits on a branch

if one extends an arm
they criss-cross noiselessly

but in the hand they move
blue and white

the fruit dawns on a tree
packed with life's silences

in its dampness something
comes up like that dream

under the sun
it waits alone and hanging and luminous

invisible juice is in its juice
ángeles se sienten en la luz
entre la mirada y lo mirado
iluminan sin ser vistos
dejan en lo azul
una huella muy clara
y en los árboles
un fruto abierto
engendran en los ojos
un ser parecido al sueño
y en el corazón una dicha
parecida a ellos mismos

lo verde se hace azul a lo lejos
la montaña aparece como fruta quebrada
los barrancos se cubren por azules rizados
y por blancura que ha llovido del cielo
su bosque no se oye su sexo no se abre
en piedras rojah y animales furtivos
el agua y la mañana que rodean la montaña
van por el valle azules y como un ave sin tiempo
angels sit in the light
between a look and the looked at
they catch fire without being seen
leave a very clear
track in the blue
and in the trees
an open fruit
they engender a being
just like dream in their eyes
and in their heart a joy
just like what they are

a greenness turns to blue far off
the mountain looks like broken fruit
the gorges fill up with kinky blues
and whiteness washed down from the sky
their forest is not heard, their sex doesn’t open up
in red stones and furtive beasts
water and morning that surround the mountain
go through the blue valley and like a timeless bird

tr. Willis Barnstone
The door closed behind him with a faint voluptuous gush. She rose and greeted him with a clipped smile that hung disturbingly from the centre of her left cheek.

They sat down beautifully and she offered him a curiously long cigarette, sizing up his hands and his discreetly youthful face with a smart and polished eye.

She had only one eye, though this was not an imperfection in an otherwise fairly unobtrusive face: the second eye was permanently obscured by an enormous lock of ash-blond hair that shimmered under the lamplight.

"Well now Mr. Er —" She looked at his card. Mr. Er, how much did he charge, and Mr. Er desperate to keep her talking replied floatingly from his rather dark corner, flashing a gold tooth at her like a lighthouse beam, well, that depends, really, the usual fee he supposed, and a mite extra for correcting exercises.

Her hands were angelic the neck lean and graceful the face eaten up by her mouth and filled with an expression of intense cunning. She regarded him faintly out of the corner of her eye, not speaking but just watching him sitting there as his cigarette burned down. It was as if she were wondering what he would do next, if anything.

There was no ash-tray. He had been tapping the hottish ash into his jacket pocket faute de mieux but here was the stub of the cigarette getting smaller and ever smaller and nowhere to put it. (I'll never smoke another, was his one thought at the moment.)
Everything in that room was so woolly or hairy, carpets and furniture and tapestries, even the ceiling was lushly carpeted, and there was no fireplace at all.

She watched him intently with her long, bare back like a kite's tail almost turned to him. The cigarette was now no more than a quarter of an inch in length. The elaborate gilt crest, representing a heart-shaped knee — he took it to be her own private emblem that had been handed down to her from time immemorial — was beginning to singe.

He was watching her to see what she would do with hers, which was only a trifle longer than his own. Raising it to her lopsided lips as if for a last quick puff she rather ostentatiously swallowed it, and he, with a sudden dramatic flair for legerdemain, contrived to make his shoot up his right sleeve. He pressed his elbow down firmly on the arm of the chair, and smiled light-heartedly with the corners of his eyes. She smiled back unconcernedly and they started chatting about this and that with evident relief.

He was to instruct her in the art of poetry for a slight consideration, at least that was the idea. But such was the atmosphere of the place, every scrap of knowledge seemed to have vanished from his being.

She showed him some of her poems, most of which succeeded in giving him violent but exquisite sensations of shame. She watched his reactions with something like envy.

In the end she beckoned to him. Her mouth was like a scarlet crescent and now and then she showed the ends of teeth. When she talked the shape of her mouth seemed to produce the wrong sounds. It was like watching a film star speak from a screen miles away: the lips moved to sounds that struck the ear with a disquietingly dislocated effect not without horror in a human being. It was hardly an enviable situation for either of them.

But she beckoned and he could but obey. He sat down beside her on the sofa that was upholstered in long, red, silky hair like a wild thing. He watched her smile like a slice of orange biting higher and higher into her cheek and noted that the corner of her eye was like a semiquaver. He always noted things when he noticed them.

Her lips spoke to him from the middle of her cheek, like some voluble dimple. To give himself countenance, he worked his eyebrows up and down: he felt that if he had a face he must do something with it, and so he did, at the same time trying to appear nonchalant, rubbing the back of his head coltishly with his left shoulder. To hide his nervousness he grabbed what he imagined to be her hand but found with a sharp pang of embarrassment that it was nothing less than her
right foot which she had somehow slipped out of its pretty feathered buskin and twisted into her lap in the attitude of Buddha suppressing Mara.

He tried to make light of the matter, remarking playfully that she had fingers like commas and stroking her little toe.

She smiled with displeasure. But she seemed to him to be every second increasingly beautiful and more and more inaccessible. She fetched a dreamy sideways sigh which seemed to shake her terribly so he put out his arms and she sank into them like some expensive toy.

He was just going to attempt some less obvious embrace when he noticed that there was after all no eye under her hanging lock of hair. There was the shape of an eye and the socket it moved in and a perfect eyebrow painted above, as if plucked, so lifelike was the brushwork. But there were no eyelids. The eye was covered by a layer of skin — her complexion was purity itself — under which the shape of the eye shifted uneasily. (“Kiss it and see,” she offered.) It was all really rather omphallic. Right from the beginning he had suspected there must be something wrong with her, but not that.

He loosened his embrace and put her away from him. Her blank eye’s rosy lid began to puff up with unshed tears. He rose and left, saying goodnight rather baldly and leaving her huddled and silent, combing her ash-blond lock down into place again.

What a strange young woman, he said to himself, and puzzled about her all the way home.
John Berryman

The following three poems will be included in John Berryman's forthcoming book of poetry, His Toy, His Dream, His Rest, to be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in August, 1968.

If all must hurt at once, let yet more hurt now, so I'll be ready, Dr God. Push on me. Give it to Henry harder.
There lives content: one area, taking a bow, unbothered, where I can’t remember, lovely, somewhere down there,
or, better still, up here, where forest fires burn on for years. From the fire-towers watch is kept on diminuendo flaming.
Each jack be the custodian of his desires from which he sprang & sullen then he slept until a coda of blaming.
—You do. She do. I will be with you-all, in a little little silence, Mr Bones.
—I see I depend on you for nothing. —Try Dr God, clown a ball, low come to you in the blue sad darkies' moans worsening than yours, too.

Now that my one are out, I indulge my rage, he cried, against that self-indulgent one forty-odd years ago.
I am alone & I tear out that page its sympathies & desecration up to this instant. No,
I condemn you now to India & China, buckets of hunger, and without a friend. At the end of the Phaedo dies the wise man, when idiots go dine condemned. You took a pistol in your hand and made your blood to flow.

Stunt my capacity before you go. Thank you. I'll see you out now to Hell Gate, the cashier's cage. I stand here thrashing with a good cheque, without identification, a dead plate, dried out, afraid of water, sage.

I dangle on the rungs, an open target. The world grows more disgusting dawn by dawn. There is a 'white backlash'. When everything else fails on the auto, park it & move away slowly. Obsolescent, on the rungs, out of the car, 'ashes'.

Ashes, ashes, All fall down. I will meet you then in the middle of the maidon jump at monsoon dawn. The bearer weeps, I'm going out so early. How to account for me? I want her dearly but being ill & so on

I stumble at the lift. Henry is dying. Erect-squat in the corner, sweating, the bearer is crying. I don't seem to make it down Shall I finish on the landing? They have all waited the foes fierce, others whom Henry baited a forest of bottles.

—Mr Bones, you a clown.
THE POET AND THE WORLD FAIR

HANS ECON HOLTHUSEN

World Fairs are essentially optimistic, institutionalizing, as it were, a belief in the future, in progress, and in the world’s boundless technical potentialities. At World Fairs humanity presents itself in an artlessly stylized yet at the same time dehydrated mood, devoid of tragedy, humour, and irony. It ignores its disasters, hides its neuroses, its enduring iniquity, the absurdity of its political and social conditions; it forgets, one might say, its fallibility. For six months, within the confines of the fairground, humanity makes the impression of having become perfectly reasonable. The future of the world is no longer regarded as an unknown quantity, but as an object of human planning. The problems it must solve in order to survive are, for instance, defined in our memorandum in the following manner: 1. The securing of happiness through social means, that is to say through an equilibrium between the individual and society; 2. The conquest of the planet through international cooperation and technical assistance; 3. The conquest of space; 4. Freedom and self-development for all peoples. This could be expanded still further. There are very specific, very concrete demands that might be raised in the name of the future, demands of almost philosophical relevance, for, say, the increased production of artificial fertilizers for the developing countries and of the anti-baby pills for their womenfolk. And there is a quite general postulate of Kantian imperativeness the fulfillment of which is seen as a conditio sine qua non for the very possibility of a future: this is the preservation of peace, the “great peace” in the age of the nuclear menace. This peace is, not to
be secured by offering prayers to the gods; it has to be organized, organized by a humanity that is currently fighting national, colonial, and civil wars in various parts of the world, and which has not seen its way over the past twenty-two years to liquidate even its last world war in the legal sense by the conclusion of a peace treaty.

One feels compelled to ask oneself what the poet's function could be at such a fair. I think I know what is meant by the expression "happiness through social means": it is a goal to be seriously contemplated from its different aspects by engineers and sociologists, food experts and political scientists, UN officials and revolutionary ideologists; but I am not sure whether this kind of happiness is identical with the one that a poet has in mind when he uses the word happiness. "Happiness through social means": for the poet, as I understand him, this is a tragicomical misunderstanding, a linguistic affront even, an unreasonable demand upon his powers of invention. The relation of the poet or artist to society and politics, Wystan Hugh Auden once said, is more difficult now than it has ever been before "because while he cannot but approve of the importance of everybody getting enough food to eat and enough leisure, this problem has nothing whatever to do with art, which is concerned with singular persons, as they are alone and as they are in their personal relations."

I quote these words of Auden because they call to mind a factor that is these days largely ignored in the literary discussions taking place in my country or is branded as being "egocentric" and "socially irrelevant": the basically personal and intimate nature of a poetic motive. I have invoked Auden to answer a pressing need, to provide a necessary rejoinder in a critical argument. But even Auden's dictum should not be taken as axiomatic but understood in a dialectical sense. He himself adds the qualification "except in Africa or still backward semifeudal countries." We would not deny the basic possibility of a poet being moved by political and social ideas. There are moments in history, there are phases in the evolution of peoples, societies, social classes or minorities, when the poet — not every poet but the poet whose imaginative powers are genuinely caught up in the experience of group solidarity — may emerge as the spokesman of the community and play an active part in the shaping of its political and social awareness. For the 19th century I would name Walt Whitman, who may be seen as the prophet of North American democracy and undoubtedly saw himself in this role. Yet it cannot be said that he wrote his poems "on behalf of society." He was not merely the poetic loud-speaker of North American society, nor was he the author or ghostwriter of its Constitution; he, too, was an individual, a creative provocateur who, in the name of a
personal vision, sought to rouse contemporary society or, more precisely, that part of society which is receptive to poetry, to a new self-awareness.

As far as our own era is concerned, it can hardly be contested that, at the present hour of history, there is no better or more pressing subject for, say, Negro poets such as Langston Hughes, Aimée Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, than the lot of their race, their sufferings, their fight for freedom, their hopes. Here we find the poet as a spokesman of collective interests which are, curiously, not only comprehended outside of the collective but also shared. It was in September 1952, at the second “Biennale Internationale de Poésie” in Knokke-le-Zoute, that Léopold Senghor cried out to his white brothers in Apollo: “Picture yourself waking up one morning, naked and black, in the awareness of being fixed by the corrosive stare of a white man.” I was present as he spoke these words and recall vividly how they electrified me, how I felt: tua res agitur. This was the moment at which Senghor emerged as the protagonist of the convention. Taken as a call for solidarity with the dignity of the black man in his struggle for political and social emancipation, his words had become for me a mark of my own part in contemporary history.

And yet it would be risky to conclude from such examples that in some such particular case, which the political ideologist would call the ideal case, the “interests” of the poet could literally coincide with those of society. When Lenin read Mayakovski’s poem “150 Million”, a poem almost unsurpassed in its expression of the collective fervour of revolutionary Russia, he directed that a mere 1500 copies should be printed: “for libraries and cranks.” From Lenin’s point of view this was, moreover, an astonishingly liberal decision, for, like Marx, his aesthetic tastes were conservative in the extreme. Mayakovski’s revolutionary poem was, therefore, anything but the expression of the idea that the father of the revolution had of himself and his mission. Could it be that the word “freedom” as used by the poet connotes something other than the word used by political practitioners, even though the poet might imagine himself to be talking of the same thing? Does the word “freedom” as used in a poem not imply something different from the same word painted on a wall? Is there not a problem of communication between poet and homo politicus, a kind of credibility gap? Obviously there is, but in what does it consist?

We are living in an age of extreme social awareness. It is no longer theology and philosophy that head the hierarchy of our sciences, but sociology and political science, psychology and behaviourism. How is a poet to find his bearings in such an age? I can imagine that his horror at the formulation “happiness through social means” might bring him
to the realization that, in so far as he is a poet, he is irrevocably out on his own. As plausible as Aristotle's definition of man as a zoon politikon or animal sociale may seem, the poet will insist that this definition overlooks a point of paramount importance, overlooks the Now and Nevermore nature of his own existence, the irrecoverability and non-substitutability of man's hypostatic and self-cognizant existence as a person. This is the mystery that Kierkegaard defined in the language of philosophy when he said: "Every individual is the exception." How, in the face of his future state of non-existence, can the poet envisage departing from this world without having said what only he, of all persons, is able to say of himself and his personal existence on this planet? How can he ever experience the certainty of having written a final line if he has failed to put into words the unique shock of self-recognition, the shock that Adam must have felt when God called down to him: Adam, where art thou?

The personal, that is to say the unique element of his existence, manifests itself as language. The poem he writes may be understood by others, but only he can write it. In language he experiences the absolute quality of his freedom: freedom to give voice to something never voiced before, to attempt a new "raid on the inarticulate" and so to annul older conventions of perception, sensibility and language. This achievement may be seen as the conquest of new areas of human awareness by poetry and as "positive phenomenology"; any genuine work of art, Max Scheler has said, adds to the material values of this world. Or it may be seen as a permanent criticism of the language of society. This I mean in the sense of Shelley's remark that poetry "creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration." The freedom of the poet, being identical with the uniqueness of his language, involves in this sense an element of social protest and possibly also of revolution.

If you ask me, therefore, whether it is the function of the poet in our time to create "new social myths" in order to prepare the way for the technical and social advances of humanity with stirring calls for action, or whether his function should rather be that of "defending mankind from a levelling conformity", the I would certainly favour the latter. In my view one can leave it to East German Party bards to celebrate "their" cosmonauts who have allegedly proved that the heavens are empty, that is to say uninhabited by any deity, and in this way degrade poetry into becoming a handmaid of political propaganda. I take my stand with the contemporary genius who had it in him to transpose the eternal theme of love and death into the language of his
time; I would like to endorse the words that Dylan Thomas found to define his poetic calling in his poem "In my Craft or Sullen Art:

Not for the proud man apart
From the raging moon I write
On these spindrift pages
Not for the towering dead
With their nightingales and psalms
But for the lovers, their arms
Round the grief of the ages,
Who pay no praise or wages
Nor heed my craft or art.

Still and all, it hardly behoves one who maintains that the important thing is to defend "mankind from a levelling conformity" to question the function of a World Fair. What this Fair demonstrates — the essential unity of the modern world under the auspices of technical civilization — is a fascinating experience of this age; it is an historical fervour which lays hold of us all. But this idea of world unity and — for the first time in human history — of a planetary destiny, requires, if it is to be accepted by mankind, a complementary and opposing idea as a corrective: the idea of autonomous regional cultures. An incontestable and, one might say, god-given objection to the levelling processes of world civilization is to my mind to be found in the very diversity of languages spoken by the peoples of this world and cultivated by their poets. My compatriot Hans Magnus Enzensberger has claimed that we are today concerned with a "universal language of modern poetry" and he has attempted to demonstrate this theory in an anthology of contemporary poems drawn from sixteen languages. Ironically, the impression gained when reading this book is quite the opposite of that intended. What becomes evident is the fact that the poets of all countries are far more concerned with themselves and with each other, with their predecessors and contemporaries in their own literature, than with the poets of other countries. In the struggle for a personal expression of uncompromising truth, any coming-to-grips with the poetic traditions of their own country has always been incomparably more important to them than contact with the poets of other languages. It also becomes apparent that the clocks of linguistic evolution run differently in the various countries, in Poland differently than in Russia, in Spain differently than in England, in North America differently than in Germany. In short, what becomes manifest is not a single universal language of modern poetry with national linguistic overtones but the world as reflected in sixteen languages.
This plea for the autonomy of regional cultures within an all-encompassing planetary civilization should be seen as a logical extension of my attempt to interpret the function of the poet from the aspect of the non-substitutable uniqueness of his existence.

If on the one hand I confess to being stirred by the voice of the modern Orphée noir as the voice of the howling, accusing, rejoicing collective, which seeks to raise its head among the community of free and independent peoples after centuries of slavery, but on the other hand attach such great value to the status of the individual in the face of the trend towards the socialization of humanity, I do not admit to any contradiction but I see rather two complementary aspects of one and the same issue. When Senghor, in his book *Negritude and Humanism*, outlines a variant form of human civilization heretofore despised in Europe as “primitive”, and when he in this way makes us aware of rich regional cultures such as those of Africa, cultures whose values must not be allowed to be lost lest we die in the chill of our worldwide technical civilization, then I understand him perfectly well. What he writes concerning the “intuitive”, the “all-encompassing” and “tactile” intelligence of the African is in all likelihood to be taken as the expression of a dialectic awareness of a dual culture to which he, as a highly sophisticated “Colonial Frenchman”, feels himself to belong, and hence as criticism of the classical Cartesian-Voltairean convention of French thinking. But one might also take it — don’t you think? — as an alignment with those human forces that we have called “poetic”.

In conclusion I should like to emphasize that it has not been my intention to play the aesthetic principle off against the ethical imperative which demands that we should take up arms and fight for the causes of justice on earth and “happiness through social means”. What I envisage is rather that peculiar, socially unmediated humanism inherent in poetry. The spokesman of the New Left that are today holding the centre of the stage in Germany assert that man is being alienated from his nature through the elimination of the human factor in production methods, and they propose to overcome this alienation by bringing about a radical change in our social structure. Students who regard any policeman as a fascoid phenomenon demand from their professors a “positive Utopia” in the name of which a process of continuous revolution may be initiated. For my own part I find it less difficult to believe in the Holy Trinity than in a “positive Utopia”, which seems to me nothing less than the rejection of all historical experience and a radical denial of human nature. But I ask myself whether I should not cite the concept of alienation in order to illustrate my meaning when I speak of the socially unmediated humanism of the poet. To me the poet is Adam,
Adam out of the Book of Genesis, exiled into historical time yet still retaining memories of Paradise. Him I seek in his moment of truth, that is to say in that situation which I regard as the most tremendous challenge to his imaginative powers: Adam in his mortality, the finite creature under the gaze of eternity. You will recall how Michelangelo depicted this situation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel: as a personal confrontation between God and Man — with that dramatic gap between the finger of God and the finger of Man which has been likened to an interval in Beethoven’s music. What fascinates me most of all in this picture is Adam’s face, its completely ordinary, completely classical cast of features which are nevertheless so inexhaustibly expressive that one could spend a lifetime trying to fathom them out. To me they are the features of the poet in a state of primordial freedom: the features of the young Mörike writing the line “O flaumenleichte Zeit der dunklen Frühe” (“O time of the dark morn, light as dawn”), the features of man in Paul Valéry’s “Aurore”. Here, at the dawn of creation, I see man free of all the alienation that his existence has undergone in history, and it occurs to me that in his original state he is not zoon politikon but a nestling, “a child of the house”. He has heard the words: “I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine”, and it is up to him to demonstrate this sense of “belonging” in his language, that is to say to restore his own name and the names of all things and creatures as though they had never been named before. Whoever finds the word, for himself and for the Now and Nevermore nature of his existence, has also found it for all others who are receptive to poetry. In this sense poetry is also a medium — if not of society then certainly of human communication.

tr. Eva Hesse
Marc Alyn

ANNEES-LUMIERE

Années-lumière ! Qui oserait habiter sa vie
Et prêter l'oreille à la voix ? En forant les espaces
Extérieurs, ce siècle a mis au secret l'absolu.
Dévoré de détails, le grand Tout s'effrange et le simple
Se dérobe en même temps que les signes. Nul n'écoute

Ruisserle la parole ou le silence au fond de soi
Car l'abîme-matière sous l'esprit creuse sa tombe
Isolant le vif du dedans, du dehors et des autres
Par l'hypnose des sons et le stupéfiant-image.
Où la pénombre ? la distance ? la terre où mûrir

Le secret qui nous crée en forme d'êtres, non de nombres
Inertes, livrés aux miroirs comme au serpent l'oiseau ?
Années-lumière ! Chaque jour l'homme s'éclaire et fond
Un peu plus dans l'acide des choses; voulant s'accroître
D'elles infiniment, il leur ressemble et s'abolit,

Diminué de son désir, possédé par l'objet
Qui soustrait la liberté du destin bref pour jaillir
Du néant, emplir l'espace tel un levain stérile
Et clouer l'espèce double au seul univers visible.
Années-lumière ! La matière ronge en nous l'humain

Et s'enfle de nos pertes, semblable au Temps qui se fonde
Sur les sables mouvants, les cendres, l'inverse semence
Des vies désagrégées dont sa propre existence flambe,
Nous exilant dans la chair elle-même garrottée
Par la fatalité de l'acte hostile à l'autre monde,

Fruit de son arbre séparé qui dans l'herbe fermente
Travaillé non de sève mais de sinistres fourmis.
Ancrés ici par les chaînes de l'âpre pesanteur,
Tanguant entre le creux de naître et le creux de mourir,
Asservis à la forme épaisse, exigante et poreuse,
Marc Alyn

LIGHT YEARS

Light-years! Who would dare dwell within his life
And lend his ear to the voice? By drilling the outer
Spaces, our century has put the absolute into solitary confinement.
Exhausted with details, the Almighty is unravelling and the innocent
Withdraws at the same time as omens. No one hears

The word streaming down and the silence in his heart
For the abyss of matter digs under the spirit its grave
Separating the quick from what is within and without, and from others
By the hypnosis of sound and the stupifying-picture.
Where is the dark? the distance? the land where the secret

Grows that creates us in the form of beings, not inert
Numbers, given over to mirrors as the bird to the serpent?
Light-years! Each day man discovers more and melts
A bit more into the acid of things; wishing to increase
Infinitely from them, he takes on their image and abolishes himself,

Reduced by his desire, possessed by the object
That removes the freedom of the brief fate in order to gush forth
From the void, filling space like sterile leaven
And nailing the double species on to the one visible universe.
Light-years! Matter erodes the human part in us

And swells with our losses, like Time founded
On quicksand and ashes and the inverse seed
Of disintegrated lives with which its own existence blazes,
Exciting us in our flesh, itself bound
By the fatality of the act hostile to the other world,

Fruit of its separated tree fermenting in the grass,
Obsessed not with sap but with sinister ants.
Anchored here by the chains of harsh gravity,
Pitching between the void of birth and the void of death,
Enslaved to our solid, demanding and porous form,
L'élan seul, peut-être, nous sauverait, axe de l'âme
Où s'enroule le fil du souffle — mais nous succombons
Aux délices de l'immobilité, ignorant l'art
D'éluder les confins, dédaignant la métamorphose
La féeerie, le divin au profit du pli des surfaces,

Et nous payons de lambeaux d'infini ce morne orgasme:
Être pris par la proie nourrie de notre mort, défaits
En cela même que nous fimes, néant maquillé
Dont la bouche sans vocables épuse la nappe lourde
Du génie (songe en dogme serti) et de la mémoire.

Années-lumière ! Je vois l'humain tituber sous l'amas
Des monstres nés de la Machine inlassable, multiple
Et une comme le Mal. Ainsi que dans les scènes peintes
Aux murs des cloîtres de Toscane, les os proférés
Par l'ange giclent, recréés, du sépulcre, les choses

Apparaissent parées, d'elles surgies, vers nous venant
(Matière encore sous le galbe, mais feignant la face),
Macabre cohorte à l'échine luisante et glacée,
Désir imposé du dehors à nos sens, mélangé
A notre sang par l'image et la fable jusqu'au cri

Ressassées, plongeant dans l'inconscient d'aigres racines,
Rétrécissant au rôle de soc la royale étrave
Conçue pour la course hauturière, les vents, les marées,
Enfermant l'être en un destin plus étroit que la fosse
Finale où tout s'entasse et fait mêmes gravats. Années-

Lumière, voici l'ère des solitudes grégaires,
Du collectif anonymat et des vies parallèles.
S'aggrave le jour sur le front cimenté de la terre,
Piste d'envol vers les soleils qui cuisent les espaces
Sillonnés de comètes, premier barreau de l'échelle

Que le Chiffre appuie aux astres pour enjamber l'éther
Silencieux. S'ouvrent aux pas de l'espèce les passes
Du cosmos, univers courbe comme un ventre où se perdre
A jamais... Dans la marge, plus bas, l'homme-corps se tasse
En l'âlvéole lisse, repu de lueurs, de gestes;
Only the taking off perhaps would save us, axis of the soul
Where the thread of our breath is wound — but we succumb
To the joy of immobility, not knowing the art
Of avoiding boundaries, scorning the metamorphosis,
The fantasy, the divine, the profit from the dip of surfaces,

And with shreds of infinity we pay for that solemn orgasm:
Being caught by the prey fed on our death, defeated
By the very thing we did, painted void
Whose wordless mouth exhausts the heavy cover
Of genius (a dream set in dogma) and of memory.

Light-years! I see what is human totter under the heap
Of monsters born from the tireless Machine, many
And one like Evil. As in scenes painted
On the walls of Tuscan cloisters, the bones uttered
By the angel, spurt, reanimated, from the grave, things

Appear bedecked, rising up from themselves, coming toward us
(Matter still under the curve, but pretending to be a face),
A dire cohort with its shining icy spine,
A desire imposed from the outside on our senses, mixed
With our blood by image and fable rehearsed

Until it shrieks, plunging to the subconscious of bitter roots,
Retracting to the role of ploughshare the royal stern-post
Conceived for the course on the high seas, winds and tides,
Enclosing our being within a narrower destiny than the final
Ditch where everything fills up and turns to dust. Light-

Years, this is the age of gregarious solitudes,
Of the anonymous collective and parallel lives.
The day grows heavy on the cemented brow of the earth,
A flight strip toward suns that burn spaces,
Furrowed with comets, the first rung of the ladder

Which the Number leans against the stars in order to cross the silent
Ether. The fairways of the cosmos open out to the steps
Of mankind. It is a universe rounded like a belly where we can be lost
Forever . . . In the margin, down below, bodily man huddles
In a smooth cavity, satiated with flashes of light and gestures;
Verre, béton, métal : tout son royaume, pyramide
Ou cabine spatiale lancée dans l'éternité
Des sables ou du ciel, déserts analogues, lieux clos
Habités par l'effroi des immensités froides, pris
En la toile du temps qui répète ses fils, niant

La fin (mais la vie non vécue comme l'autre s'éteint)
Par l'incessant retour des mêmes instants nuls, l'Histoire
Se dévidant ailleurs, tumulte d'êtres, buée vague
Sur d'étranges sangs... Années-lumière ! La nuit s'en va.
L'été perpétuel établit sa loi sur les sources.
Glass, concrete, metal: his entire kingdom, pyramid
Or space cabin hurled into the eternity
Of sand or sky, similar deserts, closed places
Inhabited by the fright of cold immenseness, caught
In the net of time repeating its threads, denying

The end (but life not lived like the other goes out)
By the ceaseless return of the same voided moments, History
Unravelling elsewhere, a tumult of beings, a vague vapor
On strange blood... Light-years! Night goes off.
Perpetual summer establishes its law on the springs.

tr. WALLACE FOWLIE
Discussion of *Momente* and *Plus-Minus*

KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN

*MOMENTE*

Self-portrait, which was requested for the program of the premiere of "Momente" in 1965 for the music festival of Donaueschingen.

Until the end of my studies, my mind was so stuffed with dualistic conceptual pairs as object-subject, intellect-feeling, being-senses, material-ideal, thematic-athematic, tonal-atonal, periodic-unperiodic, homophonic-polyphonic, sound-noise, tone-silence, etc., that a latent mistrust of anything with only two values grew in me: In my first works I restricted myself to an extremely monistic way of thinking which I slowly expanded into a more complex one.

Vertical and horizontal and vertical and diagonal and vertical and spatial and curved.

Homo and poly and homo and hetero and homo and mono and homo and. And and either and or and and.

AND.

When I write a note and leave it, leave it even years later — I know the moment precisely that I leave it for good — then it stands.

Up to now I have finished the following works: *Kreuzspiel, Punkte, Kontra-Punkte, Klavierstücke I-XI, Zeitmasse, Gruppen, Gesang der Jünglinge, Zyklus, Carré, Refrain, Kontakte, Plus Minus, Mikrophonie I, Mixtur, Mikrophonie II, Telemusik, Solo, Prozession*. They are finished. Every work must go through a period when I live with it, pursue it; I must be present at performances, direct, play, test it, hear it again and again.
Then comes the point when I let it go. For the “Momente”, the “Hymnen”, this time is not yet over. From my twenty-third to my thirty-ninth years, I composed on the average one work per year. In every work I am concerned with the totality, limited though my capacity be. I am no imitator who wants to do something better than his predecessor. When someone hits the bull’s-eye, the whole shooting gallery rings and all the lights go on — for a moment. Everything else is practice, discipline, perseverance, industry, patience.

One can ally oneself only with the future.

His work and your work and my work play a TRIO, their works accompany.
Your work and my work play a DUO, his work accompanies.
Your work plays a SOLO, my work accompanies.
My work plays a SOLO, your work accompanies.
My work and I play a DUO, the second I accompanies.
My work and I and the second I play a TRIO, the third I accompanies.

“Reflection is repetition”.

Monism — dualism — trialism — quatralism — quintalism — sexualism — Materially correct form and formally correct material and form of material-form and experience and invention and discovery imagination → experiment

work

having ← seeking

finding

Seeking or finding?
Seeking AND finding.

Many artists claim that they don’t seek, they find. They mean by this that they feel superior to those who seek. Every artist seeks, that is, he is more perceptive than other people; his eyes and ears are wide open, and the power of his concentration is so intense that very little escapes him. He cannot say in words what he is seeking; however,
almost everything he sees he leaves alone; and — if he is lucky — he will suddenly stop and pick up something that to him appears more valuable than anything else. Then he finds, and if he entertains no doubts, he is convinced of his find.

Naturally one can also go along unheedingly,—“nichts zu suchen war mein Sinn”,—and find something. But the big expeditions are more adventurous—with divining rods, sonic depth-finders, compasses, astronomical charts, tuning-forks (oxygen apparatus for high sports), magnetophones, provisions for months, time and more time,—led by the sixth sense. The “lucky finder” knows what he can do with what he finds. He feels as though he has always sought what he has found. He opens himself to something new which was missing in his being. How much he missed it, he can say only when he has found it.

My reflection changed through Webern’s music.
Webern’s music changed through my reflection.
My reflection changed through my reflection on Webern’s music.

It is confusing that notes are supposed to express something. The vibrations of the notes carry over to the person, and how he describes with words and gestures his own resonance is another matter. If the notes are arranged in a particular way, then people who have the same emotional disposition are affected in a similar manner. Some sounds vibrate for a long time in the hearer, some only a short time, some not at all. Meditation and appreciation, discussion and silence are signs of the actual resonance. After a little time, everything becomes memory, and one must listen to the music again if one wants to vibrate. Some people fall into excited vibration at only single unfamiliar tones; others need more complicated patterns, they are connoisseurs and selective. Exciting music can have the effect of a drug, another kind of music, the effect of a great thought which changes all thinking and action. Thus every method and every combination of certain methods has its effect, and the choice must be careful. However, if one doesn’t know the general effect of the methods — if they are new even to the person using them—, then he must rely entirely on himself and let the new methods act on him and assume all responsibility for the decision as to which methods he wants to use and which not.

After all, “feeling” and “presentiment”, are always filtered through the thought process in the process of composing, in which one must formulate what sounds, or how something can be made to sound; no matter what reason lies behind the origin of the “meaning” of the composition. That is valid even where musical thinking negates itself — as quite a few claim about themselves — with the motivation of giving a better chance to the “irrational”.
The present anti-positions are no longer really anti, but rather spirals through which the thinking climbs to the heat of extreme positions, in order to enable sharper formulations. However, as soon as such a position is assumed momentarily, another is immediately approached, in order to bring more forces into play. Not a dialectic limited to two positions, but trialectic, quartalectic, etc. The dodecaphonists have made only one real mistake, that is leaving out all gradations between the diatonists and themselves, and not understanding the twelve as a transitional note.

One must understand the treatises on “fullness-emptiness”, on “tone-silence”, on “sound-noise”, etc. in the same way. The question has to be asked after what and before what and simultaneous with what something is “how empty”, “how quiet”, and “how noisy”.

To compose composing.

The composition Momento is divided into three moment-groups: I call them M-moments, K-moments, and D-moments. This is the form-scheme of Momento in 1961 for solo soprano, four choral groups and thirteen instrumentalists:

Twenty-nine moments (form-parts) are designated with letters and are to be read in the following order: I(m) - M(m) - MK(d) - M(k) - MK - M - MD(k) - M(d) - MD - I(d) - KD(m) - etc. (This is the order
of the version I—as conductor—selected for the October 1965 tour.) M-
Moments concentrate more on melody composition (monody-hetero-
phony), K-moments on sound composition (homophony), D-moments
on duration composition (polyphony).

Around “pure” moments M,K,D, which reflect into themselves
as well as into one or both of the others. If, in such double reflection, the
reflection of the others is weak, then this is indicated with small letters
in the index; if it is almost equally strong, capital letters stand next to
each other. M(m) is a moment with “feedback” self-reflection; likewise
D(d-m), however with transition from self-reflection to reflection
of M; with DK(d) and DK(k), the feedback strengthens at any given
time one form of double reflection. Further, various numbers of so-called
interpolations from adjacent moments are inserted into every moment—
depending on context—which “remember” previous ones or “announce”
coming ones. I-moments (“informal”, also “indeterminate”) neutralize
the three moment-groups.

Further details on the ambiguous form of Momente and on the
rules according to which the conductor determines a version of the form
succession are described in Texte I/II (Verlag DuMont-Schauberg,
Köln; see Vol. I “Invention and Discovery”, “Momentform”, and
Vol. II, Introduction to Momente and “Ambiguous Form”.)

From January to April 1962 all the K-moments, i, i(m), i(d), as
well as M(m) and MK(d) were worked out and—except for i—
premiered, on commission, by the West German Radio in Cologne,
under the direction of the composer.

The remaining M-moments and D-moments were worked out in
Summer 1963 and in Spring 1964.

For the October 1965 tour with the Ensemble of the West German
Radio and again with Martina Arroyo as soloist, seven M-moments
were inserted into those already performed, and the i-moment forms
the conclusion of the K-moments. All the D-moments, for various rea-
sons of practical performance, could not be rehearsed for this tour.

The texts used originate from various sources, depending on the
moment: lines from the Song of Songs; sentences from letters, books,
that I read during my work; Christian names, nicknames and pet
names; onomatopoetic articulation; audience reactions that I heard at
performances of my works; etc. These are supported rhythmically by
clicks of the tongue, clapping, stamping, etc. and small percussion in-
struments of the chorists.

The Momente are dedicated to the painter Mary Bauermeister.
PLUS-MINUS

In the summer of 1963 I wrote the score “Plus-Minus” in Palermo. On October 1, 1963, my first composition course for the Cologne Courses for New Music was to begin, and writing the score of “Plus-Minus” was my preparation for this course. I wanted to write a composition in which I included as many constructional regularities as possible which had become clear to me in recent years in my work. In addition they would be so formal that it made possible many interpretations, and could thus serve as a basis for elaboration by other composers and interpreters. While composing “Plus-Minus” I thought repeatedly of creating a basis for living organisms, for “musical creatures” which constantly take up and cast off material, and are subject to an irreversible process of development, which experience mutations or can even die. The idea of writing a piece that could remove itself from me so far, that someday when I met it again, I would hardly recognize it as my own, and that again, in another meeting, would greet me as most familiar: the idea of creating such a piece had occupied me for years.

I will briefly describe the score: There are seven so-called symbol-pages, where all the musical events are noted in the form of ideograms, and then seven note-pages, where the material for the musical pitch for these events is noted. With these fourteen pages strata can be worked out and combined with each other by one or several performers, according to definite rules. (An event consists of central sound, so-called accidentals [in contrast to the central sound, which is harmonically determined, these are harmonically and melodically more indefinite sounds extraneous to the central sound, and of a more noiselike nature]. These accidentals sound before or at the beginning, in the course of or at the end of a central sound. In addition, there are so-called secondary notes, which can surround the central sound in very different ways.) The main thought of the work consists of the fact that seven musical figure-types can grow and shrink according to composed patterns. This waxing and waning of each figure also gave the piece its title “Plus-Minus”. In waning, a figure-type can reach zero; that is, with increasing reduction of its parts it has neither central sound nor accidentals nor secondary notes, or it has only accidentals left and the central sound is gone, etc. For such a case, it is provided that a so-called negative sound-band be used for every stratum. Compared with the composed figures, it should be reserved and rather undefined in its inner structure, or perhaps of quite an “unfamiliar” nature. Instead of parts of a figure that have reached zero, one should hear the negative band. Now, if a figure is reduced into the negative realm—if it should,
e.g., consist of minus one, minus two, minus three etc. parts—then this must be represented in the form of corresponding interruptions of the negative-band; there are, so to speak, holes in this sound-band, different kinds of silence. If the number of negative presence of a figure-type reaches minus 13, that is, if it has appeared 13 consecutive times as a silence corresponding to its duration and inner arrangement, then this figure-type drops out permanently; it dies. If the number of direct repetitions of a figure-type reaches plus 13, then it should renew itself radically in the nature of its sound, that is, leap completely out of context and begin again at one.

Now, in what way a certain degree of growth or reduction in particular takes place is not prescribed; only the degree of change is determined in each case. Likewise, the score leaves open many interpretations of the instrumentation; the functions and relationships of the figures are composed, and their process in time; but it is not conclusively stated what instrumentation one must choose for the performance of these functions and relationships. The composition therefore is determined in many respects by relativity; at first that will probably become noticeable to the greatest extent in the realm of the sound-colors. I wanted to leave this piece open for all opportunities and conditions of performance, and for all possible sources of sound of the present and future.

In my composition course, every participating composer had to make an elaboration of my score, and thus determine unequivocally what is noted ambiguously in my text. Then in 1964 the score of “Plus-Minus” served again as a basis for elaborations in a composition course I gave at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. There, six composers each wrote an elaboration of one stratum.

Without a personal discussion of possible interpretations of my score, the Englishman Cornelius Cardew and the American Frederic Rzewski each made an elaboration of a stratum in 1964. What they agreed upon before the rehearsals of the premiere was the instrumentation; they wanted to play the work themselves, as pianists: along with two pianos, each also chose a corollary instrument for the so-called negative bands—Rzewski a harmonium and Cardew a transistor radio. With these sound sources they presented all the figure-types and the sound-backgrounds designated as “negative”, in front of which they can emerge from and disappear into. Rzewski, moreover, used the possibilities of “Plus-Minus” by having the noisier accidentals grow more and more around the central sounds and represented them with prepared piano sounds (the score requires three special sound categories
for these accidentals: of short, medium or long sound duration). Cardew concentrated more on the growth and reduction of central sounds, and eliminated the accidentals as soon as possible. Thus in his work, increasingly larger figures appear, which, internally, strongly repeat themselves; and in addition, long interruptions, sound windows as I call them, through which the events I call negative sounds drift in as if “from outside”.

When I heard the tape of the Cardew-Rzewski version for the first time, I was fascinated in a quite unegoistical sense. The experience of a twice-mirrored self-confrontation has up to now repeated itself every time I listened to the tape again. I can describe it like this: I feel more clearly than usual that I am hearing music that I, of course, have composed (I can follow my compository thoughts, recognize the development of every figure), but which at the same time gives me the uncannily exciting experience, that this creation of mine has a stronger life than any of my other pieces; that, through the performance of two interpreters, it brings me something at the same time familiar and new. For example, sounds and sound combinations occur in this Cardew-Rzewski interpretation whose use I have previously avoided (let’s say, prepared piano or inclusion of radio music), because such means have characteristically been used in the works of other composers. Now, however, in exact reply to the sound functions demanded by my composition, such means are brought into my music by the interpreters. The result is, that it not only does not disturb me, but that it proves to be a poetry that suits me very well, since it is so closely caught in the construction of “Plus-Minus”: and in that moment, isolated considerations of sounds and material become quite insignificant. I begin to hear adventurously, I literally discover a music I created: that is what I mean by “uncanny”: I feel clearly that I function as a channel for some much deeper-lying anonymity, unconceivable to me, which can only be experienced in terms of music, or sound-poetry.

The premiere of the Cardew-Rzewski version of “Plus-Minus” took place in Spring 1964 at the music festival “Nouve Consonanze” in Rome. RAI-Roma made a tape recording of this performance.

The work is dedicated to the painter Mary Bauermeister, who—by virtue of many discussions about the form and composition of this work—participated in the creation of the score.

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS by Stockhausen of his own works will appear in the July issue of Mundus Artium.
Ahmed Ali Said

THE PAST
Each day is a child
who dies behind a wall,
turning its face to the wall’s
 corners.

Houses flee
before its ghost that rises
from the grave demanding
vengeance.

Not from eternity
but from a bitter land
it comes, fleeing as if from bullets
through the town, the public
squares, the houses of the poor.

From the desert it comes,
and on its face is the hunger
of pigeons and parching flowers.

THE CAPTIVE
Imprisoned by the buds and grass,
I build an island in my mind
by weaving branches from a shore.
Harbors dissolve. Black lines
unweave themselves. I pass

between the barriers and springs
of light that made my dream.
I feel the jailed astonishment
of every butterfly that falters
in a fluttering of dying wings.
Ahmed Ali Said

THE PAGES OF DAY AND NIGHT

Before the time of day—I am.
Before the wonder of the sun—I burn.
Trees run behind me.
Blossoms walk in my shadow.

But still tomorrow
builds into my face
such island-fortresses
of silence that words find
not a door to enter by.

The pitying stars ignite,
and days forget themselves
in my bed.

The springs within my chest
are closing now like blossoms
to the moon.

Their waters bathe
the mirror of my vision pure
as silence as I waken into sleep.

THE SLEEP OF HANDS

Today I offer my palms
to dead lands and muted
streets before death seams
my eyelids, sews me
in the skin of all the earth
and sleeps forever in my hands.
Ahmed Ali Said

THE MESSENGER

Wake up!
Let me tell you my dream.
I saw a child driving the wind
and stones as if through water.
Under the water were bounties
locked like kernels of wheat
in a rush of becoming.
But why did I sorrow like a hymn
from the kingdom of famine
and tears?

Wake up!
I’m calling you to recognize my voice.
I am your prodigal brother riding
the stallion of death to find
the door marked destiny.

tr. Samuel Hazo
Emptied of essence, he expressed a white pain.
It was as if the battles of blues, reds, and browns
Were lost on the pathways of life,
On the track of life, on a white plain.
Emptiness pervaded the atmosphere.
It was a taking away of the angels of time.

The void he felt as excessive, universalized,
No paradigm of the purposes of man appeared,
There had been too many battles of the blood,
Too many reds, too many blues, carnalities,
Ructions, displacements, tortures of effort,
The battles of the world had cancelled themselves.

It was the vast, neutral place of unknowing,
Stranger than joy, more eventual that loving,
Beyond hating, beyond memory of such a place,
Without torment, above the structures of civilization,
Out of the norm of history, ethical attitudes of the will,
There was no architecture of morality and divinity.

To the colors of the world, a building of blood,
A promise of order, the strife of effort returned.
Before the nature of reorientation appeared
He felt transfixed at the shallows of nothingness
For out of the inexpressible namelessness of the place
Came wonder, hope, colors, love, and struggle.

Aber ich hatte nie von einem Ort gehört, der Kalinowka hiess, und jedesmal drehte ich mich zur Wand und sagte: "Nein, wirklich nicht, ich kann mich nicht entsinnen."

Meine Wirtin war nicht verrückt, sie war eine sehr ordentliche Frau, und es tat mir weh, wenn sie mich fragte. Sie fragte mich sehr oft, jeden Tag ein paarmal, und wenn ich zu ihr in die Küche ging,
I didn’t get back from the war until 1950, and there wasn’t a soul left in the town whom I knew. Fortunately my parents had left me money. I rented a room in the town and there I lay on the bed, smoking and waiting, not knowing what I was waiting for. I had no desire to go out to work. I gave my landlady money and she bought everything for me and cooked my meals. Everytime she brought coffee or a meal to my room, she stayed longer than I liked. Her son had been killed at a place called Kalinowka and after she had come in she would put the tray down on the table and come over to the dusky corner in which my bed stood. Here I used to doze away the hours and stub out my cigarettes on the wall, so that the wall behind my bed was covered in black patches. My landlady was pale and thin, and when her face hovered above my bed in the dusk I used to feel scared. At first I thought she was mad, because her eyes were very bright and big, and she asked me over and over again about her son. “Are you sure you didn’t know him? The place was called Kalinowka — didn’t you ever go there?”

But I had never heard of any place called Kalinowka and every time she asked I turned over towards the wall and said: “No, really not, I don’t remember any such place.”

My landlady wasn’t mad, she was a very decent woman, and I felt sorry for her when she asked me these questions. She asked very often, several times a day, and when I went to see her in the kitchen I had to look at her son’s photograph, a coloured photograph hanging over the sofa. He had been a laughing, fair-haired lad, and in the

"Es ist in der Garnison gemacht worden," sagte meine Wirtin, bevor sie ausrückten.

Es war ein Brustbild: er trug den Stahlhelm, und hinter ihm war deutlich die Attrappe einer Schlossruine zu sehen, die von künstlichen Reben umrankt war.


"Das war nichts für ihn," sagte meine Wirtin, "es war zu schwer." Und sie zeigte mir das letzte Bild von ihm, bevor er Soldat wurde: er stand in der Uniform eines Strassenbahnschaffners neben einem Wagen der Linie 9 an der Endstation, wo die Bahn ums Rondell kurvt, und ich erkannte die Limonadenbude, an der ich so oft Zigaretten gekauft hatte, als noch kein Krieg war; ich erkannte die Pappeln, die heute noch dort stehen, sah die Villa mit den goldenen Löwen vorm Portal, die heute nicht mehr dort stehen, und mir fiel das Mädchen ein, an das ich während des Krieges oft gedacht hatte: sie war hübsch gewesen, blass, mit schmalen Augen, und an der Endstation der Linie 9 war sie immer in die Bahn gestiegen.


"Vielleicht," sagte meine Wirtin, "haben Sie ihn doch gekannt."

Ich schüttelte den Kopf und legte das Photo in den Karton zurück: es war ein Glanzphoto und sah noch neu aus, obwohl es schon acht Jahre alt war.
coloured photographs he was wearing an infantry walking-out uniform.

"It was taken in the garrison town," said my landlady, "before they went to the front."

It showed his head and shoulders. He was wearing his steel helmet and the dummy of a ruined castle wreathed with artificial vines was clearly visible behind him.

"He was a conductor on the streetcars," said my landlady. "A hardworking lad." And then she always picked up the cardboard box full of photographs that stood on the sewing-table among patching-cloths and balls of thread. And she put a lot of photographs of her son into my hand: school photographs in which there was always someone sitting in the middle of the front row with a slate between his knees, and on the slate was written a VI, a VII and finally an VIII. In a separate packet, held together with a red elastic band, lay the Communion photographs: a smiling child in a black suit like a dinner jacket and holding a gigantic candle in his hand was standing in front of a transparency with a golden chalice painted on it. Then there were photographs showing him as an apprentice mechanic at a lathe, his face calm, his hands gripping a file.

"That wasn't the right job for him," said my landlady. "The work was too heavy." And she showed me the last picture taken of him before he became a soldier. He was in conductor's uniform standing beside a Number 9 streetcar at the terminus, where the line circles a roundabout, and I recognized the lemonade kiosk at which I had so often bought cigarettes in the days before there was a war; I recognized the poplars that are still there today, I saw the villa with the gilt lions outside the door that are no longer there, and I remembered the girl about whom I had often thought during the war: she was a pretty girl, pale, with narrow eyes, and she always used to get into the streetcar at the terminus of the No. 9 line.

I always looked for a very long time at the photograph showing my landlady's son at the No. 9 terminus, and I thought of a great many things: of the girl and of the soap factory in which I had been working at that time, I heard the screeching of the streetcar, I saw the red lemonade I used to drink in the summer at the kiosk, green cigarette advertisements and again the girl.

"Perhaps you did know him," said my landlady.

I shook my head and put the photograph back in the box. It was a glossy print and still looked new, although it was already eight years old.

"No, no," I said, "I don't know Kalinowka either — really not."

I often had to go and see her in the kitchen and she often came
Ich musste oft zu ihr in die Küche, und sie kam oft in mein Zimmer, und den ganzen Tag dachte ich an das, was ich vergessen wollte: an den Krieg, und ich warf die Asche meiner Zigarette hinters Bett, drückte die Glut an der Wand aus.
“Nein,” sagte ich leise, “aber das Mädchen.”
“Das Mädchen?” sagte sie, “das war seine Braut, aber vielleicht ist es gut, dass er sie nicht mehr sah.”
“Warum?” fragte ich.
Sie antwortete mir nicht, ging von mir weg, setzte sich auf ihren Stuhl ans Fenster und hülste weiter Erbsen aus. Ohne mich anzusehen, sagte sie: “Kannten Sie das Mädchen?”
Ich hielt das Photo fest in meiner Hand, blickte meine Wirtin an und erzählte ihr von der Seifenfabrik, von der Endstation der 9 und dem hübschen Mädchens, das dort immer eingestiegen war.
“Sonst nichts?”
“Nein,” sagte ich, und sie liess die Erbsen in ein Sieb rollen, drehte den Wasserhahn auf, und ich sah nur ihren schmalen Rücken.
“Wenn Sie sie wiedersehen, werden Sie begreifen, warum es gut ist, dass er sie nicht mehr sah.”
Wiedersehen? sagte ich.
Sie trocknete ihre Hände an der Schürze ab, kam auf mich zu und nahm mir vorsichtig das Photo aus der Hand. Ihr Gesicht schien noch schmäler geworden zu sein, ihre Augen sahen an mir vorbei, aber sie legte leise ihre Hand auf meinen linken Arm. “Sie wohnt im Zimmer neben Ihnen, die Anna. Wir sagen immer blasse Anna zu ihr, weil sie so ein weisses Gesicht hat. Haben Sie sie wirklich noch nicht gesehen?”
to my room, and all day long I kept thinking about what I wanted to forget — the war — and I tapped the ash from my cigarette under my bed and stubbed out the glowing tip on the wall.

Sometimes, when I was lying there in the evening, I heard a girl’s footsteps in the next room, or I heard the Yugoslav who lived in the room next to the kitchen, heard him cursing as he looked for the light-switch before going into his room.

It was only after I had been living there for three weeks, when I was holding the photograph in my hand for about the fiftieth time, that I saw that the streetcar in front of which he was standing laughing with his money-bag slung over his shoulder wasn’t empty. For the first time I looked at the photograph attentively and saw that a smiling girl had been caught by the snapshot inside the streetcar. It was the pretty girl of whom I had so often thought during the war. The landlady came up to me, looked closely into my face and said: “Now you recognize him, don’t you?” Then she came round behind me and looked at the picture over my shoulder, and the smell of fresh peas crept up my back from her tucked-up apron.

“No,” I said, “but I recognize the girl.”

“The girl?” she said. “That was his fiancée, but perhaps it’s a good thing he never saw her again.”

“Why?” I asked.

She didn’t answer, she moved away from me, sat down on her chair by the window and started shelling peas again. Without looking at me, she said: “Did you know the girl?”

I held the photograph firmly in my hand, looked at my landlady and told her about the soap factory, about the No. 9 terminus and the pretty girl who always used to get in there.

“Nothing else?”

“No,” I said, and she tipped the peas into a colander and turned on the tap, and all I could see was her thin back.

“When you see her again, you will understand why it’s a good thing he never saw her again.”

“See her again?” I said.

She dried her hands on her apron, came up to me and carefully took the photograph from my hand. Her face seemed to have become even smaller, her eyes were looking past me, but she quietly put her hand on my left arm. “Anna lives in the room next door. We always call her Pale Anna, because she has such a white face. Have you really not seen her yet?”

“No,” I said, “I haven’t seen her yet, although I’ve heard her a few times. What about her?”
"Nein," sagte ich, "ich habe sie noch nicht gesehen, wohl ein paarmal gehört. Was ist denn mit ihr?"

"Ich sag's nicht gern, aber es ist besser, Sie wissen es. Ihr Gesicht ist ganz zerstört, voller Narben — sie wurde vom Luftdruck in ein Schaufenster geschleudert. Sie werden sie nicht wiederkennen."


“I don’t like to tell you, but it’s better you should know. Her face has been completely ruined, it’s covered in scars. She was flung into a shop window by a blast. You won’t recognize her.”

That evening I waited for a long time until I heard footsteps on the landing, but the first time I was mistaken: it was the lanky Yugoslav, who looked at me in astonishment when I suddenly rushed out onto the landing. I said “Good evening” awkwardly and went back into my room.

I tried to imagine her face covered in scars, but I couldn’t, and every time I saw it, it was a beautiful face even with scars. I thought of the soap factory, of my parents and of another girl with whom I had gone out a lot at that time. Her name was Elisabeth, but she got people to call her Mutz, and when I kissed her, she always laughed and I felt silly. I had written her postcards from the war zone, and she used to send me parcels of home-made cakes that were always reduced to crumbs by the time they reached me, she sent me cigarettes and newspapers and in one of her letters she wrote: “You will soon be victorious, and I’m so proud that you are there.”

But I wasn’t in the least proud to be there, and when I came home on leave I didn’t write and tell her, but went out with the daughter of a tobacconist who lived in our house. I gave the tobacconist’s daughter soap that I got from my firm, and she gave me cigarettes, and we went to the cinema together and dancing and once, when her parents were away, she took me up to her room, and I pushed her onto the couch in the darkness; but when I bent down over her she switched on the light and looked up at me craftily, and in the harsh light I saw Hitler hanging on the wall, a coloured photograph, and round Hitler, on the rose-pink wallpaper, men with hard faces had been hung in the shape of a heart, men wearing steel helmets, either postcards or pages from illustrated papers pinned up with thumb tacks. I left the girl lying on the couch, lit a cigarette and left. Later both girls wrote cards to me at the front saying I had behaved badly, but I didn’t answer them...

I waited a long time for Anna, smoking a great many cigarettes in the darkness and thinking of many things, and when the key was slipped into the keyhole I was too scared to get up and look into her face. I heard her open the door and walk up and down in her room humming softly, and later I got up and stood on the landing. Very suddenly it went quiet in her room, she wasn’t walking up and down any more, nor was she singing, and I was afraid to knock. I heard the lanky Yugoslav walking to and fro in his room muttering softly, I heard the water simmering in my landlady’s kitchen. But in Anna’s room it was quiet and through the open door of mine I saw the black patches from all the cigarettes I had stubbed out on the wallpaper.

Der lange Jugoslawe hatte sich aufs Bett gelegt, ich hörte seine Schritte nicht mehr, hörte ihn nur noch murmeln, und der Wasserkessel in der Küche meiner Wirtin brodelte nicht mehr, und ich hörte das blecherne Rappeln, als die Wirtin den Deckel auf ihre Kaffeekanne schob. In Annas Zimmer war es immer noch still, und mir fiel ein, dass sie mir später alles erzählen würde, was sie gedacht hatte, als ich draussen vor der Tür stand, und sie erzählte mir später alles.

Ich starrte auf ein Bild, das neben dem Türrahmen hing: ein silbrig schimmernder See, aus dem eine Nixe mit nassem blondem Haar auftauchte, um einem Bauernjungen zuzulächeln, der zwischen sehr grünem Gebüsch verborgen stand. Ich konnte die linke Brust der Nixe halb sehen, und ihr Hals war sehr weiß und um ein wenig zu lang.

The lanky Yugoslav had lain down on his bed, I couldn’t hear his footsteps any more, I only heard him muttering, and the kettle in my landlady’s kitchen wasn’t boiling any more, and I heard the tinny rattle as the landlady put the lid on her coffee pot. In Anna’s room it was still quiet, and it occurred to me that later she would tell me everything she had thought while I was standing outside her door, and later she did tell me everything.

I stared at a picture hanging by the door frame: a silvery shimmering lake from which a water-sprite with wet blond hair was rising to smile at a peasant boy who was standing hidden among very green bushes. I could half see the water-sprite’s left breast, and her neck was very white and a trifle too long.

I don’t know when, but later I laid my hand on the latch, and even before I pressed down the latch and slowly pushed the door open, I knew that I had won Anna: her face was covered all over with little scars that had a bluish shimmer, the smell of mushrooms frying in the pan came from her room, and I pushed the door right open, put my hand on Anna’s shoulder and tried to smile.

tr. Michael Bullock
the persecution and assassination of JEAN-PAUL MARAT as performed by the inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the direction of the MARQUIS DE SADE

a play by PETER WEISS
production staged in New York by the Royal Shakespeare Company directed by PETER BROOK

photographic interpretation by MAX WALDMAN
The poet writes his poem: the poem writes its poet

There was a time when the poet, before deciding that his poem was ready for the great adventure — its projection into words — asked himself a multitude of reasonable questions. It was not enough for him to feel “inspired,” or, to speak more soberly, convinced of a few concise and melodious truths that he generously wished to communicate to others in the form of a carefully premeditated result. Indeed, there is no possible doubt that he thought of his poem as a sort of premeditated result. He had enough respect for himself and for his fellow man to put into words only material already accepted by his senses and by his common sense. He stripped away from his joy or fury whatever he found unsuitable for written expression, that is, the greater part of what on first consideration seemed ridiculous or obscure. He verbalized only the final result of various metamorphoses, all directed toward reason, logic, and taste. Even the exaggerations were presented as such, ostentatiously visible to everyone. The result, proud of being one, implied premeditation with respect to the act of writing, and, of course, postmeditation with respect to the initial desire to write. There were, accordingly, four stages in the process of creation: 1) the obscure and irresistible desire to articulate and to share a still formless and diffuse set of sensations, feelings, and rhythms; 2) the alerting of certain mental habits, developed over the centuries, which traditionally required the poet to sort out, arrange, and choose; 3) equipped with the capacity to order and choose, the poet addressed himself to the matter of archi-

* From Alain Bosquet Verbe et Vertige.
architecture — what we called premeditation a moment ago — i.e., the passage from the poem as an interior conception to the poem as an exterior conception intended for writing; and 4) the actual writing of the poem; it corresponded in large part to what was decided in the third stage, but since the poet had only to watch over the poem in its larger outline, minor accidents in execution were possible, and so, therefore, were little unexpected poetic finds.

The modern poet — and I think it is possible here to generalize without being overly cautious, without insisting on differences in temperament, or even on the inflexible principle that in poetry every case is unique — the modern poet, like all creators, finds himself in a state of receptivity. He does not believe in "subjects"; he would be more inclined to believe that the only true subject of poetry is in the poetry itself, or, better, in the transformations poetry imposes on the world. For him, poetry is sovereign; this is a fact that he feels in no way obliged to prove. He is accordingly authorized to modify whatever he pleases. He does not have to reproduce, explain, or simplify. He changes, transforms, and metamorphoses, as is his right. When the moment of revelation comes, he is not "inspired," but rather caught in a flood of sensations that demand that he express them. He does not stop to wonder what it is all about. He knows that he will refuse to let his reason intervene, that any stoppage of this flood, of which he is the innocent victim, and almost without transition the determined defender, will be fatal: analysis would dry it up. He admits of only one control over his first impulse: he must know that it is imperative, intense, and without appeal, like an orgasm or the onset of death. Thus he assures himself of two simultaneous metamorphoses: he feels — quite obscurely, but as deeply as it is possible — changed by what solicits him, and he also feels that the entire universe around him has, for a moment, undergone a change of the same order of importance. Then he can write.

It might therefore be proposed that there are also four stages in the creation of modern poetry, although these have little in common with those of the past: 1) the obscure and irresistible desire to articulate a formless (and it may remain so) and diffuse (it must remain so in large measure) set of sensations, feelings, and rhythms; 2) the certainty that this desire is extremely intense, akin to mystic revelation and even pathological deformation; 3) the actual writing of the poem, during which the delirious imagery remains undisturbed by reason and logic, although they may, without his being aware of it, lead the poet to make certain choices, if only because of the difference between the speed of writing and the speed of thought; but, whatever happens, it is
not possible for him to understand what he is writing, and if such a possibility were to exist, he would decisively reject it; 4) after the poem is written, the poet may still wonder what he meant, and he may conclude: “I write before knowing what I am going to write. I write in order to understand, through my poem, what I am and what the universe is.” Reason and logic intervene after the writing of the poem. At most they may lead the poet to make occasional exterior corrections and elucidations, this time cold, fallen from exaltation.

In the past, the poet was master of his poem insofar as he himself accepted it only after he knew that it was transferable, endorsable, and consumable. He was eager to stir, to please, or to irritate. He had a purpose, perhaps not very precise, yet discernible in the center of his moods. He wrote in a language that was also the language of others, and he had to take into account this cohabitation — this coexistence, as we should say today — at the moment of writing. He and his audience came together in his poem; he reserved space for them in advance; in advance, part of his poem devolved upon them, through its easily fragmented thoughts and pleasant form. In the most secret cases, the poem was a contract between the public and the private self, offered up for the contemplation of others. The modern poet takes no such precautions. He does not even feel that he is writing the poem; he is more likely to feel that the poem is writing him. He is not the master of this strange object, this bizarre being, his poem. On the contrary, as soon as he begins to write, he is subjected, body and soul — the expression is hardly too strong — to his word, and he obeys all its whims. Little by little, he becomes aware of his own subjection, which is painful and yet filled with dizzying exaltation. He knows that he is limited, ordinary, bored with the normality he discovers in himself. But when he writes, he unfolds, he explodes, he goes beyond himself, he enters — legitimately or not — forbidden kingdoms where truths lie sleeping that are beyond his reach except in the poem. He lets himself go, voluptuously. Only rarely in the course of his writing does he allow himself to be reassured by his intellect: yes, he is grazing the unknown; yes, he is nearing the great mystery; yes, he is opening a narrow door onto the forbidden. His simple and automatic savoir faire — syntax, a leading thread, the manipulation of rhythms, the elimination of useless images — guarantees him that he is not going wrong. He knows that at the end of his poem he will be completely transformed, he will have changed his nature. The poem will have written him, that is, it will have expressed in black and white, in real and normally ordered terms, his right, for a moment, to live the possible, the impossible, the unverifiable. For nothing in this world would he go back to the superficial
good health enjoyed by his ancestors, poets capable of saying in advance what their poems would be; worse yet, capable of asserting that they, the poets, would be the same citizens after their poems as they were before.

One of the most important concepts, to my mind, in a comparison of modern poetic creation with that of the past, is the notion of distance. The distance between the self of the writer before he has written and the self of the writer at the moment he begins to write is variable. The greater the distance, the greater the part played by the conscious will; the shorter the distance, the greater the part played by inward revelation. The distance is determined, first of all, by the literary genre. The drama is, of all genres, the most distant from the deep self of the writer. It is, by definition, a contract between the playwright and the public: a play is written to be performed before a certain number of persons, and the writer must accept this limitation. The writing plays a predominant role, but there must inevitably be some compromise with particular problems of stage production or with the tastes of the audience. For every play, literary creation is a function of necessities determined by the director, the producer, the actor, and the spectator — in addition to the playwright himself. It is a collective undertaking, and, as such, and adventure in which psychology, conviction, and power of argument have a greater share than the vertiginous powers of the word itself. The deep self of the playwright must compromise with the conventional self of the actor and the distrustful self of the spectator. Drama is the art of action, not of dream, nor of any absolute whatever. There is nothing more natural than that the playwright should experience genuine intoxication before the word made flesh, but it is word weighed down by a voice, a gesture, a body, and a thousand other painfully real limitations.

When the writer composes a novel — the term compose already implies an unpleasant discipline imposed on the liberty of the artist — the distance between his original self and the one he projects into words is scarcely less than in drama. Here, however, he need not concern himself with a particular audience, nor with the conventions it may impose on him. The intercessors have disappeared. Instead of asking himself whether a given scene is psychologically and visually acceptable, the novelist is satisfied to remain true to his own conventions, in the form of his characters, their identity and their idiosyncrasies, about which he has carefully informed us and to which he is obliged to remain faithful. His liberty is considerable, if he does not forget the rules of his own game. He can allow himself a great deal, but not the essential: to surprise or to contradict himself, to announce
that Julien Sorel is in reality little Cosette, who is about to become Old Goriot. The novelist lives in the real world, or — the differences is slight — in a logically organized imaginary world. His intention, apart from occasional effervescences in the body of the story, is to communicate to others what is already clear, elucidated, and digested. Between his receiving and emitting selves he allows a considerable distance, much less than that of the playwright, but not the total rejection of distance that we find in the modern poet. He cannot forget, for example, that he must keep his story going, put his characters into plausible situations, and command the mystery to hold its tongue on the outer edges of the story.

For the poet of a century ago, the distance between the unexpressed and the expressed selves is still quite perceptible, but less, no doubt, than for the playwright or the novelist. He has a host of liberties that they have not: he need not create symbol-beings whose individuality can be immediately recognized or portrayed on stage. He can talk about himself, the absolute, nature, current ideas, nothingness. His possibilities have no other limits than his decision to transmit to his poem feeling that he can reproduce intact. Relatively unconcerned about others, he is nonetheless eager to maintain himself in a state of mind objective enough for him to be comprehensible to himself, and, of course, to anyone else willing to make comparable efforts — no doubt a considerable number. He is himself, but he is careful to eliminate from that self all the temptations he is not sure he can master during the writing of the poem, afterward, and of course, before. He purifies his primordial self, which is therefore not the self that presides over the destiny of the poem. The distance between them is unsuppressed.

Today that distance has disappeared. Nothing intervenes between the self of the poet, suddenly solicited by urgent images that have not yet had time to find their expression, and the self plunged into the mystery of writing. At no point does the poet know precisely what he means, precisely what he is writing, or what he is about to write. He does not find it miraculous to discover, a posteriori, that he has defined himself in the process of writing, or that he can learn about himself only after the self has been projected onto the word. Before the word there was in fact only a non-self, or, at the very most, a pre-self.

Poetry is not yet the poem: the poem is no longer poetry

If, instead of pondering over the stages of poetic creation in the mind and sensibility of the poet, we were to examine the life of the poem considered as an independent object, we should recognize three
phases. More precisely, we should be led to define three separate but overlapping notions: poetic feeling, poetry, and poem. The poetic feeling is an unarticulated attraction, a momentary and diffuse euphoria, a mood that predisposes toward escape from immediate reality. It remains vague, even though pervasive. It admires—or loves without a clearly defined passion—in the trite spectacles of everyday life, whatever seems admirable or worthy of uniting men in a harmonious burst of solidarity. The poetic feeling is the consciousness of a paraconsciousness, midway between the acceptance of the given and the acceptance of the mysterious in what is given. Because of it we feel, quite rightly, our nearness to a tree, for a simple and rather piquant reason: we do not understand it, but we understand ourselves for not understanding it too well. In the same way, we admire a sunset: we are on the point of asking ourselves questions about it, but we know that we can neither analyze nor control it, and we are glad to have reached the threshold of an unusual sensation. But we do not cross the threshold.

Poetry—in the strictly literary, not the general, sense—implies recourse to writing. It is a material mined headlong and in high exaltation; it may be either crude or pure—the poet would rather not decide at the time: it will suffice to say that if the act of putting himself into words is natural to him, it has a chance of being fairly pure. Drunken and irresponsible as it is, the formulation is finally brought out. The poet then accepts the poetry; that is, he accepts himself as his poetry has delivered himself to himself, a gift from the self to the self. When the operation is done, it is by no means certain that the poet, now back in a normal, static state of mind, will accept his poetry as a flawless object. He detaches himself from it, lets it become itself. The deep truth—perhaps scandalous or extraordinary—that his poetry has revealed to him, does not prevent his analyzing it less and less with his own eyes, and more and more with the eyes of others. His irresponsibility—sensitive, philosophic, psychic, etc.—having been marvelously affirmed during the writing of the poetry, it now behooves him to demonstrate his responsibility. He will therefore make his poem as perfect an object as possible, using predictable and by no means arcane criteria.

The passage from poetry to poem, to the stage of technical correctness, inevitably leads to impoverishment. The poetry is a revelation, first of all to the poet, but also to the reader. It would nevertheless be wrong to expect the poet to leave it intact, with its dross, its repetitions, and its obscurity, on the pretext that it lays bare a precise truth. When the poet takes up his poetry to change it into a poem, he says to himself: “This is very good, that is too complicated, that is useless.”
first time he works over his text, it still has a strong effect on him. He changes it considerably and is inspired by it, as if it were a foreign substance loaded with surprises. In a way, he discusses it, resists accepting it, and is disposed to defend himself against it. The next time he reacts with more circumspection. A synthesis has taken place between his astonishment and his decision to make his astonishment into as durable a phenomenon as possible. His poetry has already been sufficiently transformed to announce the appearance of the poem itself. His reactions are now essentially technical and professional. If he works it over once more or twenty times more, he perfects it only in its details. Finally the moment comes when he considers it an object quite detached from himself, and he modifies it according to esthetic criteria shared by all. When the retouching is all done, the approximate matter of the poetry has become the immutable matter of the poem. The impoverishment is sanctioned and compensated for by a solidity capable of creating, in the minds of others, reactions more violent than if the matter had retained its original form.

The poem, imperfectible object

Poetry, the first projection of the poetic feeling onto the concrete word, is essentially diffuse. It is intermediate between a state and an object. It is incarnated — and mutilated in the process — in the developing poem. It is no longer a state, but a precise stage within that state. We can imagine antecedents and sequels to poetry, but we cannot substitute one poem for another, even in its details. Its elements are immutable. Even though the poem radiates out in various directions, each time in a different way, it must come back to the same words, the same tangible source, the same structure. If its elements are immutable — and therefore the product of conscious work — it is because the poet has required of himself a kind of perfection. After finishing the first draft — during which he had only to remain in a state of dazzled passivity — the poet now recognizes his duty to make his poem into an imperfectible object. This is his only guarantee that his poem will be necessary to others and will awaken in them the magnificent disarray he experienced when he wrote his text.

The situation appears paradoxical. The poetic feeling — vague, delightful, overwhelming — is concentrated, thickened, charged with a host of possibilities, then translated into a flood of words, which, far from having a precise meaning, escapes every attempt at reduction to a simple explanation. It might well be said that this is one of the most irrefutable laws of the modern poem: It is susceptible of multiple in-
The poetry thus given to the poet undergoes many transformations before becoming a poem: whatever is not precise disappears from the language, the form, the syntax, and the organization of ideas. Consequently, one would expect the result to be of exemplary clarity. And so it is, in fact, so far as the analyzable — technical — elements are concerned. The sentence structure is clear, the construction of the verse is beyond reproach, nothing is left to chance in the sequence of sensations. It would appear, accordingly, that most of the possible interpretations of the poetic matter should have been eliminated in the finished poem. Curiously enough, what happens is the exact opposite: in order to penetrate into the self of the reader, to unfold in him and engender an effervescence approximating that felt by the poet at the time of his original creation, the poem must first present itself as a perfect — that is, imperfectible — object, one of absolute technical precision. This time, instead of starting from an exceptional ecstasy and arriving at a reasoned work, we start from a feeling of rational pleasure or surprise and arrive at an irresistible ecstasy. The shock produced by the poem must be clear in order to be profound. If the poetic matter remains imperfect — and in principle subject to a hundred interpretations, owing to its formal looseness — the attention of the reader is caught only for a brief moment; before long, he balks, hesitates, and is ashamed of having mistaken a mere flash for a revelation.

The more the analyzable elements of the poem are rigorous and perfect, the more its meaning exceeds the sum of those elements; the more the object is irreplaceable and imperfectible, the more elating and far-reaching are its prolongations. Take an alexandrine in Nerval or Mallarmé, for example: no useless adverbs, no padding adjectives, no obscurity about the principal and subordinate clauses, no repetitions, no word that another word might replace; everything seems right and necessary. In the face of such care, it would be normal to suppose that we know what the alexandrine means. Not at all! It escapes, it carries us away; through its perfection the poem is at once poem (that is, impoverished poetry) and poetry, that state where everything is marvelously afloat. On the other hand, take a more careless verse, in Victor Hugo, for example: the adjective is too heavy, the exclamation grandiloquent, the accumulation of images difficult to accept. One would think that these imprecisions would be just the thing for the beautiful voyage into the unarticulated beyond of a moment ago. Not a bit! Reason stumbles against these holes and bumps, and prevents the flight of lovely unreason. Clearly, unreason (or non-reason, or a-reason) is satisfied only if reason is satisfied first. Reason — or professional skill
— is the concierge of unreason in poetry. Only when the mind is assured of the workmanlike quality of the art (in poetry as in painting) can it savor those qualities that transcend workmanship: the reader must not be able to correct the poem he reads.

An exceptional virtue: prolongation

In the past poems were judged by their musicality, their precision, and their faithfulness to reality, which stood as a sort of example and ideal. Apart from other considerations, the poem was the more highly esteemed if it could be reduced to a single meaning. Today the notion of an indispensable harmony and unity has given way to the opposite need: the poem must give an impression of violent initial discord. The beautiful, as it used to be understood, can no longer serve as a criterion: the superficial pleasure it brings has worn thin. To find the preponderant attraction of a poem we must nowadays turn toward truth, but truth in this case is curiously fugitive: it is a future truth, an unprecedented revelation that changes in an instant into an unverifiable truth, one accepted in spite of any and all reasons that might be argued against it. If you prefer, it is the equivocal truth, improbable but insistent, the truth of delirium — not the obvious, demonstrable sort of truth you can take apart and put together again — and it gives the poem all its value.

Value implies measurement. We can compare — however fallacious the procedure may be — the effects of two or several poems on a given reader. Since the poem acts not only on the conscious faculties of intelligence and taste, but also on more vaguely defined zones, it is difficult to know just how we ought to proceed: how shall we decree — with necessarily spurious authority — that one poem is better than another? At first view it would seem a pointless game, particularly if we admit that the poem inspires the reader according to his availability, his refinement, his concentration, and so on. But take a hundred readers who know something about poetry without being specialists; choose them from at least two generations, with reasonable variety in their cultural backgrounds, being careful to mix in with them a few persons well versed in poetry and a few others thoroughly ignorant of it. Read them a poem, or, the better to catalyze their reactions, a single line whose image gives a concentrated characteristic of the whole.

This verse is prolonged in the mind and sensibility of each of them; it evokes other images; it revives memories; it activates impulses, distastes, enthusiasms. Question the hundred people; ask them, without giving them too much time, what the verse suggests to them. Explain that the response need be neither reasonable nor coherent
unless they feel the need to give it that way. What do we find? Certain verses command immediate and unanimous agreement on their meaning, just is if they were ordinary prose used to tell an anecdote or describe an ordinary incident. In a recent poem by Philippe Jaccottet, for example, we find this:

The birds are not numerous, just barely,  
Far away, where the whitethorn lights the coppice,  
The cuckoo sings...

The hundred readers admit that they “see” birds; some say that there are three, others four or five, still others perhaps ten. The words “far away” are variously interpreted, but no one bothers to be specific: say between five hundred and two thousand yards. The “whitethorn” and the “coppice” fill in the background of this familiar open-air scene, while the cuckoo adds a brief note known to everyone. Since there is no disagreement, this fragment causes no luminous burst in the mind and sensibility of the reader. There is no dark obscurity, no impression that would transcend the power of this same set of elements if they appeared in a prose passage, such as we might find in the most ordinary novel. We conclude that, devoid of prolongation and excitation in any form, this is not poetry.

Try the experiment again with another quotation, this time the beginning of a poem by Benjamin Péret:

When the sun  
Descends to earth with its mustache  
We shall open our suitcases  
And the sons of the last rats  
Will forget their language...

Question our subjects; in each of them we find a great, joyful effervescence composed of amazement and elation. Something inside them, an imperious desire to express their reserve of mental images, has been suddenly awakened. From the hundred people, it is almost certain that we shall get a hundred different responses as to the meaning of these verses and as to the various reactions they have elicited. Before long we have anarchy, the right to interpret these reckless verses any way at all. Disorder prevails. No one tries for the slightest verisimilitude or truth. On the contrary, set loose in the storehouse of verbal trickery, everybody finds his own ingenious bit of flummery, which consists in whimsically reworking the given pattern. One person will glibly say
that these lines also mean:

When the mustache descends
to earth with its sun
We shall close the suitcases
And the fathers of the last rats
Will invent their language . . .

With quite as much justification, another will say that, for him, these lines mean:

When the moon
Climbs onto the earth with its suitcases
We shall forget the last rats
And the daughters of the last languages
Will open their suitcases . . .

The hundred responses will provide a hundred prolongations, of all kinds and in all directions. The nonsensical will have given birth to a hundred new forms of nonsense, subject in their turn to indefinite proliferation. Disagreement will be total, and the poem will fall helplessly to pieces. The reason is clear: the poem is hardly more than an encouragement to revolt by following a simple formula. It lacks quality in any event, for instead of inciting men to reflect — and beyond reflection to penetrate into the unknown — it provokes only the most irresponsible license. A hundred people, a hundred responses — too many to have any significance. The poem, by dint of begging additional unexpected images from every reader — and getting them — finally dissolves. The endless prolongation has completely deprived the poem of value. A constantly functioning exciter, a trampoline without firmness, it requires the reader to do all the work. It is, as it were, but a blank page overpopulated with words selected at random; the reader is expected to fill it in. The poem that prolongs excessively has no grip.

A third experiment will perplex us more. Take this quatrain from Pierre Oster:

Swollen world, the wind blasts!
Epic space awaits living faces!
(But if your solitude ceases to be votive,
Drive it away with a greater.)

Our hundred readers first see a sort of cosmic swelling, under
a wind of immense dimensions. Generally speaking, the first image has potential beauty. We may suppose that in the minds of our subjects visions of a similar but somewhat differentiated nature are waiting for only a few more words, more precise, in order to take flight. Already we imagine stars doubling their volume, reddening suns, deepening azure, a multitude of pregnant movements. However, the second line precludes the realization of these fine promises. Is “space” synonymous with the world? What are the “living faces,” evoked but neither drawn in nor defined? We get the impression that the second verse is merely a pale illustration of the first, which it blurs with its heavy approximations. The appearance, about to burst forth in all its glory, veils over, grows heavy, becomes the object of a host of questions, and finally succumbs. The readers are then thoroughly discouraged by the third and last verses. What solitude is the poet talking about? Perhaps it is the solitude of humanity; it might quite as reasonably be the solitude of an individual, his own or that of a loved one. Too many generalities and abstractions authorize too many prolongations, and in the end none of them turns out to be either plausible or poetic. We remain in a “moral” climate in which nothing has been made concrete. There are two solitudes floundering about aimlessly as though they were groping toward some truth, but the readers, suddenly plunged into this labyrinth without a guide, increasingly protest. As in the case of the fragment from Péret, there is here an initial turn that might have given rise to a hundred different prolongations, but second thought and the reading of the second verse dilute the panorama that was taking shape, and there now emerge only a hundred atrophied prolongations, none of them real. Accordingly, this can never provide more than a weak impulse toward a poem.

But risk a fourth experiment. Give our subjects these lines from Lucien Becker, one example among many:

In the corner of the lips there is blood
But no one can wipe it away
For it comes straight from the heart
To remember that the mouth is a source of fire.

Many interpretations are proposed, but they never become obscure. Among the hundred readers there are large and fertile areas of disagreement, but at the end of what we have called the prolongation — the need in every reader to extrapolate, to continue the poem for himself, and, at a given moment, to stop musing and say to himself: “This is the profound truth that the poet has brought to me” — there is an
indication of a motion in the opposite direction. After starting out far down in the deep regions of the self and being made concrete as a sudden unverifiable truth, the poem does an about-face, goes back the way it came, and runs back toward what it has always meant from time immemorial, enriched by the particular meaning it has just been given by its temporary trustee. Prolongations of varying kind and intensity arise quickly, then converge, not around a single core, but around five or six. The result is that five or six groups of readers, after disagreeing, tend to come together, and within each group there is dissent only on matters of detail. We infer that the poem gave rise to a hundred intermediate but hasty interpretations, and that at the end only five or six remained, each of them showing a dozen or so variants bearing on accessory elements. During the process it has been neither diluted, nor multiplied to the point of losing its identity, nor yet has it been accepted as the slight affair it seemed to be at first reading. It is therefore legitimate to propose that this poem lends itself to five or six valid interpretations, and, more importantly, that it does not exist, as a poem, without the imperative of those interpretations.

Let us try to suggest just a few of them, simple condensations of what they might be in a hundred often incommensurable minds. The first verse gives a simultaneous impression of generality and disturbance. We are not told whose lips these are, so that we might think, "There is blood in the corner of the lips of the three billion inhabitants of the earth." Thus from the very outset we are confronted with an unexpected truth, as well as a certain amount of "suspense" — or, if you prefer, an enigma calling for interior solution — and, as the moments pass, the truth grows with unformulated possibilities. From a disturbing thought it becomes an obsession: before long we cannot imagine a mouth without a red blotch at the corner. Though in doubt, we are oddly satisfied: poetry appears to us as paradox, as enigma, and as counter-truth moving toward a future truth whose rational outline we cannot yet perceive. At the second verse our questioning goes deeper, for we learn that it is not in the power of any of us to wipe away this blood that fascinates and so pleasurably disturbs us. We are accordingly obliged to admit, either that the blood is not really blood, or that it has some unpredictable function which is to be the object of a new discovery, quite as disconcerting and as pleasantly unexpected as the first. The poet, in the third verse, confirms our intuition that the blood is not ordinary blood: it comes, not from an artery, but straight from the heart. Its importance is thereby increased, and we sense that it has some quite unusual function. In other words, the blood is symbolic, as is the heart, seen in its twofold aspect as the center of the emotions and
as the muscle that distributes the blood. The ambiguity persists without any need for resolution. Indeed, the last verse confirms that the heart is a symbol, since it is possible for it to “remember” a truth — one that did not exist before its revelation by the poem; namely, that the mouth is a source of fire — since it has a special function, that of serving and refreshing the memory. Again, we are puzzled but disposed to agree: nothing in us objects to the notion that the heart should in its way be a seat of the mind, and that its blood carries and delivers messages. The mouth itself is more than it appears to be: it is a source, but of an unusual sort: we freely allow that it should be a source of air, of words, or even of blood, especially now that we have been forewarned. But a new element intervenes: the mouth is a source of fire, which not only transforms our idea of the mouth, but also makes us reconsider our thoughts about the blood of a moment ago. The blood is not merely blood: it is a form of fire.

A never-ending play of concepts: a personal myth

It is now clear that poetry is above all a deliverance from reason and from everything that in men tends toward easy compromise. It has also shed certain of its trade recipes which, in the course of time, have taken on an unwarranted importance. *Poetry is no longer tied to music,* to definite rhythms, to a theory of rhymes that forced it, nine times out of ten, to be only a clever variant of what it had been before. The poet no longer thinks immediately of the word marbre upon accepting the word arbre; it is no longer obligatory that the notion of perpetuity contained in the adverb toujours should lead to the affective connotations of the noun amour. It is no longer automatic that sable and fable should suffer from a purely paronymic bond.

Poetry is preoccupied with other matters, without necessarily being fully conscious of them. It no longer has any visible discipline, except that which it forges for itself at the moment of writing. So much liberty imposes duties which cannot uniquely be the duties of poetry: they are those of thought at its most immediate and most savage level, and of intuition at its richest level, at the point where it might take a form, not poetic, but possibly scientific or philosophic. Like science and philosophy — both more or less on a wrong track as a result of their own dispersive tendencies — poetry stirs, disturbs, confuses, reinvents truth, or, to speak more modestly, glimpses of the truth that can elicit momentary support from its witnesses. This role, somewhat mad but filled with brief fervor, is enough for poetry: we ask no more of it. The rest is prolongation in the startled mind of the reader. This sudden
moment of superhuman knowledge is its whole justification. All our concepts are there, along with all our values, suddenly turned upside down.

Poetry knows no hierarchies: it creates them, undoes them, and recreates them with haughty disdain for what they were before its intervention. It plays with values, for it imposes on the whole being values it never knew before. Which is to say that it creates worlds; therefore it matters little whether it is accepted or not. If the reader or the poet should feel the need to derive, from the worlds thus flung in his face, values that he will stoutly defend, poetry itself remains aloof, neither pleased nor ashamed. The mind, however, is so constituted that it will little by little transform these intuitions into truths, these images into values. The more it knows them to be gratuitous, the more it will have them fatally necessary, consistent, and demonstrable, buttressed by a thousand dialectical stratagems. Indomitable in its birth and in its essence, poetry soon becomes a tyrant: it mobilizes in its service all the human powers that originally seemed hostile to it.

Whether the poet likes it or not, poetry perpetually calls into question fundamental laws and values, and, without any rights whatever over anything at all, it promptly arrogates the right to proclaim: this is true, that is false, all this is good, all that is bad. It is a holy subversion. Those who do not heed its unjustifiable decrees are guilty of blasphemy. Let us accept this dictatorship, this unending shipwreck of established values. Poetry is an endless source of new combinations, where all judgments have their appeal, their rejection, their reaffirmation. It offers us truth, immediately, savagely, and perfidiously. Normal and serious minds will find consolation in the fact that in every case it is a truth that knows no tomorrow. That is its tragedy: it accredits all, for the space of one intellectual and sensory spasm, but it can change only the imaginary.

It is, therefore, marvelously useless, and since it cannot resolve to be so, it aims at the essential, at the establishment of new relations between man and men, on the one hand, and, on the other, between man and the cosmos, man and the word. It supersedes everything that had previously seemed unimpeachable: reality, the past, the bases of everyday action and sane thought. But its power does not stop there: poetry commands the poet to call into question his most private nature and all his knowledge. In the immediate — but alas, only in the immediate — the poem is a sort of Holy Scripture. Yet it cannot, on its own terms, be substituted for the Creation, for it is not truly viable. Every self-respecting poem proclaims in its own way: "In the beginning was the nettle . . .," "In the beginning was the rebeginning . . ."
"In the beginning was the lower-case k . . . ,"  "In the beginning was the beard of space . . . ,"  "In the beginning was the inkwell of Father Francis . . . ."  It feeds on paradoxes, superb impossibilities, twisted doubts, marvels, insignificant things, suddenly elevated to grandeur. It imposes on all our mental acquisitions and benign certainties a scale of values — factitious but vibrant — which is at once a cosmology, a philosophy, a belief, and myth.

The poet, creator and liquidator of myths, has his style, his language, his idiosyncrasies: they suffice to persuade us that his myths are ultimately personal myths. We find it reassuring to know that he has an individual identity: it gives us the right to affirm our own identity and to orient his work as we please. As a person — signs of which we expect to find in the turn of every phrase — he must be our equal, not an inaccessible sovereign. The poem, after dominating us voluptuously, authorizes us to enter into a dialogue with it, and consequently with the author himself. Such a requirement is rather simple-minded, or, more precisely, rather sentimental: we desire to attach the work to a person while at the same time we require some sort of absolute; yet our thirst for the absolute can never be exempt from the elemental need for an intimacy that brings down to our level what must, by definition, transcend us. The Titans may remain aloof from us only if they first stoop down to us long enough to arrogate the sublime right to speak in our name. The poet must make of his work a tyrannical and yet personal myth, well furnished with recognizable details as to place, date, and limits. This implies that the personal myth, strictly speaking, allows of no heroes: ultimately, poetry only speaks well of itself, leaving the field open to a multitude of concepts invited to struggle, to vanish, and to be resurrected.

Poetry, so full of fundamental contradictions, knows no servitude. Yet in its most terrifying prolongations it can with terrifying elegance foresee its own end. Peremptory and dictatorial, it is also rich in paradoxes and outbursts that prove to be neither compatible with one another nor concerned about becoming so. A certain synthesis of these contradictions appears indispensable to its intellectual and instinctual health. Such a synthesis might be reasonably well defined in postulating that a poem must be the sum of three simultaneous and delicately intertwined elements: the affirmation of the poem, considered as an independent object; the reflection of the private self of the poet; and a general meditation on the art of poetry destined to provide an objection to the work itself.

The affirmation of the poem, considered as an independent object: here, perhaps, we find the most irrevocably necessary condition of the
poetic state made concrete in a work. The poem must proceed without scruple; it is without appeal, and it carries total authority. The poem is there, and that is enough for it to cause in men’s souls a series of anxieties and ecstasies to which it is itself indifferent. It is not rational; therefore it need not be reasonable. It affirms and is affirmed: the ravages that may be attributed to it do not matter. It is an object, a cultist object, as it were, one that changes depending on the person in its presence. It breaks free from its author; it even outlives him, for it is made of a verbal material that existed before him and will continue to exist long after his death. It spares neither the poet, obliged to withdraw into the shade when the poem is born, nor the reader, whom it traverses, transforms, abandons, exalts, depresses. It is — period. It serves no one: it uses everyone. If it permitted the intervention of thoughts, feelings, or ideas other than its own, it would not be a true poem: it would at most be an analyzable text with poetic images scattered here and there. We might wonder when and how it was written, but the answers would add nothing and would more probably prove harmful to what the poem is in itself, beyond time and space, that is, adaptable to all times and spaces, each time in a different way. We may discuss it as we discuss a star, an oak tree, or a snake, but no amount of discussion can ever change, diminish, or multiply the seeds of enchanted disquiet that it has sown in passing.

The reflection of the private self of the poet does not in the least abrogate the haughty liberties of the poem itself. The reader, before this universe that dominates him, needs something familiar to mitigate the beautiful and terrifying impression of which he is the victim. Plainly spoken, he must sense the person of the poet in the poem: in other words, the poet is at that moment a co-reader, who is not afraid to give his name, his age, and his credentials. The poem, although it can do without such details, loses nothing by accepting them. Thus the reader can find in the poem, in slight transposition, the intimate journal of the poet. Although it is true that the visions of the poet, in their imperishable aspect, become anonymous, it is nevertheless true that they carry the distinctive character of his rhythms, his vocabulary, and his style. If it were not so, if the person of the poet were to abandon the poem, a sudden chill would prevent the ecstatic prolongations we spoke of earlier.

All of Ronsard, with his avowals, his delicacy, and his twirls, is in his poems: he is so well integrated in them that they are paradoxically independent of him, yet filled with him: he is not necessary to their radiance in the same way that he is necessary to their constitution. The object-as-poem — that is, the preponderantly verbal object — and
the poem-as-object — that is, the poem that becomes itself alone — fuse harmoniously only if they find in the reader a satisfying reincarnation; for that, it is necessary that the disincarnation outside the person of the poet occur only partially; if the poem had succeeded in shedding all references to its origins and to its author, it probably would not have succeeded in finding in another person a terrain where it could live again. Yes, Hugo too is present in all his poems — eloquent, democratic, direct, dividing the world of feelings into black and white, enormous even in his most tender moments; yet it is true that Hugo’s best poems are more than Hugo the man. Perfect, grave, voluptuous: such are the poems of Baudelaire, so much so that it matters little to us that they are his . . . but if we could not discover between the lines that serene brow, those starting eyes, that bitter mouth, those lucid torments, something essential would be lacking: the desire to give ourselves completely to those poems, through inclination, through astonishment, and also through imitation of Baudelaire’s own example. The gift of the self on the part of the reader is proportionate to the gift of the self on the part of the author. They are confederates because of the poem, and without the author’s active participation it is not at all certain that the reader’s would be full and genuine. The poem always breaks away from the poet; the converse is not true: the poet cannot break completely away from the poem. If he does, he creates, as in the case of the Parnassians and particularly Heredia, impeccable objects whose radiance is nil.

Now that poetry has become self-questioning, no longer satisfied to produce marvels for everyone, from the author to the most indifferent witness, to examine at leisure, it admits into the heart of every work a sort of discussion capable of unmystifying that work. The modern poem, through modesty and a taste for risk, is willing to include a general reflection on the art of poetry destined to provide an objection to the work itself. It seems to the poet that he has rather vast powers, which are, at the same time, without any real effect: indeed, it is not ridiculous that he should compare himself to a sorcerer, a sage, or a demiurge. Yet a little sane reflection will suffice to show him that his hegemony is little more than a specialization in words. It is natural that thereafter, confused by his theoretical power and his actual weakness, he should resign himself to touch on everything in his poetry, since he has no precise subject, to proclaim that he deals only with the drifting domain of words, sounds, adjectives, and images. No doubt he has many rights; he tells himself that these are as numerous as they are only to suggest to him a precise and limited task: to define poetry and to define his own feelings about poetry in general. He yields neither to
analysis nor to superficial didacticism, but rather to an intellectual impulse that makes it almost as important to understand what he is doing as it is to do it. He finds that, however enraptured he may be during poetic creation, it is incumbent on him never to forget that it is simply that: writing as becoming. His enthusiasm amazes him, but honesty tells him: “Observe yourself, draw conclusions as you proceed, dominate what transcends you.” He becomes judge and defendant, actor and spectator, subject and object. Ultimately this habit enriches him: he incorporates into the poem his ideas about what he knows best, the poem. This sort of passionate awareness that creation is amenable to analysis is perhaps more impressive than the power of raw poetry itself. Casually assuming all powers and usurping those that are foreign to it, poetry compensates by discussing in the body of its works, what it is, what it is to a lesser degree, what it is more or less. This is its surest road to destruction and to its rebirth from its own doubts. Modern art is a dictatorship that overthrows itself.

A return to the cosmos; a paramysticism

In poetry, as in the other disciplines — discipline meaning here the choice of a verbal projection — there are periods when men, well supplied with subject matter, multiply laws and fix genres, setting a multitude of traps, while never calling into question the essence of the things said. There are other periods when men prefer to dynamite established forms in order to achieve a healthy liberation. We live in an era in which laws are transgressed with relative impunity, for people do not respect them without feeling somewhat ashamed. We also live in an era in which revolt seems futile if its object is only to destroy traditions already emptied of their content. We have other preoccupations, other manias. We know that poetry is much more than a verbal exercise, much less than a redefinition of man. We are quite aware that poetry is a set of incommensurable contradictions in which we can make out inordinate pride, absurd pretentions, abject meas culpas, and really sincere tears. Poetry wishes to leave its mark on everyone, yet refuses to say anything too precise: it feels free to be completely faithless to itself. It feeds on elusive astonishment, on pirouettes that terminate in ecstasy.

Under the circumstances, it is no easy task to pin down its special flavor. That takes measurement, comparison, confrontation, intuition ... and they reveal that the poetry of today, whether or not it is based on a definable subject, has certain convergent tendencies. It has thrown off courtly and romantic sentimentality: there are no more love poems
in the manner of Ronsard or Appolinaire; even Eluard in his elegiac mood seems dated, and Aragon’s fervent declarations to Elsa appear rather defiant in the heart of a lyricism more and more abandoned by generous and simple sentiments. Intimate poetry has also had its day: there is something anachronistic about John Follain’s evoking a Norman landscape or Charles Le Quintrec’s describing a church in Brittany. A related phenomenon forbids poets to indulge in the exoticism that so delighted Cendrars, Larbaud, and Levet. People no longer swoon at the mention of Singapore, San Francisco, or Betelgeuse. It has been a long time since the poet could seriously lament his homelessness, his absence from an inaccessible “somewhere else.” Light verse is also on the wane. The incontestable prestige of poetry — it will suffice to recall Heidegger’s pages on Hölderlin, Sartre’s on Baudelaire, Einstein’s on the value of lyricism — seems to have convinced many poets that innocent games are no longer worthy of them. They now know that the status of poetry rivals that of science and philosophy.

Given these tendencies, poetic inspiration tends to be of two main sorts. The first has as its general theme — actually a matter of temper and mood rather than theme — solitary man facing himself, plagued with doubts, scorn, suffering, approximations that gnaw away at him, and ambiguities that he cannot master; a certain philosophical temper is the clearest sign of these endeavors, which are profound, subtle, ingenious, lacking in imagery, frugal with words. The second sort centers in a romanticism typical of the twentieth century, that of vast spaces that escape from man and into which he can escape from himself, where individual and social consciousness gives way before a planetary, interstellar, and cosmic consciousness that authorizes the poetic outpour. It may be recognized by its rather restricted vocabulary; the same words keep coming back: “tree,” “river,” “island,” “earth,” “sea,” “star,” “sun,” “planet,” “mountain,” etc. Some of the dead weight the poet labored under in the period of precise gestures and detailed landscapes has been dissipated; the poet desires to breathe more freely, to brush aside the totality of objects and petty reckonings that attach him to the mechanized world; he detaches himself and in so doing rediscovers the essence of a universe that he no longer cares to mask with his ephemeral prowess. A new friendship links him with the mountain, the island, the sun. He is their equal, no longer their superior master; he appears to seek to become worthy of them again. He finds with surprise that he shares in their mystery, that of the elements. He has learned little about himself and now is forced to admit that he must unlearn even that little, for he senses how deeply the mystery of the elements is his mystery. Vast question marks nail him to the cos-
mos: it would be vain and foolish to go on writing about the minor incidents of a particular existence while the ocean, the comets, and the sequoias wait for a sign of recognition — or non-recognition — which would give him entry into another universe. A godless pantheism, a cosmogony without mystery: it is perhaps toward just this sort of escape — fervent and disillusioned, post-existentialist and neo-taoist — that the poets of an entire generation are oriented.

And it is not uniquely a tendency among French poets. Although affinities of this order may be seen in Pierre Emmanuel and Robert Sabatier, Yves Bonnefoy and Jean Grosjean, Lucien Becker and Pierre Garnier, Charles Le Quintrec and Jean-Claude Bernard, the “cosmic” temperament appears with equal intensity in a good number of poets outside France. It is now clear that the German Karl Krolow, the Yugoslav Vasko Popa, The Fleming Hugo Claus, the American Theodore Roethke, the Mexican Octavio Paz, the Spaniard Blas de Otero, the Pole Thadeusz Rozewicz, the Israeli T. Carmi, the Lebanese Ysuf al Khal — to name only poets who have appeared since the Second World War — have in common preoccupations of the same order. We may go further and assert that all of them, despite the disparity in their backgrounds and in the events they have witnessed, manifest a sensibility that differs only in matters of detail. As the world grows smaller, feelings grow closer together, and in an unexpected reflex motion, ambitions have grown. A poet, today, aware of how little he is in the world, cannot escape from his immense but secret destiny, reserved for a proud few: to speak of the universe in the name of everything that transcends man, and in so doing, to chance seizing upon a portion of its mystery, making the measureless humble and accessible.

To consummate the indissoluble marriage of the doubtful and the marvelous, it is clear that the poet will strive — more consciously than he cares to admit — to make his language quite as universal. He will instinctively eliminate from his work all vestiges of a prosody too closely dependent on the language he uses: his expression will aim at the essential, at presenting a play of concepts in words whose meanings will be easily translatable into another language. Since the language proper to poetry is universal — or at least universalist — the national language, as the poet uses it, will have to do without its too facile charms. The French poet will have to avoid constructing an allegory using the moon as a feminine personage and the sun as a masculine personage: he will know that in German the moon is masculine and the sun feminine, while in English both are neuter. The poet of the post-World-War-II generation will realize that to become involved in a sequence of images that lessens the translatability of his poem is to reduce
its poetic charge. Vocabulary is suspect by definition — the sapin may be called a cachalot, and the encrier a calèche — but it is somewhat less so if in another language the power of the image is not diminished, assuming it is faithfully transposed, element for element.

The translatability of a poem can today serve as a criterion of its worth in a nearly infallible way. Those of Eluard, for example, translated into English, Italian, or German, strike the reader as a tissue of platitudes: we may conclude that their scope is not so vast as it once seemed. On the other hand, a work known for its difficulty, that of Saint-John Perse, loses very little of its power in modern Greek, Spanish or Russian, not to mention the English and German translations, both extraordinarily good. Emotionally speaking, the return to the cosmos, in the poets of a single generation, and their secret agreement on themes worth celebrating in a universal — and in some measure anonymous — language, presupposes in all of them a solidarity of attitude toward the world, its aspirations, its shams, and its terrors. We may hesitate in the face of an argument so difficult to confirm, but we cannot ignore the sort of freemasonry that binds them together in spite of the superficial divergence of their political, social, and religious opinions.

A single faith enlivens them, one they are either too modest or too cautious to declare; it is not like other faiths, for it is fixed on nothing more than a few words felicitously brought together, a few mental shocks, a few poetic insights that claim to be truths although truths embarrass them. For them, poetry is a lay prayer, an enemy of prayers because it hates hierarchies; they are cloistered in it, which does not necessarily mean that they do not occasionally long to escape outside it. Escape... alas! the idea of salvation seems to them as false as any other idea, or any impulse that struggles against the idea of salvation. What is justified, on the other hand, is a certain ecstatic permeability that allows the word supremely to delude itself: it has the right to change everything, to order everything, to metamorphose everything, and it is free, after so total an expenditure, to bring everything back to its original state. Is it magical? Is it mystical? Poetry might be either one if it were a permanent phenomenon in continual repetition. But it is instantaneous, and its "magic" — which Jules Monnerot asserts is "without hope" — depends on a brief alliance of the spirit and the flesh, during which the limitations of the one are broken through and the pleasure of the other becomes unusually acute. Then everything returns to tranquillity... The poet dissolved into his own amazement; for a few seconds he established contact with the most distant past and the most inscrutable future. He prostrated himself before the unknown, fully prepared, the next time, to venerate with equal fervor some other
form of the unknown. He believes, deeply and seriously, in something that emanates from himself and at the same time goes beyond him, something for which he is in some measure responsible and in even greater measure irresponsible. His belief is personal, and if he shares it, his comprehension is fraught with misapprehensions. He has the sublime and painful impression that he has received a message from nothingness, destined to disappear into another nothingness. His mysticism is ecliptic; it is a paramysticism, one from which he can draw no lessons in practical behavior. He does not go into poetry as one goes into religion; he may make only a few visits, for poetry, even though it demands a lightning state of grace, has one serious drawback in comparison with mysticism: it uses words, words that belong to everyone, words the poet seeks out in the world in order to talk to the world. Paramysticism is not pure: it is too active, too eloquent truly to be so; it cannot make do with silence and draws its intoxication from its communicability. In mysticism — or in faith — there is something "sacred," and there are sacrilegious thoughts; poetry allows of nothing sacred: it replaces it, recreates it, proclaims it without verification; it does not allow of sacrilege either, however: everything is permitted to it, or, more exactly, it is in the habit of saying that everything is permitted to it, even the adoration of sow-bugs, which it can turn into archangels . . . and its audacity goes even further: it persuades others that sow-bugs have always been archangels.

The vital impulse alone: against a definition of poetry

Centuries of "arts of poetry" and treatises on poetry have not succeeded in capturing its essence definitively . . . and it is fortunate that all these attempts have failed. From the moment that we recognize poetry's right to transform the world, we recognize also that it need not submit to any exact law. It is possible — and even necessary — to clothe it in precepts in order to separate it from counterfeit: this is a matter of form and external presentation. When we have exhausted all definitions, each time with the feeling that we have discovered a variant of the same approximations and that we have fallen into the same errors, we shall resign ourselves simply to taking note that in the totality of human activities, poetry is preeminently the one about which we say the vaguest things, and whose praises, alternately vain and furious, we cannot help intoning. Every century contributes to the definition of what poetry is not; and every century, in its own way, consecrates its cult to poetry. When it is made to depend on a particular theory or feeling, it kicks them away, or else it elevates them to
its own level, not responding to their requirement, but transforming
them instead. When, on the other hand, men capitulate before its
splendor, it pays court to other affectivities, other impulses, other en-
thusiasms: we perceive that it needs them in order to be more than
poetry. We may try to resolve the enigma by saying that poetry is be-

beyond human understanding; but there again it rebels: its most success-
ful translation — the poem — is most certainly explicable in its details,
demonstrable, susceptible of the most rigorous qualification, and it
would be too easy simply to throw up our hands and accuse it of always
slipping away.

To be beautiful — or pleasant, or enchanting, or pleasurable —
is not enough for poetry; to be intelligent is not enough either: in fact
we expect poetry to compensate for the poverty and frigidity of the
intellect; mysticism does not concern it except occasionally: it rushes
in the better to escape and to pull together the ranks of moderation —
time enough, it is true, to reconstitute its madness. It tempts the lovers
of poetry, the specialists; it would be quite artificial and excessively
historified, however, if this were its only ambition. It tempts the profane,
bringing them strange intoxication; it would be thoroughly satisfied if
everyone had access to its hidden treasures without the slightest state
of grace. It tempts all those who are neither initiates nor transient
customers; we might conclude that its greatest permanence lies in the
appeal it has for many sorts of men, those who wish to give themselves
fully over to the absolute, without admitting that it is a

provisional absolute. It is deceptive because we suspect that it is located beyond
the privileged places attainable by the spirit and the senses; yet at the
same time it is on this side of those same places. Always somewhere
else. Curiously enough, it is also situated in zones available to the con-
sciousness, whether waking or sleeping, or on the borderline between
the two. It is stuck to the skin of the human being, but he cannot locate
it between this pore and that. Perhaps it would be more precise to say
that it is stuck to his pleura. Poetry is necessary for a single reason
impatiently rejected by reason itself: between two calculated acts and
two useful gestures, man is irresistibly attracted by the gratuitous, and
he pays for it dearly in images that illuminate his realities in a light
so revealing that it makes them ridiculous and even hateful.

To be what it is — the transcendence and negation of something
else — it must manifest an irresistible vital impulse. Facile and com-
mon! A pale and bloodless approximation! Indubitably . . . but, aside
from professional and philosophical considerations, poetry superbly belies
everything that can be said about it. Like a tree, it is planted there,
deeply rooted, and it bars the horizon; but it is a tree of an unknown
species; sometimes it is invisible; sometimes it is tiny and it sings; sometimes it flies and makes mountains tremble; sometimes it speaks to comets. It has its own life; it is born without our knowing where or when; it lives long, like stones, or for an instant, like a bolt of lightning. But the important thing is that by dint of changing, by forcing itself on us as a phenomenon of immense significance, by revealing a portion of the unknown to us and then taking it away, this tree — but we are speaking of poetry — becomes an internal tree on which we may impose, in our turn, all the metamorphoses that it has not yet offered us of itself. Thus we appropriate it; what belongs to us belongs to it; we accept its domination. If it had not become for us that principle which through its power and its hypnotism deserves the right to change our most intangible aspirations into passionate acts, it would not amount to much — one tree among many. But poetry is in fact powerful and strange: we can uncover it without grasping it, experience it without determining its effects. Poetry is a counter-power.

It is good continually to lay siege to the same fortress; it is good — and commendably useless — to begin for the ten thousandth time to define poetry, ever subject to examination, ever aptly paraphrased. It is enough to accept our desire to use words to make the power of the word more pure and more astonishing, and at the same time to accept our crushing defeat: an art cannot be examined with its own instruments. There remains to us one honorable and modest recourse: to say what poetry is not, or what it is not entirely; to submit to it instead of assimilating it; to recognize that the simple word — the basic instrument, in a state of rest, even before its astounding usage — is already stronger and more lasting than we; to duly note that if it escapes us, the better to carry us where it will, it is also, in its expressed form, its own executioner: put into words, it is put to death. It is — period. One must always apologize for such efforts to analyze what for the space of a moment brings to men the sense that their whole life finds its justification in an inextricable knot of words and sounds: the real and the imaginary, elevated suddenly to the rank of a god . . . who then commits suicide.

In the end will be the Word.
In the new beginning, without us, will be the Word.

tr. W. W. Ryding
Parallax between
What I say and
What I might have seen.

More and more now
With animals in open country:
There is no man between the words.

Wherever she walked on earth,
Gravity followed just below the topsoil
Like a pike under the ice, watching.

Something is rising in the black throat of the sky.
It drew him into the earth by his eyes:
Just beneath them the avalanches began.

I see no one now.
Only this secret trouble
That serves me like a squire.

All has happened before:
These things that will never happen again.
Green noise in which words decompose.

They do not live in space—
In time only—the reverse
Of glaciers bellowing through the dark.

These are the infrequent outposts.
The long dream continues
Of women and of words.
Tombstones sink in the turf
Of an earth
Sinking through space.

It's dark forever inside me.
Every operation
Is violation.

The transparent moment
Stands between life and death,
As invisible beside one as the other.

There is an imaginary child
Behind a hedge aiming an imaginary revolver
At my passing imaginary life.

Literary taxidermy:
She recites names for all the peaks
And sandbars of my topography.

Someone overhead flees
Through a black delta
Of rooms.

The telephoto man
In the wide-angle silence
Is an idiom of eyes.

At too many things
One is better than
His betters.

The man who offers himself nothing
Drives all night waiting for the city to arrive.
Never were all of us fishermen.

Gargoyles inside their bronze tongues
Convulse the evil spirits with laughter.
I'm inside where death doesn't enter.
Night is a faulty memory.
Only a few lights burning out.
Falling stars.

The difference between feeling and feeling about:
Empty containers draw me.
High peaks draw me.

Energetic despair is select joy:
He needs to go fishing
Until he needs to return.

At the full mood of the moon
He would listen to conversations
With the ears of an animal.

She lives as though she were alone on earth
Inside an hourglass and the level falling.
My past no longer fits.

The women I commit to memory
Like bad books I remember
Not to reread.
NOVIEMBRE

como la ola del otoño que arrasa el día
como su marea de hojas
como la risa del sol que cae potente y se raja en dos
igual que una catarata
así llegó noviembre a mi vida imperioso y caótico
con su ojo fijo y su ala quebrada
con su serpiente en la mano y un águila sobre el hombro
con su tropel de perros voraces que hablan en la noche
todo mi ser se pobló de pájaros ataviados de presagios
el bosque se agachó y gimió como una parturienta
y por el oriente hacia el amanecer se oyó una oración
de una sola sílaba, húmeda y jadeante

(noviembre vestido de luto se recuesta en el jardín de enfrente
noviembre cruzó las piernas mientras yo lo atisbo
detrás de las persianas
noviembre llegó inexorable como estaba previsto
y de nada valieron eucaliptos y libros de poemas
de nada sirvieron mis años como un tren de viejos
en un recodo aguarda el águila inmóvil y afilada)
los aljibes del patio se han llenado de ratas
las hojas heridas forman montones como tumbas
los ríos se quedaron dormidos y al anochecer
hay quejidos de buhos y ojos que miran en secreto
todo es un rumor de árboles penitentes
árboles que encarnan para sorprenderme
con palabras milagrosas y metálicas
mientras yo de pie sobre el puente medito acerca del agua
y la luna sigue cantando fastuosa y libertina
sobre noviembre que dormita
doblado en el desván
NOVEMBER

like the wave of autumn that levels the day
with its tide of leaves
like the laugh of the sun falling powerfully and splitting in two
just like a waterfall
that's how november came to my life commanding and chaotic
with its staring eye and its broken wing
with its snake in its hand and an eagle on its shoulder
with its pack of voracious dogs that talk all night
all my being filled with birds decked out in premonitions
the forest bent and moaned like a woman in labor
and by the east towards dawn we heard a prayer
of a single syllable, damp and heaving

(november in mourning reclines in the garden across the street
november crosses its legs as long as I spy on it
from behind the shutters
november arrives inexorable as it had been expected
and eucalyptus and books of poems were good for nothing
my years like a train of old people weren't good for a thing
in a bend the sharp motionless eagle waits)

the wells in the patio have filled up with rats
the wounded leaves form heaps like tombs
the rivers fall asleep and at nightfall
there are cries of owls and eyes watching secretly
all is a sound of trees doing penance
trees that become alive to surprise me
with metallic, miraculous words
while I standing on the bridge meditate about the water
and the moon goes on singing pompous and libertine
over november that dozes

folded in the attic
Sergio Mondragón

GURU

la melena del león cubre el zoológico del cielo
sus garras se ejercitan en mi pecho que sangra
su cola se mece con suavidad en mis pestanas

es el león de todos los años
de todos los días

es el león del tapiz
su barba de profeta
el león blanco con
y sus ojos mansos sus musculos elásticos

es el león de la Justicia
el león nacido en julio pero que reina en agosto

es el león de las tremendas carcajadas
el león al cual sólo los justos pueden mirar de frente

el león del rugido largo y penetrante
cuyo eco retumba en todos los rincones

la melena del león cae sobre mi frente
y se añida en mi entrecejo

que sigue aquí cavilando sobre el león
de la Justicia
Sergio Mondragón

GURU

the lion’s mane covers the sky’s animal zoo.
its claws are exercising on my bleeding breast
its tail gently swings across my lashes
it’s the lion that’s there every year
that’s there every day
it’s the lion of the tapestry in the temple
the white lion with its prophet’s beard
and its tame eyes, its elastic muscles
it’s the lion of Justice
the lion born in july but that reigns in august
it’s the lion of the huge bursts of laughter
the lion only the just can look into the eye
the lion of the long and penetrating roar
whose echo resounds in all corners
the lion’s mane falls upon my forehead and
nests in my brow:

my brow
which remains here pondering about the lion
of Justice.

tr. Annemarie Colbin
Nil, Episodes in the Literary Conquest of Void During the Nineteenth Century

by Robert Martin Adams.
New York: Oxford University, 1966.

Never before, I should think, have men agitated on so many fronts, and so violently, as today. No summary is necessary: the gallop of the Four Horsemen has seldom seemed closer, and though one must suppose that every age feels itself mortally threatened, the global mirror in which we live today spares us not a single spot on the face of this earth from which we fail to get the message through the medium. So it is astonishing, at first, to read the opening words of Professor Robert M. Adams' recent study *Nil: Episodes in the Literary Conquest of Void During the Nineteenth Century*: “Nothing is closer to the supreme commonplace of our commonplace age than its preoccupation with Nothing,” qualified, immediately, with the comment that Nothing may be, paradoxically, the “willful submission of oneself to non-experience as an active form of experience.” This is one way of saying we are engaged in much ado about Nothing, or at least that our responses are pantomimic gestures of frustration, explosions without noises, the silence before the moment that shatters it. However, Adams makes it quite clear that he is less interested in assessing where we are now and more concerned with how we got there. To do this he ranges with elegant ease over the uneasy topography of the whole nineteenth century: from Senancour to “The Hunting of the Snark,” from Stendhal to Zola,
from Novalis to Huysmans, from Poe to Henry James and Ibsen. While Nothing is an ubiquitous Something more stridently in France than elsewhere (néant, rien, le gouffre, l'infini — to cite only a few appropriate terms), Adams recounts the saga of Nothing as an obsession throughout Europe from England to Russia (and America as well).

Adams rejects the Death of God as the sole cause for what he conceives as “an age of ricochet and revulsion, an era of deep psychic disease and downright fright.” The death of Everything did not, in his view, automatically give birth to Nothing. Further, seeing our age as a continuation of a “colossal manic-depressive time,” he rejects as well the classic “Darwin-Marx-Freud-World War I answer.” Yet one of the questions left unanswered in this rich, suggestive study is precisely what causes there were for the “vogue of void”; for while Adams traces the steps of Nothing with an indisputable display of examples, he never really tells us why, in any large sense, Nothing should have occupied the mind and art of so many in the course of a century and longer. More crucially, perhaps, he leaves us feeling that Nothing was if not the only certainly the most aggressive subject of nineteenth-century literature, and with that assessment there may be room for considerable disagreement.

There are, as must be expected, terminological problems in a far-ranging study such as this. “We are,” says Adams, a “void-haunted, void-fascinated age” and, with some exceptions, he tends to treat the varieties of nineteenth-century void as so many conscious choices — or defenses — against responsibilities, for “void is an ultimate without responsibilities.” Often, perhaps without it being so intended, void appears to be an artist’s frivolous subterfuge, a concerted fad or a vogue of a smart set looking about to see how many ways there are of engaging Nothing: “. . . by trying it [void] out, first in one context, then in another, the imaginative writers of the nineteenth-century learned to command its keyboard, pedals, and stops. . . .” Something of this there was, of course — in the death worship of certain German Romantics, in the circle of Gautier and in Baudelaire’s early “dandyism,” in the Pre-Raphaelite supernal posture, in the studied poses of self-styled decadents and aesthetes during the prolonged (and elongated) fin de siècle, which seems to have begun as early as the Fifties. But, by and large, the confrontation with Nothing was entirely a serious affair and, in Baudelaire as in others, not so much cultivated as dreaded. Peer Gynt’s encounter with the Great Boyg (which Adams does not mention) is, all things considered, finally not comic at all.

Adams makes useful distinctions: there was the void of Infinity, of “exaltation” (Novalis) and the void of collapse (Poe); the void of dis-
gust (Baudelaire, Flaubert) and the void of immobility (Mallarmé); void of irrelevance (Gogol); the void of rhetoric (Melville) and the void of waste (James); and there are voids of “masks, screens, and guises” (Stendhal and others). It is not long before we discover the inevitable paradox: “Nothing is ... transfigured into Everything,” the preoccupation with annihilation becomes itself a feverish activity absorbing the whole of one’s Being in preparing and executing a variety of preventive measures against chronic vertigo. Gogol’s *Dead Souls* seems a surprising choice at first, but Adams reads in it a sense of “vacancy” (of which, one must think, Chekhov became the definitive spokesman), and Chichikov becomes the ever pervasive and yet nondescript “hero” of a novel that goes nowhere — or, in the image of the flying horses at the conclusion, right out of this world (Gogol of course never “finished” the novel but the intention of a continuation never continued supports rather than obstructs Adams’ reading). About Flaubert and Huysmans we hear mostly the expected (though why *L’Education Sentimentale* does not get the edge over *Madame Bovary* as a novel about Nothing I do not understand); but on Baudelaire we are furnished with some fine insights into the cruelty of Nothing, the wish for a “moral neutrality,” “an end to consciousness,” a fear of Time, and the vision of Eternity as a horrible Nothing (specialists will disagree with the reading of “Le Rêve d’un Curieux” as a final statement of Baudelaire’s “void”). Perhaps the most brilliant pages of the book are those which make us see, in Stendhal’s *Chartreuse de Parme*, the “masks,” “screens,” and “guises” of Fabrizio, especially the mask of his “little worn black coat”:

> Neutering motivation just when motives become crucially interesting, the coat’s *impenetrability* achieves the special impact of a deliberately unsounded note in a sequence... A more emphatic and less emphasized Nothing we shall be hard put to discover.

(A look at Gogol’s overcoat is irresistible but Adams foregoes it.) Less convincing is the attempt to see in *Moby-Dick* a sense of Nothing through the “irrelevance or inadequacy of strenuous expression” — in short the rhetoric stands accused of covering up the lack of a substantial subject. In the use of language itself, Biblical, Shakespearean, Miltonic, Adams sees Melville as protesting that no words are adequate for his subject, and hence he “creates a vast, reverberant shell of a book.” If *Moby-Dick* is a “gesture largely,” “verbal pantomine,” then we are obliged I think, to accept unequivocally the judgment that the
book is empty (a "shell") at the center. That may be an ingenious way of confronting the whaling chapters (the Nothing of irrelevance) but Ahab is a more difficult and imposing figure, for all the verbal "masks" he wears. Adams seems to suggest that Ahab's quest for the ever elusive whale is merely the futile pursuit of Nothing in yet another guise; yet it seems to me that Ahab's striving is more than tilting at windmills and less than Faust's streben: it is, perhaps, a challenge to Nothingness to do its worst and a readiness to pay the consequences.

Mallarmé is unquestionably the example of a book about Nothing, and there are no surprises (but an illuminating discussion of Hérodiade). Here, in Mallarmé's poetry, is a self-immolating art, an exercise of "dying" into the exquisite, unfulfilled sexuality surrounding an empty world, a world which declines into even less than Nothing when it is metamorphosed into poetry. This is akin to Wagner's Liebestod (which deserves and gets a chapter to itself) and to Axel and all those love-life denying gestures in countless works. Schopenhauer's great gesture of denial and his hope for temporary salvation in the aesthetic lull or in ascetic renunciation is, I think, mistaken for solipsism, and Adams treats Schopenhauer in the tradition of Nietzsche (though he does not mention him in this regard), calling him a "bald man selling hair-rejuvenator on the streetcorner" because "every circumstance discredits the substance of his spiel." This is frivolous oversimplification: more and more one should recognize in Schopenhauer the social critic who asked us to deny that which patently has never made men happy: materiality. Identity crisis amidst the lonely crowd comes from the greed of ambition, the hypocrisy of believing forward to be upward, progress to be Paradise. What Schopenhauer denied was not so much existence as teleology — especially the kind of teleology he saw his own age pursuing. He never recommended suicide (he specifically scorned it), and Wagner's reading of him should not be taken as a substitute.

The book is not without surprises. Toward its conclusion, Adams inserts Zola, whom he credits with "real void-worship in (his) abasement before the blind, brutal fact of fertility," delineating, like Ibsen, Woman as "a touchstone revealing if not creating spiritual bankruptcy." It is difficult to resist the temptation of seeing Molly Bloom under that category, and it would be interesting to know how Adams, who has written thoroughly on Joyce, would entertain such a rubric for Molly, surely herself a "brutal fact of fertility" (Joyce, however, is not within the purview of the book). In Ibsen and Zola, Adams sees merely different manifestations of the mal de siècle: "Passion consuming to the point of destructiveness...."
This is an important and learned book (despite the irritating absence of an Index), but it does leave one a little dazed, as if, by some clever design, we have been lured into the Abyss ourselves. At this point it would do well to remind ourselves of Nietzsche's admonition (*Beyond Good and Evil*): "If you look long into an abyss, the abyss will look back at you." The abyss of this study begins looking back at you when some of the generalizations sink in:

Thus the experience of (physical) Nothing is the only path to the delights of an (imaginative) Everything. The nineteenth century is full of witnesses following this road toward solipsism. From Julien Sorel to Des Esseintes, from Keats to Mallarmé, from Novalis to Ibsen, they all testify that anticipation, imagination, and memory (any relation as long as it is distant) are richer experiences than experience itself.

One cannot quarrel with the whole of this — it is a self-evident yet astute observation on the nature of man's relation to the world during a century that seemed preoccupied with process more than with its end. But there are doubts once one looks at cases in point. Julien Sorel (and Fabrizio) does not so much abjure experience as misunderstand its purpose. Like Wilhelm Meister he expects Life to be a *Bildungsroman* and prepares himself to play the part of its hero. In the process of preparation experience collides with sometimes unconscious affective drives, human attachments that do not square with what Julien mistakenly considers to be his "duty" on the way to a development which never really takes place. In reality, ladders mounted to climb to a Lady's window for a nocturnal rendezvous tend to make noises. But this is quite a different matter from the surrogate experience of Des Esseintes' "London trip" undertaken by sitting, in Paris, amidst English tobacco smoke and other atmosphere producing stimulants. And while Novalis goes gently into the dark night because he is certain of what lies beyond, for Keats such faith is far more risky: darkling he listens but does not follow the nightingale, for if he were to become the bird how could he ever again enjoy its enticing song? Suffering ego that he is, he would rather stay here than go there.

It is true that the "nineteenth century is full of ecstatic isolates worshipping neutralities wrapped in projections," but it is also a most violent century worshipping many other gods. Faust saw the danger ahead when he compacted with Mephisto that the wager shall be lost the moment he, Faust, is content with that moment and bids it to stay. Faust's striving (like Frost's man in the snow) is a recognition of the necessity for ceaseless activity, not always for some ultimate goal, but
for the sake of survival, for the sake of warding off the fall into the alternative Nothing. The violence of flapping one’s wings in the void is therefore the other side of the silent passivity which Adams has convincingly traced over a century of important writers. ("Silence, exile and cunning," says Stephen Dedalus in *The Portrait*; but in *Ulysses* it is painfully clear that none of these, least of all silence, has made him a poet.) There is no arguing against the persistence of “Nil” in the nineteenth century, but Adams’ subtitle is perhaps misleading: “Episodes in the Literary Conquest of Void in the Nineteenth Century.” I should not call his recital of “episodes” as demonstrating the attempt to conquer void: that is precisely the other side of the coin which we must keep in mind. The act of denial is not only in itself often an affirmative act of convulsion (something which Adams himself points out), but there were, sometimes in the very writers of “Nil,” very explicit resistances to the Abyss. After extolling the finite wholeness of the “naive” poet in a naive time, Schiller (in his *Naive and Sentimental Poetry*) maneuvers himself into a position favoring the modern, or “sentimental” poet. Self-consciousness, he admits, has brought woe to modern man: it has made him aware not only of where he is but of where he *was*. Yet the modern poet, precisely because he often sees an impassable void between the present and a lost past (a swan in the muddy streets), carries out an infinite number of strategic battles in which he may bemoan, satirize, or idealize the fate of his distance from another world. But it is this very richness of possibilities, suggests Schiller, which makes the modern poet more tragic but also less complacent. More often than one suspects, the modern poet submits to the destructive element in order to survive it.

I do not recall that Adams ever uses the word “nihilism” in the book, and I can only assume that he wished to distinguish between the specificity of that term (and its movement) and the more general “Nil” which he discusses. Yet Nil and nihilism are ultimately inseparable, and nihilism has been claimed as the precursor of certain forms of existentialism precisely because the void was to be only the Purgatory, the sojourn in the valley of futility in which some positive meaning could ultimately be salvaged. At the very moment of this writing more of us than ever are saying Nay in order to say Yea. The spectacle of violence against violence in the name of “non-violence” is perhaps one of the perplexing and inevitable chapters in the continuing saga of “Nil.”

Edward Engelberg
The literary scene in Germany abounds with books, but there are few great names, and still fewer good novels. Since the vogue of the New Novel has abated, authors like Uwe Johnson or Manfred Lettau have disappeared from view; Günter Grass and Peter Weiss have become engaged in pamphleteering, leaving only Martin Walser and a small number of older established writers in charge of the great plains of German fiction. The fall book fair in Frankfurt had to feed on meager supplies.

It was with audible sighs of relief that Alfred Andersch’s novel *Efraim* was greeted by booksellers and particularly by Diogenes in Zürich which was the lucky publisher snatching this attractive part of the spoils of Walter Editions after Otto Walter himself, who had attracted a sizeable and not unsightly group of progressive authors, was booted from his own firm. This entire editorial *pèle-mèle* helped Andersch to a fresh start in fiction after his star had become rather dim in recent years: beginning his literary career soon after the last war by a book of semi-political confessions, *Die Kirschen der Freiheit*, he achieved his masterpiece in 1957 with the novel *Sansibar oder der letzte Grund* telling the story of a young girl’s flight from Nazi Germany and the involvement of half-a-dozen other persons in this affair. The novel was, of course, politically inspired, but the political element was fused naturally, and therefore successfully, with the convincing statement of general human conditions reflected in the fates of a handful of fictitious characters. In the years that followed An-
dersch wrote radio plays and short stories plus another novel which went badly with the critics; after that he seemed to slip into the grooves of travelogue as though discouraged in his attempts to write fiction from a historical perspective.

It is quite true that — as Andersch claims — a novelist knows only what he invents. This does not necessarily mean that he has to invent everything; there are, however, things he cannot invent: matters of common experience, events in history, or patterns of social behavior. The novelist for instance who locates his fiction in a certain historical setting always risks a step into limbo, for it is hard to do justice to fact and fiction alike from the single perspective of an individual work. This tends to vitiate from the start attempts like the "non-fiction novel" which purports to amalgamate the two disparate elements — it is either one or the other. Unless, of course, the author invents his own "facts" in the manner of John Barth's Sot-Weed Factor, making his entire novel a frank parody of the "fictionalized account."

In Efraim Andersch has become a victim of the current epidemic in German letters of belated soul-searching, die Vergangenheit bewältigen: a Berlin-born Jewish journalist who escaped in his youth to England before the Nazis got a chance to send him to Auschwitz like his mother, is commissioned by his editor with a trip to his native city which he has not seen for more than twenty-five years although he has covered the better part of the world for his London paper. He enters the country as a virtual stranger, and with misgivings, becoming however duly entangled in old memories and a radical young woman's attractions — which, in addition to the futile search for a childhood friend who turns out to be his chief's illegitimate daughter by a rich Jewish lady, sufficiently unsettles him in order to make him slowly relinquish journalism as he starts to write during intermittent periods what finally amounts to the story of the novel.

It is Efraim's story told to nobody in particular, but of course Andersch did the inventing, and he is not a Jew — hence some difficulties. What we get, then, is what Andersch imagines to be a Jewish emigrant's thoughts and feelings, and which is no closer to the truth than what American whites imagine American negroes to be: he does not know what he is talking about and falls to the most ridiculous cliché notions, most of them relating to sex. (Other hilarious effects are produced when the author has his hero erupt in gusts of Yiddish vituperation — not in real life but in his writing.)

Besides, Jewishness is not the only axe Andersch has to grind in this novel. There occurs in it a rather pallid young musician who becomes memorable just for a kind of indirect music he has invented,
and for which Efraim discovers the description *ecmelic*, which means extra-melodic to our tonal patterns. This music consists of rhythms created by various sonic planes mounted by the musician with the help of a tape recorder and a pair of scissors in the manner of spatial perspective; it is something Efraim frankly admires, hoping to use it as well for a book, should he really turn writer.

As it happens, Andersch is in fact trying out this method in his novel. For his Efraim is at the beginning not a writer of fiction — a world of invention — but of “hard facts,” as behooves a good journalist. So the first pages of his notes towards a novel sound rather queer and awkward: they are really factual statements of his own physical environment in a Berlin hotel room. It is only by slow progress and in the course of time that his style becomes more lively while his journalistic activities are steadily decreasing, and his reputation as a first-class reporter goes fast to the dogs. Unfortunately Andersch’s own style seems similarly inhibited: from self-conscious clumsiness his language will switch abruptly to embarrassing figures of florid speech producing wonderful examples of *Stilblütten*.

Nevertheless the reader soon becomes aware of an intricate time pattern. It is based on a few days’ stay in Berlin which is re-created almost to the hour in piecemeal fashion over the period of some two years after those events in various locations that serve as motivating impulses for further explorations into previous episodes of Efraim’s life. The moments of transition from one time level to a different one are not easy to discover and to identify: it takes the reader several pages until he is certain of where the narrative is just then going. And this may indeed be what the author, now in his role of inventor, intends: to build an “ecmelic” — or rather, *eclogic* — rhythm of imagination from his fragmented quotations from reality.

But all has not yet been said about the style of the novel, particularly in regard to its language. Andersch is not merely portraying the growth of a narrative style and perspective; he is at the same time dealing with the problem of a man who has difficulties re-adjusting the linguistic habits of his childhood period to the current language in his home country twenty-five years later. Efraim discovers that he has become estranged to contemporary German thought and language which he can thus view and discuss in an almost disinterested manner — a subtle way of introducing social comment in a novel.

George Steiner’s contention, that the German language has been permanently corrupted by Nazi use, seems to be reflected in Andersch’s argument for a brief moment, then is submerged, however, in the complex question of generational and local change. It is in any case the
function of language that becomes one of the dominant *motifs* in the novel to the point of obsession, and if there is any specific reason why Andersch’s novel falls short of success, it is probably for belaboring this point too much and in a too theoretical manner.

When I read, a number of years ago, *The Red One*, Andersch’s most recent novel up to the publication of *Efraim*, it seemed to me that there was more than a hint of serious concern with techniques of verbal expression behind that work’s flimsy and melodramatic story. It was evidently centered on the problem of direct speech as conceptual and stylistic device in fiction which exists in all of the *romans nouveaux* in one form or another. *Efraim* picks up the line of technical exploration which has kept Andersch busy for a long time, and to which some fashionable frills have unfortunately been added for, as I believe, ephemeral reasons. The ambitious novel would undoubtedly be better off if its author had possessed the moral fortitude to let well enough alone, deciding on one central aim. As it is, *Efraim* bursts apart under the strain of its many elements that are not easily integrated into a consistent single form.

*Kurt Opitz*
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

HOMERO ARIDJIS is a young Mexican poet who has published six volumes of poems. Antes del reino and Mirandola dormir and his latest, Perséfone, figure among his best known works. In 1964 he received the Villaurrutia prize for his book Pavana por la amada presente.

MARC ALYN is a young French poet, essayist and novelist who serves as poetry critic for the weekly French newspaper Le Figaro Littéraire. He edits the modern poetry series for the publisher Flammarion in Paris. The major collections of his poetry are Le Temps des Autres, Cruels Divertissements, and Délébiles. Mr. Alyn’s critical essays include studies on François Mauriac, Dylan Thomas, and Gérard de Nerval.

WILLIS BARNSTONE is a poet and critic who is currently professor of Spanish and Comparative Literature at Indiana University. He has edited and introduced an anthology titled Modern European Poetry. He is also the editor of the bi-lingual journal, Hispanic Arts.

JOHN BERRYMAN won the Academy of American Poets Award in 1967 for his poetry. His published volumes of poetry include: Homage to Mistress Bradstreet, The Dispossessed, 77 Dream Songs, Berryman's Sonnets, and Short Poems. Mr. Berryman has written critical articles on Shakespeare, and a critical biography, Stephen Crane. His latest book of poems, intended as a companion piece to 77 Dream Songs, will be titled His Toy, His Dream, His Rest to be published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, in August, 1968.

HEINRICH BÖLL is a German novelist and short story writer. He has published several collections of short stories and his best known novels are Billiards at Half-Past Nine, and The Clown, which was chosen by the American Library Association as one of the Notable Books of 1965.
ALAIN BOSQUET has published over sixty volumes. His novel, *La Confession Mexicaine*, received the Prix Interallié in 1965. His collected poetry has been published by Gallimard in 1967 under the title *Quatre Testaments et autres poèmes*. Volumes of his selected poems have appeared in various translations in Germany, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Spain, Ecuador. Mr. Bosquet has been appointed Knapp Professor at the University of Wisconsin for 1969.

MICHAEL BULLOCK is an English poet and translator who has published translations of leading contemporary German poets and novelists. He is also the editor of the English poetry journal *Expression*.

ANNEMARIE COLBIN is a free-lance translator specializing in South American literature. She is presently translating an Argentine play that has been optioned for a Broadway production.

RICHARD EBERHART won the Pulitzer Prize in 1966 for his *Selected Poems 1930-1965*. His most recent publication is *31 Sonnets* (Eakins Press). Mr. Eberhart is presently a member of the English Department at Dartmouth College. His poems have appeared in a variety of magazines, and in eight volumes from 1944-1957.

EDWARD ENGELBERG is professor of Comparative Literature at Brandeis University. In addition to essays on Thomas Mann, Tennyson, and D. H. Lawrence, he has published *The Symbolist Poem* and *The Vast Design: Patterns in W. B. Yeats’ Aesthetic*.

WALLACE FOWLIE is a critic and translator who is currently professor of Romance Languages at Duke University. He has written critical studies on Rimbaud, Mallarmé, modern French theater, and Cocteau in addition to translating Baudelaire, Rimbaud and many others. His most recent book, *Climate of Violence*, will be reviewed in the July issue of *Mundus Artium*. 
SAMUEL J. HAZO is currently director of the International Poetry Forum, and president of the Pittsburgh Council for the Arts. He has published five volumes of his own poetry in addition to his translation work. In 1965 Mr. Hazo made a lecture and reading tour through the Middle East and Greece, and in 1966 he represented the United States during Literature Week at Jamaica. He is presently Professor of English at Duquesne University.

EVA HESSE is an essayist and translator who has translated several modern American poets into German. She has also edited a collection of Japanese Noh plays.

HANS EGON HOLTHUSEN is a German poet and critic who has published several volumes of poetry, studies on Rilke, and numerous essays on modern German poets. He was recently guest professor of German Literature at Indiana University. He presently resides in Munich.

DAVID HOSTETLER has presented one-man shows and participated in group exhibitions with his sculpture program, The American Woman, throughout the United States and Mexico. He is presently a member of the Fine Arts Department at Ohio University.

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KURT OPITZ is a German critic and translator with particular interest in the literature of the 20th century. He is currently working for UNESCO.

AHMED ALI SAID was formerly the editor of SHI’R, a magazine of Arabic poetry, between 1957-1964. His poetry collections include: The Songs of Mijyar the Damascene, Leaves in
the Wind, and Turbulences and Migrations in the Sphere of Day and Night. Mr. Said recently organized the Conference of Afro-Asian Writers in Lebanon.

KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN is a German composer, conductor and pianist whose works have been performed under his own direction in several countries. He has made extended tours in the United States giving lectures and concerts. He has composed twenty-five major works and is particularly known for his support and promotion of electronic music. The recordings of his works have appeared with Time Records, Columbia, Deutsche Grammophon, Philips, RCA Italiana, VEGA, and Vox.

MAX WALDMAN has done photographic studies of major literary and theatrical figures including André Malraux, Edward Albee, and Jason Robards, Jr. Mr. Waldman’s work has been widely published in major journals in America and abroad.

J. MICHAEL YATES is a young American poet, essayist, and translator who has published several volumes of poetry: Spiral of Mirrors, Hunt in an Unmapped Interior, Canticles for Electronic Music. He is co-editor of the new journal, Contemporary Literature in Translation, and poetry editor of Prism International.


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