

# Deconstruction and Criticism

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## Living On

Translated by James Hulbert

But who's talking about living?

In other words on living?

This time, "in other words" does not put the same thing into other words, does not clarify an ambiguous expression, does not function like an "i.e." It amasses the powers of indecision and adds to the foregoing utterance its capacity for skidding. Under the pretext of commenting upon a terribly indeterminate, shifting statement, a statement difficult to pin down [*arrêter*], it gives a reading or version of it that is all the less satisfactory, controllable, unequivocal, for being more "powerful" than what it comments upon or translates. The supposed "commentary" of the "i.e." or "in other words" has furnished only a textual supplement that calls in turn for an overdetermining "in other words," and so on and so forth.

In other words on living? This time it sounds to you more surely like a quotation. This is its second occurrence in what you

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BORDER LINES. 10 November 1977. Dedicate "Living On" to my friend Jacques Ehrmann. Recall that it was in response to his invitation, and to see him, that I first came to Yale. He had the good fortune to sign J. E. when he wrote his initials. This permitted him to inscribe my copy of his book "*Textes*" suivi de "*La mort de la littérature*," published anonymously, as follows: "To J. D. in friendly remembrance of this '10 November' on which J. E. called you." J. E. [the letters that

have every reason to suppose is a common context, although you have no absolute guarantee of it. If it is a sort of quotation, a sort of "mention," as the theoreticians of "speech acts" feel justified in saying, we must understand the entire performance "in other words on living?" as having quotation marks around it. But once quotation marks demand to appear, they don't know where to stop. Especially here, where they are not content merely to *surround* the performance "in other words on living?": they divide it, rework its body and its insides, until it is distended, diverted, out of joint, then reset member by member, word by word, realigned in the most diverse configurations (like a garment spread out on a clothesline with clothespins). For example, several pairs of quotation marks may enclose one or two words: "living on" ["*survivre*"], "on" living ["*sur*" *vivre*], "on" "living," on "living," producing each time a different semantic and syntactic effect; I still have not exhausted the list, nor have I brought the hyphen into play. Translating (almost, in other words) the Latin *dē*, the French *de*, or the English "of," "on" immediately comes to contaminate what it translates with meanings that it imports in turn, those other meanings that rework "living on" or "surviving" (*super*, *hyper*, "over," *über*, and even "above" and "beyond"). It would be superficial to attribute this contamination to contingency, contiguity, or contagion. At least, chance makes *sense* here, and that's what interests me.

Be alert to these invisible quotation marks, even within a word: *survivre*, living on. Following the triumphal procession of an "on," they trail more than one language behind them.

Forever unable to saturate a context, what reading will ever

spell *je*, "I" are also the last letters of these "texts," their final paraph [*paraphe*, also "initials"], in his untranslatable signature. 24-31 December 1977. Here, economy, the law of the *oikos* (house, room, tomb, crypt), the law of reserves, reserving, savings, saving: inversion, reversion, revolution of values [*valeurs*, also "securities," "meanings"]—or of the course of the sun—in the law of the *oikos* (*Heimlichkeit/Unheimlichkeit*). That makes three languages I'm writing in, and this is to appear, sup-

master the "on" of living on? For we have not exhausted its ambiguity: each of the meanings we have listed above can be divided further (e.g., living on can mean a reprieve or an afterlife, "life after life" or life after death, more life or more than life, and better; the state of suspension in which it's over—and over again, and you'll never have done with that suspension itself) and the triumph of life can also triumph *over* life and reverse the procession of the genitive. I shall demonstrate shortly that this is not wordplay, not on your life. What tack shall we take [*depuis quel bord*; lit., "from what side," "edge," "border," "shore" . . .] to translate the ambiguity of an in-other-words? I know, I am already in some sort of untranslatability. But I'll wager that that will not stop the procession of one language into another, the massive movement of this procession, this *cortège*, over the border of another language, into the language of the other.

(In fact, the hymen or the alliance *in the language of the other*, this strange vow by which we are committed in a language that is not our mother tongue, is what I wish to speak of here. I wish to commit myself with this vow, following the coupled pretexts of *The Triumph of Life* and *L'arrêt de mort*. But thus far the commitment is my own; it is still necessary that you be committed, already, to translating it.)

And to go write-on-living? If that were possible, would the writer have to be dead already, or be living on? Is this an alternative?

Will it be possible for us to ask whoever asked the initial question, "But who's talking about living?", what inflection governs his or her question? By definition, the statement [*énoncé*] "But

posedly, in a fourth. A question to the translators, a translator's note that I sign in advance: What is translation? Here, economy. To write in a *telegraphic* style, for the sake of economy. But also, *from afar*, in order to get down to what *é-loignement*, *Ent-fernung*, "dis-tance," *mean* in writing and in the voice. Telegraphics and telephonics, that's the theme. My desire to take charge of the Translator's Note myself. Let them also read this band as a telegram or a film for developing (a film "to be

who's talking about living?", like every other statement, does not require the presence or assistance of any party, male or female. The statement survives them a priori, lives on after them. Hence no context is saturable any more. No one inflection enjoys any absolute privilege, no meaning can be fixed or decided upon. No border is guaranteed, inside or out. Try it. For example:

1. "But *who's* talking about living?": the question stresses the identity of the speaker, without ruling out the possibility (a further complication) that it refers to the subject of the question "But who's talking about living?", and so forth.

2. "But who's *talking about living?*": in other words, who can really speak about living? Who is in a position to? Who is already on the other side [*bord*], little enough alive, or alive enough, to dare to speak about living, not about one life, nor even about life, but about living, the immediate, present, even impersonal process of an act of living that nevertheless guarantees even the spoken word that it conveys and that it thus defies to *speak on living*: it is impossible to use living speech to speak of living—unless it is possible *only* with living speech, which would make the aporia even more paralyzing. Is this the point at which a triumphant procession unfinishes? "Then, what is Life?" I said. . . ." The structure of this line, very close to the end (the end of the poem and Shelley's end), the "I said" and the self-quotation are perhaps not so foreign to the canonical question of the supposed "unfinished" quality of a "*Triumph*."

3. "But who's talking about '*living*'?": an implicit quotation of "living," a "mention" of the word or the concept, which is not the same thing and doubles the possibilities. In other words: who is saying what about "living," the word or the thing, the sig-

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processed," in English?): a procession underneath the other one, and going past it *in silence*, as if it did not see it, as if it had nothing to do with it, a double band, a "double bind," and a blindly jealous double . . . what Hillis Miller would call a "double blind" ("double blind-alley" in "The Mirror's Secret"). Double proceedings, double *cortège*, double triumph. *The Triumph of Life, L'arrêt de mort* (how will they have translated this title? Better to leave it in "French," assuming that it

nifier or the concept, if we suppose that in this case these oppositions are pertinent in the least, and that "living," precisely, does not go beyond their bounds?

4. In French, the language, "my" language, which I am speaking here but which you are already translating, a context governed by the everyday nature of oral exchange would, *in most cases*, put the principal accent on the following intended meaning, which I translate in an approximate way like this: Is it really a question of living? In other words, who said that we *had* to live? But who's talking about living? Must we live, really? Can "living," "live," be taken as an imperative, an order, a necessity? Where do you get this axiomatic, valuational certainty that we (or *you*) must live? Who says that living is worth all the trouble? That it's better to live than to die? That, since we've started, we have to keep on living? In other words living on? (The sentence in the second line has put in for a transfer and brought about its displacement.) In other words, then, what is life ("Then, what is Life?" I said. . . ."), a *quoted* question that, for want of a saturating context, we can always understand as having two meanings, at least:

a. the meaning of *meaning* or of *value* (Does life have meaning, sense? Does it have the slightest value? Is it worth living? Who's talking about living?—and so forth)

b. the meaning of *being* (What is the essence of life? What is Life? What is the living-ness [*l'être-vivant*] of life?—and so forth).

These two meanings (at least two) inhabit *The Triumph of Life* and rework its supposedly "unfinished" edge. *The Triumph* talks about

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belongs to a determinable language; but then in what language will this text appear?), each "triumph" (there are two triumphs) forming the double band or "double bind" of double proceedings. This would be a good place for a translator's note, for example, about *everything* that has been said elsewhere on the subject of the "double bind," the double band, the double procession, and so forth (a quotation *in extenso*, among others, of *Glas*, which itself . . . and so forth): this, as a measure of the

living. But what does it say about it? A great deal, far too many things, but this much at least, in its writing-on-living: it *is*, itself, the poem, and it gives itself a name, *The Triumph of Life*. In a sense still to be determined, it lives-on. But—I must say it in the syntax of my language to defy the translators to decide, at each moment—in/after whose name, or the name of what, does it live on? Does it live on in/after Shelley's name? This deserves a translators' note explaining both *survivre au nom de* and what happens in French when *triomphe de la vie* [triumph of life] is transformed into *trionpher de la vie* [to triumph over life]. This is not playing with language, as one might easily suspect. I maintain, not without delaying the proof a bit longer, that this is a question of what takes place *in* the poem and of what remains of it, beyond any opposition between finished and unfinished, whether we mean the end of the last poem or that of the man who drowned "off Lerici" on 8 July 1822, "writing *The Triumph of Life*" (as is said in one account of *Shelley's Life*, with a chronological table in five divisions, "Dates," "Events," "Residence," "Finance," "Chief Works").

"Who's talking about living?" I am treating this sentence as a quotation; there can be no doubt about it now. And you may even have the feeling that all I've been doing is commenting on this opening sentence that came, with no quotation marks, from who knows where. But wasn't this attack already a quotation? I was apparently the one who decided to write that, without asking for anyone's authorization, not taking it out of any well-defined corpus, not indicating any copyright. But I immediately began to reconstitute all sorts of corpora or contexts from which I might

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impossible. How can one text, assuming its unity, give or present another to be read, without touching it, without saying anything about it, practically without referring to it? How can two "triumphs" read each other, each one *and* the other, without even knowing each other, at a distance? At a distance and without knowing each other, like the two "women" in *L'arrêt de mort*. The "mad hypothesis," the manic hubris of a reading toward which the other procession (what happens [*se passe*] be-

have taken it. One of the most general or broadest of the categories that might limit such a corpus would be something like the language called French, or a family of languages more or less susceptible of translation of or into French. This reconstitution is far from finished. I set down here as an axiom and as that which is to be proved, that the reconstitution cannot be finished. This is my starting point: no meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation. What I am referring to here is not richness of substance, semantic fertility, but rather structure: the structure of the remnant or of iteration. But I have given this structure many other names, and what matters here is the secondary aspect of nomination. Nomination is important, but it is constantly caught up in a process that it does not control.

Since I began, and since you read the question "Who's talking about living?" (wherever it came from), the word *bord* [edge, brink, verge, border, boundary, bound, limit, shore] has imposed itself more than once.

If we are to approach [*aborder*] a text, for example, it must have a *bord*, an edge. Take this text. What is its upper edge? Its title ("Living On")? But when do you start reading it? What if you started reading it after the first sentence (another upper edge), which functions as its first reading head but which itself in turn folds its outer edges back over onto inner edges whose mobility—multilayered, quotational, displaced from meaning to meaning—prohibits you from making out a shoreline? There is a regular *submerging* of the shore.

When a text quotes and requotes, with or without quotation marks, when it is written on the brink, you start, or indeed have

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tween the two women, one of whom he imagines—if only to rule out the notion—to have drowned herself) is directed, *obviously* has nothing to do with Shelley's drowning, or even with the event thus recorded in one chronology: "Date: 1816, December Events: Harriet found drowned. Shelley marries Mary." Or with "glu de l'étang lait de ma mort noyée" ["snare" (more literally "[bird]lime") "of the pond, milk of my drowned death"; extensive resonances from "gl-", "l'étang," "lait" . . .] (in

already started, to lose your footing. You lose sight of any line of demarcation between a text and what is outside it.

(This is where my scenario breaks off, unfinished—it would have related, *on the one hand*, all the “triumphs of death” of the Italian *quattrocento*, the ironical or antithetical quotation of a genre by *The Triumph of Life*, the supposed unfinished quality at the apparent lower edge of a poem by Shelley at the moment when, in greatest proximity to the signature, at the apparent lower edge of the poem, the signatory is drowned, loses his footing, loses sight of the shore, and, *on the other hand*, all the drownings in Blanchot’s stories, the drownings that I cited in “Pas” as well as the others, all the representations [*mises en scène*] of a shoreline that disappears or is overrun at the edge of *Thomas l’obscur*, a book that is remarkable—and re-marked—from its opening sentences on:

Thomas sat down and looked at the sea. He remained motionless for a time, as if he had come there to follow the movements of the other swimmers and, although the fog prevented him from seeing very far, he stayed there, obstinately, his eyes fixed on the bodies floating with difficulty. Then, when a more powerful wave reached him, he went down onto the sloping sand and slipped among the currents, which quickly immersed him.

[*Thomas the Obscure*, new version,  
translated by Robert Lamberton  
(New York: David Lewis, 1973)]

or

*Glas*), which I would like to have translated here. Beyond all this grand phantasmic organization and these real or fictitious events, I wish to pose the question of the *bord*, the edge, the border, and the *bord de mer*, the shore. [These “Border Lines,” in French, are entitled “Journal de bord”—usually translated “shipboard journal,” but here also “journal on bord.”] (*The Triumph of Life* was written in the sea, at its edge, between land and sea, but that doesn’t matter.) The question of the bor-

I sought, this time, to approach [*aborder*] him. I mean that I tried to make him understand that even though I was there I could go no further, and that I in turn had used up my resources. In truth, I had long had the impression that I was at the end of my rope. “But you aren’t,” he remarked.

[These are the “first” words of Blanchot’s *Celui qui ne m’accompagne pas*.] You may ask what I mean by that: do Blanchot’s stories, his  *récits*, treat, in their own way, *The Triumph of Life*, and even the supposed unfinished quality that separates it from its ending, and even what separates it from its supposed signatory and his drowning? For now, I shall not answer this question, but ask one of my own: What is to say that the supposed signatory of a piece of writing must answer for it, and answer at every turn the questions of this person or that, telling them “exactly” what the “story” is?)

If we are to approach a text, it must have an edge. The question of the text, as it has been elaborated and transformed in the last dozen or so years, has not merely “touched” “shore,” *le bord* (scandalously tampering, changing, as in Mallarmé’s declaration, “*On a touché au vers*”), all those boundaries that form the running border of what used to be called a text, of what we once thought this word could identify, i.e., the supposed end and beginning of a work, the unity of a corpus, the title, the margins, the signatures, the referential realm outside the frame, and so forth. What has happened, if it has happened, is a sort of overrun [*débordement*] that spoils all these boundaries and divisions and forces us to extend the accredited concept, the dominant notion of a

derline precedes, as it were, the determination of all the dividing lines that I have just mentioned: between a fantasy and a “reality,” an event and a non-event, a fiction and a reality, one corpus and another, and so forth. Here, from week to week in this pocket-calendar or these minutes [*procès-verbal*], I shall perhaps endeavor to create an effect of *superimposing*, of superimprinting one text on the other. Now, each of the two “triumphs” writes (on [*sur*]) textural superimprinting. What about this

"text," of what I still call a "text," for strategic reasons, in part—a "text" that is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines)—all the limits, everything that was to be set up in opposition to writing (speech, life, the world, the real, history, and what not, every field of reference—to body or mind, conscious or unconscious, politics, economics, and so forth). Whatever the (demonstrated) necessity of such an overrun, such a *dé-bordement*, it still will have come as a shock, producing endless efforts to dam up, resist, rebuild the old partitions, to blame what could no longer be thought without confusion, to blame difference *as* wrongful confusion! All this has taken place in non-reading, with no work on what was thus being demonstrated, with no realization that it was never our wish to extend the reassuring notion of the text to a whole extra-textual realm and to transform the world into a library by doing away with all boundaries, all framework, all sharp edges (all *arêtes*: this is the word that I am speaking of tonight), but that we sought rather to work out the theoretical and practical system of these margins, these borders, once more, from the ground up. I shall not go into detail. Documentation of all this is readily available to anyone committed to breaking down the various structures of resistance,

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"on," this *sur*, and its surface? An effect of superimposing: one procession is superimposed on the other, accompanying it without accompanying it (Blanchot, *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas*). This operation would never be considered legitimate on the part of a teacher, who must give his references and tell what he's talking about, giving it its recognizable title. You can't give a course on Shelley without ever mentioning him, pretending to deal with Blanchot, and more than a few others.

his own resistance as such or as primarily the ramparts that bolster a system (be it theoretical, cultural, institutional, political, or whatever). What are the borderlines of a text? How do they come about? I shall not approach the question frontally, in the most general way. I prefer, within the limits that we have here, a more indirect, narrower channel, one that is more concrete as well: at the edge of the narrative, of the text *as* a narrative. The word is  *récit*, a story, a narrative, and not *narration*, narration. The reworking of a textual problematic has affected this aspect of the text as narrative (the narrative of an event, the event of narrative, the narrative as the structure of an event) by placing it in the foreground.

(I note parenthetically that *The Triumph of Life*, which it is not my intention to discuss here, belongs in many ways to the category of the  *récit*, in the disappearance or overrun that takes place the moment we wish to close its case after citing it, calling it forth, commanding it to appear.

1. *There is* the *ré-cit* of double affirmation, as analyzed in "Pas" [in *Gramma*, No. 3/4 (1976)], the "yes, yes" that must be cited, must recite itself to bring about the alliance [*alliance*, also "wedding band"] of affirmation with itself, to bring about its ring. It remains to be seen whether the double affirmation is *triumphant*, whether the triumph is affirmative or a paradoxical phase in the work of mourning.

2. *There is* the double narrative, the narrative of the vision enclosed in the general narrative carried on by the same narrator. The line that separates the enclosed narrative from the other—

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And your transitions have to be readable, that is, in accordance with criteria of readability very firmly established, and long since. At the beginning of *L'arrêt de mort*, the superimposing of the two "images," the image of Christ and, "behind the figure of Christ," Veronica, "the features of a woman's face—extremely beautiful, even magnificent"—this superimposing is readable "on the wall of [a doctor's] office" and on a "photograph." Inscription and reimprinting, reimpression, of light in

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And then a Vision on my brain was rolled.

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—marks the upper edge of a space that will never be closed. What is the *topos* of the "I" who quotes himself in a narrative [of a dream, a vision, or a hallucination] within a narrative, including, in addition to all his ghosts, his *hallucinations of ghosts*, still other visions within visions (e.g., "a new Vision never seen before")? What is his *topos* when he quotes, in the present, a past question formulated in another sort of present ["... 'Then, what is Life?' I said. . . ."] and which he narrates as something that presented itself in a vision, and so on?

3. *There is* also the ironic, antithetical, underlying re-citation of the "triumphs of death" that adds another level of coding to the poem. What are we doing when, to practice a "genre," we quote a genre, represent it, stage it, expose its *generic law*, analyze it practically? Are we still practicing the genre? Does the "work" still belong to the genre it re-cites? But inversely, how could we make a genre work without referring to it [quasi-] quotationally, indicating at some point, "See, this is a work of such-and-such a genre"? Such an indication does not belong to the genre and makes the statement of belonging an ironical exercise. It interrupts the very belonging of which it is a necessary condition. I must abandon this question for the moment; it's capable of

both texts. *La folie du jour*. The course of the sun, day, year, anniversary, double revolution, the palindrome and the anagrammatic version or reversion of *écrit*, *récit*, and *série*. The series (*écrit*, *récit*, *série*, etc.). Note to the translators: How are you going to translate that, *récit* for example? Not as *nouvelle*, "novella," nor as "short story." Perhaps it will be better to leave the "French" word *récit*. It is already hard enough to understand, in Blanchot's text, in French. An essential question for the

disrupting more than one system of poetics, more than one literary pact.)

What is a narrative—this thing that we call a narrative? Does it take place? Where and when? What might the taking-place or the event of a narrative be?

I hasten to say that it is not my intention here, nor do I claim, nor do I have the means, to answer these questions. At most, in repeating them, I would like to begin a minute displacement, the most discreet of transformations: I suggest, for example, that we replace what might be called *the question of narrative* ("What is a narrative?") with *the demand for narrative*. When I say *demande* I mean something closer to the English "demand" than to a mere request: inquisitorial insistence, an order, a petition. To know (before we know) what narrative is, the narrativity of narrative, we should perhaps first recount, return to the scene of one origin of narrative, to the narrative of one origin of narrative (will that still be a narrative?), to that scene that mobilizes various forces, or if you prefer various agencies or "subjects," some of which *demand* the narrative of the other, seek to extort it from him, like a secret-less secret, something that they call the truth about what has taken place: "Tell us exactly what happened." The narrative must have begun with this demand, but will we still call the *mise en scène* [representation, staging] of this demand a narrative? And will we even still call it *mise en "scène,"* since that origin concerns the eyes [*touche aux yeux*] (as we shall see), the origin of visibility, the origin of origin, the birth of what, as we say in French, "sees the light of day" [*voit le jour*, is born] when the present leads to presence, presentation, or representation? "Oh, I see the daylight

translator. The *sur*, "on," "super-," and so forth, that is my theme above, also designates the figure of a passage by *trans-*lation, the *trans-*of an *Übersetzung*. Version [version; also "translation into one's own language"], transference, and translation. *Übertragung*. The simultaneous transgression and reappropriation of a language [*langue*], its law, its economy? How will you translate *langue*? Let us suppose then that here, at the foot of the other text, I address a translatable message, in



[*je vois le jour*], oh God," says a voice in *La folie du jour*, a "narrative" ["*récit*"] (?) by Maurice Blanchot. (This title, *La folie du jour*, appears only in what would be called, according to a certain convention, the "second version," in book form this time [Fata Morgana, 1973; in English, "The Madness of the Day," tr. Lydia Davis, *TriQuarterly*, No. 40 (Fall 1977), pp. 168–177, quoted throughout], of a "*récit*" first published in a literary magazine [*Empédocle*, 2, 1949] under the title "Un *récit*?" Is it the same text, except for the title? Or are these two versions of the same *écrit* [piece of writing], the same "*récit*?" Usually, from one version to the next, the title remains the same. What is a version? What is a title? What borderline questions are posed here? I am here seeking merely to establish the necessity of this whole problematic of judicial framing and of the jurisdiction of frames. This problematic, I feel, has not been explored, at least not adequately, by the institution of literary studies in the university. And there are essential reasons for that: this is an institution built on that very system of framing. In the case of *La folie du jour*, the matter is even more complicated, as we shall see little by little, and this complication involves a certain "*sur*" ["on," "super-" etc.], or what I have called elsewhere, in *La Dissémination*, a certain "overcasting" [*surjet*]. For now, let us point out that the question mark [in "Un *récit*?"] appears as an integral part of the title only on the cover of the review *Empédocle*, under the general heading "Sommaire" ["contents"]. Under the same heading, on the inside of the review, on a sort of flyleaf [*page de garde*] before the text itself, the question mark disappears. This disappearance

the style of a telegram, to the translators of every country. Who is to say in what language, *exactly* what language, if we assume that the translation has been prepared, the above text will appear? It is not untranslatable, but, without being opaque, it presents at every turn, I know, something to stop [*arrêter*] the translation: it forces the translator to transform the language into which he is translating or the "receiver medium," to deform the initial contract, itself in constant deformation,

is confirmed on the first page of the *récit*, where the title is repeated: "Un *récit*." Whether this variation, which Andrzej Warminski pointed out to me, is deliberate or not, it managed to construct its own narrative of variation, in its relative specificity, only by means of such protective structures [*structures de garde*] and institutions as the registering of copyright, the Library of Congress or the Bibliothèque Nationale, or something like a flyleaf.) Thus a voice says, "Oh, I see the daylight, oh God!" in *La folie du jour*, a "*récit*" (?) by Maurice Blanchot, a story whose title runs wild and drives the reader mad, (*s'*)*affole* in every sense of the word and in every direction: *la folie du jour*, the madness of today, of the day today, which leads to the madness that comes from the day, is born of it, as well as the madness of the day itself, itself mad (another genitive): the madness of the *jour* in the sense of *diēs*, day, and in the sense of light, brightness. The title seems to refer at times to the "I went mad," "only my innermost being was mad," of the "narrator" (an impossible narrator, though, incapable of responding to the demand for narrative, mad for light: ". . . and if seeing would infect me with madness, I madly wanted that madness"), at times to the madness of a "character" following the narrator on the street ("a strange sort of lunatic"), at times, in another genitive, to "the madness of the day" itself, in a phrase that is a homonym of the title and is taken from or grafted onto the body of the story. ("Finally I became convinced that I was face to face with the madness of the day. That was the truth: the light was going mad, the brightness had lost all reason. . . .") In a dissemination as glorious as it is

in the language of the other. I anticipated this difficulty of translation, if only up to a certain point, but I did not calculate it or deliberately increase it. I just did nothing to avoid it. On the contrary, I shall try here, in this short steno-telegraphic band, for the greatest translatability possible. Such will be the proposed contract. For the problems that I wished to formalize above all have an irreducible relationship to the enigma, or in other words the *récit*, of translation. I have sought to

fleeting, the *sēma jour*, the "same" *jour*, the other, is both *ajouré* and *ajourné* ["perforated" and "adjourned, postponed"; derived from the two senses of *jour*—in itself, so to speak, in the precarious instability of its title. The madness of the day, of this moment, is momentary. The abyss that carries it away is expressed (for example) when a voice says, "Oh, I see the daylight [*jour*], oh God." It is not the narrator's voice but a feminine one [i.e., referred to by the pronoun *elle*] that discreetly sets free (by means of a sort of game that tires the narrator, he says) all the powers of a language by making it apparently untranslatable: "Suddenly, she [*elle*] would cry out, 'Oh, I see the daylight, oh God,' etc. I would protest that this game was tiring me out enormously, but she was insatiable for my glory." The game did not consist solely or surely (look at the paragraph) in wordplay. But language is involved from the first. The feminine voice that says "I see the daylight"—insatiable for the "glory" of the "I" of the story, for his triumph—this voice is spoken, is translated by language: "I am born" (*voir le jour* also means "to be born" in French), but also "I see" (things) and, what's more, "I see" light, glory, the element of visibility, the visibility of that which is visible, the phenomenality of the phenomenon; thus I see vision, both eyesight and what it can see, the stage [*scène*] and the possibility of representation [*scène*], the scene of visibility, a *primal scene*, I might say, quoting the title of a very short text [i.e., "Une scène primitive"], a "broken window" by Blanchot, a text whose powerful enigma I do not wish to touch on here. Visibility should—not be visible. According to an old, omnipotent logic that has reigned since Plato, that which enables us to see should remain

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present these problems [*les mettre en scène*], but the stage on which they appear, as will be seen, is one where the unrepresentable is in full force. Thus I have sought to present them *practically*, and in a sense *performatively*, in accordance with a notion of the performative that I feel must be dissociated, by an act of deconstruction, from the notion of presence with which it is generally linked. The maximal translatability of this band: impoverishment by univocality. Economy and formalization, but

invisible: black, blinding. *La folie du jour* is a story of madness [*histoire de la folie*], of that madness that consists in seeing the light, vision or visibility, from an experience of blindness. If from "life" we appeal to "light," from *vie* to *vision*, we can speak here of *sur-vie*, of living on in a life-after-life or a life-after-death, as *sur-vision*, "seeing on" in a vision-beyond-vision. To see sight or vision or visibility, to see beyond what is visible, is not merely "to have a vision" in the usual sense of the word, but to see-beyond-sight, to see-sight-beyond-sight. As in Ponge's "Le soleil placé en abîme," the story of glory engulfs or clouds over a sort of paternal figure, placing it in an abyss-structure, in vision-beyond-vision. The story obscures the sun ("the sun their father," says *The Triumph of Life*) with a blinding light. (Thus perhaps the mother lives on, and on, as a ghost—phantom or revenant—an absolute figurant, a walk-on who walks on and on, in accordance with the "obsequent logic" to which I referred in *Glas*. I am my father who is dead and my mother who is alive, announces Nietzsche at the midpoint of his life, in *Ecce Homo*, after passing through blindness.) To see vision, to see on beyond sight: this abyss-like madness of an utterly primal scene, the scene of scenes, stages, representation, is simulated and dissimulated in the narrative in the reassuring form (for those who want to be reassured) of spectacles [*spectacles*] within bounds, determinate "visions" or "scenes" that serve in a way to allegorize the abyss and contain the madness. The word "vision" itself is ambiguous enough to make this economy possible.

The feminine voice that says, "Oh, I see the daylight, oh God," is, as we have said, insatiable for the "glory" of the speaker who

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in the opposite sense to that of what takes place in the upper band: there, too, are economy and formalization, but by semantic accumulation and overloading, until the point when the logic of the undecidable *arrêt de mort* brings and opens polysemia (and its economy) in the direction of dissemination. Why have I chosen to stress the translation-effect here? 1. Effects of transference, of superimposing, of textual superimprinting between the two "triumphs" or the two "*arrêts*" and within

says "I" in *La folie du jour*. This speaker has supposedly triumphed over blindness. I do not know whether it is possible to consider the "glories" of *The Triumph of Life* and those of *La folie du jour* as translating one another, and if so, which translating which, and in what ways. If we are not restricted to literal recurrences of the word "glory," then that translation can go every which way. Its detours become both endless and inevitable. Let us say that I interrupt them here. I stop [*Je m'arrête*]. Thus I shall not quote "Outdoors, I saw something briefly [*j'eus une courte vision; also "I had a brief vision"*]" from *La folie du jour*, at the hinge of the text, to give it the resonance of an echo translating "And then a Vision on my brain was rolled," which is at once the linking point and the opening of the narrative in *The Triumph of Life*. After the "brief vision," before the traumatic accident in which "I nearly lost my sight, because someone crushed glass in my eyes," the accident that left him at first with his eyes banded (to be translated, I suppose, by "eyes banded" or by "banded eyes" as in lines 100 and 103 of *The Triumph of Life*), the beginning of the end is there for us to read. The beginning of the end describes in an abyss-structure [i.e., in an inserted miniature representing the whole] the structure of the "narrative," the "récit" (?) entitled *La folie du jour*. This "narrative" seems indeed to begin with a certain sentence that will subsequently be quoted towards the end as part of the narrative, unless the first sentence quotes in advance the one that comes at the end and that relates the first words of a narrative. I shall return to this structure, which deprives the text of any beginning and of any decidable

each of them. Both are written in a certain (arrested [*arrêté*]) relationship of translation. 2. The *hymen* (alliance, wedding-band, reaffirmation, "Yes, yes," "Come, come" and so forth) is related, in *L'arrêt de mort*, thematically related, to what commits us "in the language of the other." 3. Above all, by making manifest the limits of the prevalent concept of translation (I do not say of translatability in general), we touch on multiple problems said to be of "method," of reading and

edge or border, of any heading or letterhead [*en-tête*]. (*Entête* is the word with which Chouraqui translates the beginning of Genesis:

ENTÊTE [in-head] Elohim created heaven and earth.

The earth was in shambles,  
darkness upon the face of the abyss,  
the breath of Elohim moving upon the face of the waters.

Elohim says:

"There will be light."

And there is light.

Elohim sees the	light: Oh, the good.
Elohim separates the	light from the darkness.
Elohim cries to the	light: "Day."
To the darkness, he cries:	"Night."

And it is evening and it is morning:  
day, unique.

After the "brief vision," before the injury from which "I nearly lost my sight," he tells himself that this brief vision, in mid-story, marks the beginning of the end:

This brief scene roused me to the point of delirium. I don't suppose I could fully explain it to myself and yet I was sure of it, that I had seized the moment when the day, having come face to face with a real event, would now hasten to its end. Here it comes, I said to myself, the end is coming; something is happening, the end is beginning. I was overcome with joy.

teaching. The line that I seek to recognize within translatability, between two translations, one governed by the classical model of transportable univocality or of formalizable polysemia, and the other, which goes over into dissemination—this line also passes between the critical and the deconstructive. A politico-institutional problem of the University: it, like all teaching in its traditional form, and perhaps all teaching whatever, has as its ideal, with exhaustive translatability, the effacement

(There are writings entitled, for example, *Entête* [Genesis], the Gospels, Revelation [Apocalypse], and so forth. I would like to speak of them here, to attempt to read them, to move to them from, for example, *The Triumph of Life*, *La folie du jour*, *L'arrêt de mort* . . . and the story, the narrative, of "Living On" as difference, with an *a*, between archeology and eschatology, as difference *in* apocalypse. That will be a while in coming.)

What is judiciously called the question-of-narrative covers, with a certain modesty, a demand for narrative, a violent putting-to-the-question, an instrument of torture working to wring the narrative out of one as if it were a terrible secret, in ways that can go from the most archaic police methods to refinements for making (and even letting) one talk that are unsurpassed in neutrality and politeness, that are most respectfully medical, psychiatric, and even psychoanalytic. For reasons that should be obvious by now, I shall not say that Blanchot offers a *representation*, a *mise en scène*, of this demand for narrative, in *La folie du jour*: it would be better to say that it is there to be read, "to the point of delirium," as it throws the reader off the track. For the same reasons, I do not know whether the text can be classified as being of the genre (Genette: the *mode* [mode; mood of a verb]) "*récit*," a word that Blanchot has repeatedly insisted upon and contested, reclaimed and rejected, set down and (then) erased, and so forth. In addition to these general reasons there is a singular characteristic, involving precisely the (internal and external) *boundaries* or *edges* of

of language [*la langue*]. The deconstruction of a pedagogical institution and all that it implies. What this institution cannot bear, is for anyone to tamper with [*toucher à*; also "touch," "change," "concern himself with"] language, meaning *both* the *national* language *and*, paradoxically, an ideal of translatability that neutralizes this national language. Nationalism and universalism. What this institution cannot bear is a transformation that leaves intact neither of these two complementary poles.

this text. The boundary from which we believe we approach *La folie du jour*, its "first word" ("I"), opens with a paragraph that *affirms* a sort of triumph of life at the edge of death. The triumph must be excessive (in accordance with the "boundlessness" of hubris) and very close to what it triumphs over. This paragraph begins a narrative, it seems, but does not yet recount anything. The narrator introduces himself in that simplest of performances, an "I am," or more precisely an "I am neither . . . nor . . .," which immediately removes the performance from presence. The end of this paragraph notes especially the double excess of every triumph of life: i.e., the excessive double affirmation, of triumphant life, of death which triumphs *over* life.

I am neither learned nor ignorant. I have known joys. That is saying too little: I am alive; and this life gives me the greatest pleasure. And what about death? When I die (perhaps any minute now), I will feel immense pleasure. I am not talking about the foretaste of death, which is stale and often disagreeable. Suffering dulls the senses. But this is the remarkable truth, which I am certain of: I feel boundless pleasure in living, and I will take boundless satisfaction in dying.

A number of signs make it possible to recognize a man in the first-person speaker. But in the *double* affirmation seen (remarked upon) in the syntax of triumph as *triomphe-de*, triumph *of* and triumph *over*, the narrator comes close to seeing a trait that is particularly feminine, a trait of feminine beauty, even.

It can bear more readily the most apparently revolutionary ideological sorts of "content," if only that content does not touch the borders of language [*la langue*] and of all the juridico-political contracts that it guarantees. It is this "intolerable" something that concerns me here. It is related in an essential way to that which, as it is written above, brings out the limits of the concept of translation on which the university is built, particularly when it makes the teaching of language, even

Men want to escape death, strange animals that they are. And some of them cry out "Die, die" because they want to escape life. "What a life. I'll kill myself. I'll give in." That is pitiful and strange; it is a mistake.

Yet I have met people who have never told life to be quiet or told death to go away—almost always women, beautiful creatures.

Later, on the next-to-last page, we learn that this opening paragraph (the upper edge of *La folie* . . .) corresponds in its content and form, if not in its occurrence, to the beginning of the account {*récit*} that the narrator tries to take up [*aborder*] in response to the demands of his interrogators. This creates an exceedingly strange space: what appeared to be the beginning and the upper edge of a discourse *will have been* merely part of a narrative that forms a part of the discourse in that it *recounts* how an attempt was made—in vain!—to force a narrative out of the narrator. The starting edge will have been the quotation (at first not recognizable as such) of a narrative fragment that in turn will merely be quoting its quotation. For all these quotations, quotations of quotations with no original performance, there is no speech act not already the iteration of another, no circle and no quotation marks to reassure us about the identity, opposition, or distinction of speech events. The part is always greater than the whole, the edge of the set [*ensemble*] is a fold [*pli*] in the set ("Happy those for whom the fold/ Of . . ."), but as *La folie du jour* unfolds, explains itself [*s'explique*] without ever giving up its "fold" to another discourse not already its own, it is better if I quote. If I quote, for example, these last two pages:

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literatures, and even "comparative literature," its principal theme. If *questions of method* (here, a translators' note: I have published a text that is untranslatable, starting with its title, "Pas," and in "La double séance," referring to "dissemination in the refolding [*repli*] of the hymen": "Pas de méthode ["no method," but also "a methodical step"] for it: no path comes back in its circle to a first step, none proceeds from the simple to the complex, none leads from a beginning to an end. (A

I had been asked, "Tell us exactly what happened." A story [*Un récit*]? I began: I am neither learned nor ignorant. I have known joys. That is saying too little. I told them the whole story [*l'histoire*], and they listened with interest, it seems to me, at least in the beginning. But the end was a surprise to all of us. "That was the beginning," they said. "Now get down to the facts." How so? The story [*récit*] was finished!

I was forced to realize that I was not capable of forming a story out of these events. I had lost the thread of the narrative [*l'histoire*]: that happens in a good many illnesses. But this explanation only made them more insistent. Then I noticed for the first time that there were two of them and that this departure from the traditional method, even though it was explained by the fact that one of them was an eye doctor, the other a specialist in mental illness, kept making our conversation seem like an authoritarian interrogation that was being supervised and guided by a strict set of rules. Of course neither of them was the police chief. But because there were two of them, there were three, and this third was firmly convinced, I am sure, that a writer, a man who speaks and argues with distinction, is always capable of recounting facts that he remembers.

A story [*récit*]? No. No stories [*pas de récit*], never again.

By definition, there is no end to a discourse that would seek to describe the invaginated structure of *La folie du jour*. Invagination is the inward refolding of *la gaine* [sheath, girdle], the inverted reapplication of the outer edge to the inside of a form where the outside then opens a pocket. Such an invagination is possible from the first trace on. This is why there is no "first" trace. We have just seen, on the basis of this example refined to

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book neither begins nor ends: at most it pretends to.' . . . 'Every method is a fiction.') *Point de méthode* ["absolutely no method," but also "a point of method"]: that doesn't rule out a certain course to be followed" [*La dissémination*, p. 303]. The translators will not be able to translate this *pas* and this *point*. Will they have to indicate that this reminder is to be related to what is called the "unfinished" quality of Shelley's *Triumph* and the impossibility of fixing [*arrêter*] the opening

the point of madness, how "the whole story [to which] they listened" is the one (the same but another at the same time) that, like *La folie du jour*, begins "I am neither learned nor ignorant. . . ." But this "whole story," which corresponds to the totality of the "book," is also only a part of the book, the narrative that is demanded, attempted, impossible, and so forth. Its end, which comes before the end, does not respond to the request of the authorities, the authorities who demand an *author*, an *I* capable of organizing a narrative sequence, of remembering and telling the truth: "exactly what happened," "recounting facts that he remembers," in other words saying "I" (I am the same as the one to whom these things happened, and so on, and thereby assuring the unity or identity of narratee or reader, and so on). Such is the demand for the story, for narrative, the demand that society, the law that governs literary and artistic works, medicine, the police, and so forth, claim to constitute. This demand for truth is itself recounted and swept along in the endless process of invagination. Because I cannot pursue this analysis here, I merely situate the place, the locus, in which *double invagination* comes about, the place where the invagination of the upper edge on its outer face (the supposed beginning of *La folie du jour*), which is folded back "inside" to form a pocket and an inner edge, comes to extend beyond (or encroach on) the invagination of the lower edge, on its inner face (the supposed end of *La folie du jour*), which is folded back "inside" to form a pocket and an outer edge. Indeed the "middle" sequence ("I had been asked, 'Tell us exactly what happened.' A story? I began: I am neither learned nor ignorant. I have known joys. That is saying too little. I told them the whole

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and closing boundaries of *L'arrêt de mort*, all problems treated, in another mode, in the procession above? Will they relate this untranslatable *pas* to the double "knot" of double invagination, a central motif of that text, or, along with its entire semantic family, to all the occurrences of "path," "past," "pass" in Shelley's *Triumph?*)—if the question of teaching (not only the teaching of literature and the humanities) runs throughout this book, if my participation is possible only with supple-

story and they listened with interest, it seems to me, at least in the beginning. But the end was a surprise to all of us. 'That was the beginning,' they said. 'Now get down to the facts.' How so? The story was finished!"), this antepenultimate paragraph, recalls, subsumes, quotes without quotation marks the first sentences of *La folie du jour* (I am neither learned nor . . . .), including in itself the entire book, including itself, but only after anticipating, by quoting it in advance, the question that will form the lower edge or the final boundary of *La folie du jour*—or almost final, to accentuate the dissymmetry of effects. The question "A story?", posed as a question in response to the demand (Do they demand a story, a *récit*, of me?) in the antepenultimate paragraph, will be taken up again in the final sequence ("A story? No. No stories, never again."), but again, just as in the previous instance, this repetition does not follow (chronologically or logically) what nevertheless seems to come before it in the first line, in the immediate linearity of reading. We cannot even speak here of a future perfect tense, if this still presumes a regular modification of the present into its instances of a present in the past, a present in the present, and a present in the future. In this requotation of the story [*ré-citation du récit*], intensified or reinforced here by the requotation of the word "*récit*," it is impossible to say which one quotes the other, and above all which one forms the border of the other. Each includes the other, comprehends the other, which is to say that neither comprehends the other. Each "story" (and each occurrence of the word "story," each "story" in the story) is part of the other, makes the other a part (of itself), each "story" is at once larger and smaller than itself, includes it-

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mentary interpretation by the translators (active, interested, inscribed in a politico-institutional field of drives, and so forth), if we are not to pass over all these stakes and interests (what happens in this respect in the universities of the Western world, in the United States, at Yale, from department to department? How is one to step in? What is the key here for decoding? What am I doing here? What are they making me do? How are the boundaries of all these fields, titles, corpora, and so forth,

self without including (or comprehending) itself, identifies itself with itself even as it remains utterly different from its homonym. Of course, at intervals ranging from two to forty paragraphs, this structure of *crisscross double invagination* ("I am neither learned nor [ . . . ] A story? I began: I am neither learned nor [ . . . ] The story was finished! [ . . . ] A story? No. No stories, never again.") never ceases to refold or superpose or *overemploy* itself in the meantime, and the description of this would be interminable. I must content myself for the moment with underscoring the supplementary aspect of this structure: the chiasma of this *double invagination* is always possible, because of what I have called elsewhere the iterability of the mark. Now, if we have just seen a strikingly complex example of this in the case of a *récit*, a story, using the word "*récit*," reciting and requoting both its possibility and its impossibility, double invagination can come about in any text, whether it is narrative in form or not, whether it is of the genre or *mode* "*récit*" or not, whether it speaks of it or not. Nevertheless—and this is the aspect that interested me in the beginning—double invagination, wherever it comes about, has in itself the *structure of a narrative [récit] in deconstruction*. Here the narrative is irreducible. Even before it "concerns" a text in narrative form, double invagination constitutes the story of stories, the narrative of narrative, the *narrative of deconstruction in deconstruction*: the apparently outer edge of an enclosure [*clôture*], far from being simple, simply external and circular, in accordance with the philosophical representation of philosophy, makes no sign beyond itself, toward what is utterly *other*, without becoming double or dual, without making itself be "represented," refolded,

laid out? Here I can only locate the necessity of all these questions), then we must pause to consider [*on devra s'arrêter sur*] translation. It brings the *arrêt* of everything, decides, suspends, and sets in motion . . . even in "my" language, within the presumed unity of what is called the corpus of a language. 9–16 January 1978. What will remain unreadable for me, in any case, of this text, not to mention Shelley, of course, and everything that haunts his language [*langue*] and his writ-

superposed, *re-marked* within the enclosure, at least in what the structure produces as an effect of interiority. But it is precisely this structure-effect that is being deconstructed here.

If "No. No stories, never again" belongs to *La folie du jour* as it is inscribed at its edge, at the edge of a text that recounts the demand for an impossible story, a text that was first called "Un récit," and so on, the story effaces itself from the story by making itself more noticeable, by re-marking itself, with a "double exposure," a superimprinting. And the history of the story or the story of history is the story of effacement *as* superimprinting of all the logic of the "double bind" or of double invagination that is reaffirmed in that story. It is not absolutely necessary that this superimprinting by effacement also stress the word *récit*, the name of the *mode* or genre, but it makes for a remarkable supplement . . . especially if the designation [*la "mention"*] "*récit*" is part of the title without being part of it, between the title and the rest. This is what happens with the first titles of *La folie du jour* and "in" the text that bears these titles, but it is also what happens between the two versions of *L'arrêt de mort*. The first one (1948) carries, beneath the title, if not as a subtitle, the designation "*récit*." This disappears in the second version (1971), which also effaces the last two pages, an enigmatic epilogue that threatened to gather together, under the authority of a meta-story, the two "stories," independent and indeed disparate, that precede it. Here we cannot go deeply into this event, this double effacement, which is a story in itself: the two versions form (without forming) a single corpus registered at the Bibliothèque Nationale in the name of Maurice Blanchot. I allude to this institution to indicate

ing. What will remain unreadable for me of this text, once it is translated, of course, still bearing my signature. But even in "my" language, to which it does not belong in a simple way. One never writes either in one's own language or in a foreign language. Derive all the consequences of this: they involve each element, each term of the preceding sentence. Hence the triumph (necessarily double and equivocal, because it is also a phase of mourning). Hence the triumph as the triumph of

with one reference all the problems that I cannot go into here, problems of the mark that superimposes by effacement (judicial, political problems and the like, involving the convention or the fiction that guarantees an author his due [*les "droits d'auteur,"* royalties; lit., an author's rights], the unity of an author's corpus, the presumption of the "real" author in his proper name as set down in the registry office, which distinguishes him from the narrator, and so on: I reserve all these questions under the title "*du droit à la littérature*" ["from law to literature"/"of the right to literature"]). This double effacement, I say, is a story in itself, a story of "story," a "story" of the story [*un "récit" du récit*]. It is enough, in *La folie du jour*, to disrupt or unhinge the demand for narrative [*la demande du récit*], to strike the instigators with impotence but also to sustain them as instigators on the basis of that impotence. As to the double version, it is no contingent accident: it is fated, even within what in copyright law is considered to be one and the same version. Like the meaning "genre" or "mode," or that of "corpus" or the unity of a "work," the meaning of version, and of the unity of a version, is overrun, exceeded, by this structure of invagination: not merely cancelled or invalidated but exposed in the precariousness of its effect, the fragility of the conventional artifices that provisionally guarantee it, all the historical fictions that certify its *carte d'identité*. Thus, on the basis of what happens to the *récit*, to "*récit*" from one version of *L'arrêt de mort* to another or even within what is considered a single "version" of *La folie du jour*—on the basis of what happens to the subtitle "*récit*" or the title "*Un récit (?)*" from one version of the two *récits* (?) to the other, we understand better

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translation. *Übersetzung* and "translation" overcome, equivocally, in the course of an equivocal combat, the loss of an object. A text lives only if it lives *on* [*sur-vit*], and it lives *on* only if it is *at once* translatable and untranslatable (always "at once . . . and . . .": *hama*, at the "same" time). Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language [*langue*]. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately. Thus triumphant trans-

how the unity of one version can be *encroached* upon by an essential *unfinishedness* that cannot be reduced to an incompleteness or an inadequacy. I register, I record this remark on the shore of what is called the unfinishedness of *The Triumph of Life*, at the moment when Shelley is drowned. I do so without claiming to understand what people mean in this case by "unfinished," or to decide anything. I do so only to recall the immense procedures that should come before a statement about whether a work is finished or unfinished. Where are we to situate the event of Shelley's drowning? And who will decide the answer to this question? Who will form a narrative of these borderline events [*événements de bord*]? At whose demand?

### THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE

Once we have accentuated the question of narrative as demand for narrative, once the response to this demand indeterminably invaginates every border, then this will affect all the questions with which I began: the question of narrative (What is a *récit*?), that of *la Chose* (What is a thing and that thing that is called a narrative or that is called to from a narrative? What is the demand for [*de*, also "of"] *la Chose*? And so on . . .), that of the place and of taking place, of the topography of the event, which will lead us to a certain "Come" ["*Viens*"] and a certain "*pas*" ["step," "not"] which opens the door to the impossible possibility of what comes about [*arrive*] in its taking place.

Within the boundaries of this session, I shall propose a fragment, itself unfinished, detached from a more systematic reading

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lation is neither the life nor the death of the text, only or already its living *on*, its life after life, its life after death. The same thing will be said of what I call writing, mark, trace, and so on. It neither lives nor dies; it lives *on*. And it "starts" only with living on (testament, iterability, remaining [*restance*]), crypt, detachment that lifts the strictures of the "living" *rectio* or direction of an "author" not drowned at the edge of his text). The relative synonymy or intertranslatability that I seek to pro-



of Shelley, a reading oriented by the problems of *narrative* [récit] as *reaffirmation* (yes, yes) of life, in which the *yes*, which says nothing, describes nothing but itself, the performance of its own event of affirmation, repeats itself, *quotes*, *cites* itself, says *yes-to* itself as (to an-) other in accordance with the ring, requotes and recites a commitment that would not take place outside this repetition of a performance without presence. This strange ring says *yes* to life only in the overdetermining ambiguity of the triumph *de* ["of," "over"] life, *sur* ["over," "on," etc.] life, the triumph marked in the "on" of "living on" [*Je sur d'un survivre*].

All this syntax, almost untranslatable, is sealed in the French expression *l'arrêt de mort*.

In order that my fragmentary discourse may remain somewhat intelligible, concrete, coherent, I shall refer to the example of the former "récit" that has this title, *L'arrêt de mort*. In this text you will recognize the "narrative voice" that Blanchot, in *L'entretien infini*, distinguishes from the "narratorial voice." The narrative voice, he says, is "a neutral voice that utters [*dit*] the work from the placeless place where the work is silent." The placeless place where the work is silent: a silent voice, then, withdrawn into its "voicelessness" [*aphonie*]. This "voicelessness" distinguishes it from the "narratorial voice," the voice that literary criticism or poetics or narratology strives to locate in the system of the narrative, of the novel, or of the narration. The narratorial voice is the voice of a subject recounting something, remembering an event or a historical sequence, knowing who he is, where he is, and what he is talking about. It responds to some "police," a force of order or law ("What 'exactly' are you talking about?": the

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duce above between *arrêt de mort* and triumph of life. It also means that these two titles can always, in addition to or beyond any other possible reference, designate the very thing to which they give a title, that is, the text below, the writing of the "poem" or "récit" that bears the title. The triumph of life or *l'arrêt de mort* would be *the* text, this text, its element, its condition, its effect. This assumes a certain functioning of titles, and that we analyze its laws, its relationship to the law and to the

truth of equivalence). In this sense, all organized narration is "a matter for the police," even before its genre (mystery novel, cop story) has been determined. The narrative voice, on the other hand, would *surpass* police investigation, if that were possible. In *La folie du jour*, we can say that the authoritarian demand puts pressure on a narrative voice to turn into a narratorial voice and to bring about [*donner lieu à*] a narrative that would be *identifiable*, collected, connected, in its subject and in its object. Now, the narrative voice ("I" or "he," "a third person that is neither a third person nor the simple cover of impersonality") has no fixed [*arrêté*] place. It takes place placelessly, being both *atopical*, mad, extravagant, and *hypertopical*, both placeless and over-placed. Blanchot speaks of that which "designates 'its' place *both* as the place at which it [*il*, the neuter *it* of the narrative voice] would always be missing and that therefore would remain empty, *and* as surplus space, always one place too many: hypertopia" ("L'absence de livre," in *L'entretien infini* [Paris: Gallimard, 1969], p. 564n). The neuter *il*, "it," of the narrative voice, is not an "I," not an ego, even if it is represented in the narrative by "I," "he," or "she." We might wonder—and this is one of the questions that will run through my reading of this fragment—why the neuter of the *il* that is not an "I," not an ego, is represented in French, according to Blanchot, by a pronoun that privileges the affinity or apparently fortuitous and external resemblance between the masculine *il* ["he"] and the neuter *il* ["it"]. Atopia, hypertopia, placeless place [*lieu sans lieu*], this narrative voice calls out to this "-less" [*sans*, without] syntax, which in Blanchot's text so often comes to neutralize (without positing, without negating) a word,

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judicial conventions of "literature." This schema is not its own *telos*, not self-mirroring or mere *mise en abyme*; at least the "double bind" that structures these titles, as I seek to demonstrate it, keeps this reflecting representation from folding back upon itself or reproducing itself within itself in perfect self-correspondence [*adéquate à elle-même*], from dominating or including itself, tautologically, from translating itself into its own totality. Writing and triumph. Nietzsche: "Writing in order to

a concept, a term (x-less x): "-less" or "without" without privation or negativity or lack ("without" without *without*, less-less "-less"), the necessity of which I have attempted to analyze in "Le 'sans' de la coupure pure" and "Pas." This "-less" syntax enters at least twice (and that's no accident) into the (definitionless) definition of the narrative voice. We have already read "placeless place," and now we come to "at a distanceless distance," in a passage that makes the ghost return [*fait revenir le revenant*], "ghostly," "phantom-like" *revenance* (the element of haunting that inundates, if you will, *The Triumph of Life*, its "ghosts," "phantoms," "ghostly shadows," and the like):

The narrative voice that is on the inside only insofar as it is on the outside, at a distance, cannot become incarnate: although it can certainly borrow the voice of a judiciously chosen character or even create the hybrid function of a mediator (this voice that is the ruin of all mediation), it is still always different from that which utters it; it is that indifferent indifference that alters the personal voice. Let's use our imaginations [*par fantaisie*] and call it ghostly, phantom-like. [. . .]

[. . .] The narrative voice is the bearer of that which is neutral [*porte le neutre*].

The neutral and not neutrality, the neutral beyond dialectical contradiction and all opposition: such would be the possibility of a "narrative," a "*récit*," that would no longer be simply a form, a genre, or a literary *mode*, and that goes, that is borne, beyond the system of philosophical oppositions. The neutral cannot be governed by any of the terms involved in an opposition within

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*triumph*. Writing should always mark a triumph" (*Opinions et sentences mêlées*, aphorism 152; I quote from a French translation now in use but quite inadequate, precisely in its triumph. Nietzsche writes: "*Schreiben und Siegen-wollen*.—Schreiben sollte immer einen Sieg anzeigen . . ."). See what he says then of the triumph (*Überwindung*) over oneself, i.e., he claims, without using force (*Gewalt*) on others. He opposes the triumph that he prescribes for literature, to that of "dyspeptics who write only at

philosophical language and natural language. And yet it is not outside of language: it is, for example, narrative voice. Despite the negative form that it takes on in grammar (*ne-uter*, neither-nor) and that betrays it, it surpasses negativity. It is linked rather to the double affirmation (yes, yes, come, come) that re-quotes [*ré-cite*] itself and becomes involved in the *récit*.

One text reads another. How can a reading be settled on [*arrêter*]? For example, we can say that *The Triumph of Life* reads *L'arrêt de mort*, among other things. And, among other things, vice versa. Each "text" is a machine with multiple reading heads for other texts. To read *L'arrêt de mort*, starting with the title in its endless mobility, I can always be guided by another text—for example, in this case, by a certain passage from *Le pas au-delà* [Paris: Gallimard, 1973], which, more than twenty years later, also seems to provide a "commentary" for the title *L'arrêt de mort*:

◆ *Taking three steps, stopping, falling, and immediately securing oneself in this fragile fall.*

◆ *Survivre, living on: not living or (not living) maintaining oneself, lifeless, in a state of pure supplement, a movement of supplementing life, but rather stopping [*arrêter*] the dying, a stopping [*arrêt*] that does not stop [*arrête*] it, that on the contrary makes it go on, makes it last [*durer*]. 'Speak on the *arrête* [coined word; cf. *arête*: ridge, cutting edge, backbone, fish bone, aris]—the line of instability—of the spoken word.' As if it were present at the exhaustion of dying: as if night, having started too early, at the earliest moment of day, doubted that it would ever come to night.*

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the very moment when they are unable to digest something, or from the moment that the morsel [*morceau*] sticks in their teeth. . . ." The problem of the *mors* [literally "(bridle-)bit"] (how can *mors* be translated?), set forth in *Glas* and "Fors." Obviously (and this is the place to note [*marquer*] it, in this short telegraphic band addressed to the translators and that I am burying here underneath the other one), I can try for a certain intertranslatability (*triumphant* and *arrested*) of *The Triumph of*

◆ It is almost certain that at certain moments we realize it: to keep speaking—this afterlife, life-after-life of the spoken word, speaking on—is a way of making ourselves aware that for a long time we have not been speaking any more.

◆ Praise of the faraway *near*.

◆ Come, come [*viens, viens, venez*], you to whom injunction, prayer, urging, expectation [*attente*] could never be appropriate [*convenir*].

In the first of these sequences, you will have noticed the shift to italics. This indicates quite uniformly the transition from a more assertive, theoretical, impersonal mode to a more fictional, narrative one. (The interweaving of these modes complicates this opposition even more, but let's not get into that here.) For example, *durer*, "last," already italicized, glides into [*amorce continûment*] the serial interlacement. This enduring, lasting, going on, stresses or insists on the "on" of a living on that bears the entire enigma of this supplementary logic. Survival and *revenance*, living on and returning from the dead: living on goes beyond both living and dying, supplementing each with a sudden surge and a certain reprieve, deciding [*arrêtant*] life and death, ending them in a decisive *arrêt*, the *arrêt* that puts an end to something and the *arrêt* that condemns with a sentence [*sentence*], a statement, a spoken word or a word that goes on speaking. Now, the

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*Life* and *L'arrêt de mort*, here, only on the basis of work undertaken elsewhere, the code of which cannot fail to enter into the translation. *Glas*, "Pas," "Fors," to limit myself to this sequence of hardly translatable titles, lead elsewhere, but I stress them more because in them the relationship to the work of mourning is more thematic, as is work on the Freudian concept of the work of mourning. Now, we know that according to Freud "triumph" corresponds to a phase, manic in type, in the

homonymy of "*arrête*," if we can call these words homonyms, the verb and the noun ("*arrêt qui ne l'arrête pas*," "a stopping that does not stop it"; "*parle sur l'arrête*," "speak on the *arrête*, the ridge, the aris, the 'arrist'"), is made complete by means of some tampering with spelling. This is rare in Blanchot's writing, but all the more significant. And we are further justified in paying attention to this by the fact that it is repeated elsewhere, thirty pages earlier, when the noun *arête* (cutting edge, ridge, etc.) receives an *extrar* [in the context of a discussion of the words "I do not know"]: " 'Do not—I know' indicates the double power for attack that the two terms, in isolation, retain: the decisiveness of the knowing, the cutting edge of the negative, the *arrête* that in each case impatiently ends everything." *Arrête*, with two *r*'s, is thus indeed that which orders the *arrêt* (stopping/decision), but the *ar(r)ête*, as a noun, is also that sharp dividing line, that angle of instability on which it is impossible to settle, to *s'arrêter*. Thus this dividing line functions also *within* the word and traces in it a line of vacillation. This line runs within *L'arrêt de mort*, within what the *arrêt de mort* says, the expression "arrêt de mort," the title *L'arrêt de mort*—all of which are to be distinguished.

How then is the title of the book to be read? First, *is* it readable? Its open polysemia plays with the language to the point of stopping [*arrêter*] any translation of it. In his introduction to [the translation by Lydia Davis of] a fragment of *L'arrêt de mort* (*Georgia Review*, Summer 1976), Geoffrey Hartman asks rightly: "Is '*arrêt de mort*,' then, 'death sentence' or 'suspension of death'?" (Which I shall play at translating into my language as follows: Does *The Triumph of Life* triumph over life [*triomphe de la vie*] or

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process of mourning. All the difficulties recognized by Freud in "Trauer und Melancholie": mania and melancholia have the same "content," and the states of "joy," "jubilation," and "triumph" (*Freude, Jubel, Triumph*) that characterize mania require the same "economic" conditions as melancholia, and so on. A movement from *Überwindung* to *Triumphieren*. Mania brings about phases of triumphant jubilation analogous to those that appear paradoxically in depression and in melancholic inhibition

express the triumph of life [*triomphe de la vie*]?) "Death Sentence," the title chosen for the fragment of the "novella" (*récit* is also untranslatable) presented under this title (this designation as a "novella") to the American reader, does translate one meaning of the expression *arrêt de mort*. In French an *arrêt* comes at the end of a trial, when the case has been argued and must be judged. The judgment that constitutes the *arrêt* closes the matter and renders a legal decision. It is a sentence. An *arrêt de mort* is a sentence that condemns someone to death. It is indeed a question of *une chose*, a thing, as case, *cause*, *causa*, and of a decision about *la chose*. As it happens, *la Chose* is here (as in Blanchot's text) Death, and the decision (verdict, sentence) of death concerns death as cause and as end. Death does not come *naturally*, just as *la Chose* does not. Death has an obscure relationship to decision, or more precisely to some sentence, some language that constitutes an *act* ("acts and deeds," "acts of a congress") and leaves a trace. *L'arrêt de mort* makes death a decision. *I* bestow, *I* give [*donne*] death. *He, il*, gives death: the *Il* (who says "I," who occupies the place of the narratorial voice, the place of the narrator in the *récit*) gives death, after *declaring*, announcing, *signifying*, and then *suspending* it. And *he* (*I*) does indeed *give* death, both as a gift and as a murder. In French *donner la mort* means first of all "to kill."

Here, first of all, [in Lydia Davis' translation, now complete, published as *Death Sentence* (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill, 1978) and quoted throughout, with permission and with occasional modifications for the sake of continuity] is the moment in which death is signified, announced, like a condemnation that

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when the object seems to return. But in manic triumph, what the ego "has overcome and what it triumphs over" (*was es überwunden hat und worüber es triumphiert*) is concealed from it. How is this dissimulation possible? Freud's dissatisfaction in this text, and in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, whose entire problematic should be introduced here. Speculations on the improbable death drive. Always one step more [*un pas de plus*], and no thesis [*et pas de thèse*]. Freud is still—bereft of an answer,

calls forth death and calls J. to death—assent, consent, that is also a sentence (J. is *condemned* in every sense of the word, given up and given over):

After I spoke to the doctor, I told her, "He gives you another month."

"Well, I'll tell that to the queen mother, who doesn't believe I'm really ill."

I don't know whether she wanted to live or die. During the last few months, the disease she had been fighting for ten years had been making her life more limited every day, and now she cursed both the disease and life itself with all the violence she could rouse. Some time before, she had thought seriously of killing herself. One evening I advised her to do it. That same evening, after listening to me, unable to talk because of her shortness of breath, but sitting up at her table like a healthy person, she wrote down several sentences [*lignes*] that she wished to keep secret. I got these sentences from her, in the end, and I still have them. [. . . .]

No mention of me. I could see how bitter she had felt when she heard me agree to her suicide. When I think it over carefully, as I did afterwards, I realize that this consent was hardly excusable, was even dishonest, since it vaguely rose from the thought that the disease would never get the better of her, she fought so. Normally, she should have been dead long ago, but not only was she not dead, she had continued to live, love, laugh, run around the city, like someone whom illness could not touch. Her doctor had told me that from 1936 on he had considered her dead. [translation modified]

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unable to kiss it good-bye [*faire son deuil de la réponse*]. Here, in "Trauer und Melancholie," the most difficult phase seems to concern the difference between normal *Überwindung* and "triumph." Of course, the mania must have "overcome" (*überwunden*) the loss of the object or the mourning for this loss or the object itself. Hence the libidinal explosion of the manic, who, "famished," rushes to new cathexes, new objects. (During her "life after life" [*sur-vie*] or "resurrection," J., like the nar-

Condemned (by the disease, the doctor, the "narrator"), J. should have been dead already. She thus lives *on*, more alive than ever, though. The disease has not got the better of her, *n'a pas eu raison d'elle*, another expression that is hard to translate: *avoir raison de* is here to overcome, to *triumph over*. Over life, to be precise, which does not give in to that *ratio* and of which it is difficult to give a reasoned account.

In truth it is also J. who makes the decision that condemns her to death: J., who will have to, will have had to die, should have died (but will we ever know whether she died, whether death came for her?), makes the decision, takes it upon herself to decide and enjoins the narrator from deciding. She orders him to kill her, to "give her death." She decides her death [*arrête sa mort*], takes up the decree of death herself. This is the penultimate page of the first part (which also forms an independent whole) of an erstwhile "*récit*" strangely cut up into two wholes and suspended around this undecidable *arrêt de mort*. The verb *arrêter*, made reflexive as *s'arrêter*, stopping (itself) [*s'arrêtant*], twice marks a boundary that brings things to an end only to let them start or start over or start on again [*repartir*]. (The pulse "stopped [*s'arrêta*], then began to beat again[ . . . ]." [. . . .] "What is extraordinary begins at the moment I stop [*je m'arrête*].") Here, she demands death, which he gives her; she gives it to herself [i.e., takes her own life] with the hand of the narrator. As we read this, we should remember that J. *was dead* before, since she had *returned* to life at the narrator's bidding, in response to his call. Having died once, she had already lived on. This double death is a triumph of life *and* of death. Here is the passage:

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rator, is surprisingly gay, and "she ate much more than I did.") But if "normal" mourning does in fact "overcome" the loss of the object, how can we explain the fact that after it has run its course (*nach ibrem Ablaufe*) it gives no indication of anything that would provide the necessary economic conditions for a "phase of triumph"? After a long digression—namely by way of "ambivalence" as one of the three necessary conditions for melancholia—Freud evokes the "regression of the libido

I never saw her more alive, nor more lucid. Maybe she was in the last instant of her agony [*agonie*], but even though she was incredibly beset by suffering, exhaustion and death, she seemed so alive to me that once again I was convinced that if she didn't want it, and if I didn't want it, nothing would ever get the better of her. While attack followed attack—but there was no more trace of coma nor any fatal symptoms—when the others were out of the room, her hand which was twitching on mine suddenly controlled itself and clasped mine with the greatest impatience and with all the affection and all the tenderness it could. At the same time she smiled at me in a natural way, even with amusement. Immediately afterwards she said to me in a low and rapid voice, "Quick, a shot." (She had not asked for one during the night.) I took a large syringe, in it I mixed two doses of morphine and two of a sedative, four doses altogether of narcotics. The liquid was fairly slow in penetrating, but since she saw what I was doing she remained very calm. She did not move at any moment. Two or three minutes later, her pulse became irregular, it beat violently, stopped, then began to beat again, heavily, only to stop again, this happened many times, finally it became extremely rapid and light, and "scattered like sand."

I have no better way of describing it [*Je n'ai aucun moyen d'en écrire davantage*]. I could say that during those moments J. continued to look at me with the same affectionate and willing [*consentant*] look and that this look is still there, but unfortunately I'm not sure of that. As for the rest, I don't want to say anything. The difficulties with the doctor became a matter of indifference to me. I myself see nothing important in the fact that this young woman was dead, and returned to life at my bidding, but I see an astounding miracle in her fortitude, in her energy, which was great

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towards narcissism" as the only effective factor. But he suddenly suspends, calls a halt, postpones, in a gesture for the sake of economy that concerns precisely economy. We must halt (*haltmachen*), he says in conclusion, until we know the "economic nature" of physical pain and of the mental pain that is "analogous" to it. Earlier, as he *often* does, he uses the judicial expression *Verdikt* (verdict, sentence, *arrêt*) to designate the operation of Reality with respect to the lost object. Each time that

enough to make death powerless as long as she wanted. One thing must be understood: I have said nothing extraordinary or even surprising. What is extraordinary begins at the moment I stop. But I am no longer able to speak of it.

This last sentence marks, if you will, the lower or final border of the "first" of the two "récits" entitled *L'arrêt de mort*. This outer edge or border can also be considered an inner fold. This fold is marked by indecision in more ways than one: not only because the "stopping" is an instance of a beginning or a new beginning but also because the temporality of "this young woman was dead" sinks into an indefinite past, and because "unfortunately" we are "not sure" of the sentence, of her "willing" "consent" to the death sentence. The reason for the interruption finally oscillates among three types of movement, at least ("I have no way [. . .]"; "I could, but [. . .]"; "As for the rest, I don't want to say anything"; "But I am no longer able to speak of it").

Thus he stops, *il s'arrête*, when it comes to the "rest."

As defined (indefinitely) in the passage from *Le pas au-delà*, the *arrêt de mort* is not only the decision that determines [*arrêtant*] what cannot be decided: it also arrests death by suspending it, interrupting it, deferring it with a "start" [*sursaut*], the startling starting over, and starting on, of living on. But then what suspends or holds back death is the very thing that gives it all its power of undecidability—another false name, rather than a pseudonym, for *differance*. And this is the pulse of the "word" *arrêt*, the arrhythmic pulsation of its syntax in the expression *arrêt de mort*. *Arrêter*, in the sense of suspending,

we recall the lost object and the libido once linked to it returns, Reality gives its verdict, i.e., "that the object no longer exists." Then, if the ego does not want to be condemned to the same fate and if it values the narcissistic satisfactions that remain for it, it decides to break off its "tie" (*Bindung*) to the destroyed object. 23–30 January 1978. In short, will it be possible to reduce the theme of double affirmation to the meaning of triumph, in the Freudian sense? The risk is that we may

the *arrêt*, in the sense of decision. *Arrêter*, in the sense of deciding, arrests the *arrêt*, in the sense of suspension. They are ahead of or lag behind one another. One marks delay; the other, haste. There are not merely two senses or two syntaxes of *arrêt* but, beyond a playful variability, the *antagony* [*antagonie*; cf. *agonie*, "death throes," and *antagonisme*] from one *arrêt* to the other. The antagony lasts from one to the other, one relieving the other in an *Aufhebung* that never lets up, *arrêt* arresting *arrêt*, both senses, both ways. The *arrêt* arrests itself [*s'arrête*]. The indecision of the *arrêt* intervenes not between two senses of the word *arrêt* but within each sense, so to speak. For the suspensive *arrêt* is already undecided because it suspends, and the decisive *arrêt* undecided because what it decides, death, *la Chose*, the neuter, is the undecidable itself, installed by decision in its undecidability. Like death, the *arrêt* remains (rests, *s'arrête*, arrests itself) undecidable. Crisis: everything seems to begin in a period of crisis (1938, Munich, then "the end of 1940"), then with a "strange attack [*crise*]" when someone goes into "*râles*" ["breathing hoarsely" (tr. Davis); also "death-rattle"] after opening a closet where the "proof" of the story was, perhaps, to be found, and so forth. Crisis is the urgency [*instance*, also "instance," "lawsuit," "tribunal"] of impossible decision, *krinein*, the "judgment" that it is impossible to reach, to *arrêter*, in the *arrêt de mort*. Since *arrêt* arrests *arrêt*, since the suspensive *arrêt* arrests the decisive *arrêt* and vice versa, the *arrêt de mort* arrests the *arrêt de mort*. Such is the arrhythmic pulsation of the title before it scatters like sand. The *arrêt* arrests itself, but in stopping [*s'arrêtant*] (as *arrêt*), it imparts movement, sets things in motion [*donne le mouvement*]. It makes

find the negativity of mourning, of economic resentment, and of melancholia as well, in the "yes, yes." Can it be avoided? But for Freud himself what he calls "triumph" is not clear, and all the re-reading that I attempted at Yale of the athletic nature of *Beyond the PP* could be brought to bear here. What I have said elsewhere ("Ja ou le faux-bond") about the *deuil du deuil* [i.e., "relinquishing mourning itself"], and of half-mourning. The *arrêt de mort* as verdict: it is obvious, and the translators

them come and go, go and come again. It gives life; it gives death. And it gives them to itself, with a *consent* that "unfortunately" is not "sure," fortunately not sure. The *arrêt* arrests itself. It stands (but gets no foothold), stays (with no mainstay) on this unstable line, this ridge [*arête*] that relates it to itself (the *arrêt* arresting *itself*) without being able to constitute it in self-reflection and reappropriation of self. It remains [*reste*] on the *arête* of itself without remaining to itself, in itself, for itself. It *a-rests* (for) itself. No consciousness, no perception, no watchfulness can gather up this remnant, this *restance*; no attentiveness can make it present, no "I," no ego; hence its essential relationship to ghosts, fantasies, daydreams, to *Phantasieren* (Freud) or the "waking dream" (*The Triumph of Life*). This epochal [etym. *epokhē*, "pause"; in phenomenology, "bracketing"] suspension that retains the title and assures the compulsive pulsation of *L'arrêt de mort*, is also an "ingenious" decision, one of those that are made [*s'arrêtent*] only in a language, one language, and escape signature by any "I" or ego. But in the same way, linked to what is untranslatable in a language, this decision becomes *unreadable*. I maintain that this title is unreadable. If reading means making accessible a meaning that can be transmitted as such, in its own unequivocal, translatable identity, then this title is unreadable. But this unreadability does not arrest reading, does not leave it paralyzed in the face of an opaque surface: rather, it starts reading and writing and translation moving again. The unreadable is not the opposite of the readable but rather the ridge [*arête*] that also gives it momentum, movement, sets it in motion. "The impossibility of reading should not be taken too lightly" (Paul de Man).

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must take this into account, that in "everyday" language, in "normal" conversation, the expression *arrêt de mort* is unambiguous. It means "death sentence." The syntax is clear: the *arrêt* is a verdict, a decision that has been *arrêtée*, decided, determined, and that itself decides and determines, and its relationship to the object of the preposition (*de mort*) is, of course, the same as in *condamnation à mort*. But "literary" convention, the suspension of "normal" contexts, the context of everyday con-

If we say that the unreadable gives, presents, permits, yields something to be read [*l'illisible donne à lire*], this is not a compromise formula. Unreadability is no less radical and irreducible for all that—absolute, yes, you read me.

We had just read, in *L'arrêt de mort*, just before the end of the "first" "*récit*," just before the "central" ridge of the corpus, the decisive *arrêt de mort*, in which death is given and no longer deferred. True, this takes place in the course of an event that is hard to situate and about which we cannot be sure that it took place or that it was the effect of a consenting sentence. Here, now, is the account of the other *arrêt de mort*, the suspensive *arrêt*, which gives respite, which gives an unexpected "start" to the dying J., or rather the dead J.: for this suspension is a resurrection. I extract this passage from the "first" "part" (neither part not whole, nor *pars totalis*, nor strictly speaking even first; no word is right any more, not even the quotation marks) of *L'arrêt de mort*, from the "first" of the two "*récits*." I slice things up somewhat barbarously and illegitimately, as we always do, counting on an implicit contract, the impossible contract: that you read "everything" and that at every moment you know the "whole" "corpus" by heart, with a living heart that beats unceasingly [*sans arrêt*], without even a pulsation. . . .

Shortly before, J. had asked her doctor for death, as one asks for a favor, and for life:

During that scene, J. said to him, "If you don't kill me, then you're a murderer." Later I came across a similar phrase, attributed to Kafka. Her sister, who would have been incapable of inventing

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versational usage or of writing legitimized by law—starting with legislating writing or the body of laws that sets the norm for legal language itself—the functioning of the title, the transformation of its relationship to the context and of its referentiality (I locate here the necessity of a very complex analysis: What does a title entitle, designate, delimit? Does it designate something other than what it entitles, i.e., the thing "entitled," the text or book? Or something other than itself?

something like that, reported it to me in that form and the doctor just about confirmed it. (He remembered her as saying, "If you don't kill me, you'll kill me.")

The doctor, like the narrator, can receive this sentence only as a demand for what is impossible: a contradictory double demand, a double petition to which the only possible response is to desist from granting it. This sentence [sentence] ("If you don't kill me, then you're a murderer") states, or rather produces, institutes, a law whose very structure puts you in a position of fatal transgression. And yet, by the same token, you obey it even in the transgression that it defines. Hence the infinite violence of what can strictly be called a "double bind," double obligation, double demand.<sup>1</sup> The disjunction allows of no respite, no hope for reconciliation; it is unceasing, *sans arrêt*. The narrator is subjected to the violence of this untractable law, like the demand for an impossible narrative. The same law, that of the *arrêt de mort*, relates this "double bind" and the double invagination described above. The narrator is here opposed to the doctor (as he is opposed to the doctors in *La folie du jour*), but he is also on the same side with respect to J.'s order. He "signifies," relates, decides [arrête], "gives" death, he is the "author" of death, but in all this he is only obeying a demand: a demand at once impossible to satisfy and satisfied the moment it is formulated, because it envisages its own transgression. This is how death is given, how one "gives" death to another or to oneself: oneself or *another*, it comes out the same. Murder is inevitable, and it is doubtless this uncompromising law of *arrêt* that the doctor's memory seeks to attenuate by

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But who or what is it? And where? And how does it relate to self-quotation? And so on and so forth.): all this forbids (prevents, inhibits, stops [arrête]) a translation of the title *L'arrêt de mort* by its "homonym" in everyday language or by "death sentence." This translation, like any other, leaves something out, an untranslated remnant. It arrests movement. Illegitimately: for "literature" and in general "parasitism," the suspension of the "normal" context of everyday conversation or of "civil-

transforming the sentence "If you don't kill me, then you're a murderer" into "If you don't kill me, you'll kill me." The *arrêt de mort* contains within itself this "double bind" that makes every death a crime, an event foreign to nature, related to law, *causa, la Chose*, and a law that can be posited only in its own transgression. In "On tue un enfant (fragmentaire)," Blanchot writes: "There is death and murder—words that I defy anyone to distinguish seriously and that must nevertheless be separated—for this death and this murder, it is an impersonal, inactive, irresponsible 'One' ['On'] who must answer." (This fragment, in *Le Nouveau Commerce* [1976], uses the vocabulary of the *arrêt* to designate the strange law that extends beyond the limits of [Hegelian] dialectic but still leaves a mark on it: "[. . .] The result, perhaps absurd, was that what shook dialectic, the unexperienceable experience of death, arrested it immediately: an *arrêt* of which the subsequent progression [procès] retained a sort of memory, as of an aporia that must always be reckoned with." This progression is here first the one that goes from Hegel's "first philosophy" to speculative idealism.)

Thus there is a double *arrêt de mort*: "If you don't kill me, then you're a murderer." J. demands this morphine, this double-acting pharmaceutical, this death that "I" will give her. But in the interval "I" will have arrested (suspended) death—left or given an interval, a pause—the eventless event of this *arrêt de mort*. Before he is summoned, *from afar*, by a telephoned "Come," before he is told, "Come, please come, J. is dying" (*J. se meurt*: this construction with the reflexive pronoun is familiar enough in French, but aside from a perceptible connotation from Bossuet's use of the

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ian" usage of the language, in short everything that makes it possible to move from "death sentence" to "suspension of death" in the French expression *arrêt de mort*, can always come about (*de facto* and *de jure*) in "everyday" usage of the language, in language and in discourse. The dream of translation without remnants, a metalanguage that would guarantee orderly flow between "entry language" and "exit language" [e.g., of a translating computer], between semantic radicals properly



expression in a famous funeral oration for a princess, this way of saying "she is dying" derives through repetition a literal element of reflexivity—*elle se meurt*, she dies for herself, of herself, unto herself: her death sentence is decidedly her own—before this "Come," or at least before he quotes it, "I" mentions an exchange between the nurse, Dangerue (a proper name that recalls us to our projected systematic reading of all the names or initials of proper names in Blanchot's stories), and J., who "asked her, 'Have you ever seen death?' 'I have seen dead people, Miss.' 'No, death!' The nurse shook her head. 'Well, soon you will see it.'"

It is thus not a question of *one* death, one dead woman, a person who is dead or living on, between life and death—not one dead woman, one death, that is decided or undecided in this *arrêt de mort*, but *death, la mort* (*personne de mort*: no dead person, the person of death)—*la Chose*—itself as *other*. And "I," who has just been summoned ("Come"), arrives like death, as death comes about, *as* death, almost dead [i.e., "dead on his feet"]. When someone says in French "*Je suis mort*," he is playing with the word *mort*, between the noun ["death"] and the (masculine) adjective ["dead"], which can change everything (in what you would call a "sea-change"). The attribute *mort* leaves the "I" alive, otherwise, but the noun also puts him beyond the reach of the event that might happen to him, that might come about accidentally.

He is summoned—"Come"—by telephone. It was necessary to recount the exchange with the nurse before his arrival in order to suggest that the narrator and death are identical ("Soon you will see it"). Now, the telephone had hardly been hung up, the nurse will tell him later, when "her pulse [. . .] scattered like sand": a

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bordered (*arrêtés*). Who will distinguish rigorously between these languages, here? Confusion of languages, of tongues. Shelley's activity as a translator: in the strictly linguistic sense, in which it was important, and in the "textual" sense, which cannot be separated from the other. Particularly in the case of *The Triumph* (Dante, Milton, Rousseau, and so on, and all those whom Bloom calls the "precursors" in the triumphant course or procession, as well as "in the chariot-vision"). But he

sign of death, a death sentence, in an instant as elusive as the last grain of sand in the time of hourglasses, death also as the result of the dissemination of the rhythm of life with no finishing stroke [*coup d'arrêt*], unbordered and unbounded arrhythm on a beach that is a continuation of the sea. The unexpected expression (her pulse "scattered like sand") will be repeated, quoted "in quotation marks" at the moment of the second death, on the last page, after the resurrection. This is the passage that I read earlier. J. appears dead, she died at the end of the telephone call, while the narrator was being told to "Come." She is dying, *elle "se meurt"* while the "Come" runs along the line and instantly reaches (comes to) the narrator. He is told to "Come," *and* she's dead. He arrives at the apartment, finds the door open, and J.'s death is announced to him with "vulgarity." This word recurs twice to describe the doctor, the one whose relationship to the identity of death is most secure and who is always more or less, as in *La folie du jour*, a medical expert, a representative of authority or social conventions, whose language he speaks ("It's a blessed release for the poor creatures"). (Vulgarity and foolishness are two values or non-values that, along with indiscretion, which is inseparable from them, are most reprehensible in Blanchot's view—or in the narrator's in any case. But since every value leads over into its opposite, this entails certain problems.) "I" arrives in the dead woman's room. The *room* is the privileged place of *la Chose* in all these stories, domestic but utterly foreign (*unheimlich*), left in the coldest anonymity, sealed off, usually a hotel room, in any case devoid of any other description, reduced to the most indispensable constants of Western habitation: a bed on the *edge* of which

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translates *himself*. The temptation, here, of an exhaustive reading, both of *The Triumph* and of everything else, beginning with all of Shelley's *glas* [death-knells], "On Death," "Death," "Autumn: A Dirge," the fragment "The Death Knell Is Ringing," again "A Dirge," *Adonais*, etc., etc. The same temptation with Blanchot: beginning with *L'arrêt de mort*, a starting point chosen by chance *and* of necessity, to recognize a "logic" that would enable us to read *everything*, in *L'arrêt de mort* and

one sits, at times an armchair that one tries to reach, a door, a lock, and, in *L'arrêt de mort*, keys ("Yale" keys: "*du genre Yale*"); outside, corridors and stairways.

He ("I") arrives in this death-chamber, the dead woman's room.

I shall now read at great length, in the most neutral voice I can manage, and without stopping to make comments at every point, far from it. I stress only the instant of summons: J.'s first name makes her return to life, makes her be born, even, and makes her triumph over life, starting with a silent "Come" that resonates with all the "Come" 's that I have tried to recite in "Pas." Then there will be the appearance of *la Chose* which does not appear, even though it is there, forbidding that it be spoken of, which, a little later, will be called the *event*. The reaffirmation, the *récit*, of life marks its discreet triumph in a "gaiety" (the words "gay" and "gaiety" recur five or six times) the memory of which is terrifying, would "be enough to kill a man." Gaiety, reaffirmation, triumph *over* (triumph of the "on," "over," *sur*, *hyper* . . .): over life and of life, life after life and after death, at the same time between life and death in the crypt, more than life, when it's over (*and over again*), reprieve and hypervitality, a supplement of life that is *better than life and better than death*, a triumph of life and of death; a living-on that is better than truth and that would be (if such living-on could ever be) *la Chose par excellence: sur-vérité*, truth beyond truth, truth beyond life and death. Here is the passage:

[. . .] and it dawned on me [*cette lumière me traversa*] that at a certain moment in the night she must have felt defeated, too weak to

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elsewhere, down to the smallest element, the grain of sand, the letter, the space. . . . A wager: I feel at once its possibility and its impossibility, each equally essential. The same wager as that of translation, without remnant [*sans reste*], *du reste* ["moreover"/"of the remnant"]. Everything that, in the text above, goes back to the dissemination of sand (beach, seaside, hour-glass). The temptation to translate (turn over, transfer) Blanchot's hour-glass into Shelley's ". . . and whose hour/

live until morning, when I would see her, and that she had asked the doctor's help in order to last a little longer, one minute longer, the one minute which she had so often demanded silently and in vain. This is what that poor fool mistook for anger, and doubtless he had given in to her by coming, but he was already too late: at a time when she could no longer do anything, he could do even less, and his only help had been to cooperate with that sweet and tranquil death he spoke of with such sickening familiarity. My grief began at that moment.

It dawns on the narrator that at one moment in the night, in that battle between life and death, which is also a battle between day and night, she was almost "defeated." Then she *triumphed*—like the day [*jour*—]—by lasting until morning. The "triumph of life" as a "triumph of light": it is with the throes of death [*l'agonie*], the battle between life and death as between light and night, that both *The Triumph of Life* and *L'arrêt de mort* are concerned. But this antagonism follows the syntax of a revolution. One spills over [*verse*] into the other, the ring makes one come back and come down to the other in a version or translation in which each word is committed and caught up in the language of the other, and inverted to become the opposite of itself. Thus the minute of living on is retained as a minute of truth beyond truth: almost nothing, a suspended moment, a "start" [*sursaut*], the time it takes to take someone's pulse and to turn over the hour-glass.

He has entered the room "full of strangers."

I would have liked to understand why, after having resisted so stubbornly for so many interminable years, she had not found the

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Was drained to its last sand in weal or woe,/ So that the trunk survived both fruit & flower." ". . . And suddenly my brain became as sand. . . ." Then comes the play of animal tracks [*traces*], "erased" or "visibly stamp[ed]," and the "burst" of the "new Vision.") Correspondence [also "Change here . . ."]. For Patmos. Vision. Apocalypse. Revelation. The translators will have to return again to the apocalyptic text of *Glas*. They should explain the necessary immodesty of these self-

strength to hold out for such a short time longer. Naively, I thought that interval had been a few minutes, and a few minutes was nothing. But for her those few minutes had been more than a lifetime, more than that eternity of life which they talk about, and hers had been lost then. What Louise said to me when she telephoned—"She is dying"—was true, was the kind of truth you perceive in a flash, she was dying, she was almost dead, the wait had not begun at that moment; at that moment it had come to an end; or rather the last wait had gone on nearly the duration of the telephone call: at the beginning she was alive and lucid, watching all of Louise's movements; then still alive, but already sightless and without a sign of acceptance when Louise said, "She is dying"; and the receiver had hardly been hung up when her pulse, the nurse said, scattered like sand. [translation modified]

"More than a lifetime, more than that eternity of life . . .": this "more," this more-than-life [*sur-vie*], marks, at least in the passage I have just quoted, a temporal extension of life, in the form of a reprieve. Before dying, in these "few minutes," she lived "more than a lifetime [*plus qu'une vie*]." This excess, which in life triumphs over life and in time is worth more than the eternity of life, is already completely different from life or the eternity of life, but it *presents* itself, if that expression were still possible, before the *arrêt de mort*, before the death of J., "in," "life." After J.'s death, after Louise, who "must have read in my face that something was about to happen that she knew she did not have the right to see, nor anyone else in the world," has taken everyone away, the narrator remains alone with the dead woman. He is seated "on the edge of the bed." He describes her with her

references and self-quotations. I am writing here about self-quotations, its necessity and its mirages. And then, all writing is triumphant. Writing is triumph (*Schreiben und Siegen-wollen*), manic life-after-life insurance. That is what makes it unbearable. Essentially indiscreet and exhibitionistic. Even if we read no "that's me there" in it. And the increase in discretion is only a surplus-value of triumph, a supplement of triumph—enough to make you sick. This is what I am saying. I say

"stillness of a recumbent effigy and not of a living being." Mortuary sculpture, death masks and impressions, wills, embalming, and the crypt, everything that preserves [*garde*] the dead, at the same time living and dead, beyond life and beyond death—this persistent motif must be followed in the "two" "*récits*" that compose *L'arrêt de mort*. "She who had been absolutely alive was already no more than a statue." Her hands still bear the contracted trace of "the immense battle which [she] had fought." Then comes the call and the resurrection, the triumph of life, the moment when "this young woman [who] was dead [ . . . ] returned to life at my [call]." He calls (to) J. by her first name, but this first name is never spoken in the account [*récit*] that he gives of its utterance. This utterance [*proferation*] is forbidden to the *récit*. The name must not be spoken publicly, aloud. The initial keeps [*garde*] the secret like a grave—jealously. J.'s resurrection will be announced afterwards as a piece of good "news." We shall take into account, later, the fact that the other woman, in the other *récit*, is called Nathalie.

I leaned over her, I called to her loudly by her first name; and immediately—I can say there wasn't a second's interval—a sort of breath came out of her compressed mouth, a sigh which little by little became a light, weak cry; almost at the same time—I'm sure of this—her arms moved, tried to rise. At that moment, her eyelids were still completely shut. But a second afterwards, perhaps two, they opened abruptly and they opened to reveal something terrible which I will not talk about, the most terrible look which a living being can receive, and I think that if I had shuddered at that instant, and if I had been afraid, everything would

it against Nietzsche, perhaps: triumph over oneself is also pursuit of power (*Gewalt*). Hence, and I come back to this, the apocalyptic text of *Glas*. What I write here is related to reading, writing, teaching as apocalypse, to apocalypse as a revelation, to apocalypse in its eschatological and catastrophic sense, to the *Apokalupsis Ioannou*, the Revelation of St. John the Divine. The translators will quote *Glas*, including this passage that begins on page 220—"After developing the X-ray negative

have been lost, but my tenderness was so great that I didn't even think about the strangeness of what was happening, which certainly seemed to me altogether natural because of that infinite movement which drew me towards her, and I took her in my arms, while her arms clasped me, and not only was she completely alive from that moment on, but perfectly natural, gay and almost completely recovered. [translation modified]

Between the call—the only time her name is spoken, this name that is not even disclosed—and a resurrection that is marked only by a breath, there was no time (“there wasn't a second's interval”). The first “breath,” the first “sigh” (we use *le dernier soupir*, “one's last breath,” literally “the last sigh,” to mean death), the first “cry” of the woman who has just been born, did not follow a call, which was nothing but a first name, spoken out loud. Resurrection, birth, or triumph of life thus will not have been the effect of a cause, but rather an absolute event, a cause even, the cause, the *causa*, *la Chose*, the first name itself: since now no interval or interruption separates the call from the first breath, we do not even know any more who spoke that name for whom. She heard it before the other had finished speaking it. She is called as (is) the other, and it is like the name that is given for the first time, at birth. The time of this response that weds (*responsa*) the call, accompanies it rather than follows it, performs it as a naming rather than succeeds it, even makes it possible by giving itself unconditionally—this time is contemporary with the end of *L'arrêt de mort*: “. . . and to that thought I say eternally, 'Come,' and eternally it is there.” The “and” (“and immedi-

of testamentary chrisms and graveclothes (why anointing and binding in both testaments?), after attacking, analyzing, toning their relics in a sort of developing bath, why not seek in them the remains of John [*Jean*]? Gospel and Revelation violently cut up, fragmented, redistributed, with spaces, shifts in accents, lines skipped and moved around, as if they came to us over a faulty teletype, a switchboard at an overloaded telephone exchange: ‘The light shineth in the darkness and the darkness

ately,” “and eternally”) weds in a timeless time the one called and the caller, the imperative “come” and the coming of the one who comes. In this sense, we can no longer describe the call (demand, order, desire . . .) and the response in the usual terms and according to the usual distinctions of an analysis of locutionary acts. The “come”-effect of the “first name” transcends all these categories (strictly speaking, it can thus be called “transcendental”: *quī transcendit omne genus*), and this event, at once ordinary and extraordinary, is also what *L'arrêt de mort* “recounts.” But it recounts it while performing it in secret. The cryptic insistence of this secret is marked not only by the initial of a first name that is neither noun nor verb nor pronoun (the initial, at most, of the pronoun *Je*, J.): this insistence is constantly remarked, remarkable, noticeable, especially, as in the case of every crypt, in its relationship to the law, in an interdiction. Thus the narrator says repeatedly that he cannot say. He is forbidden to say. So—he says. And if the *arrêt de mort* is related to judicial decision, law, it is also an *arrêt* that arrests—with a sentence, a verdict—speech and the right to speak. (“As for the rest, I don't want to say anything. [ . . . ] I have said nothing extraordinary or even surprising. What is extraordinary begins at the moment I stop [*je m'arrête*]. But I am no longer able to speak of it.”) The same interdiction encrypts the resurrection at the moment when he sees the terrible *Chose*, which we know he does not see as something, something other than an act of seeing, a look, eyes, when J.'s eyelids “opened to reveal something terrible which I will not talk about, the most terrible look [ . . . ].” Before, you remember, Louise had seen in the narrator's face

. . . glory . . . who is worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof . . .”—and concludes on page 222: “As the name indicates, the apocalyptic, in other words capital unveiling, lays bare, in truth, self-hunger. In *Pompes funèbres* you remember, on the same page: ‘Jean was taken away from me. . . . Jean needed a compensation. . . . I was hungry for Jean’ [tr. Frechtman, *Funeral Rites*]. That is called a colossal compensation. The absolute fantasy as having oneself absolutely: [*s'avoir*

"that something was about to happen that she knew she did not have the right to see, nor anyone else in the world [. . .]." The *arrêt de mort* is thus the interdictory decision that arrests *L'arrêt de mort* (the "récit" with this title) on the verge of the event that it does not have the right to recount, but that also puts it into operation, puts it to work, makes it recount, decides, induces it to recount, starting from this interdictory suspension, makes it set out again toward the impossible narrative, to recount that (which) it will not recount. The text comments on the title (a *parergon* or *cartouche* between the work and what is outside it, as the locus *du droit à la littérature*), a title that is thus part of it without belonging to it; but the title also states the impossibility of the text or erstwhile *récit* that it will have entitled, the impossibility of the *intitulé* [title, heading, that which is entitled]. *L'arrêt de mort*: of the *intitulé*. Or of the *en-tête*. The condition for its possibility and impossibility. An entire conjugation, in all the tenses, of law and duty [*devoir*] (I must, I had to, I should not have, I must not, I shall have to refrain from, it will turn out that I should not have [in French, all expressible by conjugated forms of the verb *devoir*]), all the steps taken by the interdictory *pas*, in every tense [*temps*] and every mood [*mode*]. The *double bind* and the *double invagination* of this interdiction make it possible for us to read [*donnent à lire*] the unreadability of this impossible event (the after-life of resurrection), of this "news." Thus:

[. . .] as she asked me how long I had been there, it seemed to me she was remembering something, or that she was close to remembering it, and that at the same time she felt an apprehension

*absolu*; cf. *savoir absolu*, "absolute knowledge") in one's most mournful glory: to swallow oneself up so as to be next-to-oneself; to turn oneself into a mouthful [*bouchée*; John 13:26: "sop," "piece of bread"]; be(come) (in a word *bander* [bind, bend, blindfold, get a hard-on, etc.]) one's own bit [*mors*]. . . ." The apocalyptic theme of *Glas*, of course, is due not only to the fact that the Greek word (*apokalupsis*), another phenomenon of translation, was one recourse of the Septuagint to translate the verb

that was linked to me, or my coming too late, or the fact that I had seen and taken by surprise something I shouldn't have seen. All that came through her voice. I don't know how I answered. Right away she relaxed and became absolutely human and real again.

Strange as it may seem, I don't think I gave one distinct thought, during that whole day, to the event which had allowed J. to talk to me and laugh with me again. It is simply that in those moments I loved her totally, and nothing else mattered. I only had enough self-control to go find the others and tell them J. had recovered. I don't know how they took the news [*nouvelle*] [. . .].

The narrator reports that he reported—a *nouvelle*, a *récit*, in short, a "novella" and a piece of good news—like an evangelist who has returned (from the dead) to report J.'s resurrection. The Christ parallel (an *arrêt* that puts someone to death, an *arrêt de mort* in accordance with the resurrection that says, "I am the truth and the life," the triumph of life . . .) is supported by more than one witness (martyr, you might say) or piece of evidence in the narration. An effect of "superimposing" of images inscribes itself *en abyme*, beginning with the visit to the doctor, the one who first condemns J. to death. He is a believer:

The first day, he greeted me with this statement: "I am fortunate enough to have faith, I am a believer. What about you?" On the wall of his office there was an excellent photograph of the Turin Sudario, a photograph in which he saw two images superimposed on one another; one of Christ and one of Veronica; and as a matter of fact I distinctly saw, behind the figure of Christ, the features of a woman's face—extremely beautiful, even magnificent in its

*gilab*, which means "to reveal" in Hebrew (to reveal in particular the genitals, the ear, and the eyes; in "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" I refer to Ezekiel [on this, see what Bloom says about the Chariot of Yahweh and *The Triumph*] and to a certain sequence: "Then did I eat [the scroll of the law]; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness." A similar passage in Revelation: ". . . I took the little book . . . and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and as soon as I had eaten it,

strangely proud expression. One last thing about this doctor: he was not without his good qualities; he was, it seems to me, a good deal more reliable in his diagnoses than most.

What this "superimposing," multiplied *en abyme*, comes down to, is not a constitution of the Gospel as a paradigm or a model for reference, as if *L'arrêt de mort* powerfully quoted, or cryptically put back into operation, back to work, a great, exemplary narration. Nor is it the other way around: for one might also be tempted to read *L'arrêt de mort* as the analytic regression towards a sort of original *récit*, nuclear event-ness, an invariable sequence of which the Gospels would be only an example, a variation, a case. The relationship, it seems to me, is of a different sort: it is one of seriality without paradigm. If there is a *récit*, it is to the extent that no paradigm can determine or arrest it. Serial repetition involves paradigm-"effects" but reinserts them in the series; and this reinsertion is already, still, put into operation in *L'arrêt de mort*, which, in itself "alone" (if that's the right word), constitutes a series of *récits* (at least two), *récits* at once analogous (hence the series) and utterly different, offering no guarantee of analogy. It is by the way remarkable, since we alluded to Veronica's veil, that this episode of the Passion does not appear in any of the canonical Gospels, as Pierre Madaule points out in his *Une tache sérieuse?: récit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973, p. 106n.). Is not Shelley's relationship in *The Triumph of Life* to those whom Harold Bloom calls Shelley's "precursors" analogous to this? Could not this "poem" be called a *nouvelle*?

The question has the following resonance: What is a *nouvelle*

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my belly was bitter.") Necessary comparisons, effects of translation and superimprinting in *The Triumph of Life*, *La folie du jour*, and *L'arrêt de mort* (among others). E.g., because of the *vision* ("And I had a vision. . . ." "*Kai eidon. . .*") that brings all these texts together on Patmos. (Hölderlin is there, with lots of people.) But also because of the imperative "Come" that forms their regular scansion. "Pas," because of the "Come," as a superimprinting of Revelation. Tremendous problems of

when it no longer relates, no longer is related as the *récit* of an event of life-after-life, nor simply produces it, but when its relationship to this "event" (living on) is the uncanny one that we are tracking down here under the titles *L'arrêt de mort* or *The Triumph of Life*? Living on comes about at "dawn," with the sunrise, for the one who says "I" and must not say anything. ("As for the rest, I don't want to say anything"; "[. . .] I, whom thoughts which must remain untold/ Had kept as wakeful as [. . .].") All the outpouring of light and solar glory at the beginning of *The Triumph* is here concentrated at the moment of J.'s resurrection: "J.'s waking took place at dawn, almost with the sunrise, and the dawn light charmed her." If we had the time and space here, we would have to summon up the paternal figure of the sun ("the Sun their father") that dominates the opening of *The Triumph*, until the arrival, with the moon, of "the ghost of her dead Mother," with the figure effaced, deliberately struck with insignificance, by J., the figure of her mother, the "queen mother," a mere walk-on, almost a supernumerary, a figurant, a figureless figure, the vanishing origin of every figure, the bottomless, groundless background against which J.'s life fights, and from which it is snatched away, at every moment. Since we shall never have time and space enough for this mother, here is one passage, one of her regular, stealthy passings through the text, a few lines after J.'s "waking" at "dawn":

Apparently the morphine had not affected her spirits at all: someone who is saturated with drugs can seem lucid and even profound, but not cheerful; well, she was extremely and naturally cheerful; I

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translation. The translators should read—and quote—all these texts in Hebrew and Greek. What happens when *eidos* is translated as "vision"? And the words *erkehou* and *hupage* by "come" and sometimes by "go"? The *va* and *viens* ["go" and "come"; cf. *va-et-vient*, "interrelationship"] of *Thomas l'obscur* (in two versions). Direct the entire reading of *L'arrêt de mort* toward the end, when Jesus says: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last [*prōtōs kai eskhatos, ē arkhē*

remember that she poked fun at her mother in the kindest manner, which was unusual. When I think of all that took place before it and after it, the memory of that gaiety should be enough to kill a man. But at the time, I simply saw that she was gay, and I was gay, too.

During that whole day she had almost no attacks, though she talked and laughed enough to bring on twenty. She ate much more than I did [ . . . ].

There is a great deal to be said about this gaiety, about the quality of experience thus designated to describe what is proper to an act or instance of living on, the levity of its affirmation, of the *yes, yes, yes to yes* without self-recollection, the *yes* that, saying and describing nothing, performing only this affirmation of the *yes* saying *yes to yes*, *must not even* [*ne doit même pas*] have, and know, itself [*s'avoir et se savoir*]. But this "need not" [*ne pas devoir*] or "must not" [*devoir ne pas*] is also an interdiction that interposes an unconscious between the event and the very experience of it, between the living-on and the present, conscious, knowing experience of what thus comes about [*arriver*]. I—the one who says me, that is to say, me—do not know what has happened, what will have happened [*arriver*] to me. *J. must not know* [*ne doit pas savoir*] *what has happened to her*. This *ne . . . pas* is to be understood any—and every—way that you wish; it is re-cited here in every way, every mode, every mood. The narrator's fright:

"Why," she said coldly, "are you staying *precisely* tonight?" I suppose she was beginning to know as much as I did about the events of the early morning, but at that moment I was frightened at the

*kai to telos*]. . . . 'Surely I come quickly [*Nai, erkhomai takhu*]. . . . And the Spirit [*pneuma*] and the bride [*numphē*] say, 'Come,' " and so on. By way of the whole bibliography and sigillography of the *seven seals*. And of Blanchot's eschatology, in *Le dernier homme* ("Often what he told of his past was so obviously taken from books that, immediately put on guard by a sort of suffering, people went to great lengths to avoid hearing him. This is where his desire to speak faltered most

thought that she might discover what had happened to her; it seemed to me that would be something absolutely terrifying for anyone to learn who was naturally afraid of the night.

It is thus not sure that she knows what has happened to *her*, that is, her coming back to life; in any event she *shouldn't* know, she should *not know*, she must not have known, she should not have known, found out. . . . Here "know," *savoir*, means "discover," "learn"; these are the narrator's words. Now, what the narrator is frightened of is the possibility that J. might have "learned" or "discovered" from *him*—from his more or less irrepressible *récit*, from an account that he was unable to contain at the time of the event itself—the triumph of life that had happened, that had come, to her. He is frightened at the thought that he might have let something slip, might have violated the interdiction that forbids the *récit* of the event, already a past event, which has never been *present* (because she regains her breath before he has finished speaking her first name, telling her in effect "Come," "Come again," "Come back") and which in itself belongs to the order of the *récit*.

This frightening thing that has come about without ever presenting itself, this event that is ineffable at the very moment it is seen, seen without there being anything to see except a look or *vision* ("her eyelids [ . . . ] opened to reveal something terrible which I will not talk about, the most terrible look [ . . . ]"), this terrible thing, the terribleness of the thing [*la chose*] is not only ineffable, unnarratable: it is interdictory, it forbids telling and even seeing ("[ . . . ] I had seen and taken by surprise something

strangely. He did not have a clear idea of what we call the seriousness of facts. The truth, the precision of what must be said, astonished him. [ . . . ] 'What do they mean by "event"?' I read the question in his movement of retreat. [ . . . ] She called him 'the professor.' [ . . . ] He spoke to no one. I don't mean that he didn't speak to *me*, but it was someone other than me who would listen to him. [ . . . ] Is he still coming? Is he going away already? [ . . . ] The joy of saying yes, of

I shouldn't have seen"). But the interdiction is violated by itself ("I shouldn't have . . ."). It begins the *arrêt* of the *récit*, in other words paralyzes it but also sets it in motion with a single *pas* [step, "not"]. The interdiction transgresses itself and produces the *pas* that crosses it: the *récit*. The *récit* that tells "what happened" without having been present, and that tells it to the very "subject" to whom it happened and who is not supposed to know—this impossible *récit* is surpassed, overrun, *déborderé*, by its own *arrêt de mort*. What must remain beyond its reach is precisely what revives it at every moment. The forbidden thing forbids. That which forbids (that which is forbidden) happens, comes about, without attaining, without happening in or to, the *récit*. And J. must not find out from the "I" what thus happens without happening to her, the "subject" of the whole thing, of *la chose*.

Perhaps "*chose*" has always designated, in philosophy, that which does not come about [*n'arrive pas*]. Things come about, but *la Chose*, in its determination as *hupokeimenon* or *rēs*, is the substance to which "accidents" happen and to which predicates attach, but which cannot itself be the accident or predicate of something else. *La chose n'arrive pas à autre chose*. *La chose*, when defined as the *hupokeimenon*, is that to which the *sumbebēkos* or accident happens, but which, being a thing, *chose*, does not happen, does not come about. To this extent and in this sense at least, the history or possibility of narrative is not essentially constitutive of *la chose*. Nor of *la chose* as *aisthēton* or as *hulē*, to use the three determinations whose history—or fable—Heidegger

affirming endlessly. [. . .] He had to be in excess [*en surnombre*]: one more, just one too many. [. . .] I am constantly spared thinking: he, the last one, still would not be the last. [. . .] Even a God needs a witness. [. . .] But with me there, he would be alone, more than any other man, without even himself, without that last one that he was—thus the very last." It should all have been quoted, at length.) or of Nietzsche's (for example "Ödipus. Reden des letzten Philosophen mit

offers us in "The Origin of the Work of Art." Here, *la Chose* is "terrible" because in its very not-happening it happens (comes about) to the "Come," in its *pas de chose* [no thing, thingly step, thingly "not"]: proceeding, progression [*procès*], as *arrêt de mort* that cannot be decided, neither life nor death, but rather LIVING ON, the very progression that belongs, without belonging, to the progression of life and death. Living on is not the opposite of living, just as it is not identical with living. The relationship is different, different from being identical, from the difference of distinctions—undecided, or, in a very rigorous sense, "vague," *vagus*, evasive, *évasé* [splayed, bevelled], like a bevelled edge [*bord*]. I shall quote a passage in which "living, living on" is defined precisely as a "vague objective," at the exact moment when this comma between the two verbs is the mark of the uncertainty of a transition or opposition between them: neither conjunction, nor disjunction, nor equation, nor opposition, but merely punctuation marking a pause before the desire for an *arête*, an *arrêt*, a "firm decision," is expressed. I quote this passage also because of the proximity of a "triumph." This is one of the times that she "triumphs," absolutely, intransitively:

The pain near her heart did not go away, but the symptoms died down and she had triumphed once more. The treatment was discussed again: she wanted it very much, either in order to get it over with or because her energy could no longer be satisfied with a vague objective—living, living on [*vivre, survivre*]—but needed a firm decision on which she could lean heavily. [translation modified]

sich selbst. Ein Fragment aus der Geschichte der Nachwelt": "The last philosopher, that's what I call myself, for I'm the last man. No one speaks to me but me alone, and my voice comes to me like the voice of a man dying. . . ." To be quoted in its entirety.). But I shall reread that elsewhere. This, too, is a "fragment." Insaturable context. And how could what I am writing here "concern" *The Triumph of Life*, which I read in a "foreign" language, and of which I lack so many contextual



This *vivre, survivre* delays at once life and death, on a line (the line of the least sure *sur-*) that is thus one neither of clear-cut opposition nor of stable equivalence. "Living, living on" differs and defers, like "différance," beyond identity and difference. Its domain is indeed in a narrative formed out of traces, writing, distance, teleo-graphy. Tele-phone and tele-gram are only two modes of this teleography in which the trace, the grapheme in general, does not come to attach secondarily to the telic structure but rather marks it *a priori*. Différance—*arrêt de mort* or triumph of life—defers (differs like) the narrative of (from) writing. We notice this, as it "re-marks itself," (for example) in the immediate context of the passage that I just quoted on the "triumph" and "living, living on." The narrator has just recounted, written, what J. had written to him. ("During the beginning of my stay in Arcachon, J. wrote to me at fairly great length, and her handwriting was still firm and vigorous.") The narrator is always away (at a distance, *tele-*); he always returns from afar and finally remains at a distance. What does she write him? "She told me the doctor had just had her sign a paper in case an accident should occur. So the treatment, which consisted of a series of shots—one each day, given to her at home—was about to begin." The doctor, the one who has thus condemned her and in effect signed her death warrant by prescribing this treatment, the author of the *arrêt de mort*, asks her, the condemned woman, to release him from his responsibility as a doctor, with a signature subscribing to the *arrêt de mort*. The narrator has already signed her death warrant, subscribed to it, by telling J. that she is condemned to die, that the doctor has given her up. In the case of the paper,

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features? On what conditions, however. . . ? 20–27 February 1978. Last judgment. Resurrection of the dead. Ghosts, *Doppelgänger*. (Nietzsche: I am a *Doppelgänger*, in *Ecce Homo*. The event—which "*sur-vient*" ["takes place," "occurs"; lit., "comes on"]—how will they translate this word?—consists in nothing, nothing but coming about, going on, and being gone.) Apocalypse, eschatology, the "last War," the "context" of *L'arrêt de mort*. "Come" is said to the event that comes about. An

she must surrender, with a piece of writing signed and counter-signed, thus "giving herself death," risking death in an effort to live on. This gesture is confirmed by the demand formulated elsewhere in the text: "If you don't kill me, you'll kill me." Now, this treatment itself, as prescribed or ordered by the doctor, will be deferred in turn, postponed, for a reason that is still unrevealed, after a "crisis" and more than one *telephone* call. The day before the treatment was to begin, the paper having been signed,

she felt a violent, stabbing pain near her heart and had such a severe attack [*crise*] of choking that she had them telephone her mother [—she does not do the telephoning herself, she *has* it done: one more relay along the way—] who then called the doctor. This doctor, like all fairly prominent specialists, was not often willing to go out of his way. But this time he came quite quickly, no doubt because of the treatment he was supposed to begin administering the next day. I don't know what he saw: he never talked to me about it. To her, he said it was nothing, and it is true that the medicine he prescribed for her was insignificant. But even so, he decided to postpone the treatment several days. [translation modified]

Since it is at this point that she "triumphed once more," the suspicion arises that there is perhaps a connection between the start of the treatment and the death sentence, because she triumphs when the treatment is postponed. But because she also demands death and gives it to herself, all these propositions on the triumph and the *arrêt* are reversed at every turn.

Such would be the truth beyond truth of living on [*la sur-vérité*]

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apocalyptic superimprinting of texts: there is no paradigmatic text. Only relationships of cryptic haunting from mark to mark. No palimpsest (definitive unfinishedness). No piece, no metonymy, no integral corpus. And thus no fetishism. Everything said here about double invagination can be brought to bear—a labor of translation—on what is worked out in *Glas*, for example, on the subject of fetishism, as the argument of the *gaine* ["sheath," "girdle"; cognate of "vagina"] (to be

*du survivre*], the hypertopia of these proceedings [*de ce procès*]. *La Chose* takes place without taking place [*à lieu sans avoir lieu*]: a *non-lieu* in the proceedings, a *non-lieu* at the “end” of the proceedings beyond even acquittal, debt, the symbolic, the judicial. (The *non-lieu* is the strange judgment in French law that is worth *more* than an acquittal: it fictively annuls the very proceedings of indictment, arraignment, detention, and trial [“*cause*”], even though the proceedings have taken place; the transcript of them remains, and the certification of the *non-lieu*.) The unnarratable event of J.’s coming back to life holds the  *récit* breathless for an interminable lapse of time that is not merely the time of what is narrated: the one who narrates [*le récitant*] (between the narratorial voice and the narrative voice) is also, first, *one who lives on*. This living on is also phantom revenance (the one who lives on is always a ghost) that is noticeable (re-markable) and is represented from the beginning, from the moment that the posthumous, testamentary, scriptural character of the narrative comes to unfold. The narrator has spoken of the doctor’s sentencing J. to death, of the way in which he himself has told her about it, of the “several sentences” that she “wrote down” and “wished to keep secret.” (“I still have them. [. . .] No mention of me. I could see how bitter she had felt when she heard me agree to her suicide.”) And here he is, sentenced himself by the same doctor, and thus living on, in the “supernumerary” “remains” of a life:

Her doctor had told me that from 1936 on he had considered her dead. Of course the same doctor, who treated me several times, once told me, too, “Since you should have been dead two years

ago, everything that remains of your life is a reprieve [*est en sur-nombre*, is supernumerary].” He had just given me six more months to live and that was seven years ago. But he had an important reason for wishing me six feet underground. What he said was only an expression of his desire, only suggested what he wanted to happen. In J.’s case, though, I think he was telling the truth. [translation modified]

This does not rule out the possibility that J.’s death sentence is also an expression of the *narrator’s* desire.

The reprieve in which each moment of life is *extra, supernumerary* (the supernumerology—1936, two years, six months, seven years, six feet—with which everything is accounted for and all these accounts are settled), this living *on*, establishes this  *récit*, this former  *récit*-less “ *récit*” (now the erasing of the designation “ *récit*” is part of the  *récit* of *L’arrêt de mort*), in truth beyond truth [*la sur-vérité*], the supplement of truthless truth.

Why truth beyond truth? At the moment when the narrator has said, “I was frightened at the thought that she might discover what had happened to her; it seemed to me that would be something absolutely terrifying for anyone to learn who was naturally afraid of the night,” he suspects himself of letting himself say what must not be said (that is to say, as always, the only thing to be said), the thing that would (absolutely) frighten, *la chose effrayante*. This is the beginning of what I shall call, using a figure justified elsewhere (“Pas”), the stairway [*escalier*] or escalade of truth, one truth about another, one truth *on* (top of) another, one above or below the other, each step more or less

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translated “vagina”? On the *gaine*, see *Glas*, p. 257; see also, on the subject of fetishism, “against” Hegel, Marx, and Freud, pp. 253 and 235. Freud: the fetish erects itself like a “monument,” a “*stigma indelebile*,” a “sign of triumph”). *L’arrêt de mort* and fetishism. (“In her nightly terror, she wasn’t superstitious at all; she faced a very great danger, one that was nameless and formless, altogether indeterminate, and when she was alone she faced it all alone, without recourse to any trick or fetish”

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[translation modified].) Similarly, everything said here about double invagination can be brought to bear—a labor of translation—on what is said in “La double séance” about the *hymen* (as syllepsis) and the pane of glass [*vitre*]. A discussion, still to come, of the *vitri-fying* structure of writing and desire in *L’arrêt de mort* (“. . . I saw her again, through a store window. When someone who has disappeared completely is suddenly there, in front of you, behind a pane of glass, that person becomes

true than truth. This is not a matter of impersonal or objective truth, of veracity, of telling the truth that is equivalent to the thing in question. Nor of the relationship between truth and interdiction (the truth that must not be told), a transgressive truth or a transgression of truth, truth as law or above the law.

From J. there is a *demand for narrative*: "Perhaps I did commit a grave error in not telling her what she was expecting me to tell her. My deviousness [*manque de franchise*] put us face to face like two creatures who were lying in wait for one another but who could no longer see one another" [translation modified]. He has not concealed from her the thing that he has not told her: she knew it well enough, in a way, to expect him to tell her. Not telling the truth, in this case, or rather being "devious," failing to be "frank," is not saying something (something that is, in a way, known) but simply not *saying*, not *admitting*, what is already revealed, not unveiling the revealed. One might then think that truth is here in the act of *saying*, of *reciting*, and not in the relationship of veracity between what is said or experienced and the saying of it, between the saying and the thing said, in this case between the narrative and what it narrates (its meaning [*sens*] or its referent): all of these distinctions are called into question in this entire hypertopia. But if we were to think of truth as involving solely the act of saying, we would still be consigning truth [*confier la vérité*] to the *present* of an act (saying, narrating, reciting) or indeed of a performative (a saying or reciting that produced, in the present, the referent of the saying or *récit*, the recited referent of the *récit*, its undeferred "referred"). However, this *present*, too, is borne away in the stairstep progression of truth (above and) beyond truth.

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the most powerful sort of figure (unless it upsets you). [. . .] The truth is that after I had been fortunate enough to see her through a pane of glass, the only thing I wanted, during the whole time that I knew her, was to feel that 'great pleasure' again through her, and also to break the glass. [. . .] The strangeness lay in the fact that although the shop window experience I have talked about held true for everything, it was most true for persons and objects that particularly interested me.

The truth-beyond-truth of life-after-life: the truth that J., as she lives on, is not told, is not, as in most cases, that she has been given up, that she is sentenced to die, that the illness will not spare or pardon her, that she is *going* to die or even that she *has just* [*vient de*] died, but rather that she is not dead, that she died and has lived on. This is what is terrible in the thing: *la chose* as the event of living on, of life-after-life—but this event, this coming back to life, is never present. This is why it is truthless, more or less than true. This truth-beyond-truth provides the narrator (himself condemned, sentenced, to live on and condemned by the double bind of an impossible demand) with a double "excuse":

1. "My excuse is that in that hour I exalted her far above any sort of truth and the greatest truth mattered less to me than the slightest risk of worrying her" [translation modified].

If we stopped here, if that were all, we could interpret this movement in banal terms: he prefers J.'s well-being in life, her peaceful tranquillity, to his own sincerity, his own relationship to truth. But this is precisely not all, and for this reason the excuse, at least the one that he has or that he gives to himself, is a double one: J. has access to, or rather only approaches, *aborde*, a truth that is superior to his, to the truth in the name of which he forbids himself to say that which is true.

2. "Another excuse is that little by little she seemed to approach a truth compared to which mine lost all interest."

The truth that she only approaches may be what she already knew yet wanted, he believes, to hear from him, but perhaps also a secret located *above* what he could have told her but has forbidden himself to: *la Chose effrayante*, life-after-life that has come

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For instance, if I was reading a book that particularly interested me, I read it with vivid pleasure, but my very pleasure was behind a pane of glass: I could see it, appreciate it, but not use it up. In the same way, if I met someone I liked, everything nice that happened between us was under glass and thus preserved, but also far away and in an eternal past. Yet where unimportant people and things were involved, life regained its ordinary meaning and immediacy, so that though I preferred to keep

about or come on without coming to be here and now [*sans arriver*], the approach of what has come to pass, is *past*, without having taken place in the present, replacing both life and death without "taking" a "place," in the time that elapses or does not elapse when a first name mobilizes and paralyzes the entire narrative, forbids the very step that it sets in motion, *fascinates* all the writing of *L'arrêt de mort*. It can also be read as a fascinating *treatment* of truth. In the unarrestable dissemination of its titles, the *arrêt de mort* is the truth *about* truth, *on* truth, *truthless* truth *on* truth, the  *récit*-less  *récit* of *truthless* truth *on* truth.

From beginning to end. Let's start now at the end, the very end, the end of the end, the end of what I shall call for the sake of convenience and without rigor the "second part" of the "book." But this second part is "whole," perfectly autonomous. True, if we accept the entire conventional system of legalities that organizes, in literature, the framed unity of the corpus (binding, frame, unity of the title, unity of the author's name, unity of the contract, registration of copyright, etc.), *L'arrêt de mort* (in each of its versions) is a *single book*, signed by a *single author*, and made up of two narratives, two  *récits*, in the first person, following in a certain order, and so forth. And everything that can call into question, in the text, this conventional system of legalities, also presents itself in its framework [*cadre*]. Within this framework, the strange construction of the double narrative is held together at an invisible hinge, a double inner edge [*bord*] (the space between the last sentence of the first  *récit* and the first of the second). There is no absolute guarantee of the unity of the two  *récits*, and even less of continuity from one to the other, or even that the

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life at a distance . . ." [translation modified]. ". . . And perhaps I would have known something about its [*ses*] intentions which even it [*elle*] could never have known, made so cold by my distance that it was put under glass . . ." and in *La folie du jour* (it is glass that has almost cost him his eyesight) or in "Une scène primitive" (" . . . through the window-pane [ . . . ] (as if through the broken window) . . ."). Will they translate *verre* and *vitre* with *glas*? Something else that escapes

narrator who says "I" in each is the same. And even if, to increase the undecidedness, he starts by saying, "I will go on with this story," there is no thread that continues from one story to the other, no temporal link, no character, no situation, or anything of the sort. And "this story" can refer, with its demonstrative, to a completely different story as well as to the one that has just ended with an "I stop" "at the moment" when "what is extraordinary begins." This undecidedness is never resolved. The double  *récit* is constructed so as to preserve the undecidedness and to hold in suspension the demand for narrative that, as in *La folie du jour*, demands unity from a narrator capable of remembering and of gathering (himself) together, telling "exactly" what has happened. Among other things, we can always wonder, against the law (of the registration of copyright, with all its implications, for example of the fixed identity of the author as a "real" signatory, the bearer of a single patronymic name), whether the time of the "second"  *récit* does not come, will not have come, before that of the "first." Thus the title *L'arrêt de mort* (one more supplementary meaning) can refer also to the *arrêt de mort* in the  *récit*, almost at the "center" of it. J.'s life after the death sentence, then death, then life-after-life, then death, seem in fact to be succeeded by the long-awaited entrance of Nathalie—a first name that refers to the Nativity with the resonance of good news, tidings we have already heard. Isn't Nathalie the triumph of life? This reading of the *arrêt de mort* at the middle of *L'arrêt de mort* is powerfully called for by the crater of the double inner edge: the "first"  *récit* stops at the moment the *arrêt de mort* has done its work, but this suspension also marks the moment when "what is extraordinary"

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usage, using up, use-value. The wearing away, the using up, of what is out of use. Surplus-value and process of fetishization. The "under-glass" quality of the text in translation, and thus of every mark. How can a translation be signed? How can a proper name be translated? Is there, from that moment on, such a thing as a proper name? And the "yes" in translation. People who get married abroad (*oui . . . oui . . .*) [in the French text: "yes, yes"]: all the guarantees in the transferring of marriage

in the *arrêt de mort* begins: "What is extraordinary begins at the moment I stop. But I am no longer able to speak of it." What is extraordinary begins where the "I" stops, where the narratorial voice stops, at the "*arrête*" of the voice. Let us recall *Le pas au-delà*: "Speak on the *arrête*—the line of instability—of the spoken word.' As if it were present at the exhaustion of dying: as if night, having started too early, at the earliest moment of day, doubted that it would ever come to night." The line of this cutting edge, this "*arrête*," this *arrête*, passes "between" the two  *récits* of *L'arrêt de mort*. Indeed, the double  *récit* revolves (in the turning of a version or a revolution) around *la raie de mort* [*raie*: line, stripe, parting, ridge], death crossed out, blocked, held in check, signed, sealed, sentenced.

The truth beyond truth of living on: the middle of the  *récit*, its element, its ridge, its backbone [*arête*]. There is only one blank space in the typography of the book, between the two  *récits*. Before, in the first version, there were two. By erasing, by doing away with the second blank space, in the second version—the blank space that separated the two  *récits* from the sort of epilogue that was in danger of being meta-narrative and pretending to gather together the two  *récits*—by making this change, Blanchot has given the "middle" space an even more remarkable singularity. This is not the only effect of this change, but it counts.

Now, immediately after this blank space, at the bottom of one page and at the top of another, after the absolute interruption, the connectionless connection [*rapport sans rapport*], after J.'s second death, after the narrator has said, "What is extraordinary begins at the moment I stop. But I am no longer able to speak of

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certificates. Fundamental irresponsibility for a translated text. The ideal thing is translation into a foreign writing system (Japanese, for example, for a European). But that's valid in "my" language, too. An impossible contract. Two unrelated processions. 27 February–6 March 1978. Don't forget that N. (Nathalie) is a translator. ("She translated writings from all sorts of languages. . . .") The narrator notes: "That was an aspect of her character which helped to mislead me about her."

it," on the next page, the facing page, the other shore, truth enters—thematically, and by name. As if the veil of an interdiction were finally going to be lifted—any minute now, once more.

"I will go on with this story, but now I will take some precautions. I am not taking these precautions in order to cast a veil over the truth. The truth will be told, everything of importance that happened will be told. But not everything has yet happened. [*Mais tout ne s'est pas encore passé.*]"

Not everything has yet happened. This is difficult to understand. When does this refer to? Whatever the answer to this question, the  *récit* of *this* story, the one that begins here, will not recount a past event. It will not report, will not relate (a *rapport sans rapport*) something that remains prior to and thus outside the writing, the  *récit* or, as we can now say, the series. *L'arrêt de mort* is in series.

Not everything has yet happened. The coming of the thing, of *la chose*, its event or advent, will be also the coming of the thing to the  *récit*, subsequent to the narration, at least to its beginning, and will thus be a  *récit*-effect. Thus the  *récit* will be the cause—as well as *causa, chose* [thing, mere tool]—of what it seems to recount. The  *récit* as the cause and not as the relating of an event: this is the strange truth that is announced. The  *récit*'s the thing. But we must beware: this formula, "*la chose est le récit*," implies no performative presentation or production. What we have here is not that conclusion, readily drawn these days, using a logic of truth as presentation substituted for a logic of truth as representative equivalence, according to which new logic the narrative is the very event that it recounts, the thing presenting itself and the

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All these texts, it should now be clear, involve law and transgression, and the order that is *given*, and the sort of order that can be obeyed only by transgressing it beforehand. Read yesterday, among some graffiti: "do not read me." I continually ask what *must* be done or not be done (for example in reading, writing, teaching, and so on) to find out what the place of that which takes place, is constructed upon (for example the university, the boundaries between departments, between one discourse

text presenting itself—presenting *itself*—by producing what it says. If there is performance here, it must be dissociated from the notion of presence that people always attach to the performative. What is here recited will have been that non-presentation of the event, its presenceless presence, as it takes place placelessly: the “-less” or “without,” and the *pas*, without *pas*, without the negativity of the *pas*.

I said that “truth” appeared, at least in name, in the middle, at the beginning and at the end. And that I was going to begin at the end to recount it in turn. But how are we to decide, to fix [*arrêter*] the end of such a text? Its unfinishedness is structural; it is bound to itself in the shifting binding of the *arrêt*. I shall proceed a bit arbitrarily, as for every *arrêt*, for time is short, and I hope you will forgive me. We always ask to be forgiven when we write or recite. For here I am recounting. And so I shall choose the episode of the key.

There is a key in the  *récit* : a “Yale” key. Like all keys, it locks and unlocks, opens and closes. This key has been stolen and concealed by N. (Nathalie). The terrifying scene that this episode will have occasioned seems to form a pendant-piece, in this second  *récit* , to the scene of J.’s return to life in the first. But superimposing is something you can never be sure about, and above all we cannot strictly speaking call either of these a “scene”: in neither does  *la Chose*  present itself, nor does anything else make itself visible—or if so, it forbids one to speak of it. This is, this will be, the moment in which “I” says “Come.” This time “I” does not utter the “Come” in the conditional or virtual form or mood, or as a quotation, as in the three occurrences that I have

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and another, and so on). Today, respecting (up to a certain point) the contract or promise that binds me to the authors of this book, I have felt it best to confine myself to the problem of the “must” [“*il faut*”] and its transgression (in the realm of reading, writing, the institution of the university, and so on—all domains that defy delimitation) from the standpoint of translation (*Übersetzung*, *Übertragung*, transference, and so forth). What *must not* be said, today, if we are to follow the dominant

cited, quoted, elsewhere (“Pas”), and “I” is addressing himself here not to the merely grammatically feminine, the feminine gender of “thought” or “speech,” *la pensée* or *la parole*, or to a neuter (beyond sexual difference), but rather, *it seems*, in the present, indeed, to a woman. (True, this woman is no one: “I can say that by getting involved with Nathalie I was hardly getting involved with anyone: that is not meant to belittle her; on the contrary, it is the most serious thing I can say about a person.”)

I must assume that you are familiar with the text. In the course of an air raid during the Second World War, in an underground shelter in the metro (already what you would call a crypt), he tells her for the first time *in French*, in his language, things that he usually tells her in a fictive way or mood [*mode*], playfully, without any commitment, in her language, a *Slavic* language, for example proposing marriage to her. As long as they spoke to each other in the language of the other [*la langue de l'autre*], it was *as if* speech were *irresponsible*. But this irresponsibility already commits the speakers and, as we shall see, the return to the mother tongue does away with commitment as well as seals it. It spells the *arrêt* of commitment. The commitment thus *arrêté*, both in one’s own language and in the language of the other, is indeed the *hymen*.

For quite some time I had been talking to her in her mother tongue, which I found all the more moving since I knew very few words of it. [. . .] She [. . .] would answer me in French, but in a different French from her own, more childish and talkative, as though her speech had become irresponsible, like mine, using an

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system of norms of this domain? I do not say it; I say what must not be said: for example, that a text can stand in a relationship of transference (primarily in the psychoanalytical sense) to another text! And, since Freud reminds us that the relationship of transference is a “love” relationship, stress the point: one text loves another (for example, *The Triumph of Life loves*, transferentially, *La folie du jour*, which in turn . . .). It’s enough to make a philologist laugh (or scream), and Freud

unknown language. And it is true that I too felt irresponsible in this other language [*langage*], so unfamiliar to me [. . .]. So I made the most friendly declarations to her in this language [*langage*], which was a habit quite alien to me. I offered to marry her at least twice, which proved how fictitious [*fictif*] my words were, since I had an aversion to marriage (and little respect for it), but in her language [*langue*] I married her, and I not only used that language lightly but, more or less inventing it, and with the ingenuity and truth of half-awareness, I expressed in it unknown feelings which shamelessly welled up in the form of that language and fooled even me, as they could have fooled her.

But *tromper*, "fooling," for words that express in the language of the other a "truth of half-awareness," is also *tromper la surveillance* (as we say in "my" language, French), eluding the watchful eye of some monitor, in order to tell the truth. All the more so since the language of the other, as the language of truth, is never just the language of the other. Since it is "of the other," I invent it at every moment ("more or less inventing it"), I speak it for the first time, as if at the moment of its initial establishment, of the first contract by which I adapt and adopt [(*m'*)*approprié*] the language. At the same time, in the mythic time of this "at the same time" of the language of the other and my establishment of it, I make the contract *and* exempt myself from it. All *at once*. I am "irresponsible" *and* absolutely committed in the establishment of the language of the other. Is it not significant that the "at once," the "at the same time," of this double bind, is the occasion of the *hymen*, its chance and its law?

The words spoken in the language of the other are "true,"

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himself, who, however, did speak of transference as a "new edition" (in the metaphorical sense, of course, of *Übertragung!*). On what conditions is this transference possible between what are called textual bodies? This strange question has, perhaps, long engaged (or long committed) me. Engaged me in what must not be. . . . [*Dans ce qu'il ne faut pas.*] How are you going to translate that? What must not be done, in the realm of translation, transference, or the aforementioned

commit the speaker, are binding, in legal proceedings, in accordance with a contract that is all the more inflexible since the words belong to the language of the other. The paradox of the heteronomous dissymmetry that is due to the apparently formal element in the language before any consideration of context: the obligation is binding to whatever extent the words of the obligation are "fictitious," "fictive." There is commitment only in the language of the other, which I speak, of necessity, irresponsibly and fictively, in expropriation, but the language of the other is more contractual, contracts more, is closer to the conventional, fictive origin, to the extent that I invent it and thus adopt, appropriate it, mythically, in the present act of each spoken word. The language of the other lets the spoken word have the word, and commits us to keep our word. In this sense, there is "language of the other" whenever there is a speech-event. This is what I mean by "trace."

I must now propose a long reading. We have here the passage from the language of the other to *my* language, the *mother* tongue, the theme of which should also be related to the figure of the mother as figurant, walk-on, extra, super, in this *récit* and in certain others. Here, a sudden intrusion, the event that comes to pass in the metro when I say to the other, in my language this time, what was reserved for the other language, truth as fiction which commits and provokes—*la Chose*, the theft of the little "Yale" key. This comes immediately after the passage that I just quoted.

They did not fool her at all; I am sure of that. And perhaps my frivolity, though it made her a little frivolous too, aroused disagreeable thoughts more than anything else, not to speak of one other

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comparative literature: for example, relating in a monstrous association the "phenomenon," "occurrence," "surrection" of "rose" in *The Triumph of Life* (so many times "arose," "rose," "I rose," "I arose") to—not the resurrection—but the "rose" of resurrection in *L'arrêt de mort*. This is what would not be serious, sober, even if effects of homonymic transference are at play already and of necessity within Shelley's poem, which is, moreover, full of colors and embroidered flowers. The last word that

thought about which I cannot say anything. Even now, when so many things have become clear, it is difficult for me to imagine what the word marriage could have awakened [*faire naître*] in her. She had once been married, but that business had left her only the memory of the unpleasant details of the divorce. So that marriage was not very important to her either. And yet why was it that the only time, or one of the only times, she answered me in her own language, was after I had proposed marriage to her: the word was a strange one, completely unknown to me, which she never wanted to translate for me, and when I said to her: "All right, then I'm going to translate it," she was seized by real panic at the thought that I might hit on it exactly, so that I had to keep both my translation and my presentiment to myself.

The interdiction remains: there is "one other thought about which I cannot say anything," and the only "answer," "*réponse*," that she gives to his proposal of marriage is neither "yes" nor "no" but an untranslatable word: not only in a foreign language but also "strange" and unknown to him. The risk of his perhaps being able to translate it nevertheless, makes its untranslatability more an interdiction than an impossibility. If he translated it, there would be an answer, the "response" of a *sponsa* (fiancée, a promise made), and this possibility is maddening for her. It is this understanding of a "yes" (which must be untranslatable and unquotable, must remain outside the language, strange and foreign), this understanding between them, which, along with "madness" and "insane words," will make her flee, will interrupt the *hymen* even as it consummates it in the confusion of their tongues.

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J., the woman who "lives on," has spoken, was not *la Chose* but *la Rose*, "the perfect rose," "*la rose par excellence*." Not the sand-rose, even though the woman who lives on called for it twice at the moment when her pulse "scattered like sand." Twice, at the moment of her double death, of her double *arrêt de mort*, she says, "Quick, a perfect rose." Reread *in extenso*. For example: "Another excuse is that little by little she seemed to approach a truth compared to which mine lost all inter-

It is possible that the idea of being married to me seemed like a very bad thing to her, a sort of sacrilege, or quite the opposite, a real happiness, or finally, a meaningless joke. Even now, I am almost incapable of choosing among these interpretations. Enough of this. As I said, I was deluding myself much more than I was her with these words, which spoke within me in the language of someone else [*la langue d'une autre*]. I said too much about it to her not to feel what I was saying; inwardly I committed myself to honoring these strange words; the more extreme they were, I mean alien [*étrangers*] to what might have been expected of me, the more true they seemed to me because they were novel, because they had no precedent; the more I wanted, since they could not be believed, to make them believable, even to myself, especially to myself, putting all my effort into going farther and farther and building, on what might have been a rather narrow foundation, a pyramid so dizzying that its ever growing height dumbfounded even me. Still, I can put this down in writing: it was true; there cannot be any illusions when such great excesses are involved. My mistake in this situation, the temptations of which I see most clearly, was much more the result of the distance I imagined I was maintaining from her by these completely imaginary [*fictifs*] ways of drawing close to her. Actually, all that, which began with words I did not know and led me to see her much more often, to call her again and again, to want to convince her, to force her to see something other than a language in my language [*autre chose qu'un langage dans mon langage*], also urged me to look for her at an infinite distance, and contributed so naturally to her air of absence and strangeness that I thought it was sufficiently explained by this, and that as I was more and more attracted by it, I was less and less aware of its abnormal nature and its terrible source.

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est. Towards eleven o'clock or midnight she began to have troubled dreams. Yet she was still awake, because I spoke to her and she answered me. She saw what she called 'a perfect rose' [*une rose par excellence*] move in the room. During the day I had ordered some flowers for her that were very red but already going to seed, and I'm not sure she liked them very much. She looked at them from time to time in a rather cold way. They had been put in the hall for the night, almost in front of her



No doubt I went extremely far, the day we took shelter in the metro. It seems to me that I was driven by something wild, a truth so violent that I suddenly broke down all the frail supports of that language [*langue*] and began speaking French, using insane words that I had never dreamt of using before and that fell on her with all the power of their madness. Hardly had they touched her when I was physically aware that something was being shattered. Just as that moment, she was swept away from me, borne off by the crowd [*foule*], and as it hurled me far away, the unchained spirit of that crowd struck me, battered me, as if my crime had turned into a mob [*foule*] and was determined to separate us forever.

Shall we leave this text on its own power?

We should neither comment, nor underscore a single word, nor extract anything, nor draw a lesson from it. One should not, one should refrain from—such would be the law of the text that gives itself, gives itself up, to be read [*qui se donne à lire*]. Yet it also calls for a violence that matches it in intensity, a violence different in intention, perhaps, but one that exerts itself against the first law only in order to attempt a commitment, an involvement, with that law. To move, yieldingly, towards it, to draw close to it fictively. The violent truth of “reading.”

This is what is happening right here. With great violence, I draw three motifs from the quotation.

1. The fiction of the foreign language is intended to keep a distance, indeed infinite distance, within all the rapprochement, proximation, *propriation*, appropriation. *Pas d'Ent-fernung*: dis-tance. The *pas* is less susceptible of definition by words like “fiction,”

door, which remained open for some time. Then she saw something move across the room, at a certain height, as it seemed to me, and she called it ‘a perfect rose.’ I thought this dream image came to her from the flowers, which were perhaps disturbing her. So I closed the door. At that moment she really dozed off, into an almost calm sleep, and I was watching her live and sleep when all of a sudden she said with great anguish ‘Quick, a perfect rose,’ all the while continuing to sleep but

“language,” “language of the other,” than it is itself capable of remarking on them, drawing our attention to them [*il . . . les donne . . . à remarquer*].

2. Where does this “truth” come from, the “truth so violent” of “I” ’s repatriation in his own language? From the fact that the reappropriation does not take place and that he discovers the language of the other in his “own” language, French, in the utterly new words that he speaks in it. (Between the two experiences or the two events or the two languages, the relationship is once more one of double invagination.) Just as in the previous experience, when he was speaking Nathalie’s language, but this time within his language, his “mother” tongue, he initiates, discovers, *establishes*, creates; he speaks in words that are “novel,” that have “no precedent.” If he begins “speaking French,” he does so “using insane words that I had never dreamt of using before.” Hence their madness, madness for both him and her. We can also say that these “French” words are *untranslatable* for him, absolutely familiar and absolutely foreign. He speaks his mother tongue as the language of the other and deprives himself of all reappropriation, all specularization in it. The effect of commitment, of breaking and entering, of heteronomous expropriation, gives truth this over-violence: within my “mother” tongue I have broken all the safety-devices (“I suddenly broke down all the frail supports of that language”), everything that authorizes awareness or consciousness and the illusion [*leurre*] of appropriation with respect to language. Will it be said that by letting the trace of the other involve or commit me in this linguistic expropriation I am breaking with what is maternal in the mother tongue? Or on the

now with a slight rattle. The nurse came and whispered to me that the night before that word had been the last she had pronounced: when she had seemed to be sunk in complete unconsciousness, she had abruptly awakened from her stupor to point to the oxygen balloon and murmur, ‘A perfect rose,’ and had immediately sunk [*et aussitôt avait sombré*] again. / This story chilled me.” 6–13 March 1978. “*et aussitôt*”: to translate this, like everything said above about the “*et*,” the translators will

contrary with the paternal law that kept me away from what was maternal? You will find that I have rung some changes on these questions elsewhere.

3. The *hymen s'arrête*: it comes about *and* is immediately forbidden. It is the double-bind structure of this event: its "madness." The interruption of the *hymen*—which is nothing other than its coming to be, its event—does not arise from any decision. No one has the initiative. As soon as the words have "touched" her, she is "swept away from me, borne off by the crowd": she does not leave, nor do I, and this "sweeping away" consigns what it carries off, to *dispersion* (the event, the *coup*—blow, stroke, "suddenly"—the pulse once more "scatters like sand") and to *anonymity*. All the same, the crowd (dispersion and anonymity) brings in no verdict of acquittal. The crime has taken place (and every *hymen* intervenes, like a crime, "between perpetration and the memory of it": here I draw a veil over "La double séance"), and its dissemination dissolves or absolves it in the crowd only by multiplying it incalculably ("as if my crime had turned into a mob and was determined to separate us forever"). And my crime is that I loved her, proposed marriage to her, this *alliance*—but in a language [*langue*] that I have never been able to reappropriate or even understand, whether it be her (Slavic) language, a foreign language, or insane words (themselves foreign) in "my" language. My crime is that I proposed marriage to her in language [*langage*] that could commit me only if it was the other's, thus only if I did not understand it as mine and if it thus did not commit me, if even as it bound me, was binding upon me, it set me free. But this is always the case, always "normal": a language

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have to consult (or refer the reader to) the Greek "at the same time," *hama*, and *en tō ephexēs* ("immediately") as they are treated in "Ousia et grammè." What is a *reference*, a reference to a thing, to a text, to one text, to the other? What is this word "reference"? And the reference of a certain "perfect rose"? The absolute crypt, unreadability itself. And yet the "references" call for an "infinite finite analysis," an infinite-finite reada-translata-bility. Do not go on about the symbolism of the flower

[*langue*] can never be appropriated; it is mine only as the language of the other, and vice versa. The essential irresponsibility of the promise or the response: this is the crime of the *hymen*. The violence of a truth stronger than truth. The crime of the *hymen* takes place without taking place and repeats itself endlessly, by the throng [*en foule*], like sand, like the *arrêt de mort*: interminable proceedings.

What happens then? There's no justifying this trip, nor this series of leaps and omissions (and I am referring to writing as well as to reading). He has lost her and is looking for her. First, although "at her house [*chez elle*], no one had answered the telephone," he goes there, thinking "that she was not answering it" on purpose. But even at the door there is no answer: it is "deaf." Yet "every time I had gone, she had been there" in that room. (The last words of *L'arrêt de mort*: "and to that thought [*et à elle*] I say eternally, 'Come,' and eternally it is there [*elle est là*].") In this room he cannot even "make out the trail [*trace*] she had left in passing through" or wait for her, thus "replacing her." Replacing *her*: the woman named Nathalie, the first name that celebrates the birth of Christ, as we have noted, but also the first name of the woman who gave birth, in the story, to Christiana, whom at this moment "I cursed [. . .] for being [away] in the country, where she could not stop her mother from getting lost." Feeling "lost" himself rather than uneasy for Nathalie's sake, he is like "a wanderer in search of nothing." Has she drowned herself? No, suicide horrifies her. Then comes the moment when he stops [*arrête*] wandering. He reaches [*arrête*] a sort of decision, coolly arrived at, that one is tempted to compare to the moment

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(have done so elsewhere, at length, precisely about the rose). "Symbol" of life (the rosiness of cheeks, imitated by make-up in *L'arrêt de mort*), "symbol" of death (funeral flower) or of love, the rose is also the paradigm of that which never has to account for itself ("die Rose ist ohne warum," "the rose has no why or wherefore"), the enigmatically arbitrary that signifies the non-significance of the arbitrary, of the thing with no why or wherefore, without origin and without end. (See "Le

in the "first" *récit* when he (the same one, another) returns, then calls her back to life, then "gives" her death: "[. . .] reason returned to me, at least a fairly cool and lucid feeling which said to me: the time has come, now you have to do what has to be done." His resolution is purely formal in nature. In any case, we are told nothing of its content: what you have to do is do what has to be done. *Il faut "il faut"*: he gives himself this pure order or prescription at the same time that he receives it. He will return home, but home is not home, for two reasons. First, he lives in hotels, has no place of his own. Second, because there are two places, two hotel rooms: one, in an almost empty hotel with no owner present (it's wartime, and he's been called up), a room in which "I had nothing [. . .] but some books" and where "I almost never went," and went "at night [only if] it was really necessary"; the other, in the hotel on the rue S., where "I had asked N. never to go." She called him there one morning and "what I said," his "*réponse*," makes him hate the place. As he goes back there on this particular evening, he notes that "the strange thing" is that he does not think at all that she might be waiting there. He doesn't feel like sleeping in either place, so he tries to get a room in "a rather shady hotel," but since that hotel is full, he returns to the one on the rue d'O., the one where he "almost never [*presque pas*]" stays. His room there is like a crypt: with the elevator out of order, it is reached by way of a *stairwell* [*escalier*] with "a cold smell of earth and stone." The cryptic topology of this dark room, this obscure chamber, has the resonance of a certain triumph of life. It is a *for intérieur* [usually "conscience," "inner tribunal," "heart of hearts"] without intimacy, an enclave

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'sans' de la coupure pure" and all of the reading, in a seminar at Yale on *La chose*, of Heidegger's text on "Die Rose ist ohne warum." To be continued elsewhere, as is what concerns Ponge's rose.) If the rose is not a thing, and not *la Chose* either. Understand the perfect *rose* not as a thing but as a word, breath, a word breathing its last: adjective, noun (common or proper), immediately nominalizable predicate (*rose*, *la rose*, *le rose*, *Rose* ["pink" (adj.), "rose" (n.), "pink" (n.), "Rose"])). The first

larger than its inhabitant but which this inhabitant nevertheless carries within him; he haunts rather than inhabits it. The relationships of inclusion or inherence that link the part to the whole, cannot be fixed, defined, *arrêtés*, in terms of boundaries. The part includes the whole, and life triumphs over life. "Everything about that room, plunged in the most profound darkness, was familiar to me; I had penetrated it, I carried it in me, I gave it life, a life which is not life, but which is stronger than life and which no force in the world could ever overcome." This camera obscura is a secret; no one goes there, and he keeps the key in his wallet. Hence the transgression that follows, the theft of a key and a letter, a crypt broken into, desecrated—and a representationless scene of *la Chose*: this scene is what I was coming to.

[. . .] The elevator was not working and in the stairwell, from the fourth floor on up, a sort of strange musty smell came down to me, a cold smell of earth and stone which I was perfectly familiar with because in the room it was my very life. I always carried the key with me, and as a precaution I carried it in a wallet. Imagine that stairwell plunged in darkness, where I was groping my way up. Two steps from the door I had a shock [*je fus frappé par un coup*]: the key was no longer there. My fear had always been that I would lose that key. Often, during the day, I would search my wallet for it; it was a little key, a Yale key, I knew every detail of it. That loss brought back all my anxiety in an instant, and it had been augmented by such a powerful certainty of unhappiness that I had that unhappiness in my mouth and the taste of it has remained there ever since. I was not thinking anymore. I was behind that door. This might seem ridiculous, but I think I begged it, en-

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word of the first scene of the first act of a play (Genet's *Paravents*, for example; see *Glas*), it retains, out of context, the reserve of all those powers (*Rose!*) of a name beyond names, the reserve that it still retains when it becomes the last word (*par excellence*) of the last act: of the dead woman and of death, of *la Chose par excellence*. Rose: rose: "rose": I, a rose, rose. Its own subject and predicate, a tautology into which the other, however, has intruded, a flower of rhetoric without properties,

treated it, I think I cursed it, but when it did not respond, I did something which can only be explained by my lack of self-control: I struck it violently with my fist, and it opened immediately.

I will say very little about what happened then: what happened had already happened long ago, or for a long time had been so imminent that not to have revealed it, when I felt it every night of my life, is a sign of my secret understanding with this premonition. I did not have to take another step to know that there was someone in that room. That if I went forward, all of a sudden someone would be there in front of me, pressing up against me, absolutely near me, of a proximity that people are not aware of; I knew that too. Everything about that room, plunged in the most profound darkness, was familiar to me; I had penetrated it, I carried it in me, I gave it life, a life which is not life, but which is stronger than life and which no force in the world could ever overcome. That room does not breathe, there is neither shadow nor memory in it, neither dream nor depth; I listen to it and no one speaks; I look at it and no one lives in it. And yet, the most intense life is there, a life which I touch and which touches me, absolutely similar to others, which clasps my body with its body, marks my mouth with its mouth, whose eyes open, whose eyes are the most alive, the most profound eyes in the world, and whose eyes see me. May the person who does not understand that come and die. Because that life transforms the life which shrinks away from it into a falsehood.

I went in; I closed the door. I sat down on the bed. Blackest space extended before me. I was not in this blackness, but at the edge of it, and I confess that it is terrifying. It is terrifying because there is something in it which scorns man and which man cannot endure without losing himself. But he must lose himself; and who-

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with no proper meaning, a repeated self-quotation. "A rose is a rose is a rose": in *L'entretien infini*, Blanchot says that this line of Gertrude Stein disturbs us because it is "the locus of a perverse contradiction" (see the passage that follows, p. 503). When speaking of the "narrative voice," he mentioned a "shrewd perversity." Here the translators might amass references—to the Mystic Rose in *Miracle de la Rose* and in *Glas*, to the same Mystic Rose in "The Secret Rose" by Yeats, whose "Second Com-

ever resists will founder, and whoever goes forward will become this very blackness, this cold and dead and scornful thing in the very heart of which lives the infinite. This blackness stayed next to me, probably because of my fear: this fear was not the fear people know about, it did not break me, it did not pay any attention to me, but wandered around the room the way human things do. A great deal of patience is required if thought, when it has been driven down into the depths of the horrible, is to rise little by little and recognize us and look at us. But I still dreaded that look. A look is very different from what one might think, it has neither light nor expression nor force nor movement, it is silent, but from the heart of the strangeness its silence crosses worlds and the person who hears that silence is changed. All of a sudden the certainty that someone was there who had come to find me became so intense that I drew back from her, knocked violently into the bed, and immediately saw her distinctly, three or four steps from me, that dead and empty flame in her eyes. I had to stare at her, with all my strength, and she stared at me, but in a strange way, as if I had been in back of myself, and infinitely far back. Perhaps that went on for a very long time, even though my impression is that she had hardly found me before I lost her. At any rate, I remained in that place for a very long time without moving. I was no longer at all afraid for myself, but for her I was extremely afraid, of alarming her, of transforming her, through fear, into a wild thing which would break in my hands. I think I was aware of that fear, and yet it also seems to me that everything was so entirely calm that I could have sworn there was nothing in front of me. It was probably because of that calm that I moved forward a little, I moved forward in the slowest possible way, I brushed against the fireplace, I stopped again, I recognized in myself such great patience, such

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ing" should also be quoted—to Rilke, of whom Blanchot is a prodigious reader—to all his "rose" 's and all his "roses" (a formidable *anthology*, from which, because space is limited and for the sake of translation, I shall extract here only this line, from "Les roses," a poem written by Rilke in *French*: "Rose, toi, ô chose par excellence complète. . . ." Read and translate in full.), to Kierkegaard, of whom Blanchot is a prodigious reader ("The seal is yours, but I keep it. But you also know

great respect for that solitary night that I made almost no movement; only my hand went forward a little, but with great caution, so as not to frighten. I wanted most of all to go towards the armchair, I saw that armchair in my mind, it was there, I was touching it. In the end I got to my knees so that I would not be too large, and my hand slowly crossed through the dark, brushed against the wooden back of the chair, brushed against some cloth: there had never been a more patient hand, nor one more calm, nor more friendly; that is why it did not tremble when another hand, a cold hand, slowly formed beside it, and that hand, so still and so cold, allowed mine to rest on it without trembling. I did not move, I was still on my knees, all this was taking place at an infinite distance, my own hand on this cold body seemed so far away from me, I saw myself so widely separated from it, and pushed back by it into something desperate which was life, that all my hope seemed to me infinitely far away, in that cold world where my hand rested on this body and loved it and where this body, in its night of stone, welcomed, recognized and loved that hand.

Perhaps this lasted several minutes, perhaps an hour. I put my arms around her, I was completely motionless and she was completely motionless. But a moment came when I saw that she was still mortally cold, and I drew closer and said to her: "Come." I got up and took her by the hand; she got up too and I saw how tall she was. She walked with me, and all her movements had the same docility as mine. I made her lie down; I lay down next to her. I took her head between my hands and said to her, as gently as I could, "Look at me." Her head actually did rise between my hands and immediately I saw her again three or four steps from me, that dead and empty flame in her eyes. With all my strength, I stared at her, and she too seemed to stare at me, but infinitely far behind

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that in a sealing ring, the letters are reversed; thus the word 'yours,' by means of which you certify and validate possession, reads 'mine' from my side. Thus I have sealed this packet and should wish you to do the same with this rose before putting it in the temple of archives"; the reversal "yours"/"mine" takes place, of course, only in Danish—to so many others. *L'arrêt de mort* as another *Roman de la rose* (we know that this text, too, presents considerable problems of the unity or duality of

me. Then something awoke in me, I leaned over her and said, "Now don't be afraid, I'm going to blow on your face." But as I came near her she moved very quickly and drew away (or pushed me back). [translation modified]

(Quoting or not quoting is always equally unjustifiable, in the eyes of the law that concerns me here. What must we do to allow a text to live? Are we to take it—and how—or merely to "brush against" it? Say to it, "Come"? Isn't that what one always does "at home," i.e., in accordance with the violent law of one's own economy, here of mine? But we have just seen how what properly belongs to an economy, someone's own economy, is anonymously dedicated, divides itself and submits to the other who was waiting there for him already, without waiting for him, and how he said "I remained [*je restai*]," then "I stopped [*je m'arrêtai*] again." The rest has just been read [*vient d'être lu*].)

The "Come" that has just rung out will be quoted, after a time in which we are told of "the obstacle which must be overcome" and of what is said to have "triumphed over an immense defeat, and is even now triumphing over it, and at each instant, and always, so that time no longer exists for it." In the interval between the first occurrence, event, coming of the "Come" in the story and the first quotation of it, an interval that I'll leave for you to read, that I'll let you read (it's like letting someone, or something, live), he sees her "in the morning," like J., in the room and "quite gay" [translation modified]. This is a time of coldness beyond cold. A semblance of "natural life" [translation modified] has returned. "Naturally, what I had to do was live

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the corpus and of the "I," the narrator or the author). And to place here this rose on the most abyss-like of crypts, these "discovered fragments" by Bataille, on Laure (just published by Jérôme Peignot, Laure's nephew): "Walking through the streets, I discover a truth that will not leave me in peace: that sort of painful contraction of my whole life that for me is related to Laure's death [in October 1938, dates found at the beginning of *L'arrêt de mort*] and to the sparse autumn sadness, it also

with her, in her apartment: I had to take my revenge on that door." And here is the quotation of the "Come," "single" in its serial repetition:

[. . .] I felt determined to transform the most simple details of life into so many insignificant words, that my voice, which was becoming the only space where I allowed her to live, forced her to emerge from her silence too, and gave her a sort of physical certainty, a physical solidity, which she would not have had otherwise. All this may seem childish. It does not matter. This childishness was powerful enough to prolong an illusion that had already been lost, and to force something to be there which was no longer there. It seems to me that in all this incessant talking there was the gravity of one single word, the echo of that "Come" which I had said to her; and she had come, and she would never be able to go away again.

"Come": a single word, unique, and yet, in and of itself, entwined, interlaced, in a series. Truth beyond truth inscribes its own effacement there, in the middle of and on the invaginated boundaries of the *récit*, of these crypts, death- or bridal chambers that bring about {*donnant lieu à*} this double *récit*, this *arrêt de mort* which is finally only its own homonym. After the theft of the key—the event of a *hymen* that brings at once alliance and separation, when "as I came near her she [. . .] drew away" ("joined: separated"—*L'attente l'oubli*), in the crypt—another *arrêt de mort* punctuates the *récit*. Each time beyond decision, in a serial repetition that does not change the uniqueness of the event. Hence the extraordinary lightness, slightness, the indifferent dis-

for me the only way to 'crucify' myself. [. . .] 11 October. As Laure was dying, I found in the then ruined garden, among the dead leaves and wilted plants, one of the prettiest flowers I've ever seen: a rose, 'autumn-colored,' barely opened. Distracted as I was, still I picked it and took it to Laure. Laure was then lost in herself, lost in an undefinable delirium. But when I gave her the rose, she emerged from her strange state, smiled at me, and spoke one of her last intelligible sentences: 'It's

tractedness, the strange or insignificant coldness that is allied, in narrative affect, with a bottomless sorrow and mourning beyond measure. At the very moment when unhappiness is "immense," one must not "have faith," he says, "in dramatic decisions. There was no drama anywhere. In me it had in one second become weaker, slightly distracted, less real. [. . .] I knew that if I did not immediately again become a man carried away by an unbridled feeling I was in danger of losing both a life and the other side of a life." Thus we come to the other *arrêt de mort*, and the other theft: in the wallet, she had found not a letter but a card, and an address, the address of a sculptor who would make a cast of her head and her hands—enough to turn her into an effigy.

(Before reading this passage, let us recall the "first" *récit*, the "stillness of a recumbent effigy," the narrator's request for permission to "have [J.] embalmed." Earlier he "had sent a very beautiful cast of J.'s hands to [. . .] a professional palm reader and astrologer." To embalm, to make a death mask or cast, is indeed to set about the *arrêt de mort* in its double triumph, and indeed the chambers of this desire are in a sort of "funeral home." This comes about (again) in series in the two *récits*. There is an *arrêt* between the two deaths, and thus hypertopia: between the two deaths in each *récit*, and between the two *arrêts de mort* from one *récit* to the other. Two *récits* in one, one *récit* in two, synonymous, homonymous, anonymous. He (the narrator, whose identity is doubly problematic: he had no name, and there is no guarantee that he does not have two, from one half-*récit*—or half-mourning—to the other) loves them. He loves them . . . dead. He loves (by) seeing them. He loves (by) seeing them dead.

gorgeous,' she said to me. Then she brought the flower to her lips and kissed it with a mad passion as if she wished to hold on to everything that was slipping away from her. But it lasted only an instant: she threw down the rose the way children throw down their toys and became once more alien to everything that came near, breathing convulsively. 12 October. [. . .] Laure's dying was almost finished when she raised with a weary movement one of the roses that had just been

But when he sees them they die—when he sees them, and when they see him with that terrible look of theirs, see him as their death—with these looks, they die, are dead. Die, are dead, when he loves them—die, are dead, of this love. Moreover, he can love, desire, only behind a pane of glass, he says elsewhere. One imagines a glass coffin: this is one thematic of this *récit*—and of others—which I reserve here. But each woman is also the double, death mask, cast, ghost, body at once living and dead, of the other. Separated: joined. There are two of them, absolutely different, absolutely *other*, infinitely separated by the *arrêt de mort* between two heterogeneous *récits*. They are each bound to “me” (to the one who says “I” in each instance and who is not necessarily the same, who is perhaps not the same precisely because he, the same in name or first name, is linked, bound, in accordance with a double *hymen* and twice says “yes,” twice “Come”) in accordance with a double vow. By the same double token [*coup*], himself by the same token double, “I” becomes two, absolutely foreign to himself, divided, partitioned in his crypt: he belongs to two different *récits*, two different vows; he has another, a woman, dictate to him what he says and tell him what has to be done—another, a woman, who *inspires*. Everything is decided, we have seen, in the moment of an insufflation in which we no longer know who has the absolute initiative. Even the mouth of one of those women, “open to the noise of agony [*agonie*], did not seem to belong to her, it seemed to be the mouth of someone I didn’t know, someone irredeemably condemned, or even dead.” Interruption, this connectionless connection [*rapport sans rapport*] of the *arrêt*, passes not only between J. and N. but also, with the same interminable

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spread before her, and she cried out almost in a voice absent and infinitely pained: “The rose!” (I believe those were her last words.) [. . . .] At that same moment I was recalling what I had felt that very morning: “Take a flower and look at it until you and the flower are in harmony. . . .” That was a *vision*, an *inner vision* maintained by a silently felt necessity.” 20–27 March 1978, Resurrections, Easter week. The translators should refer to the end of my apocalypse (*Glas*), entirely con-

stroke, inside me, the ego, the henceforth insideless insides of the *récitant*. But if the two women are different, utterly other “in relation to” [*par rapport à*] one another, each one *is* the other. Each one signifies and preserves [*garde*] the other. Each one remains—the other. For and by the other. Each sings the other’s *arrêt de mort*. One dies *while* the other lives, lives on, comes—again. “While”: “as”: “when”: “in order that”: “because”: “as soon as”: this is the timeless time of the “and,” of the “and immediately” that recurs, that comes back, so often in the *récit* to describe the *simul* without causality, without absolute synchrony, without order. For the narrator: the death of one is what keeps the other under guard—preserves the other, preserves [him] from the other. Thus in the time of the “and” they must—*il faut*—they must both die so that, each time, the other will live. One dies *and* the other lives: an “immediately” that weds symbiosis to synthanatosis in a triumph without identity, without identicalness. In a double signature, he himself signs *their arrêt de mort*, at their request, their demand, he says, in order to preserve them, keep them, embalm them, encrypt them . . . *and his arrêt de mort*, with and in the same hand. What binds him to each of the two dead women (alliance, ring, vow, *hymen*, double affirmation, yes, yes, come, come: come back, come again—“come,” again), each of these two revenants, living on as ghostly fiancées—this bond is double not because it commits him twice, attaches him to two women, to two identities: this *hymen* is a “double bind” each time, because each of these bonds that bind is, in itself, double. It signifies, desires, *arrête* life death, the life the death of the other so that the other lives *and* dies, the other of the other—

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cerned with the paschal conjunction. The Christ-like figure again, of the “who?” of the X. of *L’arrêt de mort*, over whom “it’s about time we raised a cross,” says the doctor who condemns him. The translators will have to refer here to what is said about chiasmus, about  $\chi$  (*chi*) and the *ichthus* in “+ R (par dessus le marché)” (in reference to Adami) and in Hillis Miller’s article “Ariadne’s Thread” (*Critical Inquiry*, volume 3, number 1). There is another X., in *L’arrêt de mort*, the creator of that

who *is* without being the *same*. For there is an other of the other, and it is not the same: this is what the order of the symbol seeks desperately to deny. The double bond to each woman *signifies* to each woman the *arrêt de mort* (death and life-after-life/life-after-death) so that the other's *arrêt de mort* will be possible (so that she will live on and cease to live). The *arrêt de mort*—what is designated by the title of the book and of the “totality” of a *récit* that is never gathered together to form one *récit* and that thus questions even the unity of its “title,” as well as the unity of the narrator—the *arrêt de mort* would thus follow this “double bond” whose terrifying *figura*, figure, face, traverses the *récit* that is forbidden, inter-dicted in the quasi-middle of it, over above beyond its double inner border.

But there are enough signs that make it possible to read [*dominant à lire*] one *récit* in the other, and the double overrun of these two inner borders, so that *double invagination* is here no longer simply a formal structure. It is related in an essential way to the double bind that ties the “narrator” to each of these two women—related in an essential way to the triumph of life or to the *arrêt de mort* interrupted in the “middle,” the “middle” “of it,” *at the very place* where the *relationship* of the “book” to itself, in its fragile binding, is formed, the *relationship* of the “I” to himself, his alliance with himself, his ring, his anniversary, the *alliance* that joins him to himself. This *very place*, the very *same place*, being the place, the locus, of interruption, is also the place where double invagination gathers together what it interrupts in the strange *sameness* of this place. The *arrêt de mort* calls forth what it forbids: the death of the other whom it is supposed to preserve.

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“process which is strange when it is carried out on living people, sometimes dangerous, surprising, a process which . . . Abruptly [. . .].” X. is the name of the sculptor, the one who, *par excellence*, fixes life death [*arrête la vie la mort*]. *Arrêt* without *Aufhebung*: of translation. Economy. Temptation, but it's impossible, to recount the history of *this* text (countless episodes: for example the Yale Seminar in 1976, Venice, the lecture in Belgium—the feminist leader, a prodigious reader of

One *récit* (one woman) makes the other die and live in a movement that is unarrestable and unnarratable. By the same (double) token, activity *comes down to* [*revient à*] passivity, making a person die *comes down to* letting a person die, making a person live *comes down to* letting a person live. But in going from “making” to “letting,” we are no longer passing from one opposite to the other, not passing into passivity. The passivity of “letting” is different from the passivity of couples and pairs, e.g., the pair active/passive.

Each woman lives off and dies of the other, preserves the other and loses the other, preserves and loses the other's narrator. The word “and” is to be understood in each case as a conjunction that does not join logically, for example in contradiction, nor according to chronology, succession or absolute simultaneity, nor according to some fundamental ontology. This “and” must be understood, if possible, as it appears in the story, where it seems to be unreadable in terms of any of the *conjunctions* that I have just mentioned. And the conjugality of the double bind between the two women and the narrator (if there is only one narrator), joins or weds this “and” to itself *as an arrêt de mort*. (One example, although we could give a long series of them: “I called to her by her first name; and immediately—I can say there wasn't a second's interval—a sort of breath came out of her compressed mouth [. . .].” “[. . .] And to that thought [*et à elle*] I say eternally, ‘Come,’ and eternally it is there.”) This “and”-, “and immediately”-writing, as it annihilates time in the ring of eternal return, yokes affirmation to itself in its *récit*, in the being-at-the-same-time of the other beyond time, in the accompaniment of

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Blanchot, who realizes, after the fact, that it was hard for her to bear that a “man” should have dared the “mad hypothesis” of the *hymen* between the two women; she used the most academic criteriology against me, demanded “proof,” and so on—reading “Morella,” the thought of that Miss Blind bent over the corrections of *The Triumph*, hesitations about the title—I had first thought of “Living On—in Translation” and “Translations”—my calculations about the English—how will they



that which is not accompanied—this “and”-writing returns, recurs, regularly when the narrative voice is (lets itself be) heard in Blanchot’s text—in all the other texts signed by him. It is like a silent gliding, the elusiveness of a cause that does not accompany its effect, of a before and an after that are indistinct in the soft, light step [*pas*] of a movement. And, unceasingly, *sans arrêt*, *arrête*, and *arrête* nothing.

Each woman lives off and dies of the other, and the same for the other, each preserving the other’s narrator, and they lose him immediately. What do they preserve him from? From loneliness *with* the other, from the single vow with the other. But in each case there is a double vow, a single, unique vow, as they sign the narrator’s *arrêt de mort*: he can live in accordance neither with the single nor with the double alliance. He is, moreover, one who is “living on” in each of the stories, each time promised (given up, condemned) by a doctor to imminent death, like *another* anonymous Christ (X., *chi*, chiasma, raising “a cross over him”). I have already quoted the “first” *récit*; this is from the “second”: “He [an editor] thought I was nearing my end, he telephoned the doctor, who also gave me up for lost [*m’enterrait*] every few weeks, and got this opinion from him: ‘X.? My dear sir, it’s about time we raised a cross over him.’ A few days later, the doctor told me this as though it were an excellent joke.” Later, in the course of a story about blood that should be analyzed: “The doctor put me in his clinic; he thought I was dying.” A couple of pages later: “The night before, I had been on the point of dying.”

The two women, like the doctor, sign his death warrant, and he signs theirs, but always in a countersignature, because the

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render the *il faut* or perhaps the *faut-il* that is the imprint of prescription in “Living On”?—the Paris Seminar in 1974 or 1975 on “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” what my friend Koitchi Toyosaki said to me yesterday, the article in *La part du feu* entitled “Traduit de” [it begins thus: “In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Robert Jordan, discovering the importance of the moment that he is in the process of living, repeats to himself in a variety of languages the word ‘now.’ Now, *ahora*, *maintenant*,

death that is “given” is always requested, demanded, by the one who receives it and immediately gives it to himself or herself, in order to sign it, with/from/in the hand of the other.

And thus we see . . . another *hymen*.

Among these three survivors, as they live on, there can be an *arrêt* only of death. No [*pas d’*] infidelity, more than one fidelity. Three, to lose: lost. He, the sole narrator, in his improbable and divisible identity, can live neither the single nor the double alliance, and he preserves himself, makes/lets one woman preserve him from the other, using one terror to avoid the other, and the double *récit*, as we have perhaps seen adequately, insures the possibility of the impossible *arrêt de mort*. Nothing seems capable of surpassing this terrifying, triumphant affirmation—unless it comes to hold in store/check something even worse [*garder du pire*]. Unless there is something even worse—and thus more desirable, more madly terrifying—for the narrator: the *hymen* between the two women. What if the structure of the *récit*, the interruption between the two stories, guaranteed at first the non-meeting of J. and N.? And what if it were this—that the two women love each other and approach one another, before him and without him—what if it were this *hymen* that the *arrêt de mort* was both to forbid, as absolute terror, and thus, since every *arrêt de mort* calls forth what it suppresses, to make/let it live, be readable, die [*donner à vivre, à lire, à mourir*] in the unconscious, imperceptible structure of this *récit*? I am speaking here of the fascination of one woman by the other, across the uncrossable glass partition that separates the two stories. They do not know each other, have never met; they inhabit two utterly foreign worlds.

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*heute*. But he is a bit disappointed [. . .]’], the five pages in *L’amitié* entitled “Traduire” [last words: “. . . with this conviction that to translate is, ultimately, madness.”], and so on), but I count the words and I give up. Economy. Political. . . . If there is something that arrests translation, this limit is not due to some essential indissociability of meaning and language, of signified and signifier, as they say. It is a matter of *economy* (economy, of course, remains to be *thought*) and retains

They telephone each other ("Come") across the infinite distance of a no-connection [*d'un sans rapport*]. The narrator is between them, saying "I," with an "I" identical *and* other, from one  *récit*  to the other. In him, before him, without him, they are the same, the same one, "two images superimposed on one another," a "photographic" superimposing; they are utterly different, completely other, and they unite and call to each other: "Come." Of course, nothing on the manifestly readable surface of the  *récits*  makes it possible to sustain such a mad hypothesis. How could the character from one story desire, marry, fascinate, etc., the character from another story? And if we wished to consider *L'arrêt de mort* a single  *récit* , joined to itself by the supposed identity of the character who says "I," how could we fail to see that J. and N., in the story, have no connection, no relationship with each other, do not meet, just as the two series of events in which they are involved never intersect? Of course. No normal category of readability, then, could give credence to the mad hypothesis according to which the double invagination that attracts us in this  *récit*  could make it possible to read [*donner à lire*] the unreadable *hymen* between the two women: one *with(out)* the other. I am speaking here neither of an intention nor of a construction on the part of the "author"—which does not mean that the interruption between author and narrator, or indeed between the two women, is simple: it is as ambiguous as the interruption of every *arrêt de mort*. As ambiguous, moreover, as the distance of difference (*Ent-fernung*): from one  *récit*  to the other, they—the two women, the two voiceless voices, tele-phone one another: Come. And the relationship, the connection, between the two  *récits*  would be tele-graphic in nature. Furthermore, I am speaking here neither

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an essential relationship with time, space, counting words, signs, *marks*. The unity of the word is not to be fetishized or substantialized. For example, with more words or parts of words the translator will triumph more easily over *arrêt* in the expression *arrêt de mort*. Not without something left over, of course, but more or less easily, strictly, closely, tightly. Beware of the "new mode of expression" of the "totally new

of an intention nor of a construction on the part of the "narrator"—which does not mean that the interruption between narratorial voice and narrative voice, the two voices, the two women, one *without* the other, is simple: it remains as improbable as the interruption of every *arrêt de mort*. And yet something like X-ray analysis or "blood" [*sang*] analysis can make readable [*donner à lire*] that which is unreadable in this narrative body. (A moment ago I drew (on) the "blood" that circulates in one of the two stories, the "mysterious" blood, "so unstable that it was astonishing to analyze," the "madness of blood" in which the narrator seeks "hope of escaping the inevitable.") The readability of unreadability is as improbable as an *arrêt de mort*. No law of (normal) reading can guarantee it in its *legitimacy*. By normal reading I mean every reading that insures knowledge transmittable in its own language, in a language, in a school or academy, knowledge constructed and insured in institutional constructions, in accordance with *laws* made so as to resist (precisely because they are weaker) the ambiguous threats with which the *arrêt de mort* troubles so many conceptual oppositions, boundaries, borders. The *arrêt de mort* brings about the *arrêt* of the law. The double invagination of this narrative body in deconstruction overruns and exceeds not merely the oppositions of values that make the rules and form the law in all the schools of reading, ancient and modern, before and after Freud; it overruns a delimitation of the fantasy, a delimitation in the name of which some would here abandon, for example, the mad hypothesis to "my" fantasy-projection, to that of the one who says "I" here, the narrator, the narrators, or me, who am telling you all this here. This unreadability will have taken place, as unreadable, will have become

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language" and the like. Economy: stricture and not *coupure*, rupture. It is always an *external* constraint that arrests a text in general, i.e., *anything*, for example life death. What is arrested here: the authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) of a being-for-death. Think exteriority from the angle of this economy of the *arrêt*. *Arrêt*: the greatest "bound" energy, "banded," *bandéé*, tightly gathered around its own limit, retained, inhibited

readable [*se sera donné à lire*] right here, as unreadable, from the very bottom of the crypt in which it remains. It will have taken place where it remains: that's the proof. From here on it's up to you to think what will have taken place, to work out both the conditions for its possibility and its consequences. As for me, I must break off here, interrupt all this, close the parenthesis, and let the movement continue without me, take off again, or stop, arrest itself, after I simply note this: in everything that happens, it's as if the narrator desired (in other words forbid)—from the moment he comes to say "I" onward—one thing: that the two women should love one another, should meet, should be united in accordance with the *hymen*. Not [*pas*] without him, and immediately without him. That they, these two other women, others of the other, should not merely resemble each other but should be the same: this is what he desires, what he would die of, what he desires like the death that he would "give" himself. This is absolute terror: the bottomless boundless abyss of that which is single, unique—the other death, laughable, the most simply insignificant death, the most fatal. And immediately *la Chose* is its double. It remains [*reste*] its double. But now we shall be able to make out the *arrestance* of this *reste*.)

At about ten o'clock Nathalie said to me:

"I telephoned X., I asked him to make a cast of my head and my hands."

Right away I was seized by a feeling of terror. "What gave you the idea of doing that?" "The card." She showed me a sculptor's card which was usually with the key in my wallet.

Should we say that he gave her the idea of or the desire for the death mask, as he had wished to embalm the other woman, in

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(*Hemmung, Haltung*) and immediately disseminated. Sand. Empty, unloaded, discharged, of itself, spontaneously. In the trance of the *trans-*. On the word *transe*, the translators should quote *Glas*, at great length (e.g., p. 30). *Trans/partition*. *Trépas* [death: *trans-* + *passus*]. "Trespassing." To be related, without translation, to all the "trans-" 's that are at work here. I hope that they will not believe that, escorted by this mob, this

order to preserve both of them, to keep them alive-and-dead, living on? Yes and no. Yes, because it is indeed thanks to him, next to him, on him, that she finds this "idea," this direction, this destination, this address. No, because she finds them only by stealing them from him, from a place where he was hiding them, in a crypt, a crypt next to his body, clinging to his skin, the wallet, an object that is detachable from him, neither clothing nor itself a body, a safe containing other detachable objects, a card, keys, and the like. These detached objects are of a particular nature: they operate, orient, open, close; they make something readable or keep it secret. They, like the wallet that contains them, are not objects or simply things. "It seems to me you don't always behave very sensibly with that wallet," he tells her.

At this point the exchange of a "yes" takes a particular form and responds to specific demands (" 'Say yes,' and I took her by the hand [. . .]," then "I nodded [*je fis signe que oui*]. I was still holding her hand [. . .]" in the course of a scene that I cannot quote here. Then—as "yes" responds to nothing, nothing but the other "yes," itself—then the "terrible thing," the "victory over life," the "will to triumph" [*'intention triomphale'*], "glory," the "madness of victory" will all be evoked, named; then, too, will come the cry of "yes, yes, yes!"

She looked so human, she was still so close to me, waiting for a sort of absolution for that terrible thing which was certainly not her fault.

"It was probably necessary," I murmured.

She snatched at these words.

"It was necessary, wasn't it?"

It really seemed that my acquiescence reverberated in her, that it had been in some way expected, with an immense expectancy, by

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procession of doubles, ghosts, *trances, folies du jour*, manic jublations and triumphs, I have produced here an underground or shady translation of *The Triumph*, and for example of "The crowd gave way, & I arose aghast/ Or seemed to rise, so mighty was the trance,/ And saw like clouds upon the thunder blast/ The million with fierce song and maniac dance/ Raging around; such seemed the jubilee. . . ." I have amassed

an invisible responsibility to which she lent only her voice, and that now a supreme power, sure of itself, and happy—not because of my consent, of course, which was quite useless to it, but because of its victory over life and also because of my loyal understanding, my unlimited abandon—took possession of this young person and gave her an acuity and a masterfulness that dictated my thoughts to me as well as my few words.

"Now," she said in a rather hoarse voice, "isn't it true that you've known about it all along?"

"Yes," I said, "I knew about it."

"And do you know when it happened?"

"I think I have some idea."

But my tone of voice, which must have been rather yielding and submissive, did not seem to satisfy her will to triumph.

"Well, maybe you don't know everything yet," she cried with a touch of defiance. And, really, within her jubilant exaltation there was a lucidity, a burning in the depths of her eyes, a glory which reached me through my distress, and touched me, too, with the same magnificent pride, the same madness of victory.

"Well, what?" I said, getting up too.

"Yes," she cried, "yes, yes!"

"That this took place a week ago?"

She took the words from my lips with frightening eagerness.

"And then?" she cried.

"And that today you went to X.'s to get . . . that thing?"

"And then!"

"And now that thing is over there, you have uncovered it, you have looked at it, and you have looked into the face of something that will be alive for all eternity, for your eternity and for mine! Yes, I know it, I've known it all along."

I cannot exactly say whether these words, or others like them, ever reached her ears, nor what mood led me to allow her to hear

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references (to "things" and "texts," they would say) but in truth what I have just written is without reference. Above all, to myself or to texts that I have signed in another language. Precisely *because of* this jubilant multiplicity of self-references. "In order to come into being as text, the referential function had to be radically suspended" (Paul de Man, "The

them: it was a minor matter, just as it was not important to know if things had really happened that way. But I must say that for me it seems that it did happen that way, setting aside the question of dates, since everything could have happened at a much earlier time. But the truth is not contained in these facts. I can imagine suppressing these particular ones. But if they did not happen, others happen in their place, and answering the summons of the all powerful affirmation which is united with me, they take on the same meaning and the story is the same. It could be that N., in talking to me about the "plan," wanted only to tear apart with a vigilant [*jalouse*] hand the pretences we were living under. It may be that she was tired of seeing me persevere with a kind of faith in my role as man of the "world," and that she used this story to recall me abruptly to my true condition and point out to me where my place was. It may also be that she herself was obeying a mysterious command, which came from me, and which is the voice that is always being reborn in me, and it is vigilant too, the voice of a feeling that cannot disappear. Who can say: this happened because certain events allowed it to happen? This occurred because, at a certain moment, the facts became misleading and because of their strange juxtaposition entitled the truth to take possession of them? As for me, I have not been the unfortunate messenger of a thought stronger than I, nor its plaything, nor its victim, because that *thought*, if it has conquered me, has only conquered through me, and in the end has always been equal to me. I have loved it and I have loved only it, and everything that happened I wanted to happen, and having had regard only for it, wherever it was or wherever I might have been, in absence, in unhappiness, in the inevitability of dead things, in the necessity of living things, in the fatigue of work, in the faces born of my curiosity, in my false words, in my deceitful vows, in silence and in the night, I gave it all my strength and it gave me all its strength, so that this strength is too

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Purloined Ribbon," in *Glyph 1*. Quote in full.). Transreference. How can one sign in translation, in another language? Living on—in/after whose name, in/after the name of what? How will they translate that? Of course, I have not kept my promise. This telegraphic band produces an untranslatable supplement, whether I wish it or not. Never tell what

great, it is incapable of being ruined by anything, and condemns us, perhaps, to immeasurable unhappiness, but if that is so, I take this unhappiness on myself and I am immeasurably glad of it and to that thought I say eternally, "Come," and eternally it is there.

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you're doing, and, pretending to tell, do something else that immediately crypts, adds, entrenches itself. To speak of writing, of triumph, as *living on*, is to enunciate or denounce the manic fantasy. Not without repeating it, and that goes without saying.

## 4

G E O F F R E Y H. H A R T M A N

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## Words, Wish, Worth: Wordsworth

## I

Thinking of walking with Dora in the English countryside, Wordsworth is waylaid by a Miltonic image from *Samson Agonistes* that makes his twelve-year-old daughter an Antigone leading the blind Oedipus:

*"A LITTLE onward lend thy guiding hand  
To these dark steps, a little further on!"\**

Wordsworth suffered from severe eye-strain and feared to go blind. The fact is alluded to when he calls himself "not unmenaced" (9), but this merely qualifies a surprise he insists on: the usurpation of that text on his voice, and the anticipatory, proleptic nature of the thought. He records an involuntary thought having to do with privation, and which implies a halted traveler. He looks forward to the pleasure of walking with Dora, and instead of an easy progression from thought to fulfillment, from innocent wish to imaginative elaboration, something interposes darkly and complicates the sequence. The movement of fantasy is momentarily blocked; it no longer rises as easily and naturally as dawn but must precipitate itself as a Morning Voluntary: "From thy orisons / Come forth; and while the morning air is

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\* See p. 215 below for the entire text of the poem, preceded by a bibliographical note.

