

# *ABJECTION, MELANCHOLIA, AND LOVE*

*The Work of Julia Kristeva*

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## *The Adolescent Novel*

JULIA KRISTEVA

### *To Write Adolescence*

Like a child, the adolescent is one of those mythic figures that the imaginary, and of course, the theoretical imaginary, gives us in order to distance us from certain of our faults – cleavages, denials, or simply desires? – by reifying them in the form of someone who has not yet grown up. Certain epochs were in love with childhood . . . that of Rousseau aspired, through *Emile*, to the liberal stability of a new social contract. The epoch of Freud and the first Freudians sought the knowledge, comprehensive yet sure, of the polymorphous perversions. Other epochs recognized themselves willingly in the problematic incompleteness of young page-boys, picaros, delinquents, or terrorists – from Casanova to Milos Forman to Mad Max. Our epoch seems to be closest to these last. Whatever real problems are posed by the adolescents of our time, it appears, from the point of view I will take today, that to speak of the ‘adolescent’ and even more so of ‘adolescent writing’ consists in interrogating oneself on the role of the imaginary and its efficacy in the care of the patient, as well as for the analyst.

I understand by the term ‘adolescent’ less an age category than an open psychic structure. Like the ‘open systems’ of which biology speaks concerning living organisms that live only by maintaining a renewable identity through interaction with another, the adolescent structure opens itself to the repressed at the same time that it initiates a psychic reorganization of the individual – thanks to a tremendous loosening of the superego. The awakening of pre-genitality follows, and an attempt to integrate it within genitality.

In the aftermath of the oedipal stabilization of subjective identity, the adolescent again questions his identifications, along with his capacities for speech and symbolization. The search for a new love object reactivates the depressive position and the manic attempts at its resolution – from perversion to toxicomanias, global religions, and ideological adhesions.

Just as there are ‘as if’ personalities, there are ‘open structure’ personalities. These integrate the ‘as if’, as well as other traits which can manifest themselves within perverse structures – without there necessarily being any precise perversions. The evolution of the modern family and the ambiguity of sexual and parental roles within it, the bending or weakening of religious and moral taboos, are among the factors that make for these subjects *not* structuring themselves around a fixed pole of the forbidden, or of the law. The frontiers between differences of sex or identity, reality and fantasy, act and discourse, etc., are easily traversed without one being able to speak of perversion or borderline – and perhaps this would only be because these ‘open structures’ find themselves immediately echoing the fluidity, i.e. the inconsistency, of a mass media society. The adolescent is found to represent *naturally* this structure that can be called a ‘crisis’ structure only through the eyes of a stable, ideal law.

One could refine the description of this ‘open structure’ . . . . Let us insist rather on the value that writing can extract from it. I will note within writing at least three registers:

1 *The semiologically productive activity of written signs*

Understood through its linguistic substratum, this activity adds however the motor element, along with its muscular and anal mastery as well as the aggressive appropriation of the other’s body *and* one’s own, all within a narcissistic, masturbatory gratification.

2 *The production of a novelistic fiction*

An imaginary activity, this fiction borrows from the available ideologies or codes of representation that filter personal fantasies. The filtering here can become a repression of unconscious contents and give rise to a stereotyped writing of clichés; on the other hand, it can permit a genuine inscription of unconscious contents within language, and give to the adolescent the feeling of utilizing, at last and for the first time in his life, a living discourse, one that is not empty, not an ‘as if’.

3 *The screening from another's appraisal*

Through its solitary economy, writing protects the subject from phobic affects – and if it enables him to re-elaborate his psychic space, it also withdraws that space from reality testing. The psychic benefit of such a withdrawal is obvious, but does not bypass the question of managing the rapport with reality for the subject himself – and of course within the treatment in so far as it utilizes his texts.

I will briefly evoke the case of an 18-year-old patient, a 'borderline' case whom I treat in psychotherapy once a week. Incapable of phantasmatic elaboration, playing the adult through delirium and sexual acting-out (she aspires to be in the police force and is constantly seducing all varieties of officers, national guardsmen, etc.), she had no other discourse at the beginning of her treatment but accounts of this desire-delirium, and her actings-out, all intimately related. On the level of transference – and to affirm that she too, like me, could write of love – Anne began to draw comic strips representing the lives of policemen and their sexual adventures. Little by little, onomatopoeics give way to bubbles enclosing words and dialogues of increasing complexity, and to her telling me that 'these cop stories, they're like a dream, a novel.' At the next stage, Anne imagines herself a writer of love songs – but in English. One will note the utilization of drawings, and then the foreign language, to reach a more and more exact representation of unconscious contents. The sending of letters to the analyst is the following stage, expressing more directly the psychic pain and lament. Inside the sessions where she brings her writings, Anne's discourse modifies itself, becomes more complex, her claims less immediately aggressive, more depressive perhaps, but in that sense more refined. Writing has taken the place of the 'forces of order': a writing as 'guardian of the peace', provisional of course, but which seemed to me to afford Anne a respite for adapting to the memory of her past . . . .

In this case, but also in the most banal situations, I will see writing as a semiotic practice that facilitates the ultimate reorganization of psychic space, in the time before an ideally postulated maturity. The adolescent imaginary is essentially amorous and the love object – susceptible to loss – reactivates the depressive position. From the basis of this objectal position,

adolescent writing (written sign + fantasy filtered through the available imaginary codes) reactivates the process of the appearance of the symbol, a process that Hanna Segal attributes to the depressive position and which she sees as taking the place of the 'symbolic equivalents' of the paranoid position. During adolescence, this reactivation of the symbol or *depressive reactivation* is accompanied by a more or less free phantasmatic elaboration, which permits an *adjustment of drives* subjacent to the phantasms *and of the signs* of spoken or written language. In this sense, imaginary activity, and imaginary writing even more so (through the narcissistic gratification and phobic protection that it affords) gives the subject an opportunity to construct a discourse that is not 'empty', but that he lives as authentic. I will add to Hanna Segal's position<sup>1</sup> that if it seems to me incontestable that adolescent writing draws in on itself in a reactivation of the depressive position, it is yet from a *manic* position that it sustains itself. Refusal of loss, triumph of the Ego through the fetish of the text, writing becomes an essential phallic compliment, if not the phallus *par excellence*. It depends, for this very reason, on an ideal paternity.

Our society does nothing to prohibit such a phallic affirmation during adolescence. On the contrary, the adolescent has a right to the imaginary, and it is perhaps by an invitation to imaginary activities that modern societies replace or perhaps sweeten the initiation rites that other societies impose on their adolescents. The adult will have the right to this only as a reader or spectator of novels, films, paintings . . . or as artist. I do not see, moreover, what would prompt writing if not an 'open structure' . . . .

### *Novelistic Writing*

One could maintain that the novelistic genre itself (and not writing as such, which allies itself even more to the battle of the subject with schizophrenia or depression) is largely tributary, in its characters and the logic of its actions, to the 'adolescent' economy of writing. It would be, from this point of view, the work of a perpetual subject-adolescent which, as a permanent testimony of our adolescence, would enable us to retrieve this immature state, as depressive as it is jubilatory, to which we owe, perhaps, some part of that pleasure called 'aesthetic'.

To demonstrate this affirmation, namely that the novelist presents himself as an adolescent, that he recognizes himself in the adolescent, and is an adolescent, I will take the theme of the adolescent in novels. He will appear to us as a key figure in the constitution of the novelistic genre in the West.

### The Betrayed Page turns Traitor. Ambivalence, a Novelistic Value

Mozart immortalized the figure of the page-boy who, like a happy Narcissus, sighs in *The Marriage of Figaro*, night and day, without knowing whether this be love. It has been perhaps not enough stressed that the themes of the first modern novels, just after the Middle Ages, consist in the loves of page-boys. These loves thus constitute the very thread of novelistic psychology.

It is often considered that the first novel in French prose which is neither an epic nor a courtly lyric is a text by Antoine de la Sale (born 1385 or 1386, died 1460), entitled *Little Jehan de Saintré* (1456). We are right in the middle of the fifteenth century; the author is living through the Hundred Years War, the Battle of Orleans (1428), the death of Joan of Arc (1431). A feverish ecclesiastical activity attests to the symbolic upheaval of the time: the Council of Basel (1431–1439), the Council at Constance (1414–1418). Even if these events do not enter directly into the text, the novel still attests to the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, by the residue of an erudite medieval discourse, and by the appearance of new discourses within that.

Having finished his preliminary studies in Provence, Antoine de la Sale starts as a page-boy in the Court of Louis II, king of Sicily. He is 14 years old. Around 1442, he is both a writer (he compiles historic, geographic, juridical, ethical, etc., texts) and a tutor (he writes textbooks for his students). Then, as if by a synthesis of his own history as a page-boy and the students for whom he writes his didactic literature, he creates the personage of Jehan de Saintré. I will insist first of all on the unpolished and merely 'hinge' character of this first French novelist – who is so clumsy as to leave clearly visible the threads with which he wove his novel: classical erudition, borrowings from courtly literature, the utilization of theatrical dialogue are all blatant in this novelistic text. These stereotypes or clichés reveal an author still without

authority, constantly in search of a master discourse. Added to this adolescent trait is an ambiguity within the novel between text, theatre, and reality; each speech is announced by a title, such as 'Author', 'Actor', or 'Lady'. These indices signify both a certain distance *vis-à-vis* fiction (as if the author were conscious of employing contrivances and wanted to show us this), and the reification of the text in a spectacle (as if he wanted to make us see these word-creatures in the hallucinatory or real form of actual bodies). Thus, a writing that does not give up the efficacy of drama – of psychodrama – but transposes it into the quiet exercise of reading. But what seems to me to centre this inaugural text around the adolescent structure is the very specific relationship of the little page-boy with the Lady, and with her lover the Abbot. Little Jehan loves the Lady. Now, the Lady maintains a traitor's discourse: she tells Jehan one thing, and the Court another – and she directly exposes herself as a traitor to her young suitor by her relations with the Abbot. The novel is thus a confrontation, after the fact, with the oedipal situation – such that during adolescence, little Jehan himself learns duplicity. His incestuous love for the Lady will transform itself into an imaginary identification with her. Jehan will gradually forge for himself a double language: he will at once love and despise the Lady, and will end by punishing her. The story consummates itself at that point, but not the novel – this continues in the shape of a résumé of the hero's adventures up until his death.

The importance of this novel – and its novel character – rest in the triumph of the adolescent over his incestuous object, through the imaginary assimilation of the latter's discourse. In effect, an entire revolution of mentalities is at play within this little adventure. Up to this point, heroes and villains had been monovalent. In the *Song of Roland* and *Tales of the Round Table*, they follow the course of an irreconcilable hostility, with no possible compromise. Roland and Ganelon have nothing in common; they are mutually exclusive. It is the same within the courtly tradition. Now, there is nothing of the sort with our adolescent or his universe. Child and warrior, page-boy and hero, deceived by the Lady, but conquering the soldiers, cared for and betrayed, loving the lady and loved by the king or by his brother-in-arms Boucicault, never fully masculine, child-lover of the Lady, but also comrade-friend to his tutors and to the brother with whom he



shares his bed, Saintr  is the perfect androgyne, the innocent and justified pervert. It must be noted that this ambivalence is the origin of psychology, that without the logic of pretence and betrayal, there is no psychology, that ambivalence and psychology are synonyms for the novelistic as opposed to the *epic* and the *courtly* romance. As if the fifteenth-century French writer needed – in order to write loss, and betrayal – to first imagine this in-between space, this *topos* of incompleteness that is also that of all possibilities, of the ‘everything is possible’ . . . from which follows the triumph over the Lady and over the Abbot, so that a new genre henceforth lives: the adolescent novel. The writer, like the adolescent, is the one who will be able to betray his parents – to turn them against him and against themselves – in order to be free. If this does not *mature* it, what an incredible loosening of the Superego, and what a recompense for the reader – this child, who, himself speechless, aspires only to be adolescent.

### The Eighteenth Century: Which Sex? Or: How a Psychic Life is Built

The psychoanalyst has a tendency, it seems to me, to consider the psychic space as an interiority within which, through an involuntary movement, the experiences of the subject end by withdrawing in on psychic life – inner psychic space. The very principle of analysis, founded on speech and the moment of introspection, no doubt favours such a conception – a conception that gives itself, definitively, as the model of an ideal functioning leading (or able to lead) to a definitive and complete integration and elaboration.

Now, for the historian of literature, it is clear that ‘psychic interiority’ is a creation that affirms itself magnificently in the nineteenth-century psychological novel. Seventeenth-century man, on the contrary, has no inside or, at least, there exists a representation of seventeenth-century man without interiority. Completely faithful to baroque inconstancy, versatile, this individual without interior, this ‘man without a name’ (as is said of Don Juan in Tirso di Molina’s play) finds his truest reflection in baroque spectacles – those of ‘the enchanted isle’, where the sparkling of the water and the sumptuousness of the other stage props – which were in fact often burned afterwards – must have told the

spectators that nothing is true outside of God, but that all is 'staged', or 'put on'. Two centuries later, the nineteenth-century realists will have ceased to understand this kaleidoscopic and inauthentic psychic space. They will make a clumsy effort to tame it by postulating that such an improbable and careless ludism is a matter, no doubt, of a 'second nature'(!) . . . The transition from baroque man, with his neither inside nor outside, to the psychological man of the Romantics, Georges Sand and Stendhal, occurs in the eighteenth century. More precisely, this transition appears within the affirmation of the novelistic genre itself, which will recapture the surprises, the theatrical effects, the unlikely disguises and other 'actings-out' proper to picaresque and libertine novels and subordinate them to another order: order of the 'social contract', order of the 'natural' individual, order of novelistic composition. A remarkable fact: the adolescent character serves as a standard of measure within this involution of baroque man, who is neither within nor without, into nineteenth-century psychological man.

Of the numerous questions based around the eighteenth-century adolescent, I will limit myself to the interrogation of sexual identity. In reading the novels of this epoch, one can affirm that it is in the eighteenth century that the question of sexual difference as an unsolved problematic, or one that is *impossible* to solve, poses itself explicitly. Rousseau's *Emile* (1762) postulates a difference of sexes at the *origin* of society, but also at the moment of its perversion-perdition. The goal of the educator will be essentially to differentiate sexes and tasks, so that Emile becomes tutor and Sophie nurse. But the child is undifferentiated: 'Up to the age of puberty, children of both sexes have nothing apparent which distinguishes them; same face, same skin-tone, same shape, same voice, everything is equal: the girls are children, the boys are children, the name suffices for beings so similar.'<sup>2</sup> 'The child raised according to his age is alone; the only attachment he knows is that of habit, he loves his sister like his watch, his friend like his dog. He is unaware of any sex, of any species, man and woman are equally foreign to him'.<sup>3</sup> Even worse, the risk of indifferenciation endures even when the sexual identities are assumed: 'Emile is man and Sophie is woman: all their glory lies in this. Given the confusion of the sexes that reigns among us, it is almost a marvel to be of one's own kind.'<sup>4</sup> In order to arrive at a stable sexual

identity, the rousseauist child is subjected to a real educational voyage of which the initiation rites are not the rocambolesque adventures of adventure novels but consist rather in confronting the *feminine* in order to better protect oneself from it, and thus to become *other*; oneself. Now, if such is the goal of this education, it seems far from simple. A little story of Rousseau's, *The Fairy Queen* (1752), followed in fact by the *Letter to d'Alembert on Theatre* (1758) puts us on guard, as do other writings, against the danger of a generalized feminization ('no longer wanting to suffer from separation, unable to become men, women turn us into women'). This story delights in exploring the possibilities of sexual confusion. Confusion, and no longer infantile a-sexuality, this philosophical little story treats of sexual hybrids, of the double, and of twinhood. Rousseau gambles on writing a novel that is 'tolerable and even gay, without intrigue, without love or perversity'. Yet – and we are here at the height of perversity – he fails, for the story retraces a bizarre adventure. Two twins, brother and sister, find themselves at birth, through misunderstanding and spite, to possess the attributes of the opposite sex. This imbroglio spills into the natural order since the growing children, with the coming of adolescence, cannot assume their social functions, without some clarification. Far from being de-eroticized, the story plumbs the depths of sexual ambiguity: Prince Caprice is feminine in the extreme and Princess Raison has the qualities of a sovereign. The one and the other embroil themselves within an intrigue of about-faces and absurdity, hybrids and madness. The ambivalence is such that no logical or pedagogical means seems able to put an end to it. Only providence, an accident, makes things return to order. Rousseau, moreover, has his characters repeat a number of times that this order, on the whole, seems completely arbitrary to them. You must 'rave' is what he in fact recommends ('the best method you have for curing your wife is to go crazy with her' says the fairy to the King); or again: 'In spite of these oddities, or thanks to them, all will return to the natural order'. Rousseau long hesitates before publishing this eulogy of the confusion of sexes which depends, at bottom, on the fantasies of the mother, and which must resolve itself providentially at the end of adolescence. Man and woman, brother and sister, child and adult, the adolescent figure in Rousseau's work next becomes one apparently without

perversity. Such is the idyll of the rural and incestuous societies of Valais, peopled with ambiguous adolescents ('his voice breaks, or rather he loses it; he is neither child nor man, and cannot assume the tone of either of them')<sup>5</sup> who become 'husband and wife without having ceased to be brother and sister'.<sup>6</sup> Rousseau mitigates on the whole the twins' extravagant perversion in *The Fairy Queen* by the mirage of a golden age. More wanton, Diderot makes of *Rameau's Nephew* (1773), and *Jacques the Fatalist* (1777), the adolescent prototypes of those who will contest paternity, normality, and religion. To illustrate one last process of integration/disintegration of the personality and its sexual identity – through the figure of the adolescent – I will have recourse to a lesser-known eighteenth-century text: Jean-Baptiste Louvet's *The Loves of the Knight of Faublas* (1787–1790).

Faublas excels in the art of disguise, which enables him not only to change his sex at will, but to accumulate false names in a polynomia that far exceeds that of Stendhal. Son of the Baron de Faublas, but having lost his mother very early, this young man is without identity – or he accumulates them so frantically that he seems to take pleasure less in sexual inversions than in the rapidity of betrayals that leave him with no guilt whatsoever. Disguise is his art, not his essence: he changes place like the figures in a ballet, displaces himself between masters and mistresses, brothers and sisters. Such a sexual amphibian, a series of masks, he indifferently names himself Faublas, Blasfau, Mlle de Portail, the Knight of Florville (thus assuming the pseudonym that Mme de B., one of his mistresses, uses when she dresses as a man). He is the son of the Baron, the brother of Adelaide, then the daughter of the Baron, the sister of Adelaide, the daughter of Portail and then his son in order to become brother to himself . . . . In search of what 'dead mother'? Such a vertiginous disguising is a powerful screen against madness. It is sufficient in the end that two of his mistresses die (like his mother. . .), for him no longer to be able to *play-act* between them and, the game over, the masks fall and uncover not nudity, but an emptiness, nobody, adolescent insanity. In fact, Faublas, now free since the disappearance of his mistresses, does not hedge toward a select spouse: without the masks that allowed him to attain false mothers, he has no place to be. Quite symptomatically, Faublas' madness stops the narration and it is his letters (fragments, for the most part) that relate his

irrationality. And it is when his father finally puts things back in order, by imposing himself on his son, that Faublas is cured and the final cry resounds: 'He is ours again'. The masked lunatic becomes a true adolescent who belongs to his own people.

Sexual ambiguity, disguise, polynomia: Faublas is a punk in the eighteenth century. Once his game ends, madness follows. This means that the conscience is already affirming itself according to which the baroque game (Don Juan, Casanova) can – and must – cease. An interiority is in this case opened which is initially delirium, chaos, or emptiness. It will have to be ordered: by putting in place the figures of the Father and his accomplice the doctor, but also by the putting into place of the novelistic discourse. Because after the letters that relate the breakdown of madness (speechlessness, shouting), the narrative reappropriates and integrates psychic events. Disguises give way to the narrative of dreams, reconciliations, analogies. Writing becomes associative and interpretative. One will likewise note that incestuous acting-out, in Restif de la Bretonne, for example, is accompanied or announced by a text that becomes increasingly twisted into the order of representation itself: dreams that respond to each other, signs, allusions, discourses that summon their complementaries (as with *The Perverted Peasant Boy* (1775) and *The Perverted Peasant Girl* (1784)).

Thus, whether it be by the extravagance of perversion, or its naturalness, the eighteenth-century adolescent appears as a key personage: not only the emblem of a subjectivity in crisis, but also a means to display the psychic breakdown up to the point of psychosis and at the same time to re-collect it, to unify it within the unity of the novel. This unity is already polyvalent, and yet centred around an author who has in view the globalizing interpretation that could contain all the disguises, all the games. The novel that follows thus, takes up without mediation the relating of this adolescent, ambivalent, hybrid, disguised, 'baroque' universe of which the author speaks: the novel prolongs adolescence and replaces its acts with their narratives and interpretation.

### Father and Son: Of the Paternal Body and Name

Dostoevski's *The Adolescent* (1874–1875), often considered a minor text of the great writer, is situated between well-known masterpieces like *The Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.<sup>7</sup> I will

retain Dostoievski's concern for adolescence. In 1874, Dostoievski writes in his *Notebooks*: 'A novel on children, uniquely on children, and about a child-hero'. Later, in 1876, *A Writer's Journal* specifies the definitive choice: 'as the test of his thought', to take 'a boy already beyond childhood: the still immature man who timidly and all alone desires to make as quickly as possible his first step into life'. One will note: 'as the test of his thought' as a writer, an adolescent hero must be chosen. In addition, in the preparatory notes for the novel, one follows the identification of the writer with the adolescent, by the occurrence of the decision to write in the first person: 'A young man offended, with a thirst for vengeance, and a colossal love for himself'; "'The Adolescent, confession of a great sinner, written by himself"; grievous solution of the problem: to write in one's own name. Begin with the word "I". . . . An extremely concise confession'. Dostoievski sees first of all in the adolescent 'a true bird of prey . . . the lowest vulgarity allied with the most refined generosity . . . seductive and repulsive. . . .' Little by little, this type becomes Arkadi's father, and the novel describes Count Versilov – the seducer and atheist who represents decadent high society and who is nonetheless fascinating, the Adolescent's biological father. Beside him, a saintly paternity, fully symbolic: this is Makar Dolgorouki, the moujik, the legal father, who gives his name to his wife's illegitimate son before devoting himself to a mystical nomadism propagating Christ's word over the holy land of Russia. In this context, which is both historic and familial, the adolescent has an 'idea': power of money (he wants to be rich like Rothschild), the power of a triumph over women and inferiors that brings money and then, in the end, 'that which is acquired through power and cannot be acquired without it: the consciousness, calm and solitary, of his force'. A purely symbolic force, moreover, since the adolescent has no desire to use it: 'If only I had the power . . . I would no longer need it; I am certain that, from myself, of my own, I would everywhere occupy the lowest place'. And there he is, giving himself to reveries: 'I will be like a Rothschild who eats only a piece of bread and a slice of ham, and I will be sated with my conscience'. This symbolic, phallic affirmation of triumph connects the adolescent posture to the symbolic imaginary power of the writer: 'And mark it well, I need all of my evil will, only to prove to myself I have the power to renounce it'.

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Such an aspiration, megalomaniac even in humility, must confront the divided father-figure: the saint and the seducer. In terms of these two, the adolescent will place himself in a love-hate attitude, fascinated by the erotic life and religious scepticism of Versilov but also religiously admiring of the mystical renunciation of the peasant Dolgorouki. He will be by turns the wife of Versilov and the alter ego of Dolgorouki, running the gamut of his homosexual passion for an elusive father. For let us not forget that in this duo of fathers, Arkadi is never, at bottom, sure of having one. Not only would there be something like *two* 'fictional origins' battling to place definitively in doubt the existence of the father, but this implicit rejection of the father by the writer-adolescent is accompanied by a love for the father that seems to reproduce, in a profane way, Christ as the corporeal and spiritual appurtenance of the Father. The Son, separated from the Father and aspiring to reunite with him, is undoubtedly a fecund theme for orthodox Russian theology, and one that is at the very least ambiguous – if one refers to the Catholic dogma of the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son. For the orthodox Dostoievski, this consubstantiality (what I call the '*filioque*') seems not to be given right away; everything happens as if the adolescent had to prove, within his adolescent being aspiring to symbolic autonomy, this identification with paternity that is as much libidinal as symbolic. A subtle elaboration of homosexuality doubtless follows, which takes into account all the love-hate ambivalence of the father-son relation. Let us recall that in his study on Dostoievski, Freud sees him perhaps too hastily as a 'parricide'. It is possible, on the contrary, to decode even up to the epileptic symptom a pre-verbal expression of a sustained contradiction: love + hate, an insoluble that produces the subject within a motor discharge (as it can produce others within an acting-out). The novelistic elaboration by the adolescent of his struggles with the Body and Name of the father can be seen, from this point of view, as an attempt to disambiguate (if only by naming the components) the obscure relation of the young Dostoievski to his tyrant father – who was killed by the moujik rebels, and who seems to have unleashed the first convulsive symptoms reactivated, as is known, by the even more tyrannical treatment of the penal house. . . . *The Brothers Karamazov* will resume the themes of the father and guilt, of brothers and the homosexuality *between* them and always *through*

the intermediary of the father-figure, who remains the pivot of desire. Yet it is in *The Adolescent* that this problematic finds its natural place and its most direct familial treatment.

### The Seduction of the Unformed and Immature

At the other end of the line, when the modern novel questions itself, or questions the necessarily paternal values of necessarily adult society, the writer states explicitly his seduction by the adolescent boy or girl, as with Nabokov and his *Lolita*, or Gombrowicz in his *Trans-atlantic* (1950) and his *Pornography* (1958).<sup>8</sup> It is not much to say that writers thus recover the means to exhibit . . . their own more or less latent exhibitionism or homosexuality. There is a certain identification of the narrator with his seductress or seducer, even more so, since these adolescents escape all categories – even those of coded perversions – and impose themselves on novelists as metaphors for what is not yet formed: metaphor of what awaits the writer, of what calls to him, the mirage of pre-language or unnamed body. Thus Gombrowicz, although he devotes all his work to the search for narrative forms adequate to the fluidity of experience all the way up to its extinction in aphasia or absurdity (*Cosmos*, 1964), can write that ‘Form does not agree with the essence of life’ (*Journal*, 1953–6, p. 171); devoting himself to a glorification of the unformed and the ‘inferior, immature, which are essentially particular to all that is young, that is to say, to all that is alive’ (*ibid.*, p. 259). To the adult world – even the most baroque (like the pervert Gonzalo in *Trans-atlantic*) – will be opposed in this case the fascinating world of adolescents: Ignace, Karol, Henia. ‘My first task, of course, is to elevate to the highest position the minor term of “boy”, of “adolescent”, at all the official altars, by adding another one erected to the young god of the worst, of the less good, the inferior, the “unimportant”, who is yet strong in his inferior power’ (*Pornography*, p. 260). It is there that the pornography written by the writer articulates itself like the erotic game of adolescents, nothing obscure or scandalous, or even explicit, nothing but suggestions – approximations – allusions to junctions or detours. Nothing but *signs*. The pornography of the young and immature, like that of writers, of *adolescents* in short – is it the effort to name, to make an uncertain meaning appear at the



frontier of word and drive? It is thus, at least, that Gombrowicz's message comes through to me.

These themes, the betrayal of the page and the page's betrayal, bisexuality and disguise, filiation, immature seducers – clearly do not exhaust the adolescent conflicts and images that punctuate the grand moments of novelistic creation. One could add here the whole literature of character 'formation' that, from *Tristram Shandy* to *Julian Sorel* and *Bel Ami*, retraces the intimate ties between adolescent and novel. Still, these themes seem to me sufficient for indicating how much the polyphonia of the novelistic genre, its ambivalence, its more than oedipal pliancy, its dose of perversity, owe to the open-adolescent structure. Such a writing-mimesis of a structure essentially open, incomplete – is it for the reader anything but a drug? Evoking more catharsis than any elaboration that would eventually realize transference and interpretation, novelistic writing proposes however a certain elaboration internal to sublimation. I will call it semiotic: close to the primary processes awakened in adolescence, reproducing the dramaturgy of adolescent fantasies, absorbing stereotypes, but also capable of genuine inscriptions of unconscious contents that flower in the adolescent pre-conscious. This semiotic elaboration is the container – the form – and sometimes simply the mirror of adolescent transition. Question: must we choose between sending an adolescent to analysis and writing novels for him? Or maybe writing them together? Or having him write alone? The question is hardly serious, even adolescent. From which follows another: is analysis grandmotherly or adolescent? Perhaps, after all, it is never the one without the other – if we wish to remain attentive to an open structure.

This interrogation of the adolescent and writing has in fact led us to perversion and its rapport with the writer. How to understand perversion in a way that is at once faithful and non-complacent: this is what, perhaps, the history of novelistic writing could discover for us. The analyst who is already aware of the fact that his benevolent attention is not exempt from a certain perversion can continue this interrogation by submitting it to his own technique: the closure of the psychoanalytic framework of the flexibilities, the utilization or not of different signs of speech, the taking into consideration of real events outside of their intratransferential import, etc. These are some of the technical

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problems that suggest to the analyst the taking into consideration of these 'open structures' that adolescents are . . . among others. . . .

*Notes*

- 1 Cf. 'Notes on Symbol Formation', *International Journal of Psy.*, XXXVII, 1957, part 6.
- 2 J.J. Rousseau, *Oeuvres Completes*, Paris, Tome 4, p. 489.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 746.
- 5 *Emile*, p. 490.
- 6 *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, p. 125.
- 7 Editor's note. Kristeva prepared her own translations of Dostoievski. For the sake of consistency these have been retained.
- 8 Editor's note. W. Gombrowicz is a Polish writer whose work is extremely popular in France. The references are to the French editions of his work. Of his works in English see: *Diary 1904–1909*, translated by L. Vallee, London, Quartet, 1988; *A kind of Testament*, translated by A. Hamilton, London, Calder & Boyars, 1982; *Possessed*, translated by J.A. Underwood, London, Marion Boyars, 1980.