

French literature 1950–2000: An Anthology

Edited by
Sharad Chandra

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Preface

Compiling this anthology has been a great delight for me in spite of the arduous task of making selections—of authors and of excerpts, since in literature it is never easy to decide whom to keep, whom to leave out; then, to use the excerpt from what work which ones to leave out. Nevertheless, the choice had to be made. I have finally been able to select, fifty–six authors which, in my view, score over others in merit, in literary significance, as also in best illustrating the trends and tendencies of the period under study. The number or length of the excerpt(s) is in no way, indicative of the literary distinction of a particular author, rather of a characteristic trait or a singular peculiarity of the work contributing to a current concept or introducing a new feature. A major hurdle in the way was of locating and acquiring English translations of selected works—since, in order to save time as well as to avoid complications of buying translation rights, I decided to use only the existing translations. This limitation did slightly restrict my field but has not, in any way, impaired the comprehensiveness of the presentation of French literature from 1950 to the end of the century.

To make the anthology as complete as possible, interesting information on exotic literary practices like ‘Oulipo’, names of French Nobel laureates, the long list of French literary Prizes, and a chronology of Socio-political events of the period has been provided in the Appendix.

Before closing I may add that since I have concentrated specifically on French (and not Francophone) writers, and creative (not critical) literature I had to skip immortals like Roland Barthes, E.M. Cioran, Levi-Strauss and many others, just as I had to leave out most prominent and popular names like Leopold Senghor and Aime Cesaire who have left a significant body of work behind. Senghor was even elected to the Adademie francaise in 1963, yet is not referred to as a French, but a Senegalese poet. Some very brilliant voices have emerged in the field of poetry as well as of fiction at the cusp of the century, to treat whom justifiably would require a separate volume.

This anthology is not a manual or a reference book but a compendium to provide its readers foretaste of a rich literature and stimulus to explore more of that territory. I do hope it proves successful in its aim.

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Sharad Chandra

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1

Introduction

I

The Background

Before the pessimism of the 1920s set in, a brief period of optimism (roughly from 1890 to 1914) reigned in France which is popularly known as ‘the belle époque’. It constituted an exhilarating period of economic prosperity and progress. People living during this time were materially confident and culturally optimistic. Inventions like the telephone, the automobile, the airplane, and the cinema enlivened and speeded up modern life. Art of any genre prospered like never before. There was tremendous expansion in literary output and the ever-faster pace of experimentation with new means of expression. Both Marxism and Freudianism made a deep imprint on literature of the period, as on all the arts. While the two world wars gravely lacerated France the technological revolution confronted the current generation with an altogether new world. The result of such profound socio-economic and political change led to a continuous questioning of all moral, intellectual, and artistic traditions: from impressionism to Art Nouveau and cubism, and from romantic to political and socio-critical literature.

The poems of Guillaume Apollinaire characteristically reflect the giddy dilation of the times: society’s distaste for the outmoded styles like naturalism, and its enthusiasm for the new and exciting, namely, the Eiffel Tower, cubism, the joyful life of cabarets and music halls. He made bold experiments in form and style, eliminating punctuation and juxtaposing seemingly unrelated images. Following his lead Alfred Jarry published the extravagant farce of *Ubu roi* (1896; in English *Ubu King*, 1951) and Paul Claudel challenged the established conventions of drama in his densely packed poetic plays. Alain-Fournier’s novel, *Le Grand meaulnes* (1913; in English *The Wanderer*, 1928) put forth a poetic and mysterious denial of the limitations placed on the human imagination by the realists and naturalists, and the philosopher Henri Bergson peremptorily rejected the naturalist view that human destiny is shaped by predetermined factors and suggested that people have free will and limitless creative energy.

The advent of war in 1914 destroyed this buoyancy of spirit and engendered a vast body of literature in varying voices: pro-war rallying cries, expressions of shock, sorrow, and sympathy; pacifist and journalistic description. In 1919, after the armistice, began a period of philosophical, moral, and political stock-taking which in due course, produced its own rich crop of essays and treatises. In the literary field it generated even more radical tendencies. The Dada movement which had begun in a café in Switzerland in 1916 had travelled to Paris by 1920, but by 1924 the poets around Paul Eluard, Andre Breton, Louis Aragon, and Robert Desnos, heavily influenced by Sigmund Freud’s notion of the unconscious, modified it into Surrealism. In literature and in the

visual arts the surrealists tried to reveal the workings of the unconscious mind. They now championed the writers—Arthur Rimbaud, Lautreamont, Baudelaire, and Raymond Roussel—whom they previously saw as radical; and promoted an anti-bourgeois philosophy, particularly with regards to sex and politics, which would later lead most of them to join the communist party. Other writers associated with surrealism include Jean Cocteau, Rene Crevel, Jacques Prevert, Jules Supervielle, Benjamin Peret, Philippe Soupault, Pierre Reverdy, Antonin Artaud who revolutionized the theatre, Henri Michaux and Rene Char. Symbolism continued to serve as an inspiration without stifling new departures. Paul Claudel, notable as both dramatist and poet, injected a mystical Catholicism into his masterpiece, *Five Great Odes* (1904-1910; Eng. trans., 1967). Paul Valéry became famous for delicate poems that were at once meditative, musical, and rich in imagery. Guillaume Apollinaire deliberately aimed for modernity in his poetry, which was full of whimsical surprises. He not only coined the term surrealist but also produced the first surrealist play, *Les Mamelles des Tiresias* in 1918 (Eng. *The Breasts of Tiresias*, 1961). Under the leadership of the movement's theorist, André Breton, surrealism aimed for a complete revolution in poetry and the visual arts. It considered exploration of the subconscious as the deepest source of poetry. A rejuvenator of poetic imagination, surrealism launched, among others, the poet and novelist Louis Aragon, although after 1930 he found more inspiration in his Marxist beliefs.

The surrealist movement continued to be a major force in experimental writing until the Second World War. This technique was particularly well suited for poetry and theatre although Breton, Aragon and Cocteau wrote longer prose works as well, such as Breton's novel, *Nadja* (1928). While important poets like Saint-John Perse and Edmond Jabes were heavily influenced by it, others like Georges Bataille created their own group and reaction. The Swiss writer Blaise Cendrars was close to Apollinaire, Pierre Reverdy, Max Jacob and the artists, Chagall and Léger have similarities with both surrealism and cubism. The Theatre in this period (1920s and 1930s) went through further changes and in addition to producing plays by the French, Jean Giradoux, Jules Romains, Jean Anouilh, and Jean-Paul Sartre, it also produced the works of the Greek and Shakespearean theatre, and the plays by Luigi Pirandello, Anton Chekhov, and George Bernard Shaw.

In the field of fiction there was a huge production during the inter-war years of which two works stand out, *Journey to the End of Night* (*Voyage au bout de la nuit*, 1932) by Celine and *Man's Estate* (*La Condition humaine*, 1933) by Andre Malraux. *Journey to the End of Night* is a loosely strung series of adventures in which the first-person narrator, Bardamu, a doctor moves from the battlefields of the first World War to Africa, the United States, and the impoverished Paris suburbs. He takes side with the oppressed wherever he goes and directs a ready flow of bilious invective against generals, colonial administrators, industrial bosses, and other figures of authority. Using an elliptical, oral and slang-derived style to rail against the hypocrisies and moral lapses of his generation Celine equips Bardamu with an ample diction that is at once colloquial and learned with its high-flown literary allusions and low-life slang. Unlike Celine, Malraux's *Man's Estate* is concerned with political choice and conflict. The scene is the aftermath of the Chinese revolution and the seizure of power by Chiang-Kai-shek. The plot of the novel traces the betrayal and defeat of the Communist insurgents in Shanghai and dwells

at length on the motives and actions of individuals in the group where discussion, action, introspection rapidly undercut. Malraux's political agents are shrewd thinkers.

Among other novelists of the period who employed different formal techniques, the name of Georges Bernanos stands out for his use of the journalistic form to further psychological exploration. Psychological analysis was also central to Francois Mauriac's novels, although Sartre saw him as representative of an outdated fatalism. Jules Romain's twenty-seven volume novel *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* (1932–1946), Roger Martin du Gard's eight-part novel cycle⁴¹ *Les Thibault* (1922–1940), and Marcel Proust's seven-part masterpiece *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*, 1913–1927) expanded on the 'roman-fleuve' model. Andre Gide continued to experiment with the novel, and his most sophisticated exploration of the limits of the traditional novel is found in *The Counterfeiters* (*Les Faux Monnayeurs*, 1929), a novel ostensibly about a writer trying to write a novel. In the late 1930s, the works of Hemingway, Faulkner and Dos Passos came to be translated into French, and their prose style made a profound impact on the work of writers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Andre Malraux, and Albert Camus.

II

Occupation and Post-war literature

France's occupation by German troops in 1940 and the consequent division of the country was experienced as a national humiliation, and all French citizens were confronted with an unavoidable choice. In fact, the beginning of World War II forced a new strain of French literature to emerge, where the writing mainly became a branch of military and political activity of collaboration or resistance. Some writers escaped the country to live in the safety of self-exile, some faithful to political options made during the previous decade, moved directly into collaboration. Still others, out of pacifist convictions or a belief that art could remain aloof from politics, tried to carry on as individuals and as writers, ignoring the taint of passive collaboration with the occupying forces or the Vichy government. Jean Cocteau and Jean Giono were among this last group and later were criticized for their conduct. Jean Giono was briefly imprisoned, as was Louis-Ferdinand Céline, whose reputation was seriously damaged by his anti-Semitism. Several others, in marked contrast to the collaboration with the regime joined the military –like André Malraux who served on many fronts and commanded a group of underground Resistance fighters projecting the image of the writer as a man of action or joined the 'Resistance movement' like Albert Camus, Pascal Pia, Rene Char and others.

At the end of the war, the French literary scene was dominated by existential activity and the work of authors like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre aimed to establish existentialist values as a replacement for the bankrupt values of pre-war France. He explored issues of commitment in works like, *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and *The Age of Reason* (1945). Albert Camus in his novel, *The Outsider* (*L'Etranger*, 1942) introduced his philosophy of the absurd: man's futile search for meaning, unity, and clarity in the face of an unintelligible world devoid of God and eternal truths or values.

Elaborating the same in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus* he poses a rhetorical question, “Does the realization of the absurd require suicide?” and goes on to answer : “No. It requires revolt.” Subsequently, he outlines several approaches to the absurd life comparing in the final chapter, the absurdity of man's life with the situation of Sisyphus, a figure of Greek mythology who was condemned to repeat forever the same meaningless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down again, and concludes his treatise with the memorable words, “The struggle itself [...] is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”

An important outcome of the Occupation was the emergence of a very attentive audience to writers who upheld the honour of their defeated country. The Radio, then the TV played an important role in building literary taste and development of literary criticism. Broadcasts like, “Un livre des voix”, *Lettres Ouvertes*”, or *Nuits Magnetiques*” on ‘France Culture’ won a faithful public. But it was the programme , “Apostrophe” created much later—in 1975—by Bernard Pivot, which became a virtual institution. The poetry of resistance reached a wide public, notably in the works of the Communist activists, Paul Éluard and Louis Aragon, whose poems were often transmitted orally through the occupied zone. A flourishing clandestine press included the newspaper *Combat* and the Editions de Minuit, whose first book was *Le Silence de la mer* (1941; *The Silence of the Sea*) by Vercors (real name, Jean-Marcel Bruller). Translated and reprinted in Allied countries, Vercors’s short novel, like Aragon’s collection of poems *Le Crève-Coeur* (*Heartbreak*, 1941) became an emblem of French resistance and was instrumental in restoring French pride and prestige. Published at the end of the war, Camus’s fable, *La Peste* (*The Plague*, 1947), an allegory of the Occupation, returned to the issues of resistance and collaboration to present both a humane understanding of the pressures and limits set by circumstance and a moral judgment that to fail to recognize and fight evil is to become part of it.

The 1950s and 1960s were highly turbulent times in France. Despite a dynamic economy (of the years 1950 -1980, “les trente glorieuses” or “30 Glorious Years”), the country was torn by its colonial heritage (Vietnam and Indo-China, Algeria), by its collective sense of guilt from the Vichy Regime, by its desire for renewed national prestige (Gaulism), and by its conservative social tendencies in education and industry. Inspired by the theatrical experiments in the early half of the century and by the horrors of the war, the so-called avant-garde Parisian theater, known as the “New Theater” or “Theatre of the Absurd” around the writers, Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, and Fernando Arrabal refused simple explanations and abandoned traditional characters, plots and staging. Other experiments in theatre involved decentralization, regional theater, “popular theater” (designed to bring working classes to the theater), and the theater heavily influenced by Bertolt Brecht, largely unknown in France before 1954, and the productions of Arthur Adamov and Roger Planchon. Jean Vilar who was also important in the creation of the T.N.P. or the “Theatre National Populaire” started the Avignon festival in 1947.

The French novel from the 1950s onwards went through a similar experimentation in the group of writers who wrote “the new novel” or “Nouveau roman”. The “Nouveau roman” is mainly associated with Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, Robert Pinget, Michel Butor, Samuel Beckett, Nathalie Sarraute, and Claude Simon. Although these authors have no common doctrine, all reject plot and verisimilitude as

traditionally understood. Like their counterparts in the theatre, they abandoned traditional plot, voice, characters and psychology. These developments, to a certain degree, closely paralleled changes in cinema in the same period known as “the Nouvelle Vague” cinema. Working on a smaller canvas, Colette produced short novels that shrewdly analyzed the complexities of intimate relations, while François Mauriac took as his special preserve, in a series of novels influenced by his Catholicism, the eternal battle between spirit and flesh. Simultaneously, philosophical existentialism also dominated literature in postwar France, spilling over into the novel as onto the stage. Jean Paul Sartre, leader of the movement, had previously explained its tenets (namely, the human freedom to choose and to forge one's own values) in the novel *Nausea* (1949), the play *No Exit* (1946), and a trilogy of novels dealing with World War II. Its themes would be echoed by others, most notably by Albert Camus in *The Outsider aka, The Stranger* (1946) and *The Plague* (1948), in which the absurdity, or meaninglessness of life is stressed. Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre's lifelong friend and disciple, also dealt with existentialist problems in her novels but is best known for her massive treatise on the status of women, *The Second Sex* (1952), and a series of distinguished memoirs.

The popular literary event of 1954 was *Bonjour tristesse* (*Hello, Sadness*) by Françoise Sagan (pseudonym of Françoise Quoirez). Published when she was barely 19 years of age this novel of adolescent love was written with “classical” restraint and a tone of cynical disillusionment and showed the persistence of traditional form in the preferred fictions of the novel-reading public. The naturalist novel survived in the work of Henri Troyat and others, while its assumptions about the role of the author and the nature of fictional “reality” continued to be taken for granted by a host of other novelists and their readers. These assumptions found opposition in the prose fictions of Samuel Beckett, disciple of the fellow Irishman James Joyce. Beckett, who wrote in French as well as in English, published his first major text, *Molloy* in French in 1951, which was the first of a trilogy exploring the constitution of the individual subject in discursive form, setting out the framing limits of identity constituted by language, history, social institutions, family, and the forms of storytelling (the other two volumes in the trilogy being *Malone Dies* and *The Unnameable*). As the century progressed, it became increasingly clear that Beckett's work was seminal in the understanding of the material operations of writing: where writing comes from, how words work, and the extent to which all individuals live in language. In the mid-1950s, however, critical attention was focused on the group dubbed as the *nouveaux romanciers*, or new novelists: Alain Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon, Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor, and Robert Pinget. Marguerite Duras (Marguerite Donnadiou) is sometimes added to the list, though not with her approval. The label covered a variety of approaches, but, as theorized in Robbe-Grillet's *Pour un nouveau roman* (1963; Eng., *Towards a New Novel*), it implied generally the systematic rejection of the traditional framework of fiction—chronology, plot, character—and of the omniscient author. In place of these conventions, the writers offer texts that demand more of the reader, who is presented with compressed, repetitive, or only partially explained events from which to read a meaning that will not, in any case, be definitive. In Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* (*La Jalousie*, 1957) for example, the narrator's suspicions of his wife's infidelity are never confirmed or denied, but the interest of the writing is in conveying their obsessive quality, achieved by the replacement of a chronological narrative with the insistent repetition of details or events. Duras's *Moderato cantabile* (1958) favours

innovative stylistic structuring over conventional characterization and plot, her purpose not to tell a story but to use the play of form to represent the movements of desire—complex, ambiguous, and disruptive. The *nouveau roman* was open to influence from works being written abroad, notably by William Faulkner, and the cinema. Both Robbe-Grillet and Duras contributed to the *nouvelle vague*, or New Wave, style of filmmaking.

In the 1940s and early 1950s, drama found immediate subject matter in the overt clash of politics, ethics, and philosophies, public and personal that was the substance of everyday life. Jean Anouilh (1910-1937), last of the 1930s playwrights was also the first of the postwar generation. He labeled his early plays, ‘roses’ or ‘noires’ and after the war created other groupings: ‘pieces brilliants’, ‘grincantes’ and ‘costumees’. The rose-tint of optimism and the blackness of pessimism do not correspond to any consistent distinction between the comic and the tragic. The adjectives refer, rather to the author’s search for purity and his reactions to --what he believed-- a world without justice. Anouilh, sophisticated, Parisian, provocative, and always determined to entertain, scored his last success in 1982 with *Le Nombriil*. He was one of the great stylists of twentieth-century theatre. Many of his plays, exemplified by *Antigone*, are lucid, classical moralities, showing that there is a price to be paid for loyalty to people and beliefs. Henry de Montherlant’s historical dramas explored the heroic inconsistency of human behaviour and the fascination of secular and religious idealism. Sartre’s expressed aim for his theatre throughout the 1940s and ’50s was to show systems of values in conflict. From *The Flies* (*Les Mouches*), written for a France suffering Nazi oppression, to *The Condemned of Altona*, also published as *Altona* (*Les Séquestrés d’Altona*), staged when France had become the oppressor in Algeria, his work gives form to the conflicting imperatives of personal survival and collective responsibility and the impossible choices set for the revolutionary by the competing discourses of family, religion, nation, and class. This was an outstanding moment for the French stage. The Avignon Festival with the aim to reach a younger public became more vibrant in 1947. The plays of Anouilh and Sartre effectively conveyed authors’ intentions from their script. Playwrights such as Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, Artheur Adamov, and Samuel Beckett focused, to a great degree on the realization of text in performance. Though Genet’s *Les Bonnes* (*The Maids*) appeared in 1947 and Ionesco’s *La Cantatrice chauve* (*The Bald Soprano*) in 1949, public recognition of the new theatre came only in 1953 with Roger Blin’s production of Beckett’s *En attendant Godot*. The plays by Albert Camus illustrate his concept of revolt against the Absurd—*Caligula* teaches revolt against the constraints of human condition, *L’Etat de Siege* shows how dictatorship can be overthrown by collective revolt, on which *Les Justes* sets limits imposed by human solidarity, but *Le Malentendu*, with its contrived point of crisis, lends Existential theatre a heavily melodramatic air. Existentialist thinkers assumed that the world, however bleak, was a place which might receive order, and man a rational creature, who through understanding and an effort of will, could rise above the Absurd. But not everyone regarded these propositions as self-evident. To some the world was more truthfully captured by Strindberg, Kafka, or Antonin Artaud. The playwrights of the ‘New Theatre’ started with their firm conviction that nothing makes sense.

Most interesting of all, perhaps, was the revival of scripted drama towards the end of the century. During 1970s and 1980s the French stage had become more friendly to directors than to playwrights. However, with a shift from non-text to text-based plays,

individual voices began to emerge. Ministry of Culture subsidies also supported the work of Michel Vinaver and Bernard-Marie Koltes, whose plays are concerned with individuals struggling with institutional discourses—family, law, politics—of which contemporary consumer society and their own identities are woven. The quick exchanges of Vinaver’s play, *The Television Programme* (*L’Emission de television*) express the anxieties of a world in which realities are constantly shifting. Koltes’s work is especially concerned with the marginalized individuals and groups—immigrants, poor, criminals, or simply disaffected—who carry the weight of the postcolonial world. His *In the Solitude of Cotton Fields* (*Dans la solitude des champs de coton*) published in 1986, two years before his death from AIDS, is a brilliant two-actor play that embodies the central theme of his drama. It is now translated and performed across the world. Modern life for Koltes is focused in the deal, in confrontations and negotiations between unequal individuals like client and dealer, in struggles for power, which are also struggles for survival. Dealing is done in language and what is acted out on the Koltesian stage are the rhetorical performances by which people live—on the edge of darkness, at the frontiers of disorder. Close to the surface of the language of the deal and constantly piercing its skin is the violence that, in Koltes’s view constitutes the post-colonial world. It is perhaps, in the theatre that the value of current insights into the ludic and performative nature of the human condition can most easily be tested. At the close of the century, the most modern of creative writers, in this respect, remains Samuel Beckett.

In the field of poetry, the lyrical revival born of the war expired with it, and after 1945, poetry became dense, elliptical and difficult; Its language, often hermetic and esoteric further diminished readership. Mistrust of the poets deepened by abstruse commentaries by critics who explained ‘new novel’ but poetry, rather less well. The events of 1968 generated quantities of political doggerel but failed to build on the traditions of activist poetry. With greater emphasis placed on structuralism, linguistics and human sciences, a wave of intellectual formalism washed over poetic expression and poetry no longer remained a direct communication with a responsive public. Extremely varied in its subjects and forms it is not easy to summarize what poetry became after 1975 and between 1975 and 1988, the deaths of Perse, Jouve, Aragon, Michaux, Ponge, and Rene Char signaled the end of an era.

III

After the Protests of 1968, and into twenty-first century

In the early 1960s, free of colonial entanglements, France enjoyed a period of perceived increasing stability and affluence, managing for the time being to avoid facing the consequences of the processes of decolonization, which were already creating the conditions of far more radical socio-cultural change. In the end of the 1960s, however, French society grew tired of the heavy-handed, patriarchal Gaullist approach, and of the incompatibilities between modern life and old traditions and institutions. This led to the students’ revolts of May, 1968 with a variety of demands including educational, labor and governmental reforms; sexual and artistic freedom; and the end of the Vietnam War.

The student protest was quickly joined by labour movements and mass strikes erupted all over the country. In April 1969, de Gaulle resigned and was succeeded by Georges Pompidou. The events of May 1968 marked a watershed in the development of a radical ideology of revolutionary change in education, class, family and literature. In theater, the conception of “création collective” developed by Ariane Mnouchkine’s Théâtre du Soleil refused division into writers, actors, and producers: the goal was for total collaboration, for multiple points of view, for an elimination of separation between actors and the public, and for the audience to seek out their own truth.

One of the important facts of post-1968 change in the field of literature was, the birth of an overtly revolutionary “écriture féminine”. It found a focus in discussion groups and pressure lobbies. In 1974 it acquired its own publishing house, promoted by the feminist, **Editions des Femmes** which launched with flourish new women writers, such as Chantal Chawaf, Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray and others. Cixous worked in association with the major theatre director, Ariane Mnouchkine, who—as mentioned above—had harnessed the socially conscious ‘creation collective’ movement which begun in the 1960s. They made their mark in genres, which until then, had been almost exclusively male preserves: theatre, cinema, *bande dessinée* (comics and graphic literature), and the *roman policier* (detective novel). Women writers also maintained their presence in poetry (Joyce Mansour, Annie Salagar, Anne-Marie Albaich) but were most significant in renewing the traditions of fiction. Though some of them did bring a pronounced ‘female perspective’ to their work few were radical feminists. Indeed the textual innovations of the feminists avant-garde, like its theory, alienated the growing number of women writers. Big names like Marguerite Yourcenar or Marguerite Duras wrote from a broad and general perspective of *a writer*, for the benefit of both sexes, without narrow and specified distinction between male and female writing.

French literature, after 1968, became committed to the search for different themes, perspectives, and voices. The women’s movement, with its insistence on seeking out a diversity and proliferation of voices, was highly influential. Writing in French from France’s former colonies and immigrants became on the rise. Other influences include, in academia, the commitment of critical theory to the business of finding fresh angles and lines of investigation and, on the wider popular front, the exponential expansion of the media and its unprecedented demand for fresh stories, images, and forms. Within this growing commitment to the fashionable, the history of the novel became one of quickly displaced trends and meteoric rises (and disappearances). At the same time, several writers with established reputations continued to demonstrate their merit (Beauvoir, Duras, and Beckett) and were joined by others. Georges Perec, one of the best-known members of ‘OuLiPo’. He had first made his mark in 1965, with the novel *Les Choses: une histoire des années soixante* (*Things: A Story of the Sixties*), a devastatingly comic account of a young couple in thrall to consumerism and the rhetorics of advertising. He followed this with *La Disparition* (1969; *A Void*), a text composed entirely without using the letter *e*, and *La Vie: mode d’emploi* (1978; *Life: A User’s Manual*), his most celebrated work, constructed in the form of a variant on a mathematical puzzle. Michel Tournier caught the public imagination with his novels which catered a dual readership: Children as well as adults. *Vendredi; ou, les limbes du Pacifique* (1967; *Friday; or, The Other Island*) was followed by *Le Roi des Aulnes* (1970; *The Ogre*, also published as *The Erl-King*), an extraordinary combination of myth and parable. His short stories collected

in *Le Coq de bruyère* (1978; *The Fetishist and Other Stories*) and the novel *Gaspard, Melchior, Balthasar* (1980; *The Four Wise Men*) were subversive rewritings of ancient tales. Other writers provided more direct responses to the political and economic frustrations of the decade: J. M. G. le Clezio's apocalyptic fictions, for example, evoked the alienation of life in technological, consumerist society. In the 1970s writers began to confront the events of the Occupation. Perec's *W; ou, le souvenir d'enfance* (1975; *W; or, The Memory of Childhood*) is an autobiography formed of the alternating chapters of two seemingly unconnected texts, which eventually find their resolution in the concentration camp. The novels of Patrick Modiano used a nostalgic fascination with the war years to explore problems of individual and collective identities, responsibilities, and loyalties.

In the field of poetry, a new generation of poets appeared in the late seventies which manifested a concern for a very pronounced formalistic rigour, aiming at literariness. Born in the forties, directly marked by the disaster of humanism which went together with the second world conflict, the poets, Emmanuel Hocquard, Claude Royet-Journoud, Anne-Marie Albiach, Alain Veinstein, Jean Daive radicalized the trial against lyricism. They insisted that most values or truths coveted by writing were out of reach and that any attempt to grasp the being was, as such, doomed to failure. They evinced an awareness that poetry is nothing but a universe of enactments. They objected to all kind of transcendence and questioned both the subjective discourse and the myth of depth. For them, there was nothing underneath the words : neither truth nor a hidden divinity. Manifesting the desire to break up from European lyricism, they "froze" the notion of "speech". Their ultimate desire was to reach a cold writing, both dull and muffled which would put poetry in a state of hibernation and fix it as a pure work-upon-language. Claude Royet-Journoud clearly summarizes this bias with a single phrase (quoted by Jean-Michel Maulpoix in, *French Poetry Since 1950: Tendencies III* (1999): "I find it far more moving to say 'this arm is made of flesh' rather than to say 'the earth is blue like an orange'". The metaphorical is thus refused to the benefit of the literal. The poet manifests the desire for a flat language which is satisfied with observing that which takes place or that which remains. For Anne-Marie Albiach, poetry is "a practical task, since one has to know how". Writing is trying to find out more about the essence of writing. The latter is felt as a defeat of the self, an experience whose terms and stakes are being eschewed. Hence a multiplication of caesuraes within a poetics of broken speech and impossible articulation. Any musical search for alliterations or assonances is challenged. Emmanuel Hocquard speaks of a "negative modernity". For him, it means pursuing the adventure of modernity, but in defining poetry by a series of eliminations. He believes poetic writing to be conceived in terms of a "logical concrete knowledge". The task of the poet becomes an activity of "cleansing" his own language and "elucidating" his thought. He intends to clean language "out of its clichés, its stereotypes, and its over-obliging flaws and approximate formulations". In his poetical short stories, Emmanuel Hocquard develops a tabular writing, very much like photography, from which all metaphorical paraphernalia or pseudo-depth is excluded and which, nonetheless, asserts itself, upon the eye, the ear and the very sensitiveness as being "poetical", as a consequence of its arrangement, its grammar and its focus :

The wind, when it flattens the grass under the wind, when it sparkles underneath in a dull light, the scarecrow is in the middle of the song. Both vertical and hollow on the earth, it pertains some of the air. It becomes that

figure of the wind in the italicized fall of borrowed clothes collapsing into pieces. It bends right in the middle of what remains standing. Trees, a wall. He, a dug, a hollow idea, fright crossing through it.

Long ago, I was forbidden to have a slanting hand-writing. Hence why my body may have been tilting instead of my writing; hence why I remained bent amidst what stands erect, i.e. the letters of a Roman alphabet.

It is windy. The old grammar says that the wind is the real subject.
“He”, the apparent subject.”

The poem or the narrative here become an opportunity to ponder upon writing and language. The image is summoned by the poet only in order to question its own figure. Far from letting himself go to its lure, he uses it as an instrument.

Two other genres which remained popular throughout the second half of the century were, the historical novel and autobiographical writing. Marguerite Yourcenar, who in 1980 became the first woman elected to the Académie Française, had shown that the genre could move beyond escapism. Her *Mémoires d’Hadrien* (1951; *Memoirs of Hadrian*) and *L’Oeuvre au noir* (1968; *The Abyss*), evoking the making and unmaking of order in Europe, offered portraits of men who grappled with the limitations of their time. In addition to proffering rich evocations of the past, Yourcenar’s accounts had contemporary political resonance. Claude Simon’s works, *La Route des Flandres* (1960; *The Flanders Road*), *Histoire* (1967), and *Les Géorgiques* (1981; *The Georgics*), not only evoke deeply human experiences of loss and longing but also explore forms of memory and remembering and questions of subjectivity and historical truth. Along with historical fiction there was a corresponding interest in biography, autobiography, and memoirs. The novelists Julien Green, Julien Gracq, and Yourcenar were among those who began their writing career with publishing journals and memoirs. Nathalie Sarraute’s self-critical portrait, *L’Enfance* (1983, *Childhood*) proved extremely popular as a novel, and later as a film. Detective fiction, a genre sometimes exploited by the *nouveau roman*, had an outstanding practitioner in Georges Simenon, the inventor of Inspector Maigret, who during the 1970s also turned to autobiography. In Patrick Modiano’s *Rue des boutiques obscures* (1978; *The Street of Dark Shops*), a detective who has lost his memory looks for his identity in the darkness of the wartime past.

The closing years of the century were a time of adjustment to political, economic, and social changes. The slow recognition that France was no longer a major player in global politics was accompanied by a reassessment of the leading part the country still played on the cultural stage—not least in Europe, where cultural politics became increasingly important in France’s bid for power in the new European Union. Conservative commentators sometimes lamented that French culture, at times, appeared to be marginal and history to be “happening elsewhere” as a character remarks in Alain Jouffroy’s novel, *Charlotte and the Indiscretion* (*L’Indiscrétion faite à Charlotte*, 1980). On the far side of the distress caused by the gradual demise of the old regime, it was possible to see new and vital trends emerging. Pierre Nora, writing in 1992 the closing essay to his great project of national cultural commemoration, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (*Realms of Memory*), begun in 1984, was struck by the elegiac tone of the finished work

and commented that a different tone might have emerged if he had invited his contributors to focus on more marginal groups. Indeed, an important contribution was being made to French cultural life not only by Francophone writers from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean but by descendants of immigrants in France itself. Fiction, autobiography, and drama produced by the children of North African immigrants born and brought up in France (known as *les beurs*, from the word *arabe* in a form of French slang called *verlan*) began to find publishers and audiences from the early 1980s. Their insights into the tensions of cross-cultural identity and the patterns of life in the underprivileged working-class suburbs of Paris, Nancy, and Lyon began to enrich the cultural capital of a mainstream readership that was increasingly learning to see itself as formed in the cross-currents of internationalism and the anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, far-right National Front (Front National), as delineated in works such as Leïla Houari's *Zeïda de nulle part* (1985; "Zeïda from Nowhere") or her *Poème-fleuve pour noyer le temps présent* (1995; "Stream-of-Consciousness Poetry to Drown the Present In"). The French also began to come to terms with the Algerian conflict, as evidenced by the success in France of Albert Camus' posthumously published *Le Premier Homme* (1994; *The First Man*), an autobiographical novel based on his father's childhood in Algeria, in a working-class European colonist milieu. Assia Djebar, one of the turn of the century's outstanding novelists, is painfully positioned in terrain that is both European and transatlantic. Having established—in novels such as *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985; *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*)—her reputation as both ardent defender and critic of her native Algeria, which emerged from colonial oppression with gender repressions still intact, she divided her working life between Europe and the United States, producing fictions that look to the Algerian motherland but are also alert to the hierarchies of power on the frontiers of the new Europe, as in *Les Nuits de Strasbourg* (1997; "Strasbourg Nights").

In the field of prose fiction, Jean Echenoz's comic pastiches of adventure, detective, and spy stories pleased both critics and the reading public. New themes emerged in the terrain in between modes and disciplines. Photography and writing joined to produce the *photo-roman*, concerned with exploring the relationship between the image, especially images of the body, and the narrative work that goes into its construction and interpretation. The quality and variety of women's writing was outstanding. Social issues were addressed in the autobiographical fiction of Annie Ernaux, who, in *La Place* (1983; *Positions*, also published as *A Man's Place*) and *Une Femme* (1988; *A Woman's Story*), looked at the stresses between generations created by social change and changes of class allegiance. Ernaux's later writing was more directly personal: *L'Événement* (2000; *Happening*) is her account of an abortion she underwent in her early 20s. Christiane Rochefort's novel of child abuse, *La Porte au fond* ("The Door at the Back of the Room"), appeared in 1988. Hélène Cixous's feminist classic, *Le Livre de Prométhéa* (1983; *The Book of Promethea*)—learned, funny, sparkling, and innovative—achieved its writer's ambition to make a distinctive model of the desiring feminine subject, within but not consumed by the inherited forms of writing and culture. Marguerite Duras's autobiographical novels *L'Amant* (1984; *The Lover*) and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991; *The North China Lover*) voiced their author's own version of the feminine erotic. Monique Wittig stylized lesbian sadomasochism in her parodic *Virgile, Non* (1985; "Virgil, No"; Eng. trans. *Across the Acheron*). Another generation began publishing in the 1980s. Marie Redonnet's prose fictions sit at the edge of popular

culture, in a bizarre blend of realism and fantasy, engaging in confident negotiation with the myths and forms of both maternal and paternal inheritance. Chantal Chawaf's sensually charged prose offers a highly original version of the blood rhythms of the body in *Rédemption* (1989; Eng. trans. *Redemption*), a very new kind of vampire novel.

Writers offered radically different versions of life in the contemporary world. Sylvie Germain's magic realism works on landscapes steeped in history, where the past painfully but also productively encloses the present. Her novel *La Pleurante des rues de Prague* (1992; *The Weeping Woman on the Streets of Prague*) is a dreamlike, surreal evocation of a city haunted by its sorrowful history. *Tobie des marais* (1998; *The Book of Tobias*) reworks the apocryphal tale in a France that is simultaneously, and pleasingly, medieval and modern. Michel Houellebecq appears less pleased with the burden imposed on his present by the past, especially by the liberal generation of the 1960s, which he holds responsible for everything noxious in the modern world. The narrative personae of his highly successful novels *Extension du domaine de la lutte* (1994; *Whatever*) and *Les Particules élémentaires* (1998; *The Elementary Particles*, also published as *Atomised*) are splenetic victims of their own failure of nerve, attacking a society in their own image, narcissistic and world-weary. Marie Darrieussecq's *Truismes* (1996; *Pig Tales: A Novel of Lust and Transformation*) is a more dynamic novel; it is an imaginative political and moral satire depicting the blackly comic world of a young working woman with a highly materialistic lifestyle who begins to turn into a pig—and finds her transformation both appropriate and satisfying.

In the domain of poetry, Christian Prigent asked in his essay of 1996, what poets were good for in the modern world (“A quoi bon encore les poètes”). His work and that of such well-established figures as Philippe Jaccottet (*La Seconde Semailson* [1996; “The Second Sowing”]) were well-recognized at the turn of the century, and Michel Houellebecq published his collected poems (*Poésies*) in 2000. Martin Sorrell's bilingual anthology, *Elles* (1995; “They [the women]”), has shown the flourishing state of women's poetry. In it, Marie-Claire Bancquart, Andrée Chedid, and Jeanne Hyvrard offer their own insights into the problematic of gender roles and the challenge of finding a female poetic voice.

The relationship between literature and socio-political attitudes has been acutely important in the French society— as in varying degrees in the literature of any other society— introduction to French literature of any period is closely linked to the state of politics, ideology, and culture of that period in France. Instead of dedicating separate chapters to each of these facts, in this retrospective of the post-war fifty years of the previous century, we have tried to merge the two together, mentioning the impact of main historical events while summarizing the literary scene of the related period.

Jules Supervielle (1884 – 1960)

Born in Uruguay to French parents and orphaned before he was a year old, Supervielle grew up in Paris with his uncle and aunt. Though he was typically Spanish in evoking a cosmic brotherhood coupled with nostalgia for the rich landscape of South America, he published ten volumes of poetry written in French.

Jules Supervielle always kept away from Surrealism which was dominant in the first half of the twentieth century. Eager to propose a more human poetry and to rejoin the real world, Supervielle rejected automatic writing (that the Surrealists very quickly gave up themselves) and the dictatorship of the unconscious, without disavowing the assets of modern poetry since Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Apollinaire, like certain fundamental innovations of surrealism. Attentive to the universe which surrounded him, as he was to the phantoms of his interior world, he was one of the first to recommend this vigilance, this control that the following generations, moving away from the surrealist movement, put at the forefront. He anticipated the movements of the years 1945-50, dominated by the powerful personalities of Rene Char, Henri Michaux, St-John Perse or Francis Ponge. T.S. Eliot regarded him a major French poet of his generation, and Rilke called him "a great builder of bridges into space."

Supervielle's poems are sensitive, sometimes humorous, sometimes serious and a deep sense of melancholy underpins them, but his poetry invites reading and re-reading. His themes, generally, are the love of a lonely but fraternal man for the pampas and for the open spaces of his South American childhood and his nostalgia for a cosmic brotherhood of men. Many of his dream-like images of the sea, forests, the warming sun or horses stay in the mind. Some poems echo contemporary issues, both personal and environmental; and with their grounding in vivid imagery, unlike other more cerebral French poetry appeal to readers at large. In 'Prophecy' the poet imagines a future where, 'One day the Earth will be/ just a blind space turning, / night confused with day.' In his novels Supervielle allies fantasy and simplicity, and his plays constitute a complete escape into a land of fantasy.

Principal Works: Poetry: *Gravitations* (1925); *Le Forcat Innocent* (1930); *La Fable du Monde* (1938); *Poemes 1939-1945* (1946); *Oublieuse Memoire* (1949). *Jules Supervielle: Selected Writings*, New Directions, New York, 1967; *Homesick for the Earth: Selected Poems* tr by Moniza Alvi, Bloodaxe Books Paperback (1990); *Jules Supervielle: Selected Poems and Reflections on the Art of Poetry*, ed by George Bogin, SUN, New York, 1985. **Novels,** *The Kidnapper (Le Voleur d'enfants)* (1926); *The Child of the High Seas (L'Enfant de la haute mer)*, 1931); **Plays:** *The Beauty of the Wood (La Belle au bois)*, 1932) and *Robinson* (1949).

Poems:

Homage To Life

It's good to have chosen
A living home
And housed time

In a ceaseless heart
And seen my hands
Alight on the world,
As on an apple
In a little garden,
To have loved the earth,
The moon and the sun
Like old friends
Who have no equals,
And to have committed
The world to memory
Like a bright horseman
To his black steed,
To have given a face
To these words — woman, children,
And to have been a shore
For the wandering continents
And to have come upon the soul
With tiny strokes of the oars,
For it is scared away
By a brusque approach.
It is beautiful to have known
The shade under the leaves,
And to have felt age
Creep over the naked body,
And have accompanied pain
Of black blood in our veins,
And gilded its silence
With the star, Patience,
And to have all these words
Moving around in the head,
To choose the least beautiful of them
And let them have a ball,
To have felt life,
Hurried and ill loved,
And locked it up
In this poetry.

[tr by Kenneth Rexroth From Jules Supervielle: Selected Writings , New Directions 1967
rep in The Random House Book of Twentieth French Poetry ed by Paul Auster,1982 ©
New Directions 1967]

Rain and the Tyrants

I stand and watch the rain
Falling in pools which make
Our grave old planet shine;
The clear rain falling, just the same
As that which fell in Homer's time
And hat which dropped in Villon's day
Falling on mother and on child
As on the passive backs of sheep
Rain saying all it has to say
Again and yet again, and yet
Without the power to make less hard
The wooden heads of tyrants or
To soften their stone hearts,
And powerless to make them feel
Amazement as they ought;
A drizzling rain which falls
Across all Europe's map,
Wrapping all men alive
In the same moist envelope;
Despite the soldiers loading arms,
Despite the newspapers' alarms,
Despite all this, all that,
A shower of drizzling rain
Making the flags hang wet.

*[tr.by David Gascoyne From Selected Verse Translations, Oxford University Press, 1970
rep in
The Random House Book of Twentieth French Poetry ed by Paul Auster, 1982 © David
Gascoyne and Oxford University Press]*

Prophecy

One day the Earth will be only
A blind space turning,
Mingling night with day.
Under the great sky of the Andes
It will have no more mountains,
Not even a small ravine.

From all the houses of the world
Only one balcony will remain
And from the human map of the world

A sadness without bounds.
From the late Atlantic Ocean
A small taste of salt in the air,
One flying magical fish
Which will remember nothing of the sea.

From a carriage of 1905
(Four wheels and no road!)
Three young girls of that time
Remaining in the form of smoke
Will look out of the window
Believing Paris not far off
And they will smell nothing
But the smell of the sky which catches in your throat.

Where the forest was
A bird's song will rise up
Which no one will place,
Nor prefer, nor even hear,
Except God. When He listens,
He'll say: "It's a goldfinch!"

[*tr* by Wallace Fowlie From *Modern French Poets: Selections with translation*, ed by
Wallace Fowlie, Dover Publications Inc., 1955 ©1955 Wallace Fowlie]

François Mauriac (1885—1970)

François Mauriac was a French novelist, essayist, poet, playwright, journalist, and winner in 1952 of the Nobel Prize for Literature. He belonged to the lineage of French Catholic writers who examined the ugly realities of modern life in the light of eternity. His major novels—oooo—are sombre, austere psychological dramas set in an atmosphere of unrelieved tension. At the heart of every work Mauriac placed a religious soul grappling with the problems of sin, grace, and salvation. The Nobel Prize in Literature 1952 was awarded to François Mauriac "*for the deep spiritual insight and the artistic intensity with which he has in his novels penetrated the drama of human life*".

However, his 'religious' novels have been a puzzle to many critics, for they abound in evidences of the dark side of life, and their religious content is not directly apparent. For instance, *The Desert of Love* (1949; *Le Desert de l'amour*, 1925) portrays the triangle of a woman and her would-be lovers, father and son, whose 'unused' passion, an illusion of escape, turns into the desert in whose isolation the characters live their frustrated lives.

François Mauriac was born in Bordeaux. His father, a banker, died when he was eighteen months old, leaving his mother with five children, of which he was the youngest. François grew up in a closely sheltered world, first under the protection of his mother, later in a school run by the Marianists. He studied literature at Bordeaux and Paris but soon became an independent writer.

During the Second World War he lived in occupied territory, at his estate in Malagar and in Paris, and published *Le Cahier noir* (The Black Notebook) under the pseudonym Forez. After the war de Gaulle made him a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour. Apart from his many novels, Mauriac has also published several plays which have been produced by the Comédie Française, and was a distinguished journalist. He was elected to the *Académie française* in 1933.

Principal Works : *The Desert of Love* 1949, Awarded the Grand Prix de l'Académie française in 1926; *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, tr. 1947 and 2005; *Trois Récits* A volume of three stories; *That Which Was Lost*, 1951; *The Knot of Vipers*, tr. 1951; *The Frontenacs*, 1961; and *The Mask of Innocence*, 1953.

No tiniest stream of water flowed ...

The following extract from *Therese*, characteristic of Mauriac's high writing talent, expresses two essential aspects of the novel: the conflict of a solitary soul thirsty for affection, and a veritable *nostalgie* for purity.

From the darkness of the railway carriage she gazed at that unsullied season of her past-unsullied, but lit by a vague and flickering happiness. Fitful and unsure that happy time had been, while as yet she knew nothing of the part she would be called upon to play upon the world's stage. As she sat with Anne on a red rep sofa with a photograph album propped against her knees, no hint had come to warn her that the portion reserved for her in life's lottery would be a darkened drawing-room set in the merciless glare of summer heat. Whence had come all that happiness? Anne did not share a single one of Therese's preferences. She hated reading, loved only sewing, chattering, and laughing. She had not one idea in her head, while Therese devoured with indiscriminate avidity the novels of

Paul de Kock, the *Causeries de Lundi*, *L'Histoire du consulat*, and anything else that she could find lying about in the cupboards of an old country house. They had not a taste in common except that of being together through those afternoons when the blazing sky laid siege to human beings barricaded in the half-light of their shrouded rooms. Now and again Anne would get up and go to see whether the heat had abated. But through the half-opened shutters the blinding glare would pounce like a great stream of molten metal, till it almost burned the carpet, and all must be again shut tight while human beings went once more to earth.

Even at dusk, when the sun had come so near its setting that only the very lowest sections of the pine trunks were reddened with its light, and a belated cicada was still scraping away for dear life almost at ground-level, there was still an airless heat beneath the oaks. The two girls would lie at full length on the ground as though on the shores of a lake. Great storm clouds hinted at shapes which formed only to change almost at once and vanish. No sooner had Therese caught a glimpse of the winged woman whom Anne had seen pictured in the sky than she was gone again, and nothing was left but what the younger girl described as 'a funny sort of sprawling animal'.

When September came they could venture out after luncheon and wander through the parched land. No tiniest stream of water flowed at Argelouge. Only by walking a long way over the sandy heath could they hope to reach the head-waters of the rivulet which went by the name of La Hure. It carved a myriad course through low-lying meadows laced with alder-roots. Their feet turned numb in the ice-cold current, and then, no sooner dry, were burning hot again. They would seek the shelter of the huts set up in October for the guns who went out after duck. It served them as the shuttered drawing-room had done earlier in the year. They had nothing to say to one another. No word passed. The minutes flew as they lay there innocently resting. They were as still and motionless as the sportsman who, spying a flight of birds, imposes silence with a movement of the hand. To have stirred so much as a finger, so it seemed to them, would have set scurrying in fright their chaste, their formless happiness. It was Anne, always, who moved first – eager to be at the business of killing larks at sundown, and Therese, though she hated the sport, would follow, so hungry was she for the other's company. In the hall Anne would take down the rook-rifle which fired so light a charge that there was no recoil. Her friend, standing on a bank, would watch her in the field of rye, aiming at the sun as though in the readiness to shoot it from the sky. At such moments she had always put her fingers in her ears. High in the blue, the bird's shrill song of rapture broke and dropped to silence, and the girl with the gun would pick up the wounded body, tenderly pressing it in her hand, kissing the still warm feathers, before she strangled it.

'Coming tomorrow?'

'Oh no-not every day.'

She did not want to see her every day-a sensible resolve which called for no argument. It would have seemed pointless to Therese to make a protest. Anne preferred not to come. There was no particular reason why she should not, but what was the point in their seeing one another every day? If they did, she had said, they would end by getting bored. To which Therese replied: 'Of course we should-you mustn't make a duty of it. Come when you feel like it, when you have nothing better to do. ...' And her schoolgirl friend would bicycle away down the darkening road, ringing the bell.

Then Thérèse would go back to the house - the farm labourers greeting her from afar, the children shyly keeping their distance. It was the hour at which the sheep lay dotted in the oak-trees' shade. Suddenly at the shepherd's call, they would huddle into a group. Her aunt would be waiting for her at the front-door, talking unceasingly, as deaf folk do, to keep the girl from speaking to her. Why so restless? She had no wish to read, no wish to do anything in particular, only to resume her aimless wandering. 'Don't go far; dinner's just ready.' She would find her way back to the road - empty now as far as the eyes could reach. She would hear the gong sound from the kitchen entrance. Perhaps, this evening, they would have to light the lamp. The silence was no deeper for the deaf woman sitting motionless with her hand folded in her lap than for the girl with the faintly hollowed cheeks.

[*Thérèse* tr. by Gerard Hopkins, Penguin Classics, 2002 (first pub by Penguins in 1959).
© Eyre Methuen, 1972 pp. 27-29]

Towards the unknown

This is how the novel ends. Therese has tried her last explanation with her husband to no success. Leaving her alone in the Café he starts back for Argelouse. Left in a strange crowd, in a semiconscious state she tries to take a kind of 'plunge':

He hailed a taxi, and turned his head as he was getting into it to tell her that he had paid for their drinks.

For a long time she sat staring at the drop of port in the bottom of Bernard's glass; then, once more, gave her whole attention to the passers-by. Some of the seemed to be waiting, walking up and down the pavement. There was a woman who twice turned and smiled at her (a working-girl, or someone got up to look like a working-girl?). It was the hour of the day at which the dressmakers' workrooms empty. Thérèse had no intention of leaving. She felt neither bored nor sad. She decided that she would not pay Jean Azévédo a visit that afternoon-and heaved a sigh of relief. She did not want to see him, to embark on another conversation, another endless effort to find the right words. She knew Jean Azévédo, but the kind of people she wanted to meet she did not know. Of one thing only was she certain, that they would not call on her for words. No longer did she feel afraid of loneliness. It was enough that she need not move. Had she been lying on the heathland to the south, her body would have been a magnet for ants and dogs. Here, too, she felt herself already at the heart of obscure ebb and flow. She was hungry. She got up. In the window of the *Old England* tea-shop she saw herself reflected, and realized how young she was. The close-fitting travelling suit became her well. But those years at Argelouse had left their mark upon her face. She looked worn and haggard. She took note of her short nose and too prominent cheek-bones. 'I'm not an old woman yet', she thought. She lunched (as so often in her dreams) in the rue Royale. Why go back to the hotel? She had no wish to. The half-bottle of Pouilly she had drunk filled her with a warm sense of wellbeing. She asked for some cigarettes. A young man at the next table snapped his lighter and held it out to her. She smiled. Difficult to believe that only an hour ago she had been longing to drive with Bernard along the road to Villandraut in the evening light between the ominous pines! What did it matter- the sort of country one was fond of, pines or maples, sea or plain? Life alone was interesting, people of flesh and blood. 'It is not

the bricks and mortar that I love, not even the lectures and museums, but the living human forest that fills the streets, the creatures torn by passions more violent than any storm. The moaning of the pines at Argelouse in the darkness of the night thrilled me only because it had an almost human sound!

She had drunk a little and smoked much. She smiled to herself, as though she were happy. Very carefully she set about touching up her cheeks and her lips, and then walked casually out into the street.

[*Thérèse* tr. by Gerard Hopkins, Penguin Classics, 2002 (first pub by Penguins in 1959).
© Eyre Methuen, 1972 pp. 114-115]

Louise Aragon (1887-1982)

Born 'Louis Andrieux' Louis Aragon was a French poet, novelist, essayist, editor, a long-time member of the Communist Party and a member of the Academie Goncourt.

Aragon was born and died in Paris. He was raised by his mother and maternal grandmother, believing them to be his sister and foster mother, respectively. His biological father, Louis Andrieux, a former senator for Forcalquier, was married and thirty years older than Aragon's mother, whom he seduced when she was seventeen. Aragon's mother passed Andrieux off to her son as his godfather. Aragon was only told the truth at the age of 19, as he was leaving to serve in the First World War. Andrieux's refusal or inability to recognize his son would influence Aragon's poetry later on.

Having been involved in Dadaism from 1919 to 1924, he became a founding member of Surrealism in 1924, with Andre Breton and Philippe Soupault under the pen-name "Aragon". In 1931 he broke with the Surrealists and joined the Communist Party to which he remained closely attached. In 1933 he began to write for the party's newspaper, *L' Humanite*, and also became along with Paul Nizan editor secretary of the journal *Commune*. Taken prisoner by the Germans during World War II he escaped to the Unoccupied Zone and became one of the leading figures in the Resistance. Much of his finest poetry was written during this period. He was awarded Lenin Peace Prize in 1954 and for many years served as director of *Les Lettres francaises*. In addition to his abundant output as a poet, Aragon has written novels, essays, a long study of Matisse, a translation of Lewis Carroll and journalism. As a novelist he encompasses the whole ethos of the twentieth century— surrealist novel, socialist realism, realism, and nouveau roman. Indeed he was one of the founding personalities of the novel of his time. A good deal of his fiction has been translated into English, his countless poems have been set to music and have become popular as songs. In 2010, La Poste (French Post Office) issued 3 stamps honoring Louis Aragon.

Principal works: *Feu de joie* (1919); *Le Mouvement perpétuel* (1926); *Persécuté persécuteur* (1930–1931); *Le Crève-Cœur*, (1941); *Cantique à Elsa* (1942); *Les Yeux d'Elsa*, (1942); *Le Musée Grevin* (1943); *La Diane française* (1945); *Le Roman inachevé*, (1956); *Elsa* (1959); *Les Poètes* (1960); *Le Fou d' Elsa* (1963); *Il ne m'est Paris que d'Elsa* (1964); *Elegie a Pablo Neruda* (1966); *Les Beau Quartiers* (1936, Renaudot Prize winner); *Aurelien* (1944); *La Semaine Sainte* (1958) published in English in 1959 as *Holy Week*; and *La Defence de l' Infini* (1986).

Poems:

The Lilacs and the Roses

O months of blossoming months of transformations,
May without a cloud and June stabbed to heart,
I shall not ever forget the lilacs or the roses
Nor those the Spring has kept folded away apart.

I shall not ever forget the tragic sleight-of-hand,

The cavalcade, the cries, the crowd, the sun,
The lorries loaded with love, the Belgian gifts ,
The air that quivers the road this buzzing of bees
The road humming with bees, the atmosphere that spun,
The feckless triumphing before the battle,
The scarlet blood the scarlet kiss bespoke
And those about to die bolt upright in the turrets
Smothered in lilac by a drunken folk.

I shall not ever forget the flower-gardens of France—
Illuminated scrolls from eras more than spent—
Nor forget the trouble of dusk, the sphinx-like silence,
The roses all along the way we went;
Flowers that gave the lie to soldiers passing
On winds offear, a fear importunate as a breeze,
And gave the lie to the lunatic push-bikes and the ironic
Guns and the sorry rig of the refugees.

But what I do not know is why this whirl
Of memories always comes to the same point and drops
At Sainte-Marthe ... a general ... a black pattern ...
A Norman villa where the forest stops;
All is quiet here, the enemy rests in the night
And Paris has surrendered, so we have just heard—
I shall never forget the lilacs or the roses
Nor those two loves whose loss we have incurred:

Bouquets of the first day, lilacs, Flanders lilacs,
Soft cheeks of shadow rouged by death—and you,
Bouquets of the Retreat, delicate roses tinted
Like far-off conflagrations: roses of Anjou.

[tr by Louis MacNeice from *The Collected Poems of Louis MacNeice*, Oxford University Press, 1966 rep in *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Paul Auster, 1984 © Oxford University Press]

THE UNOCCUPIED ZONE

Cross-fade of grief to nothingness,
The beat of the crushed heart grew less,
The coals grew white and lost their gleam;
Drinking the wine of summer's haze
In a rose-castle in Correze
I changed this August into dream.

What could it be that of a sudden
Brought an aching sob in the garden,
A voice of low reproach in the air?
Ah not so soon, ah do not wake me;
This merest snatch of song must take me
Out of the barracks of despair.

I thought for a moment that I heard
In the middle of the corn a blurred
Noise of arms—a theme that scars.
Whence did this theme return to me?
Not carnations, not rosemary
Had thus retained the scent of tears.

By hook or crook I got relief
From the dark secret of my grief
When lo—the shadows redivide;
My eyes were only on the track
Of apathy that looks not back
When September downed outside.

My love, within your arms I lay
When someone hummed across the way
An ancient song of France; my illness
At last came clear to me for good—
That phrase of song like a naked foot
Rippled the green waters of stillness.

[tr by Louis MacNeice from *The Collected Poems of Louis MacNeice*, Oxford University Press, 1966 rep in *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Paul Auster, 1984 © Oxford University Press]

TAPESTRY OF THE GREAT FEAR

This landscape, masterpiece of modern terror
Has sharks and sirens, flying fish and swordfish
And hydra-headed birds like Lerna's hydra
What are they writing, white on blue in the sky?
Skimmers of earth, steel birds that stitch the air
To the stone houses, strident comet-birds
Enormous wasps like acrobatic matchsticks
That deck the flaming walls with primroses

Or flights of pink flamingos in the sun
Kermess in Flanders, witches at their Sabbath
On a broomstick the Messerschmitt rides down
Darkness at noon, night of the new Walpurgis
Apocalyptic time. Space where fear passes
With all its baggage train of tears and trembling
Do you recognize the fields, the birds of prey?
The steeple where the bells will never ring
The farm carts draped with bedclothes. A tame bear
A shawl. A dead man dropped like an old shoe
Hands clutching the torn belly. A grandfather's clock
Roaming herds of cattle, carcasses, cries
Art bronzes by the roadside. Where will you sleep?
Children perched on the shoulders of strange men
Tramping off somewhere, while the gold of the barns
Gleams in their hair. Ditches where terror sits
The dying man in the cart who keeps asking
For herb tea, and complains of a cold sweat
A hunchbacked woman with a wedding dress
A birdcage that passed safely through the flames
A sewing machine. An old man. I can't walk
Just a step more. No, let me die here, Marie
Evening soars down with silent wingbeats, joining
A velvet Breughel to this Breughel of hell.

[tr by Malcolm Cowley from Aragon: Poet of the French Resistance, ed by Hannah Josephson & Malcolm Cowley. Duell, Sloan, & Pearce, 1945 rep in The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry ed. Paul Auster, 1984. © Malcolm Cowley]

The Embrace

A D 1905 Pablo
 Picasso how old
Was he then twenty-three twenty-
 four it was spring
or perhaps autumn What matters is that here there reigns
The light of youth A room for
Entwined lovers needs nothing but a
Bed

It was
 twelve years later that I arrived
Boulevard Saint-Germain 202 to visit Guillaume

St.-John Perse (1887– 1975)

Saint-John Perse is the pseudonyms of Marie-Rene Alexis Saint-Leger Leger. He was born on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe to a family descended from centuries past French settlers; completed his education in France, joined diplomatic service in 1914. Served in a variety of diplomatic positions from 1916 onwards; was appointed Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs in 1933. As the Second World War embroiled France refusing to represent the Vichy government that urged collaboration with Nazi Germany he resigned from his post and fled to the United States where he managed to get a job at the Library of Congress as advisor to French Literature and lived there until 1967. He gained considerable respect among the American poets. T.S. Eliot translated *Anabasis* and Archibald MacLeish wrote a substantive introduction to a translation of *Eloges*.

His poetry is distinguished by an epic tone, a wide and exotic vocabulary, and a highly idiosyncratic use of syntax. He draws his themes from the vast matter suggested by man's discovery of the universe and of himself. As such the themes of space, movement, migration are permanent features of his work. Although he did not associate with the Surrealists, there is a surreal, dreamlike quality to his best work. He published *Exil* between 1941 and 1944, and *Vents* in 1945. With *Amers* (1957) Perse's poetry took a new turn: the image of a man reconciled with his desires. The poet of great elemental forces became more human and his poems, without losing any of their beauty or breadth, gained in unity. In 1959 St. John Perse received the Grand Prix National des Lettres and in 1960 the Nobel Prize for literature "for the soaring flight and evocative imagery of his poetry."

Principal collections of poetry: *Eloges* (1911), *Anabase* (1924), *Exil suivi de Poemes a l'etrangere*, *Pluie*, *Neige* (1946), *Vents* (1953), *Chronique* (1960), *Oiseaux* (1962), *Poesie* (1963), *Pour Dante* (1965). *Eloges and Other Poems* / translated by Louise Varèse, New York: Norton, 1944; *Anabasis* tr by T. S. Eliot, London, Faber, 1930; *Exile and Other Poems*, tr by Denis Devlin, New York, Pantheon, 1949; *Winds* tr by Hugh Chisholm, New York, Pantheon, 1953; *Seamarks*, tr by Wallace Fowlie, New York, Pantheon, 1958; *Birds*, tr by Robert Fitzgerald, New York, Pantheon, 1966; *St.-John Perse : Collected Poems*, tr by W. H. Auden and others, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

Poems:

Song

I have halted my horse by the tree of the doves, I whistle a note so sweet, shall
t rivers break faith with their banks? (living leaves in the morning fashioned in
glory) ...

* * *

And not that a man be not sad, but arising before day and bidding circum-
spectly in the communion of an old tree, leaning his chin on the last fading star,
he beholds at the end of the fasting sky great things and pure that unfold to

delight

* * *

I have halted my horse by the dove-moaning tree, I whistle a note more sweet... . Peace to the dying who have not seen this day! But tidings there are of my brother the poet: once more he has written a song of great sweetness. And some there are who have knowledge thereof... .

[tr by T.S. Eliot from *St-John Perse: Collected Poems*, © Princeton University Press, 1971© Princeton University Press]

Nocturne

Now! They are ripe, these fruits of a jealous fate. From our dream grown, on our blood fed, and haunting the purple of our nights, they are the fruits of long concern, they are the fruits of long desire, they were our most secret accomplices and, often verging upon avowal, drew us to their ends out of the abyss of our nights Praise to the first dawn, now they are ripe and beneath the purple, these fruits of an imperious fate.—We do not find our liking here.

Sun of being, betrayal! Where was the fraud, where was the offense? Where was the fault and where the flaw, and the error, which is the error? Shall we trace the theme back to its birth? Shall we relive the fever and the torment?... Majesty of the rose, we are not among your adepts: our blood goes to what is bitterer, our care to what is more severe, our roads are uncertain, and deep is the night out of which our gods are torn. Dog roses and black briars populate for the shores of shipwreck.

Now they are ripening, these fruits of another shore. “Sun of being, shield me!”—turncoat’s words. And those who have seen him pass will say: who was that man, and which is his home? Did he go alone at dawn to show the purple of his nights? ... Sun of being, Prince and Master! Our works are scattered, our tasks without honour and our grain without harvest: the binder of sheaves awaits, at the evening’s ebb.—Behold, they are dyed with our blood, these fruits of a stormy fate.

At the gate of a binder of sheaves life goes, without hatred or ransom.

[tr by Richard Howard, *Song for an Equinox*, Princeton University Press, 1977 © Princeton University Press, 1977]

ANABASIS

VII

We shall not dwell forever in these yellow lands, our pleasure ...

The Summer vaster than the Empire hangs over the tables of space several terraces of climate. The huge earth rolls on its surface over-flowing its pale ambers under the ashes.—Sulphur colour, honey colour, colour of immortal

things, the whole grassy earth taking light from the straw of last winter—and from the green sponge of a lonely tree the sky draws its violet juices.

A place of stone of quartz! Not a pure grain in the wind's barbs. And light like oil.—From the crack of my eye to the level of my hills I join myself, I know the stones gillstained, the swarms of silence in the hives of light; and my heart gives heed to a family of crickets... .

Milch-camels, gentle beneath the shears, sewn with mauve scars, let the hills march forth under the facts of the harvest sky—let them march in silence over the pale incandescence of the plain; and kneeling at last, in the fantasy of dreams, there where the peoples annihilate themselves in the dead power of earth.

These are the great quiet lines that disperse in the fading blue of doubtful vines. The earth here and there ripens the violets of storm; and these sand-smokes that rise over dead river courses, like the skirts of centuries on their route ...

Lower voice for the dead, lower voice by day. Such mildness in the heart of man, can it fail to find its measure? ... "I speak to you my soul!— my soul darkened by the horse smell!" and several great land birds, voyaging westwards, make good likeness of our seabirds.

In the east of so pale a sky, like a holy place sealed by the blind man's linen, calm clouds arrange themselves, where the cancers of camphor and horn revolve ... Smoke which a breath of wind claims from us! The earth poised tense in its insect barbs, the earth is brought to bed of wonders! ...

And at noon, when the jujube tree breaks the tombstone, man closes his lids and cools his neck in the ages... . Horse-tramplings of dreams in the place of dead powders, O vain ways swept away by breath, to our feet! where find, where find the warriors who shall watch the stream in their nuptials?

At the sound of great waters on march over the earth, all the salt of the earth shudders in dream. And sudden, ah sudden, what would these voices with us? Levy a wilderness of mirrors on the bone yard of streams, let them appeal in the course of ages! Erect stones on my fame, erect stones to silence; and to guard these places, cavalcades of green bronze on the great causeways! ...

(The shadow of a great bird falls on my face.)

[from *Anabasis* tr by T. S. Eliot Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1938 © Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.]

WINDS

And you can say to me: Where did you prize that out? Texts passed on in plain language! Versions given in dual aspects! ... You yourself headstone and cornerstone! ... And for your latest deceptions, I muster you to litigation in your reclining chair, Oh Poet, Oh bilingualist, double-pronged betwixt all things, and you yourself litigation between all things litigious--man molested by god! Man speaking equivocally! ... ah! like

a man deceived in a melee of wings and bristles, amidst cockfighting rough-legged buzzards!

And thou, bottommost Sun, ferocity of the Being sans eyelids, just fix your puma's eye on this crust of precious stones! ... Hazardous the enterprise where I have taken the arc of this song ... And there is still suspicious matter. But the Wind, ah! the Wind! Its power is without design and it is in love with itself.

We pass, and our shadows. Great works, page by page, are composed in silence in the lairs of the future, in the blear-eyed blind broodings. There we pick up our new writings, in pages stacked into cleaving schists....

[from **WINDS (VENTS)**, Part II, Canto 6, tr by Christopher Fulkerson © 2012 by Christopher Fulkerson]

SNOWS

And then came the snows, the first snows of absence, on the great linens of dream and reality interwoven; and all affliction lifted from men of memory, there was a freshness of linen cloths at our temples. And it was at morning, beneath the grey salt of dawn, a little before the sixth hour, as in a chance haven, a place of grace and of mercy for releasing the swarms of the great odes of silence.

And all night long, unknown to us, under this lofty feat of feathers, bearing aloft the souls' vestiges, the souls' burden, lofty pumice stone cities bored through by luminous insects had not ceased growing, transcendent, forgetful of their weight. And those alone knew something of it, whose memories are uncertain, whose stories aberrant. What part the mind played in these notable things, that we know not.

None has surprised, none has known, at the highest stone frontal, the first alighting of this silken hour, the first light touch of this thing, fragile and so trifling, like a fluttering of eyelashes. On bronze revetments and on soaring chromium steel, on heavy blocks of mute porcelain and on thick glass tiles, on rocket of black marble and on white metal spur, none has surprised, none has tarnished

that mist of breath at its birth like the first shiver of a sword bared... . It snowed, and behold we shall tell the wonder of it : how dawn silent in its feathers, like a great fabulous owl under the breath of the spirit, swelled out in its white dahlia body. And from all sides there came upon us marvel and festival. And let there be salutation upon the surface of the terraces, where the Architect, that summer, showed us the eggs of nighthawks!

[tr by Denis Devlin, From, *St. John Perse : Collected Poems*, Bollingen Series No. LXXXVII, Princeton University Press, 1971 © Princeton University Press]

Céline, Louis-Ferdinand (1894 – 1961)

Louis-Ferdinand Céline was a French novelist, pamphleteer, and physician. Born Louis-Ferdinand Destouches in Courbevoie, France, Céline was an only child raised by his mother, a lace merchant, and father, an insurance businessman. *Céline* was the first name of his grandmother which he adopted as his pen name and is popularly known by it.

Céline was educated at local schools and, during his early adolescence, was sent abroad to study in England and Germany, where it was hoped he would acquire marketable language skills for a business career. After working a series of odd jobs, in 1912 he enlisted in the French calvary and attained the rank of sergeant. During the First World War, Céline sustained serious arm and head wounds in the line of duty, for which he bestowed a medal of honor. He was he was reassigned to the French consulate in London in 1915 where he met and unofficially married his first wife, Suzanne Nebout, a barmaid. Upon his discharge from the military in 1916, Céline abandoned London and his wife for West Africa, where he worked for a trading company in Cameroon, returned to France the next year after contracting malaria and dysentery. Céline worked for the Rockefeller Foundation as a traveling lecturer on tuberculosis in 1918 and the next year began his medical studies at the University of Rennes where he married Edith Folle. Céline completed his medical degree in 1924. The following year he, once again left his wife and daughter to work as a doctor for the League of Nations, a position that took him to Africa, Canada, Cuba, and the United States. In 1928 he resettled in Clichy, France, where for the next decade he worked as a physician for the poor, in private practice and at a local clinic, and began to write.

Céline had published his first novel, *Journey to the End of the Night* in 1932 which won him instant acclaim and a nomination for the prestigious Goncourt Prize which he did not win owing to Jury politics. In 1936 he published *Death on the Installment Plan* and the same year traveled to Russia to collect his royalties. Reacting strongly against the hypocrisy and exploitation of the communist system he denounced it in his first polemical tract *Mea Culpa* in 1936. During the Second World War, Céline worked as a doctor on a French arms transport ship, published the first volume of *Guignol's Band* (1944), and contributed writings to collaborationist journals under the Nazi Occupation of France. Labeled a traitor and fearful of reprisal from the Resistance, Céline fled France in 1944. In 1951 although the French court found Céline guilty of treason, the military tribunal granted him amnesty, whereupon he returned to France and settled in the Paris suburb of Meudon. During the remainder of his life, Céline practiced medicine among the poor and continued to write.

Considered among the first rank of twentieth-century French novelists, Céline is regarded as a highly radical literary innovator and one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century, developing a new style of writing that modernized both French and world literature. His first two novels, *Journey to the End of the Night* (*Voyage au bout de la nuit*) and *Death on the Installment Plan* (*Mort à crédit*) earned immediate critical admiration and established his reputation as a daring literary innovator and iconoclast. Distinguished for his acerbic misanthropy, black humor, and apocalyptic vision of modern civilization, Céline broke from conventional French literature with his "style télégraphique," a fragmented, elliptical prose style infused with convulsive obscenity, neologism, lower-class slang, and delirious diatribe. Though condemned as a vehement anti-Semite and Nazi collaborator, the startling intensity and nihilism of his early novels

exerted a pervasive and lasting influence on contemporary European and American literature.

Principal works: *Journey to the End of the Night* (*Voyage au bout de la nuit*, 1932); *The Church* (*L'Église*, 1933); *Death on Credit* aka *Death on the Installment Plan* (US), (*Mort à crédit*, 1936); *Fable for Another Time* (*Féerie pour une autre fois*, 1952); *Conversations with Professor Y* (*Entretiens avec le Professeur Y*, 1955); *Castle to Castle* (*D'un château l'autre*, 1957); *Rigadoon* (*Rigodon*, 1969).

Celebration of the individual human spirit struggling to survive in a world obsessed with its destruction:

Based on Céline's escape from France to Denmark after the invasion of Normandy, *Rigadoon* explores the ravages of war and its aftermath. Often comic and always angry, the first-person autobiographical narrator, with his wife and their cat in tow, takes the reader with him on his flight from Paris to Denmark after finding himself on the losing side of World War II. The train rides that encompass the novel are filled with madness and mercy, as Céline, a physician, aids refugees while ignoring his own medical needs.

Getting lost again! back to business! ... I was telling you that this bridge was shivering. I'd even say trembling! ... and that bridge was no fluff, a giant structure of girders and arches ... it didn't seem possible ... but it was! ... just from the blast! a regular jig and us out there enjoying the view of those flowering bombs! ... violet! red! yellow! ... at the bottom of the chasm ... in the canal for sure! Some punishment those subs must be taking! ... and talk about whirlwinds ... give you the staggers! ... but what about our little slobberpusses? ... every reason to worry ... maybe they'd crossed the bridge, maybe they were playing on the other side ... the trouble with those kids wasn't just that they were deaf but that nothing scared them, they were used to bombs and thunders, they'd been through it not once but a hundred times ... as a matter of fact ... they hadn't crossed over! ... there they were on the bridge. I could see them, playing tag, catching, flopping, catching again, trying to push each other off ... the explosions didn't bother them at all ... I'd never seen them so gay ... playing tricks, tripping each other up ... I couldn't go any further, neither could Lili ... and besides, you should have seen the way the bridge was jumping ... so were the rails and our flatcars ...and bam! ... coming down again! ... the whole thing was like a roller coaster ... naturally we're deaf ... like the kids ... from the explosions, the hurricanes of bombs ... more than anybody's ears can take, or his head ... or my head, you can imagine! I won't start on that again, or the brick either ... I can still see that other engineer flying into the canal ... with his open razor! ... he was going to shave ... the one that's left isn't coming ... he'd promised ...

he's rummaging for a bottle.....on his knees in our tarp.....I call him.....hey!.....hier!

[*Rigadoon* tr by Ralph Manheim, Delacorte Press, New York, 1974]

The story of *Journey to the End of the Night* is divided into sequences of uneven length. It begins with the first World War and finishes about ten years later after the 1918 Armistice. In the manner of picaresque novels the author takes his anti-hero to all four corners of the world governed by chance and co-incidences.

The War: The novel opens on a conversation between two students—Bardamu and Arthur Ganate—on the terrace of a Café. The narrator has just read a revengeful prayer written by him, to Arthur:

“Your little piece doesn’t hold water,” he says. “I’m for the established order, and I’m not interested in politics. What’s more, the day my country asks me to shed my blood, it’ll find me ready, and no slacker.” That’s what he said.

It so happened that the war was creeping up on us without our knowing it, and something was wrong with my wits. That short but animated discussion had tired me out. Besides, I was upset because the waiter had sort of called me a piker on account of the tip. Well, in the end Arthur and I made up. Completely. We agreed about almost everything.

“It’s true,” I said, trying to be conciliatory. “All in all, you’re right. But the fact is we’re all sitting in a big gallery, pulling at the oars with all our might. You can’t tell me different! ... Sitting on nails and pulling like mad. And what do we get for it? Nothing! Thrashings and misery, hard words and hard knocks. We’re workers, they say. Work, they call it! That’s the crummiest part of the whole business. We’re down in the hold, heaving and panting, stinking and sweating our balls off, and meanwhile! Up on deck in the fresh air, what do you see?! Our masters having a fine time with beautiful pink and perfumed women on their laps. They send for us, we’re brought up on deck. They put on their top hats and give us a big spiel like as follows: “You no-good swine! We’re at war! Those stinkers in Country No. 2! We’re going to board them and cut their livers out! Let’s go! Let’s go! We’ve got everything we need on board! All together now! Let’s hear you shout so the deck trembles: ‘Long live Country No. 1!’ So you’ll be heard for miles around. The man that shouts the loudest will get a medal and a lollipop! Let’s go! And if there’s anybody that doesn’t want to be killed on the sea, he can go and get killed on land, it’s even quicker!”

“That’s the way it is exactly,” said Arthur, suddenly willing to listen to reason.

But just then, who should come marching past the café where we’re sitting but a regiment with the colonel up front on his horse, looking nice and friendly, a fine figure of a man! Enthusiasm lifted me to my feet.

“I’ll just go see if that’s the way it is!” I sing out to Arthur, and off I go to enlist, on the double.

“Ferdinand!” he yells back. “Don’t be an ass!” I suppose he was nettled by the effect my heroism was having on the people all around us.

It kind of hurt my feelings the way he was taking it, but that didn’t stop me. I fell right in. “Here I am,” I says to myself, “and here I stay.”

I just had time to call out to Arthur: “All right, you jerk, we’ll see”-before we turned the corner. And there I was with the regiment, marching behind the colonel and his band. That’s exactly how it happened.

We marched a long time. There were streets and more streets, and they were all crowded with civilians and their wives, cheering us on, bombarding us with flowers from café terraces, railroad stations, crowded churches. You never saw so many patriots in all your life! And then there were fewer patriots ... It started to rain, and then there were still fewer and fewer, and not a single cheer, not one.

Pretty soon there was nobody but us, we were all alone. Row after row, The music had stopped. “Come to think of it,” I said to myself, when I saw what was what, “this is no fun anymore! I’d better try something else!” I was about to clear out. Too late! They’d quietly shut the gate behind us civilians. We were caught like rats.

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“Is that all?”

Our Germans squatting at the end of the road had just changed instruments. Now they were having their fun with a machine gun, sputtering like handfuls of matches, and all around us flew swarms of angry bullets, as hostile as wasps.

The man finally managed to articulate a few words:

“Colonel, sir, Sergeant Barousse has been killed.”

“So what?”

“He was on his way to meet the bread wagon on the Etrapes road. Sir.”

“So what?”

“He was blown up by a shell!”

“So what, dammit!”

“That’s what, colonel, sir.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes, sir. that’s all, colonel, sir.”

“What about the bread?” the colonel asked.

That was the end of the dialogue, because, I remember distinctly, he barely had time to say “What about the bread?” That was all. After that there was nothing but flame and noise. The kind of noise you wouldn’t have thought possible. Our eyes, ears, nose, and mouth were so full of that noise I thought it was all over and I’d turned into noise and flame myself.

After a while the flame went away, the noise stayed in my head, and my arms and legs trembled as if somebody were shaking me from behind. My limbs seemed to be leaving me, but then in the end they stayed on. The smoke stung my eyes for a long time, and the prickly smell of powder and sulfur hung on, strong enough to kill all the fleas and bedbugs in the whole world

I thought of Sergeant Barousse, who had just gone up in smoke like the man told us. That was good news. Great, I thought to myself. That makes one less stinker in the regiment! He wanted to have me court-martialed for a can of meat. “It’s an ill wind,” I

said to myself. In that respect, you can't deny it, the war seemed to serve a purpose now and then! I knew of three or four more in the regiment, real scum, that I'd have gladly helped to make the acquaintance of a shell, like Barousse.

As for the colonel, I didn't wish him any hard luck. But he was dead too. At first I didn't see him. The blast had carried him up the embankment and laid him down on his side, right in the arms of the dismounted cavalryman, the courier, who was finished too. They were embracing each other for the moment and for all eternity, but the cavalryman's head was gone, all he had was an opening at the top of the neck, with blood in it bubbling and glugging like jam in a kettle. The colonel's belly was wide open, and he was making a nasty face about it. It must have hurt when it happened. Tough shit for him! If he'd beat it when the shooting started, it wouldn't have happened.

All that tangled meat was bleeding profusely.

Shells were still bursting to the right and left of the scene.

I'd had enough, I was glad to have such a good pretext for making myself scarce.

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A companion of misfortune

My horse wanted to lie down too. He tugged at his bridle and that made me turn around. When I turned back to the city, something about the look of the hummock in front of me had changed, not much, but enough to make me sing out: "Hey! Who goes there?" That change in the layout of the darkness had taken place a few steps away ... Must be somebody there ...

"Don't shout too loud!" came a deep, hoarse voice, very French. "You lost too?" he asked me. Now I could see him, a foot slogger, the peak of his cap was cracked in "goodbye to the army" style. After all these years I remember that moment, his silhouette emerging from the grass the way targets used to in shooting galleries, soldier targets.

We came closer. I was holding my revolver, for two beans I'd have fired, don't ask why.

"Hey," he asks. "You seen them?"

"No, but I've come here to see them."

"You from the 145th Dragoons?"

"That's right. You?"

"I'm a reservist ..."

"Oh!" I said. That amazed me. He was the first reservist I'd met in the war. We'd always been in with the Regular Army men. I couldn't see his face, but his voice was different from ours, sadder, which made him sound nicer. Because of that, I couldn't help trusting him a little. Which was something.

"I'm fed up," he said. "I'm going to get myself captured by the Boches ..."

He wasn't keeping any secrets.

"How are you going about it?"

All of a sudden his plan interested me more than anything else. How was he fixing to get taken prisoner?

“I don’t know yet.”

“How’d you manage to get away? ... It’s not easy to get taken prisoner.”

“To hell with that! I’ll just surrender.”

“What’s wrong? You scared?”

“I’m scared, and besides, the war is stupid. I don’t give a damn about the Germans, they never did anything to me ... “

My feeling was that I should be polite to the Germans. I’d have liked this reservist to explain, while he was about it, why I had no stomach either to make war like everybody else ... But he didn’t explain a thing, he just kept saying he was fed up.

Then he told me how his regiment had been dispersed at dawn the day before because some of our sharpshooters had fired on his company by mistake. They hadn’t been expected just then, they’d arrived there hours ahead of schedule. So these sharpshooters, tired and taken by surprise, had fired across the fields and riddled them with bullets. I knew the story. I’d been through it myself.

“Never fear,” he went on. “I saw my chance, and I took it. Robinson, I say to myself –Robinson’s my name, Leon Robinson-it’s now or never, I say to myself. This is the time to get going ... Right? So I started through a little clump of woods and pretty soon, what do you think, I run into our captain ... he’s leaning against a tree, in very bad shape! ... Dying! ... He was holding his pants in both hands and vomiting ... Bleeding all over and rolling his eyes ... There was nobody with him. He was through ... Mama! Mama!’ he was sniveling, all the while dying and pissing blood ...

“ ‘Shut up! I tell him. Mama! Mama! Fuck your mama!’ ... Just like that, on my way past, out of the corner of my mouth! ... I bet that made him feel good, the bastard! ... What do you think of that! It’s not every day you can tell the captain what you think ... Too good to miss ... A rare opportunity! ... To get out of there faster I chucked my pack and gun ... dropped ‘em in a duck pond ... You see, I don’t take to killing people, I never learned to ... even in peacetime, I never cared for fights ... I’d walk away ... See what I mean?

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“It’s a biological confession”

Our ship’s name was the *Admiral Bragueton*. If it kept afloat on those tepid seas, it was only thanks to its paint. Any number of coats laid on, layer after layer, had given the *Admiral Bragueton* a kind of second hull, something like an onion. We were heading for Africa, the real, grandiose Africa of impenetrable forests, fetid swamps, inviolate wildernesses, where black tyrants wallowed in sloth and cruelty on the banks of never-ending rivers. I would barter a pack of “Pilett” razor blades for big long elephant’s tusks, gaudy-colored birds, and juvenile slaves. Guaranteed. That would be life! Nothing in common with the emasculated Africa of travel agencies and monuments, of railways and candy bars. Certainly not! We’d be seeing Africa in the raw, the real Africa! We the boozing passengers of the *Admiral Bragueton*.

But as soon as we’d passed the coast of Portugal, things started going bad. One morning we woke up in the midst of a steam bath, pervasive and alarming. The water in

our glasses, the sea, the air, our sheets, our sweat, everything was hot, sultry, From then on, by night and day, it was impossible to have anything cool in your hands, under your ass, or in your throat, except the ice from the bar in your whisky. A dull despair descended on the passengers of the *Admiral Bragueton*, condemned to sitting permanently in the bar, held fast by little pieces of ice, exchanging threats and incoherent apologies after their card games.

It didn't take long. In that despondent changeless heat the entire human content of the ship congealed into massive drunkenness. People moved flabbily about like squid in a tank of tepid smelly water. From that moment on we saw, rising to the surface, the terrifying nature of white men, exasperated, freed from constraint, absolutely unbuttoned their true nature same as in the war. That tropical steam bath called forth instincts as August breeds toads and snakes on the fissured walls of prisons. In the European cold, under gray, puritanical northern skies, we seldom get to see our brothers' festering cruelty except in times of carnage, but when roused by the foul fevers of the tropics, their rottenness rises to the surface. That's when the frantic unbuttoning sets in, when filth triumphs and covers us entirely. It's a biological confession. Once work and cold weather cease to constrain us, once they relax their grip, the white man shows you the same spectacle as a beautiful beach when the tide goes out: the truth, fetid pools, crabs, carrion, and turds.

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Business and colonization. Voluntarily engaged in 1914, later reformed and horrified Bardamu finds a small job in Togo. Like Montaigne, Montesquieu, and Voltaire Celine denounces with verve and harsh irony the fallacious arguments of businessmen who wear the masque of civilization and humanity in Africa.

The Director came by from time to time, always aggressive, to make sure I was mastering the techniques of numbering sacks and falsifying weights.

With sweeping blows of his club he cleared his path to the scales through the press of natives. "Bardamu," he said to me one morning when he was in high spirits. "You see these niggers all around us? ... Well, when I came to Little Togo almost thirty years ago, those loafers still lived by hunting, fishing, and intertribal massacres! ... I was a small trader then ... Well, as true as I'm standing here, I'd seen them coming home to their village after a victory, loaded with more than a hundred baskets of bleeding human flesh to stuff their bellies with! ... Hear that, Bardamu? ... Bleeding! ... Their enemies! A feast! ... Today, no more victories! We've accomplished that much! ... No more tribes! ... No more flimflam and foolishness! Today we've got a labor force and peanuts! Good hard work! No more hunting! No more guns! Peanuts and rubber! ... To pay taxes with! Taxes to get us more rubber and peanuts! This is life, Bardamu! Peanuts! Peanuts and rubber! ... And say ... Well, I'll be damned. There's General Tombat!"

True enough, he was coming our way, an old man crumpling under the enormous weight of the sun.

The general wasn't exactly a soldier anymore, but he wasn't exactly a civilian either. Confidential agent of the Porduriere, he took care of liaison between the Administration and the business community, an indispensable function although the two lived in a state of permanent competition and hostility. But the general was a shrewd

maneuverer. For instance, he had disentangled a shady deal in enemy holdings, which had been judged inextricable in high places.

At the beginning of the war General Tombat's ear had been split, not very badly, just enough to get him honorably retired after Charleroi. He had immediately offered his services to "Greater France," But long after Verdun, that epic battle was still on his mind. He was always shuffling a handful of telegrams. "Our little poilus will hold on ! They are holding on !" It was so hot in the warehouse and France was so far away that we could have done without General Tombat's predictions. But just to be polite we all, and the Director with us, declared in chorus: "They're marvelous!" On these words Tombat left us.

A few moments later the Director opened up another violent path through the tightly packed torsos vanished in his turn into the peppery dust.

The Director had eyes like glowing coals, he was consumed with a passion to hornswoggle the Company. He frightened me a little, and I had difficulty in getting used to his presence. I found it hard to believe that in all the world there could be a human carcass capable of such maximum-tension greed. He seldom said anything to us straight out, he spoke only in muffled hints, and he seemed to live and breathe for the sole purpose of conspiring, spying, and betraying. I was told that he stole, swindled, and peculated incomparably more than all the other officials put together, and they were no slouches, I assure you. But I can easily believe it.

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" ... dead set against going to the end of the night."

The rain poured down, closing the night around our car as it glided over the long band of smooth concrete. Everything was hostile and cold to me, even her hand, which I was holding tight in mine all the same. Everything came between us. We pulled up in front of a house that looked very different from the one we had just left. In an apartment on the second floor a little boy of about ten was waiting for us with his mother. The furniture had pretensions to Louis xv, and the cooking smells of a recent meal were still in the air. The child jumped up on Lola's lap and kissed her affectionately. The mother also seemed very fond of Lola. While Lola was talking to the child, I managed to take the mother into the next room.

When we came back, the boy was performing for Lola's benefit a dance step he had just learned at the Conservatory. "He'll need a few more private lessons," Lola observed, "then I may introduce him to my friend Vera at the Globe Theater. I wouldn't be surprised if the child had quite a future ahead of him." After these kind, encouraging words the mother thanked her tearfully and profusely. At the same time she accepted a small wad of green dollars, which she tucked away in her bosom like a love letter.

"I'd be rather pleased with that little boy," said Lola, once we were outside, "but I have to put up with the mother at the same time, and I don't care for mothers who are too sharp for their own good ... Besides, the kid is too depraved ... That's not the sort of attachment I want ... What I long for is a purely maternal feeling ... Do you understand

me, Ferdinand?” When it comes to making a living, I can put up with anything, it’s not a matter of intelligence, I just know I have to adapt.

She couldn’t stop talking about her desire for purity. A few streets further on she asked me where I was planning to sleep that night and took a few more steps beside me. I said that if I didn’t get hold of few dollars I wouldn’t be sleeping anywhere.

“All right,” she said. “Come home with me. I’ll give you a little change, then you can go where you please.”

She was determined to put out into the night as soon as possible. The usual thing. Always getting shoved out into the night like this, I said to myself, I’m bound to end up somewhere. That’s some consolation. “Chin up, Ferdinand,” I kept saying to myself, to keep up my courage. “What with being chuked out of everywhere you’re sure to find whatever it is that scares all those bastards so. It must be at the end of the night, and that’s why they’re so dead set against going to the end of the night.

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“And inside it’s us.”

The sky in Rancy is the same as in Detroit, a smoky soup that bathes the plain all the way to Levallois. Cast-off buildings bogged down in black muck. From a distance the chimneys, big ones and little ones, look like the fat stakes that rise out of the muck by the seaside. And inside it’s us.

You need the courage of a crab at Rancy, especially when you’re not as young as you used to be and you know you’ll never get away. There at the end of the streetcar line a grimy bridge spans the Seine, that enormous sewer which displays everything that’s in it. Along the banks, on Sunday and at night, men climb up on the piles of garbage to take a leak. Flowing water makes men meditative. They urinate with a sense of eternity like sailors. Women never meditate. Seine or no Seine. In the morning the streetcar carries away its crowds to get themselves compressed in the Metro. Seeing them all fleeing in that direction you’d think there must have been some catastrophe at Argenteuil, that town was on fire. Every day in the gray of dawn it comes over them, whole clusters cling to the doors and handrails. One enormous rout! Yet all they’re going to Paris for is a boss, the man who saves you from starvation. The cowards, they’re scared to death of losing him, though he makes them sweat for pittance. For ten years you stink of it, for twenty years and more. It’s no bargain.

Plenty of bitching and beefing in the streetcar, just to get into practice. The women gripe even worse than the kids. If they caught somebody without a ticket, they’d stop the whole line. It’s true some of those women are already stinko, especially the ones headed for the market at Saint-Ouen, the semibourgeoises.”How much are the carrots?” they ask long before they get there, show they’ve got money to spend.

Compressed like garbage in this tin box, they cross Rancy, stinking good and proper especially in the summer. Passing the fortifications, they threaten one another, they let out one last shout, and then they scatter, the Metro swallows them up, limp suits, discouraged dresses, silk stockings, sour stomachs, dirty feet, dirty socks. Wear-ever collars as stiff as boundary posts, pending abortions, war heroes, all scramble down the

coal-tar and carbolic-acid stairs into the black pit, holding their return ticket which all by itself costs as much as two breakfast rolls.

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“ ... a little night just for me, in a corner of the big one”

When you get to the top of the Caulaincourt Bridge at about that hour, you see the first lights of Rancy beyond the great lake of night that covers the cemetery. To get there you have to go all the way around. It's a long way. You need so much time and so many steps to get around the cemetery to the fortifications, you get the feeling you're going around the night itself.

When you get to the porte and the toll station, you pass the stinking old office where the little green official is rotting away. The dogs of the Zone are at their barking posts. In spite of everything you see some flowers in the light of a gas lamp, they belong to the flower woman who is always there, waiting for the dead who pass from day to day, from hour to hour. The cemetery, another cemetery next to it, and then the Boulevard de la Révolte with all its street lamps, heading straight into the night. You just turn left and follow it. That was my street. There was really no fear of meeting anyone. Even so, I'd have liked to be somewhere else and far away. I'd also have liked to be wearing slippers so no one would hear me going in. Yet I was in no way to blame if Bébert wasn't getting better. I had done all I could. I had nothing to reproach myself with. It wasn't my fault if such cases are hopeless. I passed his door-without being noticed, I thought. Upstairs I didn't open the blinds, I looked through the slits to see if there were still people talking outside Bébert's. Some visitors were still coming out of the house, but they didn't look the same as yesterday's visitors. A neighborhood cleaning woman I knew was crying as she left. "It looks bad." I said to myself. "He's certainly no better ... Maybe he's dead ... if one of them is in tears already." The day was over.

I racked my brains: was I really not at all to blame? It was cold and still in my place. Like a little night just for me, in a corner of the big one.

Now and then the sound of steps rose up to me and the echo came in louder and louder, droning, then dying away ... Silence. I looked out again to see if anything was happening across the way. Nothing was happening except inside me, still asking myself the same questions.

I was so tired from walking and finding nothing that I finally fell asleep in my coffin, my private night.

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The doctor of the poor

Little by little I'd broken my bad habit of promising my patients good health. The prospect of getting well didn't thrill them. Good health can't be anything but second best.

Getting well means you can work, Isn't that lovely? While a government pension, however negligible, is purely and simply divine.

When you have no money to offer the poor, you'd better keep your trap shut. If you talk to them about anything but money, you'll almost always be deceiving them, lying. It's easy to amuse the rich, all you need, for instance, is mirrors for them to see themselves in, because in the whole world there's nothing better to look at than the rich. To keep the rich cheerful all you've got to do is move them up a notch in the Legion of Honor every ten years, like a sagging tit, that'll keep them busy for another ten years. And that's the truth. My patients were poor and selfish; they were materialists, shrunk to the measure of their sordid hope that positive sputum streaked with blood would get them a pension, Nothing else meant a thing to them. Not even the seasons meant a thing. They were aware of the seasons only insofar as the seasons affected their cough and the state of their health; in the winter, for instance, you're a good deal more likely to catch cold than in the summer, but on the other hand you're more likely to spit blood in the springtime, and during the summer heat it's not difficult to lose as much as five pounds a week ... Sometimes I heard them talking among themselves when they were waiting for their turn, and they thought I wasn't there ... They told endless horror stories about me and lies that would make you blow your imagination out. Running me down like that probably picked them up, gave them some sort of mysterious courage that they needed to be more and more ruthless, hard and vicious, to stick it out, to last. Having someone they could slander, despise, and threaten seems to have made them feel better. And yet I did all I could to please them, I went to bat for them, I tried to help them, I gave them plenty of iodine to make them spit up their filthy bacilli, but I never succeeded in neutralizing their cussedness ...

When I questioned them, they stood there in front of me, smiling like servants, but they didn't like me, mostly because I was helping them, but also because I wasn't rich, and having me for a doctor meant they were being treated free of charge, which is never flattering for a sick person, even if he is hoping for a pension. No slander would have been too great for them to spread behind my back. Most of the doctors in the neighborhood had cars, I didn't and to their way of thinking my walking was a kind of infirmity. If anyone gave them the slightest encouragement, something my colleagues were always glad to do, they'd avenge themselves, or so it seemed, for all my kindness, for my devotion and readiness to help. Which is perfectly normal. Nevertheless the time passed.

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Jean Giono (1895 – 1970)

Jean Giono was one of France's greatest writers and a committed pacifist. His prodigious literary output included stories, essays, poetry, plays, film scripts, translations and over thirty novels, many of which have been translated into English.

Jean Giono was born into a family of modest means. His father was a shoe repairer and mother ran hand laundry. Forced by family needs he left school at sixteen and took up a job in a bank. Nevertheless, he continued to read voraciously, in particular, the great classics. At the outbreak of World War I he was called up for military service. The horrors he experienced on the front lines turned him into an ardent pacifist. In 1919, he returned to the bank, and married a childhood friend a year later. In 1929 he published a novel, *Colline*, which was well received. Following its success he left the bank job in 1930 to dedicate himself to writing full-time.

Colline was followed by two more novels heavily influenced by Virgil and Homer, *Un de Baumugnes* (1929) and *Regain* (1930), the three together comprising the famous "Pan Trilogy", so-called because in it Giono depicts the natural world as being imbued with the power of the Greek god Pan. His other novels also were all set in Provence, with peasants as protagonists, and displayed prominently his humanism, pacifism and pantheistic view of nature. This tendency to portray peasants as natural aristocrats didn't go well in the salons, or in senior common rooms of some universities; nor did it impress French intellectuals in spite of exceptional narrative power and sincerity of the author. After the war Giono cast aside his romanticism for a time, and took a tougher view of human nature. The literary ostracism that he suffered ended in 1951 when he wrote *Horseman on the Roof* (*Le hussard sur le toit*). The *Times Literary Supplement* noted in 1955 that Giono had evolved from a "distinctly sentimental lyricist of his native Provence" to "a pessimistic novelist writing with great power and invention" hailing him as "one of the most important novelists in Europe." More than forty years later *Horseman on the Roof* was made into an acclaimed film.

In 1953 Giono had written a charming story, *L'homme qui plantait des arbres* which was not noticed much in France, but became a cult work elsewhere, with translations into more than a dozen languages. It was translated into English by Peter Doyle as *The Man Who Planted Hope and Grew Happiness*. This tale established him as a master craftsman of stories that thrive on insightful portraits of fallible humanity. The narrator is a young man traveling by foot through a deserted area of Provence where he encounters a shepherd-hermit, the only person living alone in that desolate land with his sheep and a dog. He is surprised to find that this man lived in a house and not a hut, was clean, groomed, orderly, and the food too was good. He found him no garrulous, grumpy recluse but a thoughtful and purposeful man. Even his dog, "as silent as himself" was "friendly without being servile." The next day, the narrator witnesses the hermit's occupation or passion: the planting of acorns that will one day become oak trees, thousands of them. In answering the narrator's insistent questions, the shepherd notes only that he planted trees because he had "no very pressing business of his own." His wife and son had died, and "he had withdrawn into this solitude" to live, and had seen that the land was dying for lack of trees. A war follows, the narrator comes that side again after the war, recalls his earlier visit and is literally speechless to witness the ten thousand oak trees, and the hermit relentlessly carrying on his mission. One is hard pressed to find, among fictional or historical hermits, the

insightful assignment of qualities Giono identifies in the protagonist of *The Man Who Planted Trees*: the striking combination of anonymous service to humanity through service to nature; disengagement from society but, more positively, engagement with nature, which, after all, is superior to and encompasses society and everything else.

Giono's reputation increased after his death. Today Giono is considered one of the most important French novelists of the century. The critic Maxwell Smith has said, "Giono [was] first of all a great poet in prose... it is now generally recognized that he... brought... a new freshness, warmth, and color to the French language." Outside France, Giono's best-known work is the short story *The Man Who Planted Trees*. This optimistic tale of a man who brings a deserted valley back to life by planting trees reflects Giono's long-standing love of the natural world, an attitude that made him a precursor to the modern ecological movement. He declined to receive any royalties from this text, and granted free use to anyone who wanted to distribute or translate it. In 1953 Giono was honoured with Rainier of Monaco literary prize awarded for his lifetime achievements. In 1954 he was elected to the Academie Goncourt, and in 1963 he was made a member of the *Conseil Littéraire* of Monaco. Giono died of a heart attack in 1970.

Principal Works: *Horseman on the Roof* (1988); *The Man Who Planted Trees* (1985); *The Straw Man* (1958); *The Song of the World* (2006); *Blue Boy* (1932); *Joy of Man's Desiring* (1935); *Harvest* (1930).

Spring from the wasteland

The shepherd went to fetch a small sack and poured out a heap of acorns on the table. He began to inspect them, one by one, with great concentration, separating the good from the bad. I smoked my pipe. I did offer to help him. He told me that it was his job. And in fact, seeing the care he devoted to the task, I did not insist. That was the whole of our conversation. When he had set aside a large enough pile of good acorns he counted them out by tens, meanwhile eliminating the small ones or those which were slightly cracked, for now he examined them more closely. When he had thus selected one hundred perfect acorns he stopped and we went to bed.

There was peace in being with this man. The next day I asked if I might rest here for a day. He found it quite natural—or, to be more exact, he gave me the impression that nothing could startle him. My rest was not absolutely necessary, but I was interested and wished to know more about him. He opened the pen and led his flock to pasture. Before leaving, he plunged his sack of carefully selected and counted acorns into a pail of water.

I noticed that he carried for a stick an iron rod as thick as my thumb and about a yard and a half long. Resting myself by walking, I followed a path parallel to his. His pasture was in a valley. He left the dog in charge of the little flock and climbed toward where I stood. I was afraid that he was about to rebuke me for my indiscretion, but it was not that at all: this was the way he was going, and he invited me to go along if I had nothing better to do. He climbed to the top of the ridge, about a hundred yards away.

There he began thrusting his iron rod into the earth, making a hole in which he planted an acorn; then he refilled the hole. He was planting oak trees. I asked him if the land belonged to him. He answered no. Did he know whose it was? He did not. He supposed it was community property, or perhaps belonged to people who cared nothing

about it. He was not interested in finding out whose it was. He planted his hundred acorns with the greatest care.

After the midday meal he resumed his planting. I suppose I must have been fairly insistent in my questioning, for he answered me. For three years he had been planting trees in this wilderness. He had planted one hundred thousand. Of the hundred thousand, twenty thousand had sprouted. Of the twenty thousand he still expected to lose about half, to rodents or to the unpredictable

designs of Providence. There remained ten thousand oak trees to grow where nothing had grown before.

[...]

When I reflect that one man, armed only with his own physical and moral resources,

was able to cause this land of Canaan to spring from the wasteland, I am convinced that in spite of everything, humanity is admirable. But when I compute the unfailing greatness of spirit and the tenacity of benevolence that it must have taken to achieve this result, I am taken with an immense respect for that old and unlearned peasant who was able to complete a work worthy of God.

[*The Man Who Planted Trees* Shambala Pocket Classics, Boston 1999 © 1985, Chelsea Green Publishing Company.]

The Horseman and the Nun

In *The Horseman on the Roof*, the entire country so dear to the author is ravaged by Cholera in 1838. Cholera is at once the background and foreground, a social context and a primary agent of the narrative. Angelo Pardo, an idealistic young Piedmontese freedom fighter and cavalry officer, is living in exile in Provence and making his way to join his best friend in Manosque, when a cholera epidemic transforms the region. By turns, he aids an altruistic doctor in futile attempts to save the dying, lives as a fugitive on the roofs of Manosque, helps a nun to dispose of the dead, and accompanies a beautiful young woman, Pauline, to her home near Gap. His adventures illustrate the transformations produced by an epidemic and the means taken for survival.

“Hurry up, and take that bell.”

She was standing. She was waiting. She was leaning on a strong oak stick.

“Let’s go. Come!”

She led the way down the length of the cloister. She opened a door.

“Go through,” she said.

They were in the street.

“Swing your bell and get a move on,” she said.

She added, almost tenderly: “My child”

“I’m in the street,” thought Angelo. “I’ve left the roofs. That’s over with!”

The reverberations of the bell raised torrents of flies. The heat was strongly sugared. The air greased the lips and nostrils oil.

They passed from street to street. All was deserted. At certain places in the walls, gaping Passages sent back echoes; at others the clang of the bell was muffed as though deep under water.

“Get a move on!” the nun kept saying. “Some elbow grease there! Ring! Ring!”

She moved rapidly, all together, like a boulder. Her jowls quivered in her wimple.

A window opened. A woman’s voice called: “Madame!”

“Let me go first,” the nun told Angelo. “Stop your ringing.” On the threshold she asked: “Have you a handkerchief?”

“Yes,” said Angelo,.

“Stuff it in the bell. One sound from it and I’ll shake your teeth out.” And tenderly she added:

“My child!”

She darted like a bird toward the staircase, and Angelo saw an enormous foot place itself on the first step.

Upstairs there was a kitchen and an alcove. Near the open window from which the call had come stood a woman and two children. From the alcove came a noise like a coffee mill. The woman pointed to the alcove. The nun drew the curtains. A man stretched out on the bed was grinding his teeth in a ceaseless chewing that drew back his lips. He was also shivering so that his maize mattress crackled.

“There, there,” said the nun. And she took the man in her arms. “There, there,” she said, “a little patience. Everybody gets there; it’s on its way. We’re here, we’re here. Don’t force yourself, it’s coming by itself. Gently, gently. Everything in its own time,”

She stroked his hair with her hand.

“You *are* in a hurry, *you are* in a hurry,” she said, and she pressed her huge hand down on his

Knees to stop him from thrashing about in the wooden bed. “Just look what a hurry he’s in! You’ll get your chance. Don’t worry. Keep calm. Everyone has his turn. It’s coming. There, there, that’s it. It’s your turn. Pass, pass, pass.”

The man gave a twist and lay still.

“We ought to have massaged him,” said Angelo in a voice he didn’t recognize.

The nun sat up and turned to him.

“What’s this about massaging?” she said. “So you’re a freethinker, eh? You’d like to forget the Gospel, eh? Ask that lady for a bit of soap, and a basin, and towels.”

[*The Horseman on the Roof* tr by Jonathan Griffin, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988 © 1953 by Alfred A. Knopf. Inc.] pp158-159

“The wind dropped. The clouds, brought to a standstill, heaped on the horizon ...”

A tale of primitive love and vendetta, *The Song of the World* is set in the timeless French landscape of river, mountain and forest, and in the cycle of the seasons. Sailor, a woodsman, has twin sons, the elder of whom is dead and the younger, the red-head, has gone missing. With his friend Antonio, the river-man, he goes in search of the boy, fearing that he too has been killed. On the way they come upon a lone girl giving birth in the woods at dead of nigh. They bring her to a place of safety. Once among Maudru's

drovers, who effectively serve him as a private army, they have to watch their step carefully, the more so when they learn that the lost twin is in fact alive.

It was the great disorder of spring. The fir forests puffed up clouds from their trees. The clearing smoked like ash-heaps. The mist ascended across the fan-like braches; it emerges from the forest like smoke from a camp-fire. As it hovered aloft, thousands of similar curls of mist hovered beneath the forest like thousands of camp-fires, as if all the gipsies in the world were camping there. It was only spring rising out of the earth.

Little by little the cloud of mist took on a dark colour, as if reflecting the heavy branches. It also had the heaviness of that great mass of trees; it throbbed like them and carried the smell of their bark and of the ground. It weighted down on the hollow vales, resting on a rim of new grass.

The pastures, furrowed by new-born springs, sang a muffled, velvet song. The tall trees creaked as they swayed to and fro like mast of the ships. A black wind arrived from the east. It brought with it one storm after another and extraordinary sunlight. The clouds in the vales throbbed under it, and then suddenly tore themselves away from their bed and bounded in the wind. Heavy grey rains drove across the sky. Everything was blurred over: mountains and forests. The rain hung from the north wind like long hairs from the belly of a he-goat. It sang in the trees and sailed noiselessly across the open pastures. Then came the sun, a thick three-coloured sun, more russet than a fox's coat, and so heavy and hot that it quenched everything, noise and motion alike. The wind rose in the sky. Everything was steeped in silence. The branches, as yet without leaves, sparkled with a thousand tiny silver flames, and under each flame a new bud swelled in a glittering raindrop. At times, a heavy smell of sap and bark rose in the still air. Rain that had already fallen started pattering from the braches to the ground. The new rain drove through the firs. The wind came down again with all its weight, and black splashes of rain swept across the sun, over the whole countryside lying beneath far-flung rainbows.

Clouds began to thicken in the punchbowls with sudden spurts, like flour soup in a cauldron. From time to time gigantic bubbles burst, throwing out flashes of lightning. The thunder rolled its heavy wooden blocks through all the mountain valleys. Then the storm reared in its lair. It trampled the village and fields underfoot and split trees asunder with its golden claws.

The streaming waters danced, and burrowed beneath the under growth. The swirling springs leapt from the sloping banks, spitting like cats. The snows had already completely melted. They had left uncovered a black earth with red veins, filled with water that oozed under the light tread of birds. Glaciers, worn by sun and rain, slid down in torrents, along narrow defiles encumbered with enormous boulders.

The wind dropped. The clouds, brought to a standstill, heaped on the horizon their thick dappled foliage, their caverns, their dark steps, and the blue abysses in which all the beaming lights of the sun lost themselves. It was warm. The very shade was warm. The last bounds of the wind jolted out a few showers of hailstones. Day by day the sun recovered its natural colour. I rose every morning through a flock of clouds, then started to roll gently over the fine sand of uncovered sky. Furred animals, feathered animals, sleek-skinned animals, cold-blooded animals, warm-blooded animals, burrowers, gnawers of wood and borers of rock, swimming kinds, running kinds, flying kinds- all began to swim, to run, and to fly, with memories of former movements. Then they all stopped, sniffed at the warmth, and, amidst the shivering flaxen netting of light, sought

out with their muzzles the syrupy tracks of love. During the long twilights, the sun went down behind ringing vales, amidst the calls of animals and the manifold streaming of waters.

The glaciers were melting. They had only small, slender tongues between the grooves of rocks; the mountains, covered with waterfalls, rumbled like drums. There were no longer and tiny brooks, but muscular torrents with terrible loins, which carried away ice-blocks and rocks, bounded above the fir trees, shining and streaming all over with foam underneath their deep banks, and swept away tatters of forest. Waters, rocks, ice-blocks, and skeleton of trees, all twisted themselves into great steel-grey braches swirling across the whole countryside, and roared as they poured out into the giant river.

The river itself had spread out its waters so far from its usual bed that it had almost stopped moving. It was encumbered with deserted farm-houses, clusters of trees, earthy knolls, and rows of poplars. Lost in the folds of the hills, it swelled slowly outwards. From its distant banks, one could just perceive, far away in the middle, the fleecy foam of the main stream.

Long ago the “houldres” had left the Ark cliff to go and herald spring far and wide. But the common birds flew back every evening to the big rock, overgrown with ivy and clematis. There were warblers, all manner of tits, nightingales, greenfinches, redfinches, magpies, ravens, and all the denizens of bush and forest, but only flesh-eaters. No seed-eaters. They were so fat and heavy that they could no longer fly or walk. They hung, clutching at the slender netting of braches and leaves which mantled the rocks, and they remained there awhile to recover from their day-long flight over the great open country full warmth and hope. They blinked, they looked around, they whetted their bills, they picked at their fleas, then began to tell of what they had seen, of overheard, up there in the sky.

[*The Song of the World* tr by Henri Fluchere and Geoffrey Myers Rupa & Co., 2006 ©
The Viking Press Inc., 1937]

Albert Cohen (1895 -1981)

Abraham Albert Cohen was a Greek-born Jewish Swiss novelist who wrote in French. Born in on the Greek island of Corfou in a Sephardic Jewish family, he emigrated to Marseilles at the age of five with his parents in 1900 and moved to Geneva in 1914 to study law. He graduated in 1917 and took the Swiss citizenship in 1919. During the German occupation, in 1940, Cohen fled to Bordeaux, then to London. The Jewish Agency for Palestine gave him the responsibility of establishing contact with exiled governments. In 1944, he became an attorney for the Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees. In 1947, Cohen returned to Geneva. In 1957, he turned down the post of Israeli Ambassador in order to pursue his literary career.

While publishing his first novels he worked as a senior civil servant with the International Labour Organization and lobbied with the League of Nations to alert public opinion on the rise of anti-semitism in Europe. In 1940 he joined the European governments in exile in London to help coordinate the resistance to German occupation in Europe. After the war he moved back to Switzerland where he worked as director of the Inter-governmental Committee on Refugees at the United Nations. Meanwhile, he resumed his writing with *Le Livre de ma Mère* ("A book for my Mother") and in 1968 his most famous novel, *Belle du Seigneur* which won the Grand Prix from the French Academie that same year.

Themes such as the weight of cultural heritages, religious hypocrisy, bourgeois narrow-mindedness, bureaucratic organizations and overall petty mediocrities of everyday people are omnipresent throughout his work. But more than anything else, they serve as a canvas to the depiction of the age-old story of an irreconcilable, uncompromising, and passionate love between diametrically opposed characters. Although some critiques consider Albert Cohen's style somewhat long-winded and don't see a real interest in his merciless autopsy of passion, he is considered by many as one of the most influential writers of this century. If you can stand to read through its humongous amount of pages, *Belle du Seigneur* is very likely to leave a deep mark on your mind.

Principal works: *Jewish Words*(1921); *Ezéchiel*(1921); *Solal of the Solals* (1933); *Nailcruncher* (1940); *Book of my Mother* (1997); *Belle du Seigneur* (1968); *O Humans, MY Brothers* (1972) and *Carnets*(1979).

All the excerpts are taken from *Belle du Seigneur*. The action in this novel takes place during World War II. The hero, Solal is a senior bureaucrat (with the League of Nations, the organization Cohen mocks at). One day he meets Ariane, wife of another bureaucrat. He falls in love with her and tries to seduce her. In the following excerpt he is spying on her:

Now listen and you shall hear a marvel

‘Other men take weeks, months before they fall in love, and even then they love but tepidly, nor can they dispense with endless talk, shared tastes and crystallizations. All I needed was one flutter of her eyelashes. Say I am mad, but believe me. A flutter of lashes, and she looked at me but did not see me, and suddenly I beheld the glory of spring

and the sun and the warm sea and the transparency of water near the shore and my youth restored and the world fresh-minted, and I knew that no one before her, not Adrienne nor Aude nor Isolde not any who peopled my splendour and youth, I knew that they had merely prepared a way for her and were her handmaidens. No one came before her not will come after her, I swear it on the Scrolls of the Holy Law when in solemn state they pass before me in the synagogue, arrayed in gold and velvet, the Holy Commandments of the God in whom I do not believe but revere, for I am absurdly proud of my God, God of Abraham and of Isaac, God of Jacob, and I thrill to my very core when I hear His name and His words

‘But now listen and you shall hear a marvel. Wearying of the ignoble crowd, she fled the room and the chatter of the seekers of contacts and sought voluntary exile in a small adjoining antechamber which was deserted. Who is She? Why, you! A voluntary exile like myself, and she did not know that I was behind the curtains watching her. Then, and listen well now, she went up to the mirror that hung in that antechamber, for she has a mania for looking-glasses as I do, it is the mania of sad and lonely people, and, alone and unaware that she was observed, she leaned forward and pressed her lips to the glass of the mirror. Our first kiss, my love. O my mad sister, loved at first sight, transformed into my beloved by that kiss administered by herself unto herself. Oh how tall and slender. Oh those long curved lashes in the mirror! and my soul flew out and clung to her long curved lashes. A flutter of eyes, the space of a kiss in a mirror, and she was revealed forever. Say I am mad, but believe me. And that was all. When she had returned to the crowded room, I did not approach her, I did not speak to her, I did not wish to treat her like the others.

“And she will love me, will love me ... ”

Solal suddenly appears before Ariane disguised as a decrepit old man. The declaration of his passion is as strange as his disguise. He is a Don Juan and doesn’t need to take recourse to such burlesque artifices to win those he loves ...

‘Oh she whose scared name I speak during my solitary walks and patrols around the house where she sleeps, for I watch over her as she sleeps, and she does not know that I watch, and I speak her name in secret to the trees, and I tell them, for I am mad for her long curved lashes, that I am in love, that I love the woman I love who will love me too, for I love her as no one else could, and why should she not love me back, she who can truly love a toad, and she will love me, love me, love me, the paragon will love me, and each evening I shall wait yearningly for the moment when I shall see her again and I shall make myself handsome to please her, and I shall shave, shave myself so close to please her, I shall bathe, bathe for an age to make the time pass more quickly, and all the time I shall think of her, and soon it will be time, oh the wonder of it, the snatches of song in the car which will carry me to her, to she who waits for me, towards her long star-spangled lashes, and the soon look, the look in her eyes when I stand before her, she waiting at her door, tall and slender and dressed all in white, ready and beautiful for me, ready and fearful lest she mar her beauty if I should delay, and darting to her mirror to view her beauty, to see if her beauty is still there, still intact, and then returning to the door and waiting for me in a cloud of love, heart-stoppingly standing at her door under the roses, oh tender night! Oh youth that is mine once more! Oh the wonder when I stand before

her! the look in her eyes! the love we share! and she shall lower her head to my extended hand, a simple country-girl now, and oh the wonder of her kiss upon my hand! and she shall look up at me and our eyes shall light up with love and we shall smile at loving so, you and I, and glory be to God.'

He smiled at her, and she shuddered and averted her eyes. Horrible that toothless smile. Horrible the words of love which had escaped from that vacant mouth. He advanced one step and she felt the danger come near. Don't cross him, say whatever he wants to hear, but O God make him go, let him be gone!

'Behold, I stand before you,' said he, 'I am come. I am old but await your miracle. Here am I, feeble and poor, white of beard, and of teeth I have but two, but no man will love you or know you as I love and know you nor could another honour you with such love. Two teeth only, but I give them to you with my love. Will you receive this love of mine?'

'Rather,' she said and she moistened her dry lips and essayed a smile.

'Glory be to God,' said he, 'in truth glory, for here is she who redeemeth all women. Behold the first woman!'

He bent his knee before her, a gesture which made him look quite ridiculous, then stood up and came towards her, towards their first kiss, came with the dark smile that was the badge of old age, his hands reaching out to she who redeemed all women, the first women, who suddenly recoiled, backed away with a coarse yelp, a yelp of fear and hate, collided with the bedside table, grabbed the empty tooth-glass and hurled it at that antique face. He raised his hand to his eye, wiped the blood away and stared at the blood on his hand. Then he laughed and stamped his foot.

'Turn away, you little fool!' said he.

She obeyed, turned round, stood still, alone with the fear that she was about to get a bullet in the back of her head. Meanwhile, he drew back the curtains, leaned out of the window, put two fingers to his lips and whistled. Then he rid himself of the old greatcoat and the fur hat, took off his false beard, removed the black tape which covered his teeth, and retrieved his riding-crop from behind the curtains.

'Turn round,' he ordered.

In the tall horseman with the wild, black hair and the sharp smooth features, a dark, clean-cut diamond, she recognized the man her husband had from a distance whisperingly pointed out her at the Brazilian reception.

The art of seducing women :

'And now she is ready for the final gambit: the declaration of love. Use all the stale old clichés you like, but attend to your voice and its fire. A grave tone is recommended. Naturally, you must make her feel that she is ruining her life with her awful lawful spiderman, that life with him is unworthy of her, at which point you will observe her yield a martyr-style sigh. This is a special kind of sigh, produced through the nose, and it means: "Oh, if only you knew what I've had to put up with from that man, but I shall say nothing, for I am a person of refinement and infinite discretion. "Naturally, you will tell her that she is the only one, that she is unique, for they insist on this too, that her eyes are windows which offer a glimpse of the godhead. She won't understand this but will find the thought so beautiful that she will close the aforementioned windows and feel that with you life would be one perpetual round of extramarital bliss. For good

measure, mention that she is the fragrance of lilac and the softness of night and the song of rain falling on a garden . Keep it cheap and cheerful and you will observe her far more deeply moved than if she heard the same words sincerely spoken by an old man. They'll swallow the whole bag of tricks as long as there is a deep and throaty throb in you voice. Go to it with all guns blazing so that she feels that life with you would be a paradise of eternal carnivalities, which they call living intensely. And don't forget to talk about setting off to the sea off your heads, they love it. Off to sea off your heads: remember these six words. Say them and the effect is miraculous. You'll see the poor wretch quiver. Choose a hot place, sumptuous surroundings, lots of sun, that is, ensure association of ideas with joyous physical congress and the high life. Off is the crucial word, for their vice is wanting to be off. The minute you mention going off, she shuts her eyes and opens her mouth. She's firmly on the hook, and you can gobble her up and wash her down with a cup of sadness. It's over. Here are the papers containing your husband's promotion. Love him and give him fine children. Goodbye.'

'Goodbye,' she said softly, but did not stir.

'Do you remember the poor words the old man spoke? Oh the wonder of it, the snatches of song in the car which will carry me to her, to she who waits for me, towards her long star-spangled lashes, and the soon look, the look in her eyes when I stand before her, she waiting at her door, tall and slender and dressed all in white, ready and beautiful for me, ready and fearful lest she mar her beauty if I should delay, and darting to her mirror to view her beauty, to see if her beauty is still there, still intact, and then returning to the door and waiting for me in a cloud of love, heart-stoppingly standing at her door under the roses, oh tender night! Oh youth that is mine once more! Oh the wonder when I stand before her! the look in her eyes! the love we share! and she shall lower her head to my extended hand, and oh the wonder of her kiss upon my hand! and she shall look up at me and our eyes shall light up with love and we shall smile at loving so, you and I, and glory be to God.'

'Glory be to God.' She said.

And then she bowed her head and her lips alighted on the hand of her lord, and she raised her head, looked at him, to virginity restored, holily gazed upon his face of gold and night, as upon a sun. With a bewildered smile on his trembling lips, he stared at the hand which she had kissed and raised it close to his eyes. What proof could he give her? Take Michael's dagger, pierce his flesh, and swear by the blood which coursed out of him? But that would make a mess of his dinner-jacket, it was his best, and he should have to leave her while he got changed! Heigh-ho, forget the dagger, stay with her for ever and ever, and Glory be to God, Glory be to God.

She gazed on, not daring to speak for fear of tarnishing the majesty of the moment, and besides perhaps her voice would break. Piously believing, devoutly young, she gazed gravely upon her lord, gazed upon him wildly, hardly breathing, icy-cold, trembling with fear and love, with the ache of happiness on her lips.

From the ballroom rose a summons, Hawaiian guitars reluctantly releasing their long, pure lamentation, a lament from the heart, a long-drawn, sweet lament, liquid to liquidate the soul, an infinite keening of farewell. Then he took her by the hand and they left the room. Slowly they descended. Solemnly did they go.

“Wool or Cotton?”

One evening, just before nine, she decided that waiting for him outside, at the door, made her look cheap. Well then, she'd wait inside and answer the door when he came, but no hurrying, mind, walk slowly, taking deep breaths, that way she would remember who she was, that way also she wouldn't get there all out of breath. Yes, good, self-control, show him politely into the sitting-room. There, make conversation, then suggest a cup of tea. It was a good idea to have set everything out ready in the sitting room beforehand, that way she wouldn't look like the maid bringing the tea-tray. Yes, she hadn't forgotten anything, teapot plus cosy, cups, milk, lemon. At the right moment, stand, pour tea slowly, then ask, and mind no crawling, milk or lemon. She tried it. 'Milk or lemon?' No good, it was all wrong, much too hockey-sticks, made her sound like a Girl Guide leader. She tried again. 'Milk or lemon?' Yes, that was fine. Pleasant, and not the least crawly.

When the bell rang, she made a dash for the door. But when she got as far as the hall she did an about-turn. Had she removed all the powder? She returned to her sitting-room, parked herself in front of the mirror, and peered at herself blankly. In the end, with the blood thumping in her ears, she sprang into action, scurried away, almost tripped, and opened the door. 'How-nice-to-see-you-hope-you're-well,' she said, and said it every whit as naturally as a soprano in an operetta attempting a passage of *parlando*.

Breathing with difficulty, she led him into her sitting-room. Her lips locked in a fixed grin, she motioned him towards one armchair, sat herself in another, pulled her dress well down over her knees, and waited. Why didn't he speak? Had she offended him? Perhaps she hadn't got all that powder off. She ran her hand over her nose and suddenly felt that she wasn't at all pretty. Should she say something? Her throat felt congested, and clearing it would make a horrid noise. Little did she know that he was merely adoring her embarrassment, that he wasn't saying anything because he wanted to make the moment last.

With trembling lips, she offered him a cup of tea. He accepted dispassionately. Tense and uneasy, her cheeks ablaze, she poured tea on the table, into the saucers and occasionally even into the cups, apologized, then held out the little milk-jug in one hand and the lemon slices in the other. 'Silk or melon?' she asked. He laughed, and, screwing up her courage, she looked up at him. He smiled, and she held out both hands. He took them, and got down on his knees before her. In a moment of inspiration, she went down on her knees to him too, and did it with such grace that she knocked over the teapot, the cups, the milk-jug and every last slice of lemon. Kneeling, they smiled, and their teeth gleamed, the teeth of youth. Kneeling, they were ridiculous, they were proud and they were handsome, and it was bliss to be alive.

[*Belle du Seigneur*, tr by David Coward Penguin Books, 1997 © Penguin Books / David Coward, not mentioned.]

Henry de Montherlant (1895 –1972)

Henry Marie Joseph Frédéric Expédite Millon de Montherlant was a French essayist, novelist, and dramatist. He was elected to the Académie Française in 1960.

Henri de Montherlant, in full, Henri Marie Joseph Frédéric Expédite Millon de Montherlant was born and raised in Neuilly, outside of Paris. His father, who boasted of his connection to the aristocracy, was a rock-ribbed reactionary and lost most of the family's fortune speculating on the Paris Bourse. He died in 1914, his mother followed one year later. That left Henri in the care of his maternal grandmother. She and his two weirdly eccentric uncles-- both present in his novel "The Bachelors" --continued to live with him in the family's Neuilly villa. In 1912, Montherlant was expelled from the Sainte-Croix de Neuilly academy for a homosexual relationship with a fellow student. After briefly studying law he was enlisted in the army, and was wounded in World War I. His first novel, *The Dream* (1922), was a paean to the camaraderie of warriors, and several subsequent works were written in a similar vein. However, in *The Bachelors* (1934) Montherlant discovered a new interest in the aberrations of human behavior and psychology, and developed his mature voice: sardonic, bemused, without hint of consolation. *The Bachelors* won the Grand Prix of the French Academy and was followed by four novels that were collected as *The Girls* (1936–39), one of Montherlant's major achievements and an international best seller.

Montherlant's major work of fiction is a cycle of four novels that became a *succès de scandale*. Written for the most part in letters, the tetralogy consists of *Les Jeunes Filles* and *Pitié pour les femmes* (both 1936; "The Girls" and "Pity for Women"), *Le Démon du bien* (1937; "The Demon of Good"), and *Les Lépreuses* (1939 "The Lepers"). (An English two-volume translation of the tetralogy was entitled *The Girls: A Tetralogy of Novels*.) This sardonic and misogynistic work describes the relationship between a libertine novelist and his adoring women victims. It exalts the pleasures of the body and of artistic creation while scornfully rejecting feminine possessiveness and sentiment. A similar arrogantly virile outlook marks Montherlant's one other novel of importance, *L'Histoire d'Amour de la Rose de Sable* (1954 translated as *Desert Love*, also highly critical of French colonial rule in North Africa. After 1942 Montherlant turned to the theatre with the historical drama *La Reine morte* and became "one of France's finest playwrights" admired by such as Malraux, Camus, Graham Greene and Peter Quennell. The summits of his dramatic production are *Malatesta* (1946), set in the Italian Renaissance; *Le Maître de Santiago* (1947), set in the Spanish Golden Age; *Port-Royal* (1954), a Jansenist drama set in a French convent at the end of the 17th century; *La Ville dont le prince est un enfant* (1951), set in a French Catholic college of the mid-1930s; and *La Guerre civile* (1965), set in Caesar's Rome. All are dramas of character whose protagonists strive to hold to their high, sometimes perilously inflated, ideals of themselves. They reveal a preoccupation with pride and self-mastery as well as a dual attraction to sensual pleasure and the more austere forms of Christianity. During World War II, Montherlant remained in occupied Paris and wrote scathingly in right-wing journals about the fallen Third Republic.

The Bachelors (*Les célibataires*) was awarded the Grand Prix de Littérature de l'Académie française and the English Northcliffe Prize. In 1960 Montherlant was elected a member of the Académie française. He was an Officer of the French Ordre national de la Légion d'Honneur. In 1972, after years of worsening health, he committed suicide.

Principal works: *The Bachelors* (*Les Celibataires*, 1934); (*Le Chaos et la nuit*, 1963); *The Boys* (*Les Garçons*, 1969); *The Bullfighters* (*Les bestiaires*, 1926); and the plays, *The Dead Queen* (*La reine morte*, 1942); *Fils de personne*, 1944); *Le Maître de Santiago* (1947); *Malatesta*, 1948); *La Ville don't le prince est un enfant*, 1951; *Le Cardinal d' Espagne*, 1960; *La Guerre civil*, 1965).

“ ... all to no purpose”

The Bachelors has no plot, no content, little characterization, only style and avid irony. It is the story of family intrigues and physical and mental disintegration. Two impoverished members of the French provincial aristocracy, the baron de Coëtquidan and his nephew the comte de Coantré, live in the suburbs of Paris, each pursuing an eccentric, decaying existence cut off from the pressures of the twentieth century. When Madame de Coantré dies in 1924 — ruined — there is literally nothing left to sustain her middle aged son, Count Léon de Coantré or his uncle, Elie de Coëtquidan. These are incapable of making their own ways in the world—each is in his own inimitable way squalid and incurably eccentric, with the difference that Léon is almost devoid of malice, while malice courses through the veins of Elie. Baron Octave come to the aid of his brother and lets his nephew starve, if he must. Léon dies upon learning that his uncle, knowing that he has not a penny left, has made a large gift to a charity that he boasted held no interest for him. It is in its own way *an acte gratuit*. Montherlant's accurately painted portrait of Paris and French bourgeoisie in the first three decades of the 20th century is brilliant.

At a quarter past six there was a great cascade of men surging into the Metro. This world of dawn and early morning was very much a male world; at this hour the whole town belonged to the men, like an oriental town. This did not worry M. de Coantré. On the contrary, the feeling that had kept him going throughout the night was being purified. He wondered whether it had't all been a misunderstanding, whether what he had really been after hadn't been some contact with the people, and whether he hadn't simply been obeying some old bourgeois atavism in seeking the people through their women. When, at seven o'clock, he saw the first puffs of smoke rising from the factory chimneys, he was moved by it: already men were toiling, when so many others were not yet awake. He remembered the workshop he and Levier had had at the Barrière du Trône, and the embarrassment he used to feel when, returning at five o'clock in the morning in an open carriage from some all-night spree in top hat and tails with a camellia in his buttonhole, he met the first workers, with picks on their shoulders—pleasure and toil passing one another with the same white faces ... As for the women he had met that night, he was content to be able to tell himself that he had desired. To have proved to himself that one had only to stoop and pick up what one wanted seemed to him enough. Already this night was becoming transfigured in his mind; he now had the impression that if he had let these women escape him it was because he wanted to.

At seven o'clock the dustmen passed by, talking in such a strong accent that they might almost have been putting it on. The waiter in the café was cleaning the dominoes. Around 8.15, advancing from the suburbs towards the Metro, came a great wave of women for the opening of the offices at nine o'clock. Then the flow ceased. One aspect of Paris died away, and its customary aspect reappeared: the bourgeois day began. M. de Coantré considered his 'ordeal' at an end. He took out his wallet to settle his bill at the café, saw the five hundred franc note still intact, and regretted the happiness it might have

procured him. His bill was six francs; he put down ten and told the waiter to keep the change. A humble and pathetic gesture: after a whole night spent trying to insinuate himself into the life of the people, he ended up with this age-old bourgeois gesture of giving money. And, as it happened, the waiter misunderstood what he said and brought back the change. So M. de Coantré, seeing that even gesture had misfired, did not insist but left a fifty centime tip.

As he left, he noticed the name of the neighbouring bar: Tout va Bien. 'Yes,' he thought, with a sort of smile, 'all is well.' He imagined how bitter he would have felt if he had spent an hour and a half dressing up the previous evening with a view to an amorous adventure, and all to no purpose. He shuddered at the thought. He hailed a taxi and gave the driver the Boulevard Arago address.

[*The Bachelors*, tr by Terence Kilmartin, 1977, Greenwood Press © 1977 by Greenwood Press]

Mystery of the child yet to be born

Written in 1942, at a time when several French writers were turning to mythology in order to sidestep censorship during the German occupation' as well as to give a different perspective on modern problems, the play, *The Dead Queen (La reine morte)* has significant mythological overtones. set in sixteenth-century Spain, articulates the vanity of life and action. It dwells on the ever alive poignant duality of love versus reason. Ferrante, King of Portugal, is to marry his son Don Pedro to the Princess of Navarre. He doesn't know that Don Pedro has already married Dona Ines de Castro in secret and that she is carrying his child. Candid Ines captivates Ferrante with her earnestness and the purity of her feelings, but the old king must nevertheless, resign himself to sacrifice the two lovers and their passion for the sake of the state. Throughout the play Ferrante shows signs of deterioration, the weight and guilt of this decision finally take its toll and he too dies soon after Ines. At the end of the play, we see his son Pedro remove the crown from his father's head, and place it on Ines's belly.

English translation of the play does exist but, in spite of all possible efforts, could not be located in the stock of any of the possible libraries within the country. However, in view of the relevance and importance of the work an extract from the original French is reproduced below:

INES : J' accepte de devoir mepriser l' univers entire, mais non mon fils. Je crois que je serais capable de le tuer, s' il ne repondait pas a ce que j' attends de lui.

FERRANTE : Alors, tuez- le donc quand il sortira de vous. Donnez- le a manger aux pourceaux. Car il est sur que, autant par lui vous etes en plein reve, autant par lui vous serez en plein cauchemar.

INES : Sire, c'est peche a vous de maudire cet enfant qui est de votre sang.

FERRANTE : J' aime decourager. Et je n' aime pas l' avenir.

INES : L' enfant qui va naitre a déjà son passé.

FERRANTE : Cauchemar pour vous. Cauchemar pour lui aussi. Un jour on le déchirera, on dira du mal du lui... Oh ! je connais tout cela.

INES : Est-il possible qu' on puisse dire du mal de mon enfant !

FERRANTE : On le detestera ...

INES : On le detestera, lui qui n'a pas voulu d' être !

FERRANTE : Il souffrira, il pleurera ...

INES : Vous savez l' art des mots faits pour desesperer ! –Comment retenir ses larmes, les prendre pour moi, les faire couler en moi ? Moi, je puis tout supporter : je puis souffrir a sa place, pleurer a sa place. Mais lui ! Oh ! Que je voudrais que mon amour eut le pouvoir de mettre dans sa vie un sourire eternal ! Deja, cependant, on l' attaque, cet amour. On me desapprouve, on me conseille, on pretend etre meilleure mere que je ne le sui. Et voice que vous, Sire – mieux encore ! – sur cet amour vous venez jeter l' anathema. Alors, qu' il me semblait parfois que, si les homes savaient combine j' aime mon enfant, peut-etre cela souffrirait-il pour que la haine se tarit a jamais dans leur coeur. Car moi, tant que je le porte, je sens en moi une puissance merveilleuse de tendresse pour les homes. Et c' est lui qui defend cette region profonde de mon etre d' ou sort ce que je donne a la creation et aux createurs. Sa purete defend la mienne. Sa candeur preserve la mienne contre ceux qui voudraient la detruire. Vous savez contre qui, Seigneur.

FERRANTE : Sa purete n'est qu'un moment de lui, elle n'est pas lui. Car les femmes dissent toujours : "Elever un enfant pour qu' il meure a la guerre !" Mais il y a pis encore : elever un enfant pour qu' il vive et se degrade dans la vie. Et vous, Ines, vous semblez avoir parie singulierement pour la vie. Est-ce que vous vous etes regardee dans un miroir ? Vous etes bien fraiche pour quelqu'un que menacent de grands tourment. Vous aussi vous faites partie de toutes ces choses qui veulent continuer, continuer ... Vous aussi, comme moi, vous etes malade : votre maladie a vous est l' esperance. Vous meriteriez que Dieu vous envoie une terrible epreuve, qui ruine enfin votre folle candeur, de sorte qu' une fois au moins vous voyiez ce qui est.

INES : Seigneur, inutile, croyez- moi, de me rappeller tout ce qui me menace. Quoi qu' il puisse paraître quelquefois. Jamais je ne l' oublie.

FERRANTE, *a part* : Je crois que j'aime en elle le mal que je lui fais. (*Haut.*) Je ne vous menace pas, mais je m'impatiente de vous voir repartir, toute voiles dehors, sur la mer inepuisable et infinie de l' esperance. La foi des aures me deprime.

INES : Sire, puisque Votre Majeste connait desormais l' existence de mon enfant ...

FERRANTE : En voila assez avec cet enfant. Vous m'avez etale vos entrailles, et vous avez ete chercher les miennes. Vous vous etes servi de votre enfant a venir, pour remuer mon enfant passé. Vous avez cru habile de me faire connaitre votre maternite en ce moment, et vous avez ete malhabile.

[*La Reine morte*, III, vi, Editions Gallimards 91942) © Editions Gallimards.]

Francis Ponge (1899-1988)

Francis Jean Gaston Alfred Ponge was a highly original poet born in Montpellier, France. He studied philosophy and law in Paris before serving in the army during World War I. Ponge joined the Communist Party in 1937, briefly served as literary and art editor of its weekly, *Action*, and left the party in 1947 to concentrate on writing and teaching at the Alliance Française (1952–64).

Briefly involved with the Surrealist movement in the 1920s Ponge was a controversial figure opposed to emotional and symbolic style of composing poetry. His method was to observe things meticulously and describe them in rational, yet lyric terms. He described his own works as "a description-definition-literary artwork" which avoided both the drabness of a dictionary and the inadequacy of poetry. Francis Ponge crafted intricate prose poems about everyday objects seeking to create a "visual equivalence" between language and subject matter by emphasizing word associations and by manipulating the sound, rhythm, and typography of the words to mimic the essential characteristics of the object described. These largely prose poems are an impassioned meditation on the essence of objects.

Francis Ponge is best known for his collection of verse *Le Parti pris des choses* (*The Voice of Things*) and the book-length poem, *Le Savon* (*Soap*). *The Voice of Things* is ostensibly a set of descriptions of banal, everyday objects such as an orange, a cigarette and an oyster where the poet has meticulously described 'things' in a poetic voice and a very personal style. It is a monumentally ambitious disquisition into the relationship between the world and consciousness, reality and our attempts to represent it. His long composition, *Soap* describes the experience that 'soap' goes through. In 1961 he published three volumes of *Le Grand Recueil*, containing his new poems as well as an extensive discussion of his poetic method. His principal aim was to avoid stereotypical thinking. In *Le Grand Recueil* (The Grand Collection), he explains his method as, "concentration on simple objects – stones, grass, directed towards a restoration of the power and purity of language."

In 2005 Gallimard Press published *Pages d'atelier, 1917-1982*, a text encompassing Ponge's entire life's work, including some pieces that had previously never been published.

His awards include Neustadt International Prize for literature (1974), the French National Poetry Prize in 1981 and the Grand Prix of the Société des gens de lettres in 1985. He also received the Legion d' honneur in 1983.

Principal collections : *The Voice of Things* , 1971 (*Le Parti pris des choses*, 1942); *Mute objects of Expression*, (*La Rage de l'expression*, 1952) ; *Soap*, 1969 (*Le Savon*, 1967); *Pour un Malherbe*, 1965, *Le Grand Recueil*, 1967; *The Making of the Pré*, 1978 (*La Fabrique du Pré* ,1971).

SOAP

Roanne, April 1942

If I rub my hands with it, soaps foams, exults ...

The more complaint it makes them, supple,
smooth, docile, the more it slobbers, the more
its rage becomes voluminous, pearly ...

Magic stone!

The more it forms with air and water
clusters of scented grapes
explosive ...

Water, air and soap
overlap, play
at leapfrog, form
combination less chemical than
physical, gymnastical, acrobatical ...
Rhetorical?

There is much to say about soap. Precisely every-
thing that it tells about itself until the complete dis-
appearance, the exhaustion of the subject. This is
precisely the object suited to me.

*

Soap has much to say. May it say it with volubility,
enthusiasm. When it has finished saying it, it no longer
is.

*

A sort of stone, but which does not let itself be
rolled around in nature: it slips between your fingers,
and melts before your eyes rather than be rolled about
by water.

The game exactly consists, then, of holding it in
your fingers and chafing it with the right dose of
water, so as to obtain from it a voluminous, pearly
reaction ...

If one lets it remain in the water, on the contrary,
it perishes in confusion.

*

A sort of stone, but (*yes! a-sort-of-stone-but*) which
does not let itself be unilaterally caressed by the
forces of nature: it slips between their fingers, melts
before their eyes.

It melts before the eyes, rather than let itself be
rolled about by water.

*

There is, in nature, nothing comparable to soap.
No pebble (quoit), no stone so slippery, whose reac-
tion in your fingers, if you have managed to hold it

there while chafing it with the right dose of water, is such a voluminous, pearly sober, consisting of so many clusters of plethoric bubbles.

The hollow grapes, the scented grapes of soap. Agglomerations.

It gobbles the air, it gobbles the water all over your fingers.

Although at first it reposes, inert and amorphous in saucer, the power is in the hands of soap to make our own willing, complaisant to use water, to abuse water in its least details.

So we slip from words to meaning with a lucid inebriety, or rather an effervescence, an iridescent though lucid and cold ebullition, which we come out of with hands purer than before this exercise began.

*

Soap is a sort of stone, but not natural: sensitive, susceptible, complicated.

It has a particular sort of dignity.

Far from taking pleasure (or at least passing its time) is being rolled about by the forces of nature, it slips between their fingers; it melts before the eyes, rather than let itself be unilaterally rolled about by water.

[From **Soap** (Le Savon, 1967) by Francis Ponge translated by Lane Dunlop, Jonathan Cape Ltd. London 1969: © Jonathan Cape, Soap, Pp 13-15]

The Oyster

The Oyster, the size of an average pebble, looks tougher, its colour is less uniform, brilliantly whitish. It is a stubbornly closed world. And yet, it can be opened: one must then hold it in the hollow of a dish towel, use a jagged and rather a tricky knife, repeat this many times. Curious fingers cut themselves on it, nails break on it: it's tough going. Hitting it that way leaves white circles, like halos on its envelop.

Inside, one finds a whole world to drink and eat: under a nacreous *firmament* (strictly speaking), the heavens above recline on the heavens below and form a single pool, a viscous and greenish bag, that flows in and out when you smell it or look at it, fringed with blackish lace along the edges.

Sometimes, a very rare formula pearls in their nacreous throat, and right away you have an ornament.

[tr by Serge Gavronsky in *Modern French Poetry*, Columbia University Press, 1975 rep in **The Yale Anthology of Twentieth century French Poetry**, ed Mary Ann Caws, 2004. P. 209 © Columbia University Press]

Rain

In the yard where I watch it fall, the rain comes down at several different speeds. In the middle it is a delicate and threadbare curtain (or a net) an implacable but relatively slow descent of quite small drops, a sempiternal precipitation lacking vigour, an intense fragment of the pure meteor. A little away from the walls on each side heavier drops fall separately, with more noise. Some look the size of a grain of corn, others a pea, or almost a marble. On the parapets and the balustrades of the window the rain runs horizontally, and on the inside of these obstacles it hangs down in convex loops. It streams in a thin sheet over the entire surface of a zinc roof straight below me—a pattern of watered silk, in the various currents, from the imperceptible bosses and undulations of the surface. In the gutter there, it flows with the contentment of a deep but slightly inclined stream, until suddenly it plunges in a perfectly vertical thread, quite thickly platted, to the ground, where it breaks and scatters in shining needles.

[tr by Peter Riley in **The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry** ed. Paul Auster 1984, p.311 © Peter Riley]

The Candle

Night sometimes revives a curious plant whose light decomposes furnished rooms into clumps of shadows.

In golden leaf, held by a very black peduncle, stands unconcerned in the hollow of a little column of alabaster.

Shabby moths attack it, perfectly at high moon which dissolves the woods. But quickly burnt or beaten in the scuffle, all of them shudder on the edge of a frenzy or stupor.

Yet the candle, by the flickering of its brightness, on the book with abrupt eruptions of original smoke, encourages the reader to go on—but then bends over its plate and drowns in its own nourishment.

[tr by Raymond Federman in **The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry** ed. Paul Auster 1984, p.313 © Raymond Federman]

The Pleasures of the Door

Kings do not touch doors.

They do not know that happiness: to push before them with kindness or rudeness one of these rude familiar panels , to turn around toward it to put it back in place—to hold it in one's arms.

... The happiness of grabbing by the porcelain knot of its belly one of these huge single obstacles; this quick grappling by which, for a moment, progress is hindered, as the eye opens and the entire body fits into its new environment. With a friendly hand he holds it a while longer before pushing it back decidedly thus shuttling himself in –of which, he, by the click of the powerful and well-oiled spring, is pleasantly assured.

[tr by Raymond Federman in **The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry** ed. Paul Auster 1984, p.313-14 © Raymond Federman]

Henri Michaux (1899–1984)

Henri Michaux was a highly idiosyncratic Belgium-born poet, writer, and painter who wrote in French. Michaux is best known for his esoteric books written in a highly accessible style, and his body of work includes poetry, travelogues, and art criticism.

Michaux was born in Namur, Belgium, the son of a lawyer, and educated at a Jesuit school in Brussels. He contemplated entering the priesthood, turned to the study of medicine, then left school entirely, enlisting instead as a stoker in the French merchant marine. Henri Michaux travelled widely, tried his hand at several careers— worked as a teacher for a time and was employed as a secretary to the poet Jules Supervielle. In 1955 he took French citizenship and lived there for the rest of his life. Settling in Paris, Michaux began to write and paint. His work, especially his prose poems recounting the strange and very funny misadventures of the character he called Monsieur Plume, drew the attention and praise of other writers, among them André Gide. . In 1948 Michaux's wife died. Devastated, he devoted himself increasingly to his distinctive calligraphic drawings in ink. He also began to take mescaline at regular intervals, recording his deeply disorienting, often traumatic experiences in a series of unflinching texts beginning with *Miserable Miracle*.

Throughout his life Michaux examined the inner world revealed by dreams, fantasies, and hallucinogenic drugs. His work can be called a revelation and testimony. **Miserable Miracle** opens with this phrase: "This book is an exploration. By means of words, signs, drawings. Mescaline, the subject explored." Michaux's painting has never been a mere adjunct to his poetry: the two are at once autonomous and complementary to each other. Forms, ideas and sensations intertwine as though they were a single, dizzyingly proliferating entity. In a certain sense, the sketches, far from being illustrations of the written word, are a sort of commentary.

Michaux's view of the human condition is essentially bleak. His poems emphasize the impossibility of making sense of life as it impinges on the individual. However, Michaux sets the richness of his imagination against this ambience of futility. The contradictions of his surrealistic images were intended to reflect the absurdity of existence. Some of his poetry is cast in the form of deceptively flippant verse with playful rhymes. At other times he presented his themes in prose poems.

In 1930–1931, Henri Michaux visited Japan, China and India. The result of this trip is the book *A Barbarian in Asia*. Oriental culture became one of his biggest influences. The philosophy of Buddhism, and Oriental calligraphy, later became principal subjects of many of his poems and inspired many of his drawings. Michaux is best known for his stories about Plume – "a peaceful man" - perhaps the most unenterprising hero in the history of literature, and his many misfortunes. All his writing is strange and original. As his translator put it in *Darkness Moves*, his poems are "messages from his inner space." That space may be transformed by drugs as in *Miserable Miracle* or by terrifying vision, as in "Space of the Shadows" (in *Darkness Moves*) but the "messages" from it are always as clear and concrete as possible.

Celebrated in France and around the world for his accomplishments as a writer and a highly original artist, Michaux remained averse to publicity and public honors throughout his life, and in 1965 refused the **French Grand Prix National des Lettres**.

Principal works: *Qui je fus* (1927); *Ecuador* (1929); *Mes Propriete* (1929); *Un Certain Plume* (1930); *Un Barbare en Asie* (1933); *La Nuit remue* (1935); *Plume precede de Lointain interieur* (1937); *Au pays de la magie* (1942); *Passage* (1950); *Miserable miracle* (1956); *L' infini turbulent* (1957); *Les grandes epreuves de l; spirit* (1966); *Face a ce qui se derobe* (1974); *Chemins churches, Chemins perdus, transgressions* (1981); *Deplacements, Degagements* (1985); *Affrontements* (1986).

In English: Spaced, Displaced tr by David & Helen Constantine, Bloodaxe Contemporary French Poets, 1992; Someone Wants to Steal My Name ed by Nin Andrews, Cleveland State University Press, 2003; Selected Writings tr by Richard Ellman, New Directions, 1968;

Where to lay the head?

A sky
a sky because earth no longer is
not a wing, neither down nor the feather of a bird, not a wisp

strictly and only sky
a sky because earth no longer is

After the blast in the head, the horror, the hopelessness
after there was nothing anymore but everything waste, scuttled
and every exit lost

a sky glacially sky

Obstructed at present, blocked and full of debris;
sky because of the migraine of the earth
deprived of sky

a sky because now there is nowhere to lay the head

Traversed, shrunk, withdrawn, eaten away, here and there undone,
unbreathable in the explosions and the smoke
good for nothing

a sky henceforth never to be found again

[tr. by David & Helen Constantine. *Spaced, Displaced*, Bloodaxe Contemporary French Poets, 1992 ©1992, David & Helen Constantine]

ICEBERGS

Icebergs, without guardrail, without girdle, where
old weather-beaten cormorants and the souls of
recently dead sailors lean on their elbows on the
enchancing and hyperboreal nights.

Icebergs, Icebergs, cathedrals without religion of
the eternal winter, robed in the glacial skullcap of
the planet Earth.

How high, how pure are your edges, born of the
cold.

Icebergs, Icebergs, back of the North Atlantic,
august Buddhas, frozen on un contemplated seas,
gleaming Lighthouses of Death without issue, the
desperate cry of the silence lasts for centuries.

Icebergs, Icebergs, Solitaries without cause,
countries barred-up, distant and free of vermin.
Parents of islands, parents of springs, how well I
see you, how familiar you are to me ...

[From *La nuit remue*, tr Richard Ellman in *Henri Michaux: Selected Writings*, A New
Directions Book, 1952 © Richard Ellman]

The Hindu is a reinforced being. He reinforces himself by means of meditation.
He is high-pressured.

There is a difference between a European and a Hindu, a difference like that
between silence and a note on an organ. The Hindu is always intense, his repose is
positive. The white man's repose is zero, or rather it is minus x.

The Hindu is a sensualist: he takes delight slowly.

The exceptional place that he occupies in the spiritual world is due to the fact that
he has always sought enjoyment in satisfying the most remarkable appetites.

In religion and in sacrifice, in adoration, in magic power and... in an
extraordinary vanity.

The rajahs have trained thousands of Hindu menials for thousands of years to be
cringing cowards.

And this cringing, inconceivable to one who has not seen it, is more frightful,
more painful to behold than all the miseries and the famine and the endemic cholera.

This cringing of caste, the cringing born of three thousand years of male and
female cringing, was made for their benefit. And look at the result.

Only princes and quite rich people use Royal Yakuti.

These are the headlines of a stupendous advertisement. For a patent medicine, and
not such a tremendously high-priced one at that.

This advertisement with its appeal to the flashy has done more to sell the stuff than a hundred thousand medical certificates.

Without their vanity, the institution of caste would not have held out for three thousand years.

Christian converts have had a partition built in the cathedral at Pondicherry to separate the castes.

I am a Christian, but of the Brahmin caste!

[From, *A Barbarian in Asia*, tr by Sylvia Beach, Rupa & Co.,2006 © 1949 by New Directions.]

Hindu religion includes monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, animism and devil worship. He who can do so adores only. Brahma, but if he is unable to manage with that, he has Kali and Vishnu as well; and if that doesn't do, too bad, but there are plenty more of them. And he has *put everything* into religion.

Nothing is to be found outside of it. The priest is a pimp and his temple is full of women; union with them washes away all sin. The *Kamasutra* is not a book to be read *sub rosa*. I myself saw in Orissa and Kornarak on the façade of temples a half dozen love postures of which I had had a very hazy notion up till then. These statues are placed in evidence right on the exterior; the child who does not understand has only to ask the meaning, but it is usually obvious.

All actions are sacred. One thinks of them without being detached from the All.

The sexual act, even these very European words themselves, are already sins, infection, beastliness, human mechanism.

The Hindu is never apart from his sexual organ¹; it is one of the centers upon which he bases his equilibrium. The same with the abdomen, the same with the forehead. He prays seated, his thighs open, on the ground, in a low equilibrium close to the lower center.

In France you tell dirty jokes and you laugh at them. Here you tell them, you absorb them without laughing. you follow them dreamily, you seek the game of organs.

In the Hindu songs, or dramas translated into French, there are always passages put in Latin, on account of their immodesty.

In one of the best plays of Kalidasa (or is it in the *Malati Madhava* of Bhavabhuti?),after several passages that are so irresistible in their appeal to sentiment that one cannot help weeping, the young maiden involved in the affair is asked by her lady companion: 'Dost thou feel in thy vagina the moisture that precedes love?' Now really, that is the way one would speak of a mare in heat. Nevertheless, the young girl replies without astonishment, after the pretty fashion of young girls: 'Ah! Hush, how canst thou read thus in my heart?'

1. *Sperm puts the Hindu in a state of mystic jubilation. He sees his goddess covered with it.*(See *Atharva Veda*, Book VIII, hymn ix.(note by Michaux)

[From *A Barbarian in Asia*, tr by Sylvia Beach, Rupa & Co.,2006 © 1949 by New Directions.]

Fate

Already we were on the boat, already I was sailing, I was in the open sea, when, falling on me suddenly like the date of payment of a debt, misfortune of faithful memory came and said: "It's I, you know, come now, come back!" and he took me away in no time at all, and he drew me in as you pull in your tongue.

Already on the boat, already the ocean with its confused voices withdraws with suppleness, already the ocean in its great modesty withdraws with kindness pressing back on itself its long blue lips, already the mirage of distant lands, already... but suddenly...

When misfortune taking its basket and its box of pincers, goes into the newly lighted parts of the city, goes to see if there isn't over there one of its own who might have tried to lose its destiny ...

When misfortune with its skillful fingers of a hair-dresser takes hold of its scissors in one hand, and in the other the nerve system of a man, that frail hesitant ladder in the plump flesh, drawing froth flashes and spasms and the despair of that flaxen animal, terrified... .

Oh! Loathsome world, it wasn't easy to draw good from you.

For him who has a pin in his eye, a future in the English navy is no longer interesting. If only he could sleep. But the eyelid covering his sore like brush ...

On an eye, if you push it out just a bit for the purpose, you can flip plates magnificently.

It is marvelous to see that. You never tire watching tire watching. But the man who suffers from that eye, has a part in this game he would sell willingly, without being urged. Or at least not for long.

[tr by William Fowlie in *Modern French Poets* ed & tr by Wallace Fowlie, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1955 © 1955, Wallace Fowlie]

A Peaceful Man

Stretching his hands out of the bed, Plume was amazed at not touching the wall. "Well," he thought, "the ants must have eaten it ..." and he went back to sleep.

Soon after, his wife took hold of him and shook him: "Good-for-nothing," she said, "Look! While you were busy sleeping, they stole our house from us." It was true. Whenever he looked, he saw the sky. "Bah! it's done now," he thought.

Soon after, he heard a noise. It was a train rushing at them. "With all that haste," he thought, "it will certainly get there before us." And he went back to sleep.

Next, the cold woke him up. He was drenched in blood. A few pieces of his wife lay near by. "With blood," he thought, "there are always a great many annoyances. I'd be very happy if this train hadn't really passed. But since it's already passed by ..." and he went back to sleep.

--Well, said the judge, how do you explain that your wife was wounded and found cut into eight pieces and you who were beside her couldn't do anything to stop it. You didn't even see it. That's the mystery. The whole trouble is right there.

--I can't help him with that story, thought Plume, and he went back to sleep.

[tr by William Fowlie in *Modern French Poets* ed & tr by Wallace Fowlie, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1955 © 1955, Wallace Fowlie]

Plume Travelling

Plume cannot say that he has been paid great respect while travelling. Some pass right over him without a word of warning, and others placidly wipe their hands on his coat. He grew accustomed to this. He prefers to travel modestly. As long as he can, he will behave thus.

If someone cross serves him a root on his plat, a big root, "Come now, eat. What are you waiting for?"

"Of course, right away." He doesn't want to become involved uselessly.

And if at night they refuse him a bed: "You don't mean you come from so far just to sleep? Come, take your bag and your things. This is the best part of the day for walking."

"Why yes, certainly! I was just pretending. My little joke." And he sets out in the dark of night.

And if you throw him out of the train. "So you think we fired this locomotive for three hours and attached eight cars to transport a young fellow of your age, in good health, who may be of great service here, and who has no need of going that far, and that it's for that reason they dug out tunnels, dynamited tons of rock and laid hundreds of miles of rails in all kinds of weather, without forgetting that we still have to guard the tracks continually for fear of sabotage, and all that for ..."

"Of course, of course. I understand. I came inside just to look. And now that's over. I was just curious, you understand. Many thanks." And he goes back to the road with his bags.

And if at Rome he asks to see the Coliseum: "No, Sir! It's already in a terrible condition. You'll want to touch it, lean against it or sit down. That's why there are ruins everywhere. It's been a lesson for us, a hard lesson, but from now on, nothing doing, do you understand?"

[tr by William Fowlie in *Modern French Poets* ed & tr by Wallace Fowlie, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1955 © 1955, Wallace Fowlie]

Nathalie Sarraute (1900-1999)

Born in Ivanovo, Russia she spent most of her life in Paris. Having settled in France at an early age Nathalie Sarraute became a lawyer. After 1939 she devoted herself entirely to literature. Primarily a novelist, she was also a playwright, essayist, critic, and dramatist.

Sarraute is often named as one of the originators of a French literary movement which began in the mid-1950s known as the "Nouveau Roman," or the "New Novel." *L'ère du soupçon* (1956; *The Age of Suspicion*), a collection of critical essays in which Sarraute announced a break with the traditional form of the novel, is regarded as one of the classic texts of the movement; its publication coincided with a similar announcement by Alain Robbe-Grillet, the best known of the New Novelists. Although Sarraute shares with the New Novelists a rejection of traditional plot structures, identifiable characters, and other realistic conventions of the novel, she and some of her critics have pointed out that many of her connections with the New Novelists are superficial. Sarraute's primary interest is in human beings and their psychological states, while other New Novelists emphasize visual description of the external world, something which is almost completely absent from Sarraute's work. The New Novelists' fascination with language apart from any point of reference in the real world is also anathema to Sarraute, who uses language to explore the real, albeit unseen, inner world of her characters. In an essay, she asks, "What is a work of art if not a break through appearances toward an unknown reality?" Sarraute initiated many of the innovations associated with the New Novel in *Tropisms* and *Portrait of a Man Unknown*, works which significantly predate the movement. But it was not until its tenets had been formulated and gained recognition that these early works became widely read. Her first book, *Tropismes* (1938) was not discovered until after World War II.

Critics frequently complain that nothing in Sarraute's work justifies the difficulty of understanding it. Henri Peyre, one of her most prominent detractors, contends that Sarraute's refusal to give names to most of her characters "erects a hurdle of dubious value between the book and the reader." While critics admire Sarraute's use of tropisms to take the psychological novel a step beyond the work of Dostoevski or Virginia Woolf, many contend that the psychological elements of Sarraute's work cannot stand without an ordering of the many details of sensibility which she relates. Another common appraisal of Sarraute's work is that it has duplicated the tedium and boredom of the real world so faithfully that the books themselves are tedious.

Sarraute's work gradually took a revered place on the shelves of French bookstores and in the syllabi of French universities two years before Sarraute's death. Though she was hailed by Susan Sontag and Richard Howard and other Americans in the 1960s, Sarraute is now very difficult to find in English. One of Sarraute's major contributions to contemporary literature is the concept of the "tropism." Sarraute borrowed this term from biology to describe "the almost imperceptible movements concealed behind the social facade of gestures, actions and language, the authentic, constantly moving realm of instinctive reactions." The technique which Sarraute devised as a medium for expression of tropisms is "subconversation." Subconversation consists not of unspoken dialogue, but of half-formed thoughts and feelings which are conveyed to the reader impressionistically through metaphor, imagery, sound, and rhythm.

Sarraute's writing is often difficult to understand because of her almost complete lack of exposition, her use of ellipses in place of standard punctuation, her refusal to distinguish between different speakers, between spoken and unspoken thoughts, and between real and imaginary events narrated in her characteristically dense, elliptical, and terse paragraphs. Critical opinion of the New Novel has often been negative, especially on the part of English and American scholars. The New Novelists are often accused of abolishing many staples of the traditional novel without offering the reader anything of value in their place. Because Sarraute shares with the New Novelists a rejection of such novelistic conventions as plot and character, she has often been the target of similar objections. Despite the opinion of some critics that Sarraute's novels are too inaccessible to merit wide readership, her concept of the tropism and her technique of the sub-conversation are considered among the few major innovations in contemporary fiction. As Claude Mauriac has stated, "What [Sarraute] says corresponds to what our experience has taught us, but nobody has expressed it before her"; he also calls her "the only living author who has created anything new after Proust."

Principal works: *Tropisms* (*Tropismes*, 1939); *Portrait of a Man Unknown* (*Portrait d'un inconnu*, preface by Jean-Paul Sartre 1949); *The Planetarium*, (*Le Planétarium*, 1959); *Martereau* (1953); *Fools Say*. *The Golden Fruits* (*Les Fruits d'or*, 1963); *Childhood* (*Enfance*) *The Age of Suspicion*: Essays on the Novel, and *The Use of Speech*.

“In the afternoon they went out together, led the life that women lead.”

Sarraute herself has explained in her foreword that tropisms are ‘inner movements’, “veritable dramatic actions, hiding beneath the most commonplace conversations, the most everyday gestures, and constantly emerging up on the surface of the appearances that both conceal and reveal them... . [...] while we are performing them, no words express them, not even those of the interior monologue – for they develop and pass through us very rapidly in the form of frequently very sharp, brief sensations, without our perceiving clearly what they are.”

In the afternoon they went out together, led the life that women lead. And what an extraordinary life it was! They went to “tearooms,” ate cakes, which they picked out daintily, in a slightly greedy manner: chocolate éclairs, “babas,” and tarts.

All about them was chirping aviary, warm and gaily lighted and decorated. They remained there, seated, pressed close together around their little tables, talking.

There was a current of excitement and bustle about them, a slight disquiet filled with joy, the memory of a difficult choice, concerning which they were still not certain (would it go with the blue and gray outfit: Why of course, it would be perfect), the prospect of this metamorphosis, of this sudden enhancement of their personality, of this glamour.

They, they, they, they, always they, voracious, chirping, dainty.

Their faces seemed to be stiff with a sort of inner tension, their indifferent eyes skimmed lightly over the aspect, the mask of things, weighted it for a short second (was it pretty of ugly?) then let it drop. And their makeup gave them a hard brilliancy, a lifeless freshness.

They went to tearooms. They remained sitting there for hours, while entire afternoons slipped by. They talked: “They have awful scenes, disputes about nothing at all. I must say that he’s the one I feel sorry for in it all. How much? Oh, at least two millions. And if only what she inherited from her Aunt Josephine ... No ... How could it? He won’t marry her. What he needs is a good housewife, he don’t realize it himself. Certainly not, I mean it. What he needs is a good housewife Housewife ... Housewife ...” They had always heard it said, they knew it: the sentiments, love, life, these were their domain. It belonged to them.

And they talked and talked, repeating the same things, going over them, then going over them again, from one side then from the other, kneading and kneading them, continually rolling between their fingers this unsatisfactory, means substance that they had extracted from their lives (what they called “life,” their domain) kneading it, pulling it, rolling it until it ceased to form anything between their fingers but a little pile, a little gray pellet.

[*Tropisms* tr.by Maria Jolas, George Braziller, New York, 1963 © 1963, John Calder Ltd. pp.38-39]

“Gleaming bits of life”

The narrator watches an old man and his daughter to find out the origin of their feelings, their relationship with others. The vision of a Rembrandt painting, ‘Portrait of an unknown man’ seems suddenly to free him of his obsessive quest.

The world stretched out before me like the fields in fairy tales on which, as a result of a few magic words, the traveler sees fine linen covered with delicious viands spread out before him on glistening grass, beside a spring, or along the banks of a stream.

No longer would I have to stretch out a docile hand to be fed by them, to receive from them the little mouthfuls of pre-masticated foods and ready-to-serve pleasures that they used to give me.

I had retrieved my own foods, my own pleasures, prepared for me alone, and known to me alone. I recognized their former savor. They enveloped me with their mild fragrance, similar to that given forth by wet young leaves in the spring air. My fetishes, My little gods. The altars on which I had once laid so many secret offerings, back in the days when I still had all my strength, all my purity.

Scattered about the world, they constituted, for me alone, the means of finding my way. There existed a pack between them and me, a secret alliance. Like the Unknown Man they offered me their support.

They were, above all- these treasures of mine –stones, fragments of walls: gleaming bits of life that I had succeeded in capturing. There were all kinds: certain ones that I knew well, and others that had just greeted me once, that had undulated for me with a soft, warm luster, for one brief moment, as I passed by in a group of people, without being able to stop. But I haven’t forgotten them.

As, for instance, in the deserted courtyard of a mosque, the rim of a well, lying warm and golden in the sunlight, downy as ripe peach, and buzzing with the constant hum of bees on the wing. Its uneven outlines must have been modeled long ago, with delicate, devout tenderness, and then , it has been touched each day by hands accustomed

to making quiet gestures and, like people who have had a sheltered childhood, it is as though the stones had been impregnated with all this tenderness and were radiating it even now, as though they gave forth this tenderness like a very gentle glow.

There are also, elsewhere, old stones that are a dark gray, damp and velvety, partly covered by a thin growth of bright green moss. They are sunk deep in the water of the canal, only to reappear here and there, now dull and almost black, now sparkling in the sunlight. The lapping of the water against them is gentle and caressing like the name Tiepolo, when spoken very softly: *Tie-po-lo*, which calls up patches of deep-blue sky and winged colours.

I recall, too, along tortuous, roughly paved little streets certain bits of wall that are bathed in light. Occasionally the deep shade of a palm branch serves to heighten their brilliance.

And in the north there are wharves that are a silvery white in the morning light, and corners of wharves along canals where silver-winged birds fly, and whitewashed walls, snow-bordered, which, at dusk, take on the shade of blue-rinsed linen, the way snow does.

They sprang up around me from every side, my gems and delight of old, move vivid, more radiant than they had ever been.

It seemed to me that during our long separation all their sap which was intended for me had collected in them. They were heavier and riper than before, all swollen with their unused sap. I felt their firm, warm nearness, I leaned on them and they gave me protection; in their proximity I felt like a fruit ripening in the sun, I, too, became heavy and swollen with sap, buzzing with promises and impulses and entreaties.

As it had **done** before, long ago, the future stretched ahead of me, deliciously indistinct and blurred, hazy as a mist-covered horizon on the morning of a fine day.

Like water that divides under the prow of a ship, time began gently to open up, in a moment of endless expansion, under the pressure of my hopes and my desires.

The water opened with a sound of crumpled silk under the bow of the boat. Fine crests of white foam raced by, trembling with delight ...

[*Portrait of a Man Unknown* tr. Maria Jolas, paperback, 1990 pp. 87-89 © 1958, George Braziller Inc.]

“ ... since I’m not intelligent”

His name. He heard it distinctly ... His name, like the click of a trigger behind his back, followed by a volley of bird shot: “Not intelligent? Really? You think so? ... –I’m sure. Gifted, that’s certain, but not intelligent.–Yes perhaps, at bottom ... He stops, he’s shaking, his head is swimming, he’s about to lose consciousness, fall down ... and they catch him ... –Ah, at last, he’s waiting for us ... Quitter, there, always in the clouds. It’s all we can do to follow you, you run from us like a rabbit ...

At the time, no pain, just that little weakness and a new, strange sensation, it must be this sensation that people lying helpless, with an injured spinal column, when they try to get up and realize that their usual reflexes have ceased functioning, that their legs are paralyzed ... one of their vital points must have been affected ...

The center. The secret spot where the General Staff is located and from where he, the Commander-in-Chief, all the maps spread out for him to see, examining the lay of the land, listening to reports, taking decisions, directing operations, a bomb hit it ... he is thrown to the ground, his insignia torn off, he is shaken, obliged to get up and walk, pushed forward by blows from rifle butts, kicks, into the gray flock of the prisoners, all dressed alike, classified in the same category: fools.

Impossible to defend oneself, to counterattack; he has been disarmed. Impossible to escape, there's no place to hide, wherever he goes he'll be caught.

And it started ... a sort of dual personality ... One part of himself, in an effort to survive, coming unattached, separating, crawling towards them ... trying to pull himself up to their height, to see through their spectacles, to adapt ... Yes, I see, I see very clearly ... they are gifts. I am rather gifted ... But as regards ... yes, you're right. It's not what you might call intelligence ... No ... and yet I can't be mistaken for the others, the ones about whom they say ... –Do listen to him, it's really a curious case ... He himself acknowledges... It's interesting, it would be worth examining more closely ...–So you see, my case is not a desperate one ... I could perhaps get a re-examination ... perhaps a rehabilitation? –Now see here, how could you? The poor creature is trying to outwit us. He repeats what we say like a parrot ... –No, that's not true, I have kept my distance ever since I found out ... That was a shock. A revelation ... But since ... –How do you mean since? –Since then, whenever I think, when I allow myself to judge ... I tell myself, I tell myself: that doesn't hold water ... shortsighted, weak judgement ... Necessarily, since I'm not intelligent. So we have there, admit it, a bit of myself that has been saved, a bit of live tissue that has been preserved, that it will be perhaps possible to cultivate, to develop, and with which I'll succeed in getting rid of the rest ... –That's really touching ... It's rare such modesty, such perspicacity ... Such perspicacity? You too are beginning to make me anxious ... How do you expect it to be possible? Of course, if he's helped, prodded, propped up by us, ruled by us, terrorized, without knowing why, by dint of repeating without understanding it, “I am not intelligent,” he may succeed in persuading himself, in being on his guard ...

[*Fools Say* tr by Maria Jolas, New York, Braziller, 1977]

“Dearest little pillow...”

“Dearest little pillow, with choicest feathers sewn, so soft and warm beneath my head, and made for me alone ... “as I recite, I can hear my little voice, which I am making shriller than it really is because I want it to be the voice of a very little girl, and I can also hear the affected silliness of my intonation... I am perfectly well aware of how false, how ridiculous is this imitation of the innocence, the naivete of a little child, but it's too late, I've let myself in for it, I didn't dare resist when they picked me up under my arms and stood me on that chair so that they could see me better ... if they left me on the floor, they wouldn't be able to see me properly, my head would hardly reach above the long table where, on either side of a bride dressed all in white, people are sitting, looking at me, waiting ... I have been pushed, I have fallen, into this voice, this tone, I can't retreat, I have to advance, masquerading under this disguise of a baby, a silly goose, and now I've come to the place where I have to feign terror, I part my lips, I open my eyes wide,

my voice rises, vibrates ... “When you’re afraid of the wolf, of the wind, of the storm ... “
and then, the tender, native emotion ... “Dearest little pillow, how well I sleep on you ...
“ I follow it through to the bitter end, this path of submission, of abject renunciation of
everything I feel myself to be, of everything I really am, my cheeks are burning, while
they lift me down from my chair, while of my own accord I make the little curtsey of the
well-brought up, good little girl and run off to hide ... in whose lap? ... what was I doing
there? ... who had taken me there? ... to the approving laughs, the amused, sympathetic
exclamations, the loud clapping ...

[*Childhood*, tr by Barbara Wright, New York, Braziller, 1984]

André Malraux (1901-1976)

André-Georges Malraux was a French novelist, art historian, and statesman. He served as Minister of Information (1945–1946) and as France's first Minister of Cultural Affairs during President Charles de Gaulle's presidency (1959–1969). Malraux lived a richly eventful life achieving recognition as a man of action, as well as an important novelist and art theorist. He won the Prix Goncourt for his novel, *La Condition humaine* (*Man's Fate*, 1934), and several war awards, *Medaille de la Resistance* and the *Croix de guerre* from his government and *Distinguished Service Order* from the British.

In 1923, aged 22, Malraux undertook a small expedition into unexplored areas of the Cambodian jungle in search of lost khmer temples, hoping to recover items that might be sold to art museums. On his return, he was arrested by French colonial authorities for removing a bas-relief from Banteay Srei, a somewhat ironic turn of events given that French authorities had themselves removed large numbers of statues and bas-reliefs from temples such as *Angkor Wat*. Malraux's experiences in Indochina led him to become highly critical of the French colonial authorities there. In 1925, he helped to organize the Young Annam League and founded a newspaper *L'Indochine*. On his return to France, Malraux published *The Temptation of the West* (1926) comparing aspects of the Asian and the Western cultures, followed by his first novel *The Conquerors* (1928), and then by *The Royal Way* (1930) which reflected some of his Cambodian experiences. In 1933 Malraux published *La Condition Humaine*, a novel about the 1927 failed Communist rebellion in Shanghai.

After 1945 Malraux virtually abandoned the writing of novels and turned instead to the history and criticism of art. His *Les Voix du silence* is a brilliant and well-documented synthesis of the history of art in all countries and through all ages. It is also a philosophical meditation on art as a supreme expression of human creativity and as one that enables man to transcend the meaningless absurdity and insignificance of his own condition. Malraux continued to explore this approach in *La Métamorphose des Dieux*, 3 vol. (1957–76; *The Metamorphosis of the Gods*). He published his autobiography, *Antimémoires*, in 1967.

Principal Works : *The Psychology of Art*(1947-49); *The Imaginary Museum of World Sculpture* 3 vols.(1952-53); *Man's Hope* (1938); *Days of Warath* (1935); *The Royal Way* (1930); *Man's Estate* or *Man's Fate* (1934); *The Conquerors* (1928); *The Temptation of the West* (1926); *The Voices of Silence* (1953); *Anti-Memoirs* (1968); *The Metamorphosis of the Gods* 3 vols.(1957-1976).

Man's Estate

Malraux called his book, *Man's Estate*(*La Condition humaine*) a report, but it is in fact, largely a work of fiction, with pieces of true information blended with philosophical reflection. His objectives for writing the book are, to reflect the tribulations of a developing world, to shape people who express the aspirations of a tormented time and to depict man's combat with Destiny. Following is the very first page of the novel showing the 1927 uprising in Shanghai which was organized by the communists and repressed by the nationalist General Tchang-Kai-Shek:

Part I
21st. march 1927

12:30 A.M.

SHOULD Chen try lifting up the mosquito-net? Or should he strike through it? He felt desperate in his inability to decide. He knew he was strong really, but for the moment it was only a blank realization, powerless before that man of white muslin which draped down from the ceiling over a body that was vaguer than a shadow; from which only a foot protruded, the foot of a sleeper, angular but still convincingly human flesh. What light there was came from the neighbouring building; a great rectangle of pale electric light, striped by the shadows of the window-bars, one of which cut across the bed just below the man's foot, as if to give it greater substance and reality. Four or five klaxons rasped out all together. Had he been discovered? If only he could fight, fight an enemy who was on his guard, who gave blow for blow-what a relief that would be!

The wave of noise receded: a traffic jam (so there still were traffic jams out there, in the real world...). Once more he was faced with the great shapeless splodge of muslin and the rectangle of light, fixed particles in a world grown timeless.

He kept telling himself that the man must die. It was foolish; for he knew that he was going to kill him. Whether he was caught or not, paid the penalty or not, mattered little. Nothing counted any more but that foot, this man whom his blow must paralyse before he could resist: there must be no resistance, or he would call out.

Chen's eyelids fluttered as he stood there, and the thought came to him, rose up till it sickened him, that he was not the fighter he expected, but one performing a sacrifice. And to more than the gods of his own choosing. This was his offering to the Revolution, but in its train black horrors would rise from the abyss, till the crushing anguish of that night would pale into insignificance before them. Assassination isn't like ordinary killing: far from it... ' In his pockets his hands waited doubtfully; in the right he held a razor, closed; in the left a short dagger. He stuffed them in as far as possible, as though without that aid the darkness were insufficient to conceal his doings. The razor was safer, but Chen knew that he could never bring himself to use it: he was less revolted by the dagger. The back of the razor was digging into his clenched fingers, and he let go of it; the dagger lay naked in his pocket, without a sheath. He change it over into his right hand, his left dropping down on to the woollen surface of his singlet, and clinging there. He raised his right arm a little, amazed that the silence remained unbroken around him, as if some catastrophe should have been precipitated by his gesture.

Malraux served as an aviator in the Spanish Civil War on the Republican side and his novel, *Days of Hope* is based on his experiences. Told exclusively from the Republican point of view the story follows group of combatants, particularly aviators, from the outbreak of the Civil War after Franco's attack to the end emphasizing that the will is nourished and sustained by the power of men working together to achieve greater freedom. 'Hope' because in spite of all blood-shedding and defeats the man's brotherhood continues to exist. In the following extract, Slade, the American journalist close to Republicans is dictating his report right under the bombardment of besieged Madrid.

“And mind you, all this serves no purpose.”

At the moment when, having got Paris, Slade was called into the telephone room, a shell dropped quite near. Then two others, nearer still. Almost all the occupants of the

room rushed to the wall farthest from the window. Despite the electric lights, all in the room were conscious of the fierce red glare in the street; it seemed as if it were the fires outside that were bombarding the Central, with its thirteen stories of windows, at none of which was last shadow of a human form. Finally an old journalist with a big moustache ventured away from the wall. One by one the others followed suit. But they kept glancing back at the wall, as though looking to see if they had left their traces there.

More shells were falling. Scarcely farther away than the first ones. Yet now they had regained their places no one moved again. They say that wherever people meet together, every twenty minutes an angel of silence passes. Here an angel of indifference passed.

Soon Slade was able to begin dictating. As he went on describing his experiences of the morning, the shells came nearer. At each explosion, all the pencil-points leapt up at the same instant from the writing-pads. When there was a pause in the firing the tension increased. Were the guns, over there, correcting their range? Everyone was waiting, waiting, waiting. Slade went on speaking. Paris relayed to New York.

‘This morning, comma, I saw bombs falling all round a hospital where lay a thousand wounded, full stop. On the sidewalk, comma, on the walls, comma, were spoors of blood, comma, such as are left by wounded animals...’

The shell dropped less than twenty yards away. This time there was a general rush to the basement. In the almost empty room there remained only the operators and the correspondents on the wire. The operators listened to the message, but their eyes seemed watching for the coming of the shells. The journalist who were dictating went on doing so; once cut, the communication would not have been made again in time for the morning edition. Slade dictated what he had seen at the ‘Palace’.

‘This afternoon I arrived a few minutes after a shell had exploded in front of a butchershop; there, where women had been standing in line, waiting their turn, were stains; the blood of the slain butcher ran down the counter between the sides of beef and carcasses of mutton hanging from iron hooks, and dripped on to the floor where it was washed away by the water from a burst pipe.

‘And, mind you, all this serves no purpose. None whatever. The inhabitants are far more shaken with horror than with fear. For instance, while bombs were falling all round us, an old man said to me: “I have never meddled in politics. I have always regarded them as beneath contempt. But we can’t let power fall into the hands of people who use power this way – power which is not even their by right as yet – can we?” I stood a whole hour in a line-up in front of a bakery. In the queue were only a few men, but about a hundred women. And everyone, remember, feels it is more dangerous to stay for an hour in the same spot than it is to walk about. Five yards away from the bakery, on the other side of the street, the dead collected from a demolished building were being put into their coffins (The same thing is being done at this very moment in all the shattered houses of Madrid.) There was no noise of guns or of airplanes, and the hammering echoed in the silence. At my side a man said to a woman, “Juanita’s arm has been torn off; do you think her young man will marry her in that state?”

[*Days of Hope* tr by Stuart Gilbert and Alastair MacDonald, London Penguin Books, 1968 pp348-9]

Michel Leiris (1901 – 1990)

Michel Leiris was a key figure in 20th-c. French culture whose work combines poetry, ethnography, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and autobiography in strikingly innovative ways. A pioneer in modern confessional literature he was also an art critic and a talented poet. Poetry was important in his approach to the world. Although mainly recognized for his prolific prose works, he is quoted as saying, in the preface to *Haut Mal, suivi de Autres Lancers* (Gallimard 1969) that "the practice of poetry enables us to posit the Other as an equal" and that poetic inspiration is "a very rare thing, a fleeting gift from Heaven, to which the poet needs to be, at the price of an absolute purity, receptive - and to pay with his unhappiness for the benefits derived from this blessing."

Leiris studied at the Sorbonne and at the School for Advanced Scientific and Religious Studies. While associated with the Surrealists, Leiris published a collection of poems, *Simulacre* (1925; "Simulacrum"), and, in the late 1920s, wrote a novel, *Aurora*, published in 1946. The novel and his numerous collections of poems all show his fascination with puns and wordplay and with the associative power of language.

He broke with Surrealists in 1929, joined the ethnologist, Marcel Griaule and a group of linguists and ethnologists in the Mission Dakar-Djibouti. Together the team explored sub-Saharan Africa and its cultures, bringing back to Paris more than three thousand objects destined for the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro. During the two-year expedition he wrote his first book, *L'Afrique fantôme*, discovering through the process his dual passion for ethnography and autobiography. He continued to study the various facets of subjectivity in his prolific autobiographical writings.

In 1939 Leiris published the autobiographical *L'Âge d'homme* (*Manhood*), which attracted much attention and was reissued in 1946. Self-deprecating and punitive, the work catalogs Leiris' physical and moral flaws; he introduced the 1946 edition with an essay, "De la littérature considérée comme une tauromachie" (1946; *The Autobiographer as Torero*), comparing the courage required to write with that required of a matador. In 1948 he began another autobiography, *La Règle du jeu* ("The Rules of the Game"), which was published in four volumes as *Biffures* (1948; "Erasures"), *Fourbis* (1955; "Odds and Ends"), *Fibrilles* (1966; "Fibrils"), and *Frêle Bruit* (1976; "Frail Noise") and which was replete with memories of childhood humiliations, sexual fantasies, and contemplations of death.

In 1938 Leiris founded the Collège de sociologie with Georges Bataille and Roger Caillois. He served as director of research at the National Centre for Scientific Research from 1935 to 1970. His *Journal 1922–1989* was published in 1992. His anthropological essays include *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934; "Phantom Africa"), *Le Sacré dans la vie quotidienne* (1938; "The Sacred in Everyday Life"), and *Race et civilisation* (1951; "Race and Civilization").

Principal works: *Simulacre* (1925); *Le Point Cardinal* (1927); *L'Âge d'homme* (1939) Eng. *Manhood* (1963); *Haut Mal suivi de Autres Lancers* (1969); *Brisées* (1966); *La Règle du jeu* (1948–1976); *Fourbis* (1955); *Fibrilles* (1966); *Journal 1922-1989* (published in 1992).

Poems

Vertical

On our heads
the finely striped space
and sometimes the work of swift gusts of air

*Charge of living clouds
the shoulders' horizon*

At the waist
the tousled routes
the sunny stumps of the heart

*Grass
thirst of the threadbare earth
toward the rock of knee*

Beneath our feet
piece of blackened sky
the shadow we cut

[tr by Cole Swenson, From *Yale Anthology of Twentieth Century French Poetry*, ed by
Mary Ann Caws, Yale University Press, 2004 © 2004 Yale University Press]

Miserly

Lighten me
unfeather me

strip my baggage down to bare

Abandoning my long-plumed train
of plumage
of needlepoint and feather spray

to become miser-bird
lyre of the lone flight of its wings

[tr by Cole Swenson, From *Yale Anthology of Twentieth Century French Poetry*, ed by
Mary Ann Caws, Yale University Press, 2004 © 2004 Yale University Press]

“The concavity of a mouth”

No doubt it is in the nature of underground caves, chasms, and everything that on the earth imitates, on a gigantic scale, the concavity of a mouth to engender an apprehension that one will always have to overcome, even if this recovery of oneself takes place instantaneously and practically without effort. As is perhaps the case with the uneasiness experienced in darkness (that other sort of cavern in which we already feel swallowed up, quite apart from the many other dangers that threaten us), it is possible that such an apprehension must be associated with the childish fear we have of being eaten, the most rudimentary form of aggression among all those to which we may imagine our presence in the midst of the world exposes us, during that phase of mental life in which we are still so close to the state of the baby who scarcely emerges from his sleep except to suck on his mother's breast or ingest food in some other way. Isn't it possible that death, which Christian allegories represent as a skeleton with empty sockets and very conspicuous teeth, might be-with the two black holes that it uses as eyes, and its sadistic ogre's rictus-the dark, gazeless thing that will eat us some day? It is the memory of a veritable incursion into the bowels of death (as though I had been devoured quite raw by the monster just as the initiates of many ancient cults were supposed to have been), the memory of coming into contact with the abyss or of a descent into the underworld that I have preserved from certain touristic excursions or various other circumstances that led me to visit underground caves, quarries, or, at least, to find myself confronted with what passed, in my eyes, for such.

[*Scraps* / Michel Leiris, tr by Lydia Davis, Johns Hopkins University Press, New York, 1997 © Johns Hopkins University Press]

“ ... by this deliberate segregation I seek to reassure myself”

As sparing of myself as any peasant may be of his pennies; inhibited by fear; reticent in love (perhaps because of that dread of having to pay with my body that also leads me to make myself very small at the idea of pain); liking to play at being a torero but without ever having a real bull in front of me, and at being a Don Juan, without any conquests nor challenge to the Commandant; no longer existing except through writing and, at each instant, attempting to formulate sententious phrases with the distant tone of last words, as though my fingers were already squeezed by the stone gauntlet of death, am I not a proxy unfaithful to the destiny I have dreamed of, in other words am I not that prevaricator? The examination I have made of what is hidden behind my refusal to engender and more particularly the bad faith detectable in one of the explanations for it I proposed (my recourse to rather specious notions about incest) commits me to think so. I would be lying and, therefore, in any case a traitor with respect to my own person were I to posit-as I so often do- as a moral attitude my rebellion against the yoke that is always imposed (in various forms) by belonging to a family when I know that, if I tend to break my ties with my people while everything makes me incline to return to infantile states and to resurrect old memories which I did not experience alone and certain of which are not even my exclusive possessions, it is not simply for the proud joy of putting myself outside the flock; even more, by this deliberate segregation I seek to reassure myself by

insinuating that as for me, I am from a *different* species (a species not subject, like theirs, to ills such as senility, painful diseases, death) and by thus taking refuge in the vague hope of being beyond reach, since, through the negation of my roots and my rejection of a progeniture that would make me the link between what was before and what will come after, I can imagine to myself that I, in my uniqueness, preserved from any succession, remain outside the flow of time.

[*Scraps* / Michel Leiris, tr by Lydia Davis, Johns Hopkins University Press, New York, 1997 © Johns Hopkins University Press]

Marguerite Yourcenar (1903 – 1987)

One of the most respected writers in the French language Marguerite Yourcenar was born and raised in Belgium. Capable of almost every type of writing including novels, short stories, translations, poems, plays, memoirs, and criticism, Yourcenar holds the distinction of having been the first woman ever to attain membership of the Academie francaise. With her election in 1980 she created history in this three-century old august, male dominated institution. She was winner of the Prix Femina and Erasmus Prize.

Yourcenar's works of fiction typically tell the story of men rather than women, often homosexual men who are torn between their political duties and personal passions. Secondly, almost all her fiction has a historical or mythological setting, and a male point of view, distancing the real Yourcenar from the story. Her views on feminism, liberally expressed in her interview, *Et le feminism* (Les yeux ouverts: Entretiens avec Matthieu Galey, Les editions Centurion, 1978; Eng. With Open Eyes: Conversations with Matthieu Galey, 1980) make for a perfect counterpoint to Beauvoir's. Agreeing with Simone de Beauvoir on the big political issues arising from feminism she strongly opposes any kind of 'particularism' whether based on religion, nationality or species. "So don't count on me to support sexual particularism either. I believe that a good woman is worth just as much as a good man, and that an intelligent woman is worth as much as an intelligent man." She supports women in their fight for education, schooling, for equal salary, use of contraceptive, issue of abortion but has, "strong objections to feminism as it now presents itself. It is usually aggressive and aggression rarely succeeds ... [W]hat is important for women, I think, is to take an as-active-as-possible role in useful causes of every description and to win respect by their competence."

Her first novel, *Alexis* was published in 1929 and was followed by many more novels, essays, poems, memoirs, and the translation of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. Her masterpiece, *Memoires d' Hadrien* became an immediate success with its publication in 1951; received great critical acclaim, and is considered a modern classic. It also inaugurated most of her signature themes, namely, the artist's struggle to maintain and express his sensibilities in a hostile environment; male homosexuality, love and pleasure; and the emergence of self-identity and its relation to guilt. Another novel *Abyss* (*L'Œuvre au noir*, 1968) was immediate success and was awarded Le Prix Femina.

Principal works tr in English: *Abyss* (1968), *Memoirs of Hadrian* (1954), *Coup de Grace* (1939), *A Coin in Nine hands* (1982), *Oriental Tales* (short stories, 1985), *Dear Departed* (autobiography, 1974), *Mishima: A Vision of the Void* (Criticism, 1980)

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Memoires d' Hadrien is a historical novel in the form of a long letter written by the Roman Emperor Hadrian to his young friend and eventual successor, Marcus Aurelius. Hadrian is "growing old, and is about to die of a dropsical heart." The Emperor begins by describing his recent visit with his physician Hermogenes, who "was alarmed, in spite of himself, at the rapid progress of the disease" In light of his physical deterioration, Hadrian begins to reflect on his life and work, and to share his wisdom with his young correspondent. Following excerpts offer a long meditation on the idea of empire, conquest and rule.

“The landscape of my days”

When I consider my life, I am appalled to find it a shapeless mass. A hero's existence, such as is described to us, is simple; it goes straight to the mark, like an arrow. Most men like to reduce their lives to a formula, whether in boast or lament, but almost always in recrimination; their memories obligingly construct for them a clear and comprehensible past. My life has contours less firm. As is commonly the case, it is what I have not been which defines me, perhaps, most aptly: a good soldier, but not a great warrior; a lover of art, but not the artist which Nero thought himself to be at his death; capable of crime, but not laden with it. I have come to think great men are characterized precisely by the extreme position which they take, and that their heroism consists in holding to that extremity throughout their lives. They are out poles, or our antipodes. I have occupied each of the extremes in turn, but have not kept to any one of them; life has always drawn me away. And nevertheless neither can I boast, like some plowman of worthy carter, of a middle-of-the-road existence.

The landscape of my days appears to be composed, like mountainous regions, of varied material heaped up pell-mell. There I see my nature, itself composite, made up of equal parts of instinct and training. Here and there protrude the granite peaks of the inevitable, but all about is rubble from the landslips of chance. I strive to retrace my life to find in it some plan, following a vein of lead, or of gold, or the courses of some subterranean stream, but such devices are only tricks of perspective in the memory. From time to time, in an encounter or an omen, or in a particular series of happenings, I think that I recognize the working of fate, but too many paths lead nowhere at all, and too many sums add up to nothing. To be sure, I perceive in this diversity and disorder the presence of a person; but his form seems nearly always to be shaped by the pressure of circumstances; his features are blurred, like a face reflected in water. I am not of those who say that their actions bear no resemblance to them. Indeed, actions must do so, since they alone give measure, and are the sole means of engraving me upon the memory of men, or even upon my own memory (and since perhaps the very possibility of continuing to express and modify oneself by action may constitute the real difference between the state of the living and of the dead). But there is between me and these acts which compose me an indefinable hiatus, and the proof of this separation is that I feel constantly the necessity of weighing and explaining what I do, and of giving account of it to myself. In such an evaluation certain works of short duration are surely negligible; yet occupations which have extended over a whole lifetime signify just as little. For example, it seems to me as I write this hardly important to have been emperor.

II

Hadrian describes the organization and functioning of the bureaucracy as conceived by him:

We emperors are not Caesars; we are functionaries of the State. That plaintiff whom I refused one day to hear to the end was right when she exclaimed that if I had no time to listen to her, I had no time to rule. The apologies which I offered her were not merely a matter of form. But nevertheless is lacking: the more the empire expands the

more the different aspects of authority tend to be concentrated in the hands of the chief of state; this man so pressed for time has necessarily to delegate some part of his tasks to other; his genius will consist more and more in surrounding himself with trustworthy personnel. The great crime of Claudius or of Nero was that they indolently allowed their slaves and freedmen to take on these roles of agent and representative of the master, of to serve him as counselor. One portion of my life and my travels has been passed in choosing the administrative of the master, or to serve or to serve him as counselor. One portion of my life and my travels has been passed in choosing the administrative heads of a new bureaucracy, in training them, in matching as judiciously as I could the talents to the posts, and in opening possibilities of useful employment to that middle class upon whom the State depends.

III

Having reached the peak of his glory Hadrian now dwells on what an ideal State should be like:

Trahit sua quemque voluptas. Each to his own bent; likewise each to his aim of his ambition, if you will, or his most secret desire and his highest ideal. My ideal was contained within the word beauty, so difficult to define despite all the evidence of our senses. I felt responsible or sustaining and increasing the beauty of the world. I wanted the cities to be splendid, spacious and airy, their streets sprayed with clean water, their inhabitants all human beings whose bodies were neither degraded by marks of misery and servitude nor bloated by vulgar riches; I desired that the school boys should recite correctly some useful lessons; that the women presiding in their households should move with maternal dignity, expressing both vigor and calm; that the gymnasiums should be used by youths not unversed in arts and in sports; that the orchards should bear the finest fruits and the fields the richest harvest. I desired that the might and majesty of the Roman Peace should extent to all, insensibly present like the music of the revolving skies; that the most humble traveler might wander from one country, or one continent, to another without vexatious formalities, and without danger, assured everywhere of minimum of legal protection and culture; that our soldiers should continue their eternal pyrrhic dance on the frontiers; that everything should go smoothly, whether workshops or temples; that the sea should be furrowed by brave ships, and the road resounding to frequent carriages; that, in a world well ordered, the philosophers should have their place, and the dancers also. This ideal, modest on the whole, would be often enough approached if men would devote to it one part of the energy which they expand on stupid or cruel activities; great good fortune has allowed me a partial realization of my aims during the last quarter of a century. Arrian of Nicomedia, one of the best minds of our time, likes to recall to me the beautiful lines of ancient Terpander, defining in three words the Spartan ideal (that perfect mode of life to which Lacedaemon aspired without ever attaining it): Strength, Justice, the Muses. Strength was the basis, discipline without which there is no beauty, and firmness without which there is no justice, Justice was the balance of the parts, that whole so harmoniously composed which no excess should be permitted to endanger. Strength and Justice together were but one instrument, well tuned, in the hands of the

Muses. All forms of dire poverty and brutality were things to forbid as insults to the fair body of mankind, every injustice a fake note to avoid in the harmony of the spheres.

IV

Approaching his end, Emperor Hadrian writes his Will and testament to his successor, Mark Aurelius with admirable serenity and detachment :

Presages are also increasing: from now on everything seems like an intimation and a sign. I have just dropped and broken a precious stone set in a ring; my profile had been carved thereon by a Greek artist. The augurs shake their heads gravely, but my regret is for that pure master piece. I have come to speak of myself, at times, in the past tense: in the Senate, while discussing certain events which had taken place after the death of Lucius, I have caught myself more than once mentioning those circumstances, by a slip of the tongue, as if they had occurred after my own death. A few months ago, on my birthday, as I was mounting the steps of the Capitol by letter, I found myself face to face with a man in mourning; furthermore, he was weeping, and I saw my good Chabrias turn pale. At the period I still went about and was able to continue performing in person duties as high pontiff and as Arval Brother, and to celebrate myself the ancient rites of this Roman religion which, in the end, I prefer to most of the foreign cults. I was standing one day before the altar, ready to light the flame; I was offering the gods a sacrifice for Antoninus. Suddenly the fold of my toga covering my brow slipped and fell to my shoulder, leaving me bare-headed; thus I passed from the rank of sacrifice to that of the victim. Verily, it is my turn.

My patience is bearing fruit; I suffer less, and life has become almost sweet again. I have ceased to quarrel with physicians; their foolish remedies have killed me, but their presumption and hypocritical pedantry are work of our making: if we were not so afraid of pain they would tell fewer lies. Strength fails me now for the angers of old; I know from a reliable source that Platorius Nepos, for whom I have had great affection, has taken advantage of my confidence; I have not tried to confound him with the evidence, nor have I ordered a punishment. The future of the world no longer disturbs me; I do not try still to calculate, with anguish, how long or how short a time the Roman peace will endure; I leave that to the gods. Not that I have acquired more confidence in their justice, which is not our justice, or more faith in human wisdom; the contrary is true. Life is atrocious, we know. But precisely because I expect little of the human condition, man's periods of felicity, his partial progress, his efforts to begin over again and to continue, all seem to me like so many prodigies which nearly compensate for the monstrous mass of ills and defeats, of indifference and error. Catastrophe and ruin will come; disorder will triumph, but order will too, from time to time. Peace will again establish itself between two periods of war; the words *humanity, liberty, and justice* will here and there regain the meaning which we have tried to give them. Not all our books will perish, nor our statues, if broken, lie unrepaired; other domes and other pediments will arise from our dimes and pediments; some few men will think and work and feel as we have done, and I venture to count upon such continuators, place irregularity throughout the centuries, and upon this kind of intermittent immortality.

If ever the barbarians gain possession of the world then will be forced to adopt some of our methods; they will end by resembling us. Chabrias fears that the pastophor of Mithra or the bishop of Christ may implant himself one day in Rome, replacing the high pontiff. If by ill fate that day should come, my successor officiating in the vatical fields along the Tiber will already have ceased to be merely the chief of a gang, or of a band of sectarians, and will have become in his turn one of the universal figures of authority. He will inherit our palaces and our archives, and will differ from rules like us less than one might suppose. I accept with calm these vicissitudes of Rome eternal.

[All 4 excerpts from *Memoirs of Hadrian* tr from the French by Grace Frick in collaboration with the author, New York Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York paperback edition 2005 Eng tr © Marguerite Yourcenar renewed 1991 by Yannick Guillou]

Jean Tardieu (1903-1995)

Jean Tardieu was a prominent poet and playwright who was also—through various managerial positions—greatly responsible for the growth and quality of French National Public Radio after the Second World War. He was born in St Germain de Joux, earned a degree in literature and spent his early years working for a publishing house where he honed his writing skills in the field of poetry, and developed an austere style of lyrical poetry based on the work of Mallarmé. He published several collections of poetry during the 1930s before starting to write for the stage. Tardieu's works are often associated with the Theatre of the Absurd. Author of several plays his stylistic exercises are not unreminiscent of Ionesco. Esslin calls Tardieu "a playwright's playwright, a dedicated pioneer bent on enlarging the vocabulary of his art. Tardieu inspires a dedicated following, even to this day, and several of his plays have been translated into English, including two collections: *The Underground Lovers: And Other Experimental Plays*, and *Going...Going...Gone! The Client Dies Twice: Three Plays*.

Tardieu's first published poems appeared in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1927 but the core of his poetry is found in *Le Fleuve caché*, which groups collections published between 1938 and 1961. Often tinged with an ironic, burlesque, and sometimes black humour (also a feature of his plays), Tardieu's poetry is suffused by a feeling for the enigmatic dimension at the heart of experience which language, however widely its resources are exploited, tends to confirm rather than dispel. Later collections include the poetic prose of *La Part de l'ombre* (1972) and *L'Accent grave et l'accent aigu: poèmes 1976-1983* (1985), which deepen and ramify the same basic experiences and devices. He contributed to many clandestine publications during the Occupation, and after the war made his career in French radio. His output includes 'pièces radiophoniques', but his best-known plays, collected in *Théâtre de chambre* (1955) and *Poèmes à jouer* (1960), were written for the 'petites salles' of the Left Bank and have been widely performed and translated around the world. Generally very brief, a typical Tardieu play develops a single idea, situation, or convention: theatrical asides (*Oswald et Zénaïde ou les Apartés*), the hollowness of social chat (*La Sonate et les trois messieurs*), the illusory nature and pitfalls of hope (*Qui est là?*), memory (*Une voix sans personne*), or self-knowledge (*Monsieur moi*). Many of these 'drames-éclair' use word-play, verbal rhythm, and linguistic distortion to great effect. Tardieu's work earned him the Grand Prix of the Académie Française in 1972, the Critics Prize in 1976, and the National Grand Prix for Literature in 1993.

Principal works : *Le Fleuve caché*(1933) ; *Accents* (1939) ; *Le Témoin invisible* (1943) ; *Les Dieux étouffés* (1946) ; *Jours pétrifiés* (1947) ; *Poèmes à jouer* (1950) ; *Monsieur Monsieur* (1951); *Un mot pour un autre* (1951) ; *La Première Personne du singulier* (1952) ; *Une voix sans personne* ; *Histoires Obscures* (1961) ; *Comme ceci comme cela*(1979) ; *Poèmes à voir*(1990) ; *Les Portes de toile* (1969) ; *Formeries*(1976); *L'Accent grave et l'accent aigu* (1986); *Théâtre de chambre*; *On vient chercher Monsieur Jean* (1990); *Le Miroir ébloui* (1993); *Da capo*(1995).

Poems

Oradour

Tardieu wrote “Oradour” when the news of Nazi atrocity against the inhabitants of the village of Oradour-sur-Glane, the merciless massacre of the inhabitants reached him. It is a moving example of ‘Resistance poetry’. Tardieu makes the name of the village synonymous with horror itself through the relentless rhythm of its repetition across the text:

Oradour

Oradour has no more women
Oradour has no longer a man
Oradour has no more leaves
Oradour has no more stones
Oradour has no church
Oradour has no more children
More smoke more laughter
More roofs more attics
More breasts more love
More wine more songs
Oradour, I am afraid to hear
Oradour, I do not dare
To approach your wounds
The blood of your ruins,
I cannot I cannot
See or hear your name.
Oradour, I scream and shout
Each time a heart bursts
Under the blows of assassins
A terrified head
Two broad eyes two red eyes
Two grave eyes two large eyes
Like the night of madness
Both eyes of small children:
They will not leave me.
Oradour, I no longer dare
To read or speak your name.
Oradour, shame of man
Oradour eternal shame
Our hearts will not find peace
That the worst revenge
Is hatred and shame forever
Oradour no longer has form

Oradour, women nor men
Oradour has no children
Oradour has no more leaves
Oradour has no church
More smoke than girls
More evenings than mornings
More tears than songs.
Oradour is now nothing but a cry
And this is the worst offence
To those who lived in the village
And this is the greatest shame
Not to be more than one cry,
Name of the hatred of man
Name of the shame of man
The name of our revenge
That through all our lands
One listens shivering,
A mouth without body,
Howling for all time.

[From the collection, *Jours pétrifiés* (1947) Translation, Online.]

The Fly and the Ocean

A fly swayed
Above an ocean.
Suddenly it felt
Caught up in the cold.

Moral:

Always pay attention.

[Tr by David Kelley, from Jean Tardieu: *The River Underground: Selected Poems and Prose*, Bloodaxe Books, 1991 rep. in *Yale Anthology of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Mary Ann Caws, Yale University Press, 2004 © Bloodaxe Books]

Days

In a city of darkness caught up in time
(each building crumbles in time before its time)
with all my shadows I went in and went out.
Suns from their thousands rose as from a river bed,

a thousand sunsets coloured the towering walls;
I followed hands on the balconies' edge;
forms faded (bearing the brunt of light)
or fell into oblivion (with the turning rays).
Days and days ... Who then sighs and who calls,
and to what feast, what torture, what pardon?

[Tr by David Kelley, from Jean Tardieu: *The River Underground: Selected Poems and Prose*, Bloodaxe Books, 1991 rep. in *Yale Anthology of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Mary Ann Caws, Yale University Press, 2004 © Bloodaxe Books]

The Seine in Paris

Since I prefer rivers to regrets
the grave profundity of monuments to memories,
love the water's flow dividing cities,
the Seine in Paris knows me deeply faithful
to its gentle book-lined quays. Not a breath
arrives defeated by the eddying waters
but that I am ready to take it and to read again
in its hair the mountain song, not a
summer night-time silence but that I glide
like a leaf between air and water, not a white
gull's wing returned from the sea pursuing the sun
but that I am wrenched from the weight of my monotony
by a strident cry! The pillars way heavy
after the unnecessary step and plunge
by them to earth, and when I climb again
streaming and shake myself,
I invoke a god who looks through windows
and gleams with pleasure in the panes.
Protected by his rays I conduct an inner race
with water which will not wait
and from the burden of footsteps and motorcar noises
the beating of hammers on bars and voices
that rapid flow frees me ... Quaysides
and towers are already faraway when
suddenly I rediscover them, covering like the centuries,
with equal love and equal terror, wave upon wave,
meanderings of the mind and the bend of my river.

[Tr by David Kelley, from Jean Tardieu: *The River Underground: Selected Poems and Prose*, Bloodaxe Books, 1991 rep. in *Yale Anthology of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Mary Ann Caws, Yale University Press, 2004 © Bloodaxe Books]

“I have only one aim: to give satisfaction to my clients.”

The Client:

Which question should I ask you?

The Official (*detached*):

If you have to ask a question to find out which question you have to ask we'll be here forever! I'm not the sphinx ... Nor Oedipus either for that matter.

The Client:

Of course.

The Official:

What's more, nor are you

The Client:

Of course Let's see.... What should I say? Ah! Know : a nice banal little question. Something that's not in any way urgent, and leaves me all my time in front of me, a question about my future, for example Here we are

(*with hilarity*).

When will I die?

The Official (*with an extremely amiable and hideous smile*):

At last, now we've got there: in a few moments time, my dear sir. When you leave here.

The Client (*incredulous and gaping*):

Ah! Really! Just like that! When I leave here? Why not here?

The Official:

That would be more difficult. We don't have the necessary. People don't die here.

The Client (*getting on his high horse*):

Ah! So you don't have the necessary? And what about your stove, couldn't it set fire to the place? Or asphyxiate us? And couldn't the building collapse on our heads? And... your umbrella? And ... your pen-holder? And your rotten little guillotine?

(*He points to the window behind which the official is sitting. The Official lets it fall implacably but immediately lifts it up again*)

The Official:

You asked me a question: I replied. The rest isn't my business.

The Client (*shrugging his shoulders*):

In that case I'll ask you another: is there no way of avoiding all that?

The Official (*implacably*):

None.

The Client (*still incredulous*):

None at all? Absolutely none?

The Official (*irrevocably*):

Absolutely none at all.

The Client (*suddenly downcast*):

Oh well ... oh well... thank you very much. But ...

The Official:

But what? That, I think, concludes the matter, no?

The Client:

That's to say ... I still wanted to ask you when... ask whether ...or rather how...

The Official (*interrupting him*):

When? Whether? How?

(*He Shrugs his shoulders*).

You realize, suppose, that your last two questions... or rather my last two answers... make all the other questions and answers more or less unnecessary? Or at least as far as you've concerned...

The Client (*thunderstruck*):

Yes, that's true in fact.

The Official (*becoming rather officious*):

If you'd started there you would have saved us both a lot of trouble! And a lot of wasted time!

The Client (*quivering and humble as at the beginning*):

How right you are, sir! Please excuse me. It was just curiosity you know!

The Official (*nevertheless amiable*):

It doesn't matter! But don't come back to it again, alright?

The Client (*in heart-rending tone*):

Alas!

The Official (*in a self-justificatory mood*):

I've given you all information you required.

The Client (*obsequiously*):

That's absolutely right, sir. Thank you, sir.

The Official:

No thanks necessary. I was just doing my job.

The Client:

Oh, that's quite true! You are a model of efficiency.

The Official (*with modesty*):

I have only one aim: to give satisfaction to my clients.

The Client:

Thank you sir, many thanks... from the depths of my heart...

(*he goes towards the door, thinks again*).

By the way, how much do I owe you?

The Official (*with an air of grandiose generosity*):

Don't worry about that. Your heirs will receive my little invoice.

The Client:

Thank you. Thank you very much. So... Good-bye, sir...

The Official (*getting up, with a kind of funereal respect*.): Farewell, sir!

The client leaves slowly, regretfully of course... Hardly has he closed the door behind him than a sharp hooting, a screech of brakes and a scream of pain is heard. The Official listens a moment, nods his head, and goes to the Radio. A popular crooner is singing. Then he goes back to his desk and buries himself in his papers. CURTAIN

[From the play, "The Enquiry office » in *Going.. going.. gone! or The client dies thrice : The contradiction* /Jean Tardieu, tr by David Kelley, Cambridge, Black Apollo Press, 1999.

© David Kelley]

Georges Simenon (1903–1989)

Georges Simenon was by many standards the most successful author of the 20th century, and the character he created, Inspector Jules Maigret, who made him rich and famous, ranks only after Sherlock Holmes as the world's best known fictional detective. He and his works have been the subject of innumerable books and articles. The Maigret stories are unlike any other detective stories — the crime and the details of unraveling it are often less central to our interest than Maigret's journey through the discovery of the cast of characters... towards an understanding of man. Simenon did not write mystery stories. Rather, his novels revolve around a criminal investigation of some kind, but the outcome of that investigation is rarely the point. Simenon said he was obsessed with a search for the "naked man" — man without his cultural protective coloration, and he followed his quest as much in the Maigrets as in his "hard" novels.

Although most of Simenon's work is available in English, it was originally written in French. Simenon was born and raised in Belgium, and while Paris was "the city" for him, the home of Maigret, he was 'an international,' a world traveler who moved often and lived for many years in France, the United States, and Switzerland. Because he wrote in French, and for the most part lived in French-speaking countries, most of the books and magazine articles about him were written in French as well. Unlike his own books however, many of these have never been available in translation. Because Simenon lived to be nearly 90, and left a legacy of hundreds of books — from which more than 50 films have been made, along with hundreds of television episodes — there is still much to collect, to examine, to display and discuss.

Simenon was one of the most prolific writers of the twentieth century, capable of writing 60 to 80 pages per day. His oeuvre includes nearly 200 novels, over 150 novellas, several autobiographical works, numerous articles, and scores of pulp novels written under more than two dozen pseudonyms ('G. Sim', 'Monsieur Le Coq'). Altogether, about 550 million copies of his works have been printed. He is best known, however, for his 75 novels and 28 short stories featuring Commissaire Maigret. The first novel in the series, *Pietr-le-Letton*, was serialized in 1930 and appeared in book form in 1931, the last one, *Maigret et M. Charles*, was published in 1972. The Maigret novels were translated into all major languages and several of them were turned into films and radio plays. Two television series (1960-63 and 1992-93), have been made in Great Britain, one in Italy in four different seasons for a total of 36 episodes (1964-72), and two in France: (1967-1990).

During his "American" period(1945-1955), Simenon reached the height of his creative powers, and several novels of those years were inspired by the context in which they were written (*Trois chambres à Manhattan* (1946), *Maigret à New York* (1947), *Maigret se fâche* (1947)). He also wrote a large number of "psychological novels" (what the French refer to as "romans durs"), such as *The strangers in the House* (1940), *La neige était sale* (1948), or *Le fils* (1957), as well as several autobiographical works, in particular *Je me souviens* (1945), *Pedigree* (1948), *Mémoires intimes* (1981). In 1966, Simenon received the MWA's highest honor, the **Grand Master Award**. In 2003, the collection **La Pleiade** for the Library of America has included 21 of Simenon's novels, in 2 volumes. The task of selecting the novels and the preparation of the notes and analyses was performed by two Simenon specialists, Professor Jacques Dubois, president of the Centre for Georges Simenon Studies at the Universite de Liege and his assistant Benoît

Denis. In 2005, he was nominated for the title of **De Grootste belg / Le Plus grand Belge** ("The Greatest Belgian") in two separate television shows.

Principal works: *The Crime at Lock 14* (1931); *The Yellow Dog* (1931); *The Widow* (1942); *Inspector Cadaver* (1943); *Three Bedrooms in Manhattan* (1945); *Act of Passion* (*Lettre à mon juge*, 1947); *Dirty Snow* (1948); *My Friend Maigret* (1949); *The Man on the Boulevard* (1953)

He wanted to be known:

When Frank did kill his first man, at nineteen years old, his initiation into murder was hardly more exciting than the earlier initiation into sex had been. And like the earlier one it was quite unpremeditated. It was an event without context. It was as though a moment came when it was both essential and natural to take a decision – a decision which, in reality, had already been taken before.

No one had pushed against Frank. No one had laughed at him. Anyway only fools allowed themselves to be influenced by what their friends did.

For weeks, perhaps months, past, perhaps because of a vague inner sense of inferiority he had been saying to himself:

‘I must try it ... ‘. [...]

‘First of all, I ask your permission to make an important statement.’

He was going to speak calmly and deliberately. That would lend more weight to his words.

‘I stole the watches and I killed Fraulen Vilmoss, the sister of the watch-maker in my village. I had already killed one of your officers, at the corner of the alley by the tannery. I did it to get his revolver. I have committed other, much more shameful deeds; I have committed the worst crime in the world, but it has nothing to do with you. I am not a fanatic, nor an agitator, nor a patriot. I am a rotter. Eversince you started questioning me, I have used every trick I knew to gain time, because it was indispensable that I should do so. Now it’s all over ...’

He spoke almost without drawing breath. It might have been thought that he was trying to assume the icy voice of the old gentleman, but at times his voice sounded like Holst’s.

‘Of all that you would like to learn, I know nothing. That I solemnly declare. If I knew anything, I wouldn’t tell you. From now on you can question me for as long as you like, I shan’t answer one word. You have the power to torture me. I’m not afraid of torture. You have the power to promise me my life. I don’t want it. I want to die as soon as possible, in whatever fashion you choose.

‘Don’t think ill of me for speaking in this way. I have nothing against you personally. You have been doing your job...’

[*The Stain on the Snow* tr by John Petrie, Orion Books, 2003 © 1948 by Georges Simenon Ltd.]

‘Now, doctor, why don’t we take a walk over to your house together?’

The Yellow Dog shows Georges Simenon in top form. His understanding of human motivations and how people become isolated by their fears is extraordinary. Maigret slices away the layers of intrigue, showing what the world of the docks can be like when greed is in control. The reader is presented with the “whys” of the criminal action and the “hows” take their rightful place in the background of this superb psychological mystery.

A shrill bell sounded. She looked at Maigret, then at the electric panel behind the till. ‘Will you excuse me?’

She went upstairs. The superintendent heard footsteps, an indistinct murmur of voices in the doctor’s room.

The pharmacist came in, a little drunk.

‘All done, superintendent! Forty-eight bottles analyzed, and carefully. I promise you that! Not a trace of poison except in the Pernod and the calvados. The proprietor can take back all his stock ... So, now, what do you think, just between you and me? Anarchists-right?’

Emma returned, stepped outside to close the shutters, and then waited by the door to lock up.

‘Well?’ said Maigret, when they were alone again.

She turned her head away without answering. Unexpectedly embarrassed, and the superintendent felt that if he pressed her, even a little, she would burst into tears.

‘Good night, child’ he said.

When Maigret went downstairs the next morning, the sky was so dark with clouds, he thought he must be the first one up. From his window, he had seen a solitary crane at work, unloading a sand barge in the deserted port, in the streets, a few umbrellas and raincoats hurrying along close to the buildings.

Halfway down the stairs, he had passed a travelling sales-man, who had just arrived; a porter was carrying his bags up.

Emma was sweeping the café. On a marble table stood a cup with some coffee stagnating in the bottom.

‘Was that my inspector’s?’ Maigret asked.

‘A while ago he asked the way to the station. He was carrying a big package.’

‘And the doctor?’

‘I took him his breakfast upstairs. He’s sick. He doesn’t want to go out.’

And the broom went on stirring the mixture of debris and sawdust. ‘What will you have?’

‘Black coffee.’

She had to pass close to him to reach the kitchen. When she did, he gripped her shoulders with his heavy paws and looked her in the eyes. His manner both gruff and kindly, he said: ‘Tell me, Emma . . .’

She tried only a timid move to get free, then stood motionless, trembling and making herself as small as possible.

‘Just between us, now, what do you know about all this? ... Quiet! You’re about to lie! You’re a sad little girl, and I don’t mean to make trouble for you . . . Look at me! The bottle, eh? Tell me, now ...’

‘I swear-’

‘Don’t bother swearing.’

‘It wasn’t me!’

‘For heaven’s sake, I know it wasn’t you! But who was it?’ Her eyelids swelled suddenly. Tears poured out. Her lower lip throbbed. The waitress looked so touching that Maigret loosened his grip. ‘The doctor ... last night?’

‘No! ... It wasn’t for what you think.’

‘What did he want?’

‘He asked me the same thing you did. He threatened me. He wanted me to tell him who’d been handling the bottles. He nearly hit me ... And I don’t know! On my mother’s head, I swear-’

‘Bring me my coffee.’

It was eight o’clock. Maigret went out to buy some tobacco and took a walk around the town. When he came back, about ten, the doctor was downstairs in the café, in his slippers and with a foulard around his neck in place of a collar. His features were drawn, his red hair tousled.

‘You’re not looking in very good shape.’

‘I’m sick . . . I should have expected it. Kindey trouble. The slightest upset or excitement, and it shows up. I didn’t get a wink of sleep last night. ‘He kept watching the door.

‘You’re not going back to your house?’

‘No one’s there. I’m in better hands here.’

He had sent out for all the morning papers, and they lay on his table. ‘You haven’t seen my friends? Servieres? Le Pommeret? ... It’s odd they haven’t turned up to see if anything’s happened.’

‘Oh they’re probably still asleep,’ Maigret mumbled. ‘Incidentally, I haven’t seen that awful yellow dog ... Emma, have you seen any more of that dog? ... No? Here comes Leroy. He may have run across him in the street ... What’s new, Leroy?’

‘The bottles and the glasses are on their way to the laboratory. I stopped by the police station and the Town Hall ... You were asking about the dog, I think? Apparently some peasant saw him this morning in Dr Michoux’s garden.’

‘In *my* garden?’ The doctor jumped. His pale hands shook. ‘What was he doing in *my* garden?’

‘From what I was told, he was lying on the doorstep. When the peasant approached, he growled so viciously that the man decided to give him a wide berth.’

Maigret was watching their faces from the corner of his eye. ‘Now, doctor, why don’t we take a walk over to your house together?’

A stained smile. ‘In this rain? In my condition? That would put me in bed for a week ... What does that dog matter? Just an ordinary stray, probably.’

Maigret put on his hat and coat.

‘Where are you going?’

‘I don’t know. Get a breath of air.’

[*The Yellow Dog* tr by Linda Asher Penguin Classics, 2003 © 1987 by Georges Simenon Ltd, 2003]

Raymond Queneau (1903 – 1976)

Considered to be one of the 20th century's most original and prolific French writers, Queneau was a poet, novelist, critic, editor, translator, playwright, philosopher, mathematician and co-founder of the esteemed and still active group of writers called 'Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle' (Oulipo).

Known chiefly as a novelist, Queneau preferred to remain distant from specific literary movements. Although he had a brief association with the Surrealists, he avoided categorization. He doesn't conform to the usual literary parameters. With his playful, zesty use of language he is in a category all by himself. He is best known for "Exercices de style," (1947) a most innovative, inventive, funny, and provocative publication. It retells the same story in 99 different linguistic styles. Queneau indulges in "language as a game" giving us neologisms and fantasies, plus archaisms, anachronisms, puns, real and phony proverbs, catch phrases, intentional clichés, foreign words. His novel, "Zazie dans le metro," was made into a film in 1960.

Oulipo's initial literary projects were largely the result of Queneau's love of mathematics. His "Cent mille milliards de poèmes" (1961) and "Exercices de style" grew out of this group's passion for abstract mathematical structures and patterns. Although Oulipo, with its linguistic games and mathematical challenges, produced myriad texts, the function of the group was to create new literary forms and revitalize old ones. Queneau was an erudite, non-conventional, and an eclectic scholar. Between 1936 and 1938 he kept in a Parisian newspaper a daily column titled "Connaissez-vous Paris?", with questions-and-answers about curiosities from the city's history.

Queneau was elected to the Académie Goncourt in 1951 and to the Académie de l'Humour in 1952. He became a member of the Société Mathématique de France in 1948 and the American Mathematical Society in 1963. He served on the jury of the Cannes Film Festival during 1955–1957.

Principle works: *The Bark Tree* (1933); *The Sunday of Life* (1952); *The Flight of Icarus* (1968); *We Always Treat Women Too Well* (1947); *Zazie in the Metro* (1959); *Exercises in Style* (19810); *The Blue Flower* (1965); *Pierrot mon ami* (1942); *Fendre les* (1969).

Exercises in Style

On a crowded bus at midday, Queneau observes one man accusing another of jostling him deliberately. When a seat is vacated, the first man appropriates it. Later, in another part of town, Queneau sees the man being advised by a friend to sew another button on his overcoat. *Exercises in Style* retells this tale ninety-nine times from different points of view. Three of them are given below:

Narrative

One day at about midday in the Parc Monceau district, on the back platform of a more or less full S bus (now No. 84), I observed a person with a very long neck who was wearing a felt hat which had a plaited cord round it instead of a ribbon. This individual suddenly addressed the man standing next to him, accusing him of purposely treading on

his toes every time any passengers got on or got off. However he quickly abandoned the dispute and threw himself on to a seat which had become vacant.

Two hours later I saw him in front of the gare Saint-Lazare engaged in earnest conversation with a friend who was advising him to reduce the space between the lapels of his overcoat by getting a competent tailor to raise the top button.

The Subjective Side

I was not displeased with my attire that day. I was inaugurating a new, rather sprightly hat, and an overcoat of which I thought most highly. Met X in front of the gare Saint-Lazare who tried to spoil my pleasure by trying to prove that his overcoat is cut too low at the lapels and that I ought to have an extra button on it. At least he didn't dare attack my headgear.

A bit earlier I had roundly told off a vulgar type who was purposely ill-treating me every time anyone went by getting off or on. This happened in one of those unspeakably foul omnibi which fill up with hoi polloi precisely at those times when I have to consent to use them.

Another Subjectivity

Next to me on the bus platform today there was one of those half-baked young fellows, you don't find so many of them these days, thank God, otherwise I should end up by killing one. This particular one, a brat of something like 26 or 30, irritated me particularly not so much because of his great long featherless turkey's neck as because of the nature of the ribbon around his hat, a ribbon which wasn't much more than a sort of a maroon-coloured string. Dirty beast! He absolutely disgusted me! As there were a lot of people in our bus at that hour I took advantage of all the pushing and shoving there is every time anyone gets on or off to dig him in the ribs with my elbow. In the end he took to his heels, the milksop, before I could make up my mind to tread on his dogs to teach him a lesson. I could also have told him, just to annoy him, that he needed another button on his overcoat which was cut too low at the lapels.

[tr by Barbara Wright From *Exercises in Style* by Raymond Queneau, tr by Barbara Wright, John Calder, London 1998 © Calder Educational Trust Limited 1981, 1998]

Zazie in the Metro

Zazie Laloche arrives in Paris with her mother from their vague, dreary-sounding provincial village where she meets the enigmatic 'ton-ton' (uncle) Gabriel, is consigned to his care for next thirty-six hours, with whom she merrily scoots around the capital sweeping everyone and everything like a hurricane, but never succeeds in satisfying her heart's primary desire—to travel in the Metro. It has been closed because of a strike.

Shall we take the Metro?

Gabriel has come to the station to fetch Zazie. Irrked by the obnoxious smell of the travellers he takes out a perfumed handkerchief from his pocket. In spite of his huge body build a small little man challenges him and a scuffle breaks out, just then the train arrives, and leaving her daughter with Gabriel Jeanne runs to join her lover. “She is mad,” comments Zazie.

Gabriel shrugs his shoulders. He says nothing. He seizes Zazie’s suitcase.

Now he does say something.

‘Let’s go,’ he says.

And he changes, scattering around him everything that happens to be in his trajectory. Zazie gallops behind.

‘Unkoo,’ she yells, ‘are we going by metro?’

‘No.;

‘What d’you mean, no?’

She has come to a full stop. Gabriel likewise halts, turns round, puts the suitcase down and **starts** to iksplain:

‘Well yes: no. Today, can’t be done. Za strike.’

‘Za strike?’

‘Well yes: za strike. The metro, that eminently Parisian means of transport, has fallen asleep under the ground, for the employees with their perforating punches have ceased to work.’

‘Oo the bastards,’ cries Zazie, ‘oo the swine. To do that to me.’

‘Snot only you they’re doing it to,’ says Gabriel, perfectly objective.

‘Don’t give a damn. Doesn’t alter the fact that it’s happening to me, me that was so happy, so pleased and everything to be going to be conveyed by metro. Blast, bloody hell.’

‘Have to make the best of it, have to be reasonable,’ said Gabriel whose remarks were sometimes tinged with a slightly Kantian Thomism.

And, passing on to the level of cosubjectivity, he added:

‘And anyway we must get a move on. My time and patience may be inexhaustible, but Charley’s aren’t.’

‘Oh no! I know that one,’ exclaimed Zazie, furious, ‘I read it in the Almanach Vermot¹.’

‘Oh no,’ said Gabriel, ‘oh no, Charles is a pal and he has cab and he’s waiting for us, I booked it uswise, his cab, precisely on account of the strike. Got it? Tsgo.’

He resized the suitcase with one hand and dragged Zazie along with the other.

1. To be found in most bourgeois households: a fanciful amalgam of *Old Moore’s Almanack*, *Film Fun*, and *The Girl Guide’s Diary*, each page garnished with feeble jokes—translator’s note.

[tr Barbara Wright From *Zazie in the Metro* translated by Barbara Wright, Penguin Classics, 2000 © Barbara Wright.]

“To be or not to be...”

Zazie has climbed up the Eiffel tower with her uncle. He suddenly feels dizzy and comes down immediately leaving her alone on top. In his dazed state of mind he breaks into a monologue parodying the famous Shakespearean soliloquy.

Being or nothingness, that is the question. Ascending, descending, coming, going, a man does so much that in the end he disappears, A taxi bears him off, a metro carries him away, the Tower doesn't care, nor the Pantheon, Paris is but a dream, Gabriel is but a reverie (a charming one), Zazie the dream of a reverie (or of a nightmare) and all this story the dream of a dream, the reverie of a reverie, scarcely more than the typewritten delirium of an idiotic novelist (oh! Sorry). Over there, farther-a little farther- than the Place de la Republique, the graves are overflowing with Parisians who were, who ascended and descended the stairs, came and went in the streets, and who did so much that in the end they disappeared. Forceps bore them, a hearse carries them away, and the Tower rusts and the Pantheon cracks more rapidly than the bones of the dead who are too much with us dissolve in the humus of the town impregnated with cares. But I am alive, and there ends my knowledge, for of the taximann, fled in his locatory jalopy, or of my niece, suspended a thousand feet up in the atmosphere, or of my spouse the gentle Marceline, left guarding the household gods, I know nothing at this precise moment, here and now, I know nothing but this, alexandrinarily: that they are almost dead because they are not here. But what do I see above the hairy noddles of the good people who surround me?

[tr Barbara Wright From, *Zazie in the Metro* translated by Barbara Wright, Penguin Classics, 2000 © Barbara Wright.]

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980)

Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre was a French existentialist philosopher, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, political activist, biographer, and literary critic. He was one of the key figures in the philosophy of existentialism, and one of the leading figures in 20th. Century French philosophy and Marxism.

Sartre was born in Paris where he spent most of his life. After a traditional philosophical education in prestigious Parisian schools that introduced him to the history of Western philosophy with a bias toward Cartesianism and neoKantianism he read the leading phenomenologists of the day, Husserl, Heidegger and Scheler and was deeply influenced by their thought. His main idea is that people, as humans, are "condemned to be free". This theory relies upon his position that there is no creator. He believed that that human beings have no essence before their existence because there is no Creator. Thus: "existence precedes essence". This forms the basis for his assertion that since one cannot explain their own actions and behaviour by referencing any specific human nature, they are necessarily fully responsible for those actions. "We are left alone, without excuse."

As a junior lecturer at the Lycée du Havre in 1938, Sartre wrote the novel *La Nausee (Nausea)*, which serves in some ways as a manifesto of existentialism and remains one of his most famous books. Taking a page from the German phenomenological movement, he believed that our ideas are the product of experiences of real-life situations, and that novels and plays can well describe such fundamental experiences, having equal value to discursive essays for the elaboration of philosophical theories such as existentialism. With such purpose, this novel concerns a dejected researcher (Roquentin) in a town similar to Le Havre who becomes starkly conscious of the fact that inanimate objects and situations remain absolutely indifferent to his existence. As such, they show themselves to be resistant to whatever significance human consciousness might perceive in them. This indifference of "things in themselves" has the effect of highlighting all the more the freedom Roquentin has to perceive and act in the world; everywhere he looks, he finds situations imbued with meanings which bear the stamp of his existence. Hence the "nausea" referred to in the title of the book; all that he encounters in his everyday life is suffused with a pervasive, even horrible, taste—specifically, his freedom. No matter how much Roquentin longs for something else or something different, he cannot get away from this harrowing evidence of his engagement with the world. The novel also acts as a terrifying realization of some of Kant's fundamental ideas; Sartre uses the idea of the autonomy of the will as a way to show the world's indifference to the individual. The freedom that Kant exposed is here a strong burden, for the freedom to act towards objects is ultimately useless, and the practical application of Kant's ideas proves to be bitterly rejected.

The very model of public intellectual Sartre was a cultural giant. He was an important philosopher, a political scientist, a campaigning journalist, founding editor of *Les Temps Modernes*, a supporter of the 'Front de Liberation Nationale' in Algeria and of the student uprising of May 1968, a would-be mediator both between Israel and the Arab states and between the opposing superpowers during the Cold War. In these countless activities he gave the act of writing an urgent and provocative role. Moving easily between genres he wrote remarkable novels, essays, short-stories, plays, and an autobiography. He was also a screen writer and a literary theorist. In his speculative biography of Flaubert, *L' Idiot de la famille'* (1972) he introduced a new kind of

biography writing which can be called, 'existential psycho-analysis' . He was awarded the 1964 Nobel Prize in Literature and refused it, saying that he always declined official honors and that "a writer should not allow himself to be turned into an institution."

Principal Works : Nausea (1938); The Wall(1939); The Flies (1943); No Exit (1944); The Age of Reason (1945); The Reprieve (1945); Dirty Hands (1948); *Iron in the soul* (1949); *Intimacy* (1949); Being and Nothingness (1943); Existentialism is a Humanism (1946); *The Words* (1964); *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phony War* (1984).

Amidst books ...

I began my life as I shall no doubt end it: amidst books. In my grandfather's study there were books everywhere. It was forbidden to dust them, except once a year, before the beginning of the October term. Though I did not yet know how to read, I already revered those standing stones : upright or leaning over, close together like bricks on the book-shelves or spaced out nobly in lanes of menhirs. I felt that our family's prosperity depended on them. They all looked alike. I disported myself in a tiny sanctuary, surrounded by ancient, heavy-set monuments which had seen me into the world, which would see me out of it, and whose permanence guaranteed me a future as calm as the past. I would touch them secretly to honor my hands with their dust, but I did not quite know what to do with them, and I was a daily witness of ceremonies whose meaning escaped me: my grandfather- who was usually so clumsy that my grandmother buttoned his gloves for him-handled those cultural objects with the dexterity of an officiant. Hundreds of times I saw him get up from his chair with an absent -minded look, walk around his table, cross the room in two strides, take down a volume without hesitating, without giving himself time to choose, leaf through it with a combined movement of his thumb and forefinger as he walked back to his chair, then, as soon as he was seated, open it sharply "to the right page," making it creak like a shoe. At times, I would draw near to observe those boxes which slit open like oysters, and I would see the nudity of their inner organs, pale, fusty leaves, slightly bloated, covered with black veinlets, which drank ink and smelled of mushrooms.

[The Words tr by Bernard Frechtman, Vintage Books 1981 (reprint of the edition pub by George Braziller, New York, 1964) © 1964 George Braziller]

We had our myths, our oddities

We had our myths, our oddities of language, and our ritual jokes. For almost a whole year, ended at least one sentence in ten with the following words, which I uttered with ironic resignation: "But that doesn't matter." I would say: "There's a big white dog over there. He's not white, but that doesn't matter." We got into the habit of relating the trivial incidents of our life to each other, as they occurred, in an epic style; we would refer to ourselves in the third person We would be waiting for a bus; it would go by without stopping; one of us would then cry out: "They stamped their feet and called down curses," and we would burst out laughing.public, we had our little collusions; a wink would be enough. In a store, in a tea-shop, the sales-girl or waitress would seem funny to us; when we left, my mother would say: "I didn't look at you. I was afraid of

laughing in her face,” and I would feel proud of my power: there weren’t many children who could make their mother laugh just by a look. We were shy and afraid together. One day, on the quays, I came upon twelve numbers of Buffalo Bill that I did not yet have. She was about to pay for them when a man approached. He was stout and pale, with anthracite eyes, a waxed moustache, a straw hat, and that slick look which the gay blades of the period liked to affect. He stared at my mother, but it was to me that he spoke: “They’re spoiling you, kid, they’re spoiling you!” he repeated breathlessly. At first I merely took offense; I resented such familiarity. But I noticed the maniacal look on his face, and Anne Marie and I were suddenly a single, frightened girl who stepped away. Taken aback, the gentleman went off. I have forgotten thousands of faces, but I still remember that blubbery mug. I knew nothing about things of the flesh, and I couldn’t imagine what the man wanted of us, ~~but the wanted of us~~ but the manifestation of desire is such that I seemed to understand, and, in a way, everything became clear to me. I had felt that desire through Anne Marie; through her I learned to scent the male, to fear him, to hate him. The incident tightened the bonds between us. I would trot along with a stern look, my hand in hers, and I felt sure I was protecting her. Is it the memory of those years? Even now, I have a feeling of pleasure whenever I see a serious child talking gravely and tenderly to his child-mother. I like those sweet friendships that come into being far away from men and against them. I stare at those childish couples, and then I remember that I am a man and I look away.

[*The Words* tr by Bernard Frechtman, Vintage Books 1981 (reprint of the edition pub by George Braziller, New York, 1964) © 1964 George Braziller]

No matter. I write and will keep writing books.

Nulla dies sine linea.

It’s a habit, and besides, it’s my profession. For a long time, I took my pen for a sword; I now know we’re powerless. No matter. I write and will keep writing books; they’re needed; all the same, they do serve some purpose. Culture doesn’t save anything or anyone, it doesn’t justify. But it’s a product of man: he projects himself into it, he recognizes himself in it; that critical mirror alone offers him his image. Moreover, that old, crumbling structure, my imposture, is also my character: one gets rid of a neurosis, one doesn’t get cured of one’s self. Though they are worn out, blurred, humiliated, thrust aside, ignored, all of the child’s traits are still to be found in the quinquagenarian. Most of the time they lie low, they bide their time; at the first moment of inattention attention, they rise up and emerge, disguised; I claim sincerely to be writing only for my time, but my present notoriety annoys me; it’s not glory, since I’m alive, and yet that’s enough to belie my old dreams; could it be that I still harbor them secretly? I have, I think, adapted them: since I’ve lost the chance of dying unknown, I sometimes flatter myself that I’m being misunderstood in my lifetime. Griselda’s not dead. Pardaillan still in-habits me. So does Strogoff. I’m answerable only to them, who are answerable only to God, and I don’t believe in God. So try to figure it out. As for me, I can’t, and I sometimes wonder whether I’m not playing winner loses and not trying hard to stamp out my one-time hopes so that everything will be restored to me a hundredfold. In that case, I would be

Philoctetes; that magnificent and stinking cripple gave everything away unconditionally, including his bow; but we can be sure that he's secretly waiting for his reward.

Let's drop that. Mamie would say:

"Gently, mortals, be discreet."

What I like about my madness is that it has protected me from the very beginning against the charms of the "elite": never have I thought that I was the happy possessor of a "talent"; my sole concern has been to save myself-nothing in my hands, nothing up my sleeve-by work and faith. As a result, my pure choice did not raise me above anyone. Without equipment, without tools, I set all of me to work in order to save all of me. If I relegate impossible Salvation to the proroom, what remains? A whole man, composed of all men and as good as all of them and not better than any.

[*The Words* tr by Bernard Frechtman, Vintage Books 1981 (reprint of the edition pub by George Braziller, New York, 1964) © 1964 George Braziller]

My thought is me

La Nausee is Sartre's most important work—in fact, his personal diary in the person of Antoine Roquetin where he explains his philosophy of existentialism. Here are two significant passages:

I exist. It's sweet, so sweet. And light: you'd swear that it floats in the air all by itself. It moves. Little brushing movements everywhere which melt and disappear. Gently, gently. There is some frothy water in my mouth. I swallow it, it slides down my throat, it caresses me-and now it is starting up again in my mouth, I have a permanent little pool of whitish water in my mouth-unassuming – touching my tongue. And this pool is me too. And the tongue. And the throat is me.

I see my hand spread out on the table. It is alive-it is me. It opens, the fingers unfold and point. It is lying on its back. It shows me its fat under belly. It looks like an animal upside down. The fingers are the paws. I amuse myself by making them move about very quickly, like the claws of a crab which has fallen on its back. The crab is dead: the claws curl up and close over the belly of my hand. I see the nails-the only thing in me which isn't alive. And even that isn't sure. My hand turns over, spreads itself out on its belly, and now it is showing me its back. A silvery, somewhat shiny back – you might think it was a fish, if it weren't for the red hairs near the knuckles. I feel my hand. It is me, those two animals moving about at the end of my arms. My hand scratches one of its paws with the nail of another paw; I can feel to weight on the table which isn't me. It's long, long, this impression of weight, it doesn't go. There's no reason why it should go. In the long run, it's unbearable ... I withdraw my hand, I put it in my pocket. But straight away, through the material, I feel the warmth of my thigh. I promptly make my hand jump out of my pocket; I let it hang against the back of the chair. Now I feel its weight at the end of my arm. It pulls a little, not very much, gently, softly, it exists. I don't press the point: wherever I put it, it will go on existing; I can't suppress it, nor can I suppress the rest of my body, the damp warmth which soils my shirt, nor all this warm fat which turns lazily, as if somebody were stirring it with a spoon, not all the sensations wandering about inside, coming and going, rising from my side to my armpit or else quietly vegetating, from morning till night in their usual corner.

I jump to my feet: if only I could stop thinking, that would be something of an improvement. Thoughts are the dullest things on earth. Even duller than flesh. They stretch out endlessly and they leave a funny taste in the mouth. Then there are the words, inside the thoughts, the unfinished words, the sketchy phrases which keep coming back: 'I must fini ... I ex . . . Dead ... Monsieur de Roll is dead ... I am not ... I ex ... ' It goes on and on ... and there's no end to it. It's worse than the rest because I feel responsible, I feel that I am to blame. For example, it is I who keep up this sort of painful rumination: I exist. It is I. The body lives all by itself, once it has started. But when it comes to thought, it is I who continue it, I who unwind it. I exist. I think I exist. Oh, how long and serpentine this feeling of existing is-and I unwind it, slowly ... If only I could prevent myself from thinking! I try, I succeed: it seems as if my head is filling with smoke ... And now it starts again: 'Smoke ... Mustn't think ... I don't want to that I don't want to think. Because it is still a thought.' Will there never be an end to it?

My thought is me: that is why I can't stop. I exist by what I think ... and I can't prevent myself from thinking. At this very moment – this is terrible – if I exist, it is because I hate existing. It is I, it is I who pull myself from the nothingness to which I aspire: hatred and disgust for existence are just so many ways of making me exist, of thrusting me into existence. Thoughts are born behind me like a feeling of giddiness, I can feel them being born behind my head... . If I give way, they'll come here in front, between my eyes – and I go on giving way, the thought grows and grows and here it is, huge, filling me completely and renewing my existence.

Six O' Clock in the evening

I can't say that I feel relieved or happy: on the contrary, I feel crushed. Only I have achieved my aim: I know what I wanted to know; I have understood everything that has happened to me since January. The Nausea hasn't left me and I don't believe it will leave me for quite a while; but I am no longer putting up with it, it is no longer an illness or a passing fit: it is me.

I was in the municipal park just now. The root of the chestnut tree plunged into the ground just underneath my bench. I no longer remembered that it was a root. Words had disappeared, and with them the meaning of things, the methods of using them, the feeble landmarks which men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, slightly bent, my head bowed, alone in front of that black, knotty mass, which was utterly crude and frightened me. And then I had this revelation.

It took my breath away. Never, until these last few days, had I suspected what it meant to 'exist'. I was like the others, like those who walk along the sea-shore in their spring clothes. I used to say like them: 'The *sea* is green, that white speck up there is a seagull', but I didn't feel that it existed, that the seagull was an 'existing seagull'; usually existence hides itself. It is there, around us, in us, it is us, you can't say a couple of words without speaking of it, but finally you can't touch it. When I believed I was thinking about it, I suppose that I was thinking nothing, my head was empty, or there was just one word in my head, the word 'to be'. Or else I was thinking ... how can I put it? I was thinking appurtenances, I was saying to myself that the sea belonged to the class of green objects, or that green formed part of the sea's qualities. Even when I looked at things, I was miles from thinking that they existed: they looked like stage scenery to me. I picked them up in my hands, they served me as tools, I foresaw their resistance. But all that

happened on the surface. If anybody had asked me what existence was, I should have replied in good faith that it was nothing, just an empty form which added itself to external things, without changing anything in their nature. And then, all of a sudden, there it was, as clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost its harmless appearance as an abstract category: it was the very stuff of things, that root was steeped in existence. Or rather the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass on the lawn, all that had vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, was only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, in disorder - naked, with a frightening, obscene nakedness.

The word Absurdity is now born beneath my pen; a little while ago, in the park, I didn't find it, but then I wasn't looking for it either, I didn't need it: I was thinking without words, about things, with things. Absurdity was not an idea in my head, or the sound of a voice, but that long dead snake at my feet, that wooden snake. Snake or claw or root or vulture's talon, it doesn't matter. And without formulating anything clearly, I understood that I had found the key to Existence, the key to my Nausea, to my own life. In fact, all that I was able to grasp afterwards comes down to this fundamental absurdity. Absurdity: another word; I am struggling against words; over there, I touched the thing. But here I should like to establish the absolute character of this absurdity. A gesture, an event in the little coloured world of men is never absurd except relatively speaking: in relation to the accompanying circumstances. A madman's ravings, for example, are absurd in relation to the situation in which he finds himself, but not in relation to his madness. But I, a little while ago, experienced the absolute: the absolute or the absurd. That root –there was nothing in relation to which it was not absurd. Oh, how can I put that in words? Absurd: irreducible; nothing-not even a profound, secret aberration of Nature – could explain that. Obviously I didn't know everything, I hadn't seen the seed sprout or the tree grow. But faced with that big rugged paw, neither ignorance nor knowledge had any importance; the world of explanations and reasons is not that of existence. A circle is not absurd, it is clearly explicable by the rotation of a segment of a straight line around one of its extremities. But a circle doesn't exist either. That root, on the other hand, existed in so far that I could not explain it. Knotty, inert, nameless, it fascinated me, filled my eyes, repeatedly brought me back to its existence.

[*Nausea* / Jean-Paul Sartre, tr by Robert Baldick, London, Penguin Books, 2000] pp. 143-44 ;182-183

« **How far away from them I feel ...** »

I look at the grey shimmering of Bouville at my feet. In the sun it looks like heaps of shells, of splinters of bone, of gravel. Lost in the midst of that debris, tiny fragments of glass or mica give little flashes from time to times. An hour from now, the trickles, the trenches, the thin furrows running between the shells will be streets, I shall be walking in those streets, between walls. Those little black dots which I can make out in the rue Boulibet—an hour from now I shall be one of them.

How far away from them I feel, up on this hill. It seems to me that I belong to another species. They come out of their offices after the day's work, they look at the houses and the squares with a satisfied expression, they think that it is *their* town. A 'good solid town'. They aren't afraid, they feel at home. They have never seen anything

but the tamed water which runs out of the taps, the light which pours from the bulbs when they turn the switch, the half-breed, bastard trees which are held up with crutches. They are given proof, a hundred times a day, that everything is done mechanically, that the world obeys fixed, unchangeable laws. Bodies released in a vacuum all fall at the same speed, the municipal park is closed every day at four p.m. in the winter, at six p.m. in summer, lead melts at 335°C., the last tram leaves the Town Hall at 11.05 p.m. They are peaceable, a little morose, they think about Tomorrow, in other words simply about another today; towns have only one day at their disposal which comes back exactly the same every morning. They barely tidy it up a little on Sundays. The idiots. It horrifies me to think that I am going to see their thick, self-satisfied faces again. They make laws, they write Populist novels, they get married, they commit the supreme folly of having children. And meanwhile, vast, vague Nature has slipped into their town, it has infiltrated everywhere, into their houses, into their offices, into themselves. It doesn't move, it lies low, and they are right inside it, they breathe it, and they don't see it, they imagine that it is outside, fifty miles away. I *see* it, that Nature, I *see* it ... I know that its submissiveness is laziness, I know that It has no laws, that what they consider its constancy doesn't exist. It has nothing but habits and it may change those tomorrow.

[*Nausea* / Jean-Paul Sartre, tr by Robert Baldick, London, Penguin Books, 2000] pp. 224-225

The Wall

The first story is about the Spanish war. The convicts have gathered together for their last night. They will all be shot dead in the morning.

Suddenly Juan spoke. "You're a doctor?"

"Yes," the Belgian said.

"Does it hurt... very long?"

"Huh? When... ? Oh, no" the Belgian said paternally "Not at all. It's over quickly."

He acted as though he were calming a cash customer.

"But I... they told me... sometimes they have to fire twice."

"Sometimes," the Belgian said, nodding. "It may happen that the first volley reaches no vital organs."

"Then they have to reload their rifles and aim all over again?"

He thought for a moment and then added hoarsely, "That takes time!"

He had a terrible fear of suffering, it was all he thought about: it was his age. I never thought much about it and it wasn't fear of suffering that made me sweat.

I got up and walked to the pile of coal dust. Tom jumped up and threw me a hateful look: I had annoyed him because my shoes squeaked. I wondered if my face looked as frightened as his: I saw he was sweating too. The sky was superb, no light filtered into the dark corner and I had only to raise my head to see the Big Dipper. But it wasn't like it had been: the night before I could see a great piece of sky from my monastery cell and each hour of the day brought me a different memory. Morning, when the sky was a hard, light blue, I thought of beaches on the

Atlantic: at noon I saw the sun and I remembered a bar in Seville where I drank manzanilla and ate olives and anchovies: afternoons I was in the shade and I thought of

the deep shadow which spreads over half a bull-ring leaving the other half shimmering in sunlight: it was really hard to see the whole world reflected in the sky like that. But now I could watch the sky as much as I pleased, it no longer evoked anything in me. I liked that better. I came back and sat near Tom. A long moment passed.

Tom began speaking in a low voice. He had to talk, without that he wouldn't have been able to recognize himself in his own mind. I thought he was talking to me but he wasn't looking at me. He was undoubtedly afraid to see me as I was, grey and sweating: we were alike and worse than mirrors of each other. He watched the Belgian, the living.

"Do you understand?" he said. "I don't understand."

I began to speak in a low voice too. I watched the Belgian. "Why? What's the matter?"

"Something is going to happen to us than I can't understand."

There was a strange smell about Tom. It seemed to me I was more sensitive than usual to odors. I grinned. "You'll understand in a while."

"It isn't clear," he said obstinately. "I want to be brave but first I have to know... Listen, they're going to take us into the courtyard. Good. They're going to stand up in front of us. How many?"

"I don't know. Five or eight. Not more."

"All right. There'll be eight. Someone'll holler 'aim!' and I'll see eight rifles looking at me. I'll think how I'd like to get inside the wall, I'll push against it with my back... with every ounce of strength I have, but the wall will stay, like in a nightmare. I can imagine all that. If you only knew how well I can imagine it."

"All right, all right!" I said. "I can imagine it too."

"It must hurt like hell. You know they aim at the eyes and the mouth to disfigure you," he added mechanically. "I can feel the wounds already. I've had pains in my head and in my neck for the past hour. Not real pains. Worse. This is what I'm going to feel tomorrow morning. And then what?"

I well understood what he meant but I didn't want to act as if I did. I had pains too, pains in my body like a crowd of tiny scars. I couldn't get used to it. But I was like him. I attached no importance to it. "After," I said. "you'll be pushing up daisies."

He began to talk to himself: he never stopped watching the Belgian. The Belgian didn't seem to be listening. I knew what he had come to do; he wasn't interested in what we thought; he came to watch our bodies, bodies dying in agony while yet alive.

"It's like a nightmare," Tom was saying. "You want to think something, you always have the impression that it's all right, that you're going to understand and then it slips, it escapes you and fades away. I tell myself there will be nothing afterwards. But I don't understand what it means. Sometimes I almost can... and then it fades away and I start thinking about the pains again, bullets, explosions. I'm a materialist, I swear it to you; I'm not going crazy. But something's the matter. I see my corpse; that's not hard but I'm the one who sees it, with my eyes. I've got to think... think that I won't see anything anymore and the world will go on for the others. We aren't made to think that, Pablo. Believe me: I've already stayed up a whole night waiting for something. But this isn't the same: this will creep up behind us, Pablo, and we won't be able to prepare for it."

"Shut up," I said, "Do you want me to call a priest?"

[*The Wall* tr by Lloyd Alexander, New Directions Paperbook, 1969 (New Directions Publishing Corporation) © 1975 Lloyd Alexander]

Samuel Beckett (1906 – 1989)

Samuel Barclay Beckett was an Irish avant-garde novelist, playwright, theatre director, and poet who lived in Paris for most of his adult life and wrote in both English and French. His work offers a bleak, tragic-comic outlook on human nature, often coupled with black comedy and gallows humour. Few writers have offered the world a bleaker portrait of life than Samuel Beckett. His prose, poems, and plays have confused many, but he has been called one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century.

Beckett's father was a Quantity Surveyor and mother a nurse in Dublin, where along with his initial schooling he also learned music and arts. He was a natural athlete, excelled at cricket. Later played for Dublin University, and two first class games against Northamptonshire. He is the only Nobel laureate in Literature to have an entry in Wisden Cricketers' Almanack, the "bible" of cricket.

Beckett studied French, Italian, and English at Trinity College, Dublin from 1923 to 1927, graduated with a BA, and—after teaching briefly at Campbell College in Belfast—took up the post of *lecteur d'anglais* in the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. While there, he was introduced to renowned Irish author James Joyce by Thomas MacGreevy who also worked there. This meeting had a profound effect on him. Beckett assisted Joyce in various ways, one of which was research towards the book that became *Finnegans Wake*. During late 1920s and early 30s he frequently travelled in Europe, published a number of essays and reviews, a book of his poetry, *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates* (1935) and worked on his novel *Murphy*. After the 1940 occupation by Germany Beckett joined the French Resistance, in which he worked as a courier. He was awarded the **Croix de Guerre** and the **Medaille de la Resistance** by the French government for his efforts in fighting the German occupation. In 1945 he returned to Dublin for a brief visit.

Despite being a native English speaker, Beckett wrote in French because—as he himself claimed—it was easier for him thus to write "without style". After World War II, Beckett turned definitively to the French language as a vehicle. During the 15 years following the war, Beckett produced four major full-length stage plays: *Waiting for Godot* (*En attendant Godot*), *Endgame* (*Fin de partie*), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), and *Happy Days* (1961). These plays—which are often considered to have been instrumental in the so-called "Theatre of the Absurd" deal in a very blackly humorous way with themes similar to those of the roughly contemporary existentialist thinkers. The term "Theatre of the Absurd" was coined by Martin Esslin in a book of the same name; Beckett and *Godot* were centerpieces of the book. Esslin claimed these plays were the fulfillment of Albert Camus's concept of "the absurd". Though many of the themes are similar, Beckett had little affinity for existentialism as a whole. He in fact broke off from the existentialist movement and founded his own philosophy.

In 1946 Beckett began working on *Waiting for Godot*, his most famous, most studied, most controversial, most absurdist, monographed, celebrated, and perhaps most influential play. With its non-story of two tramps at loose ends in a landscape barren of all but a single tree, amusing or distracting themselves from oppressive boredom while they wait for a mysterious figure who never arrives, the play became the favourite text for theatrical innovation and existential thought in the latter half of 20th century. In a much-quoted article, the critic Vivien Mercier wrote that Beckett "has achieved a theoretical

impossibility—a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats.” It is performed even today quite frequently.

Beckett's career as a writer can be roughly divided into three periods: his early works (generally considered to have been strongly influenced by James Joyce), up until the end of World War II in 1945; his middle period, stretching from 1945 until the early 1960s, during which period he wrote what are probably his best-known works; and his late period, from the early 1960s until Beckett's death in 1989, during which his works tended to become shorter and his style more minimalist.

Broadly speaking, the plays deal with the subject of despair and the will to survive in spite of that despair, in the face of an uncomprehending and incomprehensible world. The words of Nell—one of the two characters in *Endgame* who are trapped in ashbins, from which they occasionally peek their heads to speak—can best summarize the themes of the plays of Beckett's middle period: "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that. ... Yes, yes, it's the most comical thing in the world. And we laugh, we laugh, with a will, in the beginning. But it's always the same thing. Yes, it's like the funny story we have heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh anymore." Samuel Beckett is to the modern drama what James Joyce, his fellow Irishman and one-time employer, is to the modern novel: a father and patron saint whose shadow stretches inescapably into the 21st century. It could even be argued that "Waiting for Godot" , the work that made him famous, is the most influential play of the last hundred years, forever altering the form and direction of drama. Beckett's outstanding achievements in prose during the period were the three novels *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. In these novels—sometimes referred to as a "trilogy", though this is against the author's own explicit wishes—the prose becomes increasingly bare and stripped down. Beckett translated all of his works into English himself, with the exception of *Molloy*, for which he collaborated with Patrick Bowles. Samuel Beckett received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969.

Of all the English-language modernists, Beckett's work represents the most sustained attack on the realist tradition. He opened up the possibility of theatre and fiction that dispense with conventional plot and the unities of time and place in order to focus on essential components of the human condition. Vaclav Havel, John Banville, Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter have publicly stated their indebtedness to Beckett's example. He has had a wider influence on experimental writing since the 1950s. In an Irish context, he has exerted great influence on poets such as John Banville, Derek Mahon, Thomas Kinsella as well as writers like Trevor Joyce and Catherine Walsh. Many major 20th-century composers have created musical works based on his texts. Beckett's work was also an influence on many visual artists, as well as some short film makers, like Leila Newton-Fox has been inspired by his play 'Endgame' created a short film 'Stalemate'. Beckett is one of the most widely discussed and highly prized of 20th-century authors, inspiring a critical industry to rival that which has sprung up around James Joyce.

Principal works: *Waiting for Godot* (1953); *Act Without Words I, and II* (1956); *Endgame* (1957); *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958); *Happy Days* (1961); *Breath* (1969); *Not I* (1972); *That Time* (1975); *Molloy* (1951); *Malone Dies* (1951); *The Unnamable* (1953); *How It Is* (1961).

The Circus

Two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon wait under a tree for the arrival of an enigmatic Godot. While they engage in a discussion to kill time another clownish couple enters, Pozzo whipping his old sniveling slave, Lucky.

VLADIMIR: You want to get rid of him?

POZZO: He imagines that when I see him indefatigable I'll regret my decision. Such is his miserable scheme. As though I were short of slaves! [*All three look at LUCKY.*] Atlas, son of Jupiter! [*Silence.*] Well, that's that I think. Anything else? [*Vaporizer.*]

VLADIMIR: You want to get rid of him?

POZZO: Remark that I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine, if chance had not willed otherwise. To each one his due.

VLADIMIR: You waagerrim?

POZZO: I beg your pardon?

VLADIMIR: You want to get rid of him?

POZZO: I do. But instead of driving him away as I might have done, I mean instead of simply kicking him out on his arse, in the goodness of my heart I am bringing him to the fair, where I hope to get a good price for him. The truth is you can't drive such creatures away. The best thing would be to kill them.

[*LUCKY weeps.*]

ESTRAGON: He's crying.

POZZO: Old dogs have more dignity. [*He proffers his handkerchief to ESTRAGON.*] Comfort him, since you pity him. [*ESTRAGON hesitates.*] Come on. [*ESTRAGON takes the handkerchief.*] Wipe away his tears, he'll feel less forsaken.

[*ESTRAGON hesitates.*]

VLADIMIR: Here, give it to me, I'll do it.

[*ESTRAGON refuses to give the handkerchief. Childish gestures.*]

POZZO: Make haste, before he stops. [*ESTRAGON approaches LUCKY and makes to wipe his eyes. LUCKY kicks him violently in the shins. ESTRAGON drops the handkerchief, recoils, staggers about the stage bowling with pain.*]

Hanky!

[*LUCKY puts down bag and basket, picks up handkerchief, gives it to POZZO, goes back to his place, picks up bag and basket.*]

ESTRAGON: Oh the swine! [*He pulls up the leg of his trousers.*] He's crippled me!

POZZO: I told you he didn't like strangers.

VLADIMIR:[*To ESTRAGON.*] Show. [*ESTRAGON shows his leg. To pozzo, angrily.*] He's bleeding!

POZZO: It's a good sign.

ESTRAGON:[*On one leg.*] I'll never walk again!

VLADIMIR: [*Tenderly.*] I'll carry you. [*Pause.*] If necessary.

POZZO: He's stopped crying. [*To ESTRAGON.*] You have replaced him as it were. [*Lyricaly.*] The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh. [*He laughs.*] Let us not then speak ill of our generation, it is not any unhappier than its predecessors. [*Pause.*]

Let us not speak well of it either. [*Pause.*] Let not speak of it at all. [*Pause. Judiciously.*] It is true the population has increased.

VLADIMIR: Try and walk.

[ESTRAGON *takes a few limping steps, stops before LUCKY and spits on him, then goes and sits down on the mound.*]

POZZO: Guess who taught me all these beautiful things.

[*Pause. Pointing to LUCKY.*] My Lucky!

VALDIMIR: [*Looking at the sky.*] Will night never come?

POZZO: But for him all my thoughts, all my feelings, would have been of common things. [*Pause. With extraordinary vehemence.*] Professional worries! [*Calmer.*] Beauty, grace, truth of the first water, I knew they were all beyond me. So I took a knook.

VLADIMIR: [*Started from his inspection of the sky.*] A knook?

POZZO: That was nearly sixty years ago ... [*He consults his watch*] ... yes, nearly sixty. [*Drawing himself up proudly.*] You wouldn't think it to look at me, would you? Compared to him I look like a young man, no? [*Pause.*] Hat! [LUCKY puts down the basket and takes off his hat. His long white hair falls about his face. He puts his hat under his arm and picks up the basket.] Now look. [POZZO *takes off his hat.*¹ *He is completely bald. He puts on his hat again.*] Did you see?

VLADIMIR: And now you turn him away? Such an old and faithful servant.

ESTRAGON: Swine!

[POZZO *more and more agitated.*]

¹ All four wear bowlers

VLADIMIR: After having sucked all the good out him you chuck him away like a ... like a banana skin. Really ...

POZZO: [*Groaning, clutching his head.*] I can't bear it ... any longer ... the way he goes on ... you've no idea ... it's terrible ... he must go ... [*He waves his arms*] ... I'm going mad ... [*He collapses, his head in his hands*] ... I can't bear it ... any longer ...

[*Silence. All look at POZZO.*]

VLADIMIR: He can't bear it.

ESTRAGON: Any longer.

VLADIMIR: He's going mad.

ESTRAGON: It's terrible.

VLADIMIR: [*To LUCKY.*] How dare you! It's abominable! Such a good master! Crucify him like that! After so many years! Really!

POZZO: [*Sobbing.*] He used to be so kind ... so helpful ... and entertaining ... my good angel ... and now ... he's killing me.

ESTRAGON: [*To VLADIMIR.*] Does he want to replace him?

VLADIMIR: What?

ESTRAGON: Does he want someone to take his place or not?

VLADIMIR: I don't think so.

ESTRAGON: What?

VLADIMIR: I don't know.

ESTRAGON: Ask him.

POZZO: [*Calmer.*] Gentlemen, I don't know what came over me. Forgive me. Forget all I said. [*More and more his old self.*] I don't remember exactly what it was, but you may be sure there wasn't a word of truth in it. [*Drawing himself up, striking his*

chest.] Do I look like a man that can be made to suffer? Frankly? [*He rummages in his pockets.*] What have I done with my pipe?

VLADIMIR: Charming evening we're having.

ESTRAGON: Unforgettable.

VLADIMIR: And it's not over.

ESTRAGON: Apparently not.

VLADIMIR: It's only beginning.

ESTRAGON: It's awful.

VLADIMIR: Worse than the pantomime.

ESTRAGON: The circus.

[*Waiting for Godot*, Act I, Samuel Beckett : The Complete Dramatic Works, Penguin Books in association with Faber and Faber, 2003 ©. Samuel Beckett 1955 and 1965.

It' d pass the time ...

VLADIMIR: It'd pass the time.[ESTRAGON *hesitates.*] I assure you , it would be an occupation.

ESTRAGON: A relaxation.

VLADIMIR: A recreation.

ESTRAGON: A relaxation.

VLADIMIR: Try.

ESTRAGON: You' ll help me?

VLADIMIR: I will, of course.

ESTRAGON: We don't manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us?

VLADIMIR: Yes, yes. Come on, we' ll try the left first.

ESTRAGON: We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?

VLADIMIR: [*Impatiently.*] Yes, yes we' re magicians. But let us persevere in what

We have resolved, before we forget. [*He picks up a boot.*] Come on, give me your foot. [*Estragon raises his foot.*] The other hog!

[*Estragon raises the other foot.*] Higher! [*Wreathed together they stagger about the stage. Vladimir succeeds finally in getting on the boot.*] try and walk. [*Estragon walks.*] Well?

ESTRAGON: It fits.

VLADIMIR: [*Taking string from his pocket.*] We' ll try and lace it

ESTRAGON: [*Vehemently.*] No no, no laces, no laces!

VLADIMIR: You' ll be sorry. Let's try the other. [*As before.*] Well?

ESTRAGON: [*Grudgingly.*] It fits too.

VLADIMIR: They don't hurt you?

ESTRAGON: Not yet.

VLADIMIR: Then you can keep them.

ESTRAGON: They're too big.

VLADIMIR: Perhaps you' ll have socks some day.

ESTRAGON: True.

VLADIMIR: Then you' ll keep them?

ESTRAGON: That's enough about these boots.

VLADIMIR: Yes, but --

ESTRAGON: [*Violently.*] Enough! [*Silence.*] I suppose I might as well sit down.
[*He looks for a place to sit down, then goes and sits down on the mound.*]

VLADIMIR: That's where you were sitting yesterday evening.

[*Waiting for Godot*, Act II, Samuel Beckett : The Complete Dramatic Works, Penguin Books in association with Faber and Faber, 2003 ©. Samuel Beckett 1955 and 1965.]

Light black. From pole to pole.

Endgame, a one act Play. Four characters wait in a bare room which fills their miserable life: old parents of Hamm who are stuck in garbage bins, Hamm who is paralyzed and blind stuck in a wheel-chair, and

Their servant, Clov who alone can move. He tries to escape from their solitude, their gloom and anguish by looking far away from the window:

CLOV: Never seen anything like that!

HAMM: [*Anxious.*] What? A sail? A fin? Smoke?

CLOV: [*Looking.*] The light is sunk.

HAMM: [*Relieved.*] Pah! We all knew that.

CLOV: [*Looking.*] There was a bit left.

HAMM: The base.

CLOV: [*Looking.*] Yes.

HAMM: And now?

CLOV: [*Looking.*] All gone.

HAMM: NO gulls?

CLOV: [*Looking.*] Gulls!

HAMM: And the horizon? Nothing on the horizon?

CLOV: [*Lowering the telescope, turning towards HAMM, exasperated.*] What in God's name could there be on the horizon?

[*Pause.*]

HAMM: The waves, how are the waves?

CLOV: The waves? [*He turns the telescope on the waves.*] Lead.

HAMM: And the sun?

CLOV: [*Looking.*] zero.

HAMM: But it should be shining. Look again

CLOV: [*Looking.*] Damn the sun

HAMM: Is it night already then?

CLOV: [*Looking.*] No.

HAMM: Then what is it?

CLOV: [*Looking.*] Grey. [*Lowering the telescope, turning toward HAMM, louder.*] Grey! [*Pause. Still louder.*] GRREY! [*Pause. He gets down, approaches HAMM from behind, whispers in his ear.*]

HAMM: [*Starting.*] Grey! Did I hear you say grey?

CLOV: Light black. From pole to pole.

HAMM: You exaggerate. [*Pause.*] Don't stay there, you give me the shivers.

[CLOV *returns to his place beside the chair.*]
 CLOV: Why this farce, day after day?
 HAMM: Routine. One never knows. [*Pause.*] Last night I saw inside my breast. There was a big sore.
 CLOV: Pah! You saw your heart.
 HAMM: No, it was living. [*Pause. Anguished.*] Clov!
 CLOV: Yes.
 HAMM: What's happening?
 CLOV: Something is talking its course.
 [*Pause.*]
 HAMM: Clov!
 CLOV: [*Impatiently.*] What is it?
 HAMM: We're not beginning to ... to ... mean something?
 CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something! [*Brief laugh.*] Ah that's a good one!
 HAMM: I wonder. [*Pause.*] Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough. [*Voice of rational being.*] Ah, good, now I see what it is, yes, now I understand what they're at! [CLOV *starts, drops the telescope and begins to scratch his belly with both hands. Normal voice.*] And without going so far as that, we ourselves ... [*with emotion*] ... we ourselves ... at certain movements ... [*Vehemently.*] To think perhaps it won't all have been for nothing!
 CLOV: [*Anguished, scratching himself.*] I have a flea!
 HAMM: A flea! Are there still fleas?
 CLOV: On me there's one. [*Scratching.*] Unless it's a crablouse.
 HAMM: [*Very perturbed.*] But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!
 CLOV: I'll go and get the powder.
 [*Exit CLOV.*]
 HAMM: A flea! This is awful! What a day!

[*Endgame*, Samuel Beckett : The Complete Dramatic Works, Penguin Books in association with Faber and Faber, 2003 ©. Samuel Beckett 1955 and 1965.pp.107-108. Also, *Endgame*, Grove Press 1958]

The sack moves

Quoted extract is from Beckett's short mime play, *Act Without Words II* (1959) where two sacks and a neat pile of clothes sit on a low, "violently lit" platform at the back of a stage. Both sacks contain a man. A long pole (described in the text as a "goad") enters and prods the men into action:

Enter goad right on wheeled support (one wheel). The point stops a foot short of sack B. Pause. The point draws back, pauses, darts forward into sack, withdraws, recoils to a foot short of sack. Pause. The sack moves. Exit goad.

B, wearing shirt, crawls out of sack, gets to his feet, takes from shirt pocket and consults a large watch, puts watch back, does exercises, consults watch, takes a tooth brush from shirt pocket and brushes teeth vigorously, puts brush back, rubs scalp

vigorously, takes a comb from shirt pocket and combs hair, puts comb back, consults watch, goes to clothes, puts them on, consults watch, takes a brush from coat pocket and brushes clothes vigorously, brushes hair vigorously, puts brush back, takes a little mirror from coat pocket and inspects appearance, puts mirror back, takes carrot from coat pocket, bites off a piece, chews and swallows with appetite, puts carrot back, consults watch, takes a map from coat pocket and consults it, puts map back, consults watch, takes a compass from coat pocket and consults it, puts compass back, consults watch, picks up two sacks and carries them bowed and staggering to two yards short of left wing, sets them down, consults watch, takes off clothes (except shirt), folds them in a neat pile, consults watch, does exercises, consults watch, rubs scalp, combs hair, brushes teeth, consults and winds watch, crawls into sack and lies still, sack B being now to left of sack A as originally.

[*Act Without Words II*, Samuel Beckett : The Complete Dramatic Works, Penguin Books in association with Faber and Faber, 2003 ©. Samuel Beckett 1955 and 1965.] page, 210

“I can't go on, I'll go on.”

The Unnamable is the third and final entry in Beckett's "Trilogy" of novels, which begins with *Molloy* followed by *Malone Dies*, published in French as *L'Innommable* and later adapted by the author into English. Grove Press published the English edition in 1958. It consists entirely of a disjointed monologue from the perspective of an unnamed. It is a mix of recollections and existential musings on the part of its narrator. The novel builds in its despairing tone until the ending, which consists mainly of very long run-on-sentences. It closes with the phrase “You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.”

They say I suffer, perhaps they're right, and that I'd feel better if I did this, said that, if my body stirred, if my head understood, if they went silent and departed, perhaps they're right, how would I know about these things, how would I understand what they're talking about, I'll never stir, never speak, they'll never go silent, never depart, they'll never catch me, never stop trying, that's that, I'm listening. Well I prefer that, I must say I prefer that, that what, oh you know, who you, oh I suppose the audience, well well, so there's an audience, it's a public show, you buy your seat and wait, perhaps it's free, a free show, you take your seat and you wait for it to begin, or perhaps it's compulsory, a compulsory show, you wait for the compulsory show to begin, it takes time, you hear a voice, perhaps it's a recitation, that's the show, someone reciting, selected passages, old favourites, a poetry matinée, or someone improvising, you can barely hear him, that's the show, you can't leave, you're afraid to leave, it might be worse elsewhere, you make the best of it, you try and be reasonable, you came too early, here we'd need Latin, it's only beginning, it hasn't begun, he's only preluding, clearing his throat, alone in his dressing-room, he'll appear any moment, he'll begin any moment, or it's the stage-manager, giving his instructions, his last recommendations, before the curtain rises, that's the show, waiting for the show [...]

[Originally published in French as *L'Innommable*, later adapted by the author into English. Grove Press published the English edition in 1958.]

Jacques Prévert (1907-1977)

Jacques Prévert was France's most widely read poet since Victor Hugo and a screenwriter. His poems became and remain very popular in the French-speaking world, particularly in schools. Some of the movies he wrote are extremely well regarded, with **Les Enfants du Paradis** considered one of the greatest films of all time. Prévert participated actively in the Surrealist movement but was "Expelled" from this group by Breton in 1930, because of his "occupation or character". Prévert responded with a savage satirical attack on Breton in "Death of a Gentleman."

Jacques Prévert was born in Paris at the beginning of the century. He left school in 1915 and worked at various jobs until 1920 when he served in the military in Lorraine and with the French occupation forces in Turkey. In the 1930s he worked with a theatre company, the "October Group", linked to the Communist Party though not always reflecting the Party's views. In 1933 he attended the International Workers' Theatre Olympiad in Moscow for the première of his play, "The Battle of Fontenoy". In the same years he began writing film scripts, his first film "It's In The Bag" appeared in 1932.

Prévert's first poems were published in 1930. The following year witnessed his first major success, "Attempt to Describe a Dinner of Heads in Paris - France", subsequently published in *Paroles*. *Paroles*, which appeared late in 1945 was actually patched together by René Bertelé from forgotten newspapers and reviews, cabaret songs, and scribbles from the backs of envelopes and the paper tablecloths of cafés. It is generally considered Prévert's best work. Jacques Prévert's poems are often about life in Paris, and life after the Second World War. They are widely taught in schools in France and frequently appear in French language textbooks published worldwide. Some of Prévert's poems, such as "Les Feuilles mortes" (Autumn Leaves), "La grasse matinée" (Sleeping in), "Les bruits de la nuit" (The sounds of the night), and "Chasse à l'enfant" (The hunt for the child) were set to music by famous musicians and sung by prominent French vocalists. Jacques Prévert died of lung cancer in 1977. Two further poetry collections, *Soleil de nuit* (1980) and *La cinquième saison* (1984) were published posthumously.

Principal works: "Stories" (*Histoires*,1946); *Paroles*, 1949; *Spectacle* (1951); Grand Ball of Spring (*Grand bal du printemps* ,1951); "Charms of London" (*Charmes de Londres* ,1952); "Stories and Other Stories"(*Histoires et d'autres histoires* ,1963); and Things and Other Things (*Choses et autres* ,1972).

Poems:

Pater Noster

Our Father who art in heaven
Stay there
And we'll stay here on earth
Which is sometimes so pretty
With its mysteries of New York
And its mysteries of Paris
At least as good as that of the Trinity

With its little canal at Ourcq
 Its great wall of China
 Its river at Morlaix
 Its candy canes
 With its Pacific Ocean
 And its two basins in the Tuileries
 With its good children and bad people
 With all the wonders of the world
 Which are here
 Simply on the earth
 Offered to everyone
 Strewn about
 Wondering at the wonder of themselves
 And daring not avow it
 As a naked pretty girl dares not show herself
 With the world's outrageous misfortunes
 Which are legion
 With legionaries
 With torturers
 With the masters of this world
 The masters with their priests their traitors and their troops
 With the seasons
 With the years
 With the pretty girls and with the old bastards
 With the straw of misery rotting in the steel
 of cannons.

[tr. by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *PAROLES: Selected Poems Jacques Prevert*, tr by
 Lawrence Ferlinghetti, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1958 © Lawrence Ferlinghetti
 1958, p.9]

BREAKFAST

He put the coffee
 In the cup
 He put the milk
 In the cup of coffee
 He put the sugar
 In the *café au lait*
 With the coffee spoon
 He stirred
 He drank the *café au lait*
 And he set down the cup
 Without a word to me

He lit
A cigarette
He makes smoke-rings
With the smoke
He put the ashes
In the ash-tray
Without a word to me
Without a look at me
He got up
He put
His hat upon his head
He put his raincoat on
Because it was raining
And he left
In the rain
Without a word
Without a look at me
And I I took
My head in my hand
And I cried.

[tr by Lawrence Ferlinghetti PAROLES: Selected Poems Jacques Prevert, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1958 © Lawrence Ferlinghetti 1958]

The Dunce

He says no with his head
but he says yes with his heart
he says yes to what he loves
he says no to the teacher
he stands
he is questioned
and all the problems are posed
sudden mad laughter seizes him
and he erases all
the words and figures
names and dates
sentences and snares
and despite the teacher's threats
to the jeers of infant prodigies
with chalk of every colour
on the blackboard of misfortune
he draws the face of happiness.

[tr by Lawrence Ferlinghetti PAROLES: Selected Poems Jacques Prevert, tr by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1958 © Lawrence Ferlinghetti 1958]

Quartier libre

I put my cap in the cage
and went out with the bird on my head
So
one no longer salutes
asked the commanding officer
No
one no longer salutes
replied the bird
Ah good
Excuse me I thought one saluted
Said the commanding officer
you are fully excused everybody makes mistakes
said the bird.

[PAROLES: Selected Poems Jacques Prevert, tr by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1958 © Lawrence Ferlinghetti 1958]

To Paint a Picture of a Bird

First paint a cage
With an open door
then paint
something pretty
something simple
something beautiful
something useful
for the bird
then place the canvas against a tree
in a garden
in a wood
or in a forest
hide behind the tree
without speaking
without moving...
sometimes the bird comes quickly
but he can just as well spend long years
before deciding
Don't get discouraged
Wait
Wait years if necessary

The swiftness or slowness of the coming
Of the bird having no rapport
with the success of the picture
when the bird comes
if he comes
observe the most profound silence
wait till the bird enters the cage
and when he has entered
gently close the door with a brush
then
paint out all the bars one by one
taking care not to touch any of the feathers of the bird
then paint the portrait of the tree
choosing the most beautiful of its branches
for the bird
paint also the green foliage and the wind's freshness
the dust of the sun
and the noise of insects in the summer heat
and then wait for the bird to decide to sing
If the bird doesn't sing
It's a bad sign
a sign that the painting is bad
but if he sings it's a good sign
a sign that you can sign
so then so very gently you pull out
one of the feathers of the bird
and you write your name in a corner of the picture.

[PAROLES: Selected Poems Jacques Prevert, tr by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, City Lights
Books, San Francisco, 1958 © Lawrence Ferlinghetti 1958]

Barbara

Remember Barbara
It rained all day on Brest that day
And you walked smiling
Flushed enraptured streaming-wet
In the rain
Remember Barbara
It rained all day on Brest that day
And I ran into you in Siam Street
You were smiling
And I smiled too
Remember Barbara
You whom I didn't know

You who didn't know me
Remember
Remember that day still
Don't forget
A man was taking cover on a porch
And he cried your name
Barbara
And you ran to him in the rain
Streaming-wet enraptured flushed
And you threw yourself in his arms
Remember that Barbara
And don't be mad if I speak familiarly
I speak familiarly to everyone I love
Even if I've seen them only once
I speak familiarly to all who are in love
Even if I don't know them
Remember Barbara
Don't forget
That good and happy rain
On your happy face
On that happy town
That rain upon the sea
Upon the arsenal
Upon the Ushant boat
Oh Barbara
What shitstupidity the war
Now what's become of you
Under this iron rain
Of fire and steel and blood
And he who held you in his arms
Amorously
Is he dead and gone or still so much alive
Oh Barbara
It's rained all day on Brest today
As it was raining before
But it isn't the same anymore
And everything is wrecked
It's a rain of mourning terrible and desolate
Nor is it still a storm
Of iron and steel and blood
But simply clouds
That die like dogs
Dogs that disappear
In the downpour drowning Brest

And float away to rot
A long way off
A long long way from Brest
Of which there's nothing left.

[tr. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *PAROLES: Selected Poems Jacques Prevert*, tr by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1958 © Lawrence Ferlinghetti 1958]

René Char (1907 –1988)

An eminent 20th century French poet and philosopher René Char was born in L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue in the Vaucluse district of France. He wrote and published prolifically from 1928 until just before his death in 1988. Throughout his long career, first in association with the Surrealist movement and later as an active participant in the French Resistance, and still later as a supporter and proponent of artistic expression in the face of economic oppression, Char consistently addressed universal themes such as justice versus injustice and resistance as a moral imperative. After the war he founded the review, *Empedocle* with Albert Camus.

Poetry, according to Char is committed to any cause unless one calls life itself a cause and a reason for commitment. He celebrates life, while acknowledging its pain and chaos. His early association with the surrealists freed his imagination and colored his imagery and his involvement with World War II shaped his major themes. He is a surrealist in the way in which he feels an event, and symbolist in the distance, that, he knows exists between the occurrence of the event and its narration.

From his early poems through the final volume published after his death Char embraces the notion that art, literature, and music are reciprocally linked as necessary expressions of resistance necessary to preserve the humanity of individuals and the morality of society. The vigour of his mind puts him into a separate poetic world. We are moved as much by the vitality of his thought as by the vitality of his concreteness. The truths of the world as he sees them are constantly demanding his allegiance. Char finds an ordered meaning in the relationship between nature and men.

Second essential quality of his poems is the presence of contrast, contrast between solidity and fragility, between a sense of security and a premonition of the evanescence of things. Char so often establishes the state of the world in these terms of contrast that the poems themselves seem finally to be constructed in a similar tension between strength and weakness. In "Le Bois de l'Epte," for example, the poet is seen following on foot a valley stream. He comes upon two wild rose bushes bending into the water. The brilliance of a single rose in the water awakens in the poet an awareness of the earth and he sees the wood of Ept beginning just ahead.

The myth of tragedy is man's principal heritage, but it may accompany a lifetime of revolt against this fate. This revolt, the subject matter of some of the greatest prose writers of modern France like Malraux, Saint-Exupéry, Camus, is also found in Char's poetry, not as the subject matter of poetry but as poetry itself. Poetry was his life as a maquis fighter and as a disciple of the philosopher Heraclitus. Char can no more cut himself off from the action of men than he can cease meditating on the tragedy of man's fate in a world of change and flux. His poems and aphorisms show, in their emphasis on will, responsibility, and independence, a genuine affinity with the view of life expressed by Camus in *La Peste*, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, and *L'Homme Révolté*.

Considered by Camus to be France's greatest living poet, Char was greatly admired by writers, philosophers, painters of many nations and remains a towering figure. Among the poets who have translated his hermetic works into English are William Carlos Williams, Samuel Beckett, Richard Wilbur, James Wright, John Ashberry, W.S. Merwin, and Paul Auster. His work has been illustrated by such notable contemporaries as Braque and Picasso, and set to music by Pierre Boulez. To read Char is to experience the best that modern poetry offers as also a glimpse into the directions that poetry might

take in the future, yet to read him is like facing the challenge of entering a dense, elliptical, and fragmented universe. Despite the fact that he is a difficult poet in almost every sense, René Char is today the undisputed giant among contemporary French poets.

Principal collections: *Outside the Night is Governed* (*Dehors la nuit est gouvernée*, 1938); *Nakedness Lost* (*Le Nu perdu*, 1971); *Furor and Mystery* (*Fureur et mystère*, 1948); *The Dawn Breakers, 1992* (*Les Matinaux*, 1950); *The Word as Archipelago* (*La Parole en archipel*, 1962); *In Van Gogh's Territory* (*Les Voisinages de Van Gogh*, 1985).

Poems

In his poetry, Char has a reputation of being difficult. His poems often throw up strange phrases, and surreal images aimed at provoking imaginative leaps. He once said it was not possible for us to live without the unknown. He invites us to leap into the unknown to change our way of looking at things. Yet, he also believed in the healing power of beauty, and even in prose poems, displays a lyrical side that can have great simplicity. Though by no means a regional poet, Char's native region of Provence provided the backdrop for many of his literary treatments of the universal conflicts of good versus injustice and resistance in the face of oppression.

Every Life ...

Every life, as it dawns,
kills one of the injured.
This is the weapon:
nothing,
you, me, interchangeably
with this book,
and the riddle
that you, too, will become
in the bitter caprice of the sands.

[tr James Wright From, *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry*
ed. Paul Auster, 1984 © Mrs. James Wright and Random House Inc.]

“Restore to Them ... ”

Restore to them what is no more present in them,
They will see again the harvest grain enclosed in the stalk and swaying
on the grass.
Teach them from the fall to the soaring, the twelve months of their face,
They will cherish their emptiness until their heart's next desire;
For nothing is shipwrecked or delights in ashes;
And for the one who can see the earth's fruitful end,
Failure is of no moment, even if all is lost.

[tr by Mary Ann Caws From, *Rene Char: Selected Poems*, ed Mary Ann Caws and Tina Jolas, New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992. © New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992]

Nakedness Lost

The Poplar Tree's Effacement

The hurricane is stripping the woods.
I lull the tender-eyed lightening to sleep.
Let the great wind where I tremble
Marry the earth where I grow.

Its breath sharpens my vigil.
How turbid it is, the hollow
Of the sullied streambed's lure!

A key will be my dwelling,
The feint of a fire the heart confirms;
And the air whose talons held it.

[tr by NK. From *Rene Char: Selected Poems*, ed Mary Ann Caws and Tina Jolas, New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992. © New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992.]

Remanence

From what do you suffer? As if in the noiseless house there were to awake ascendancy of a face that an acrid mirror seemed to have fixed. As if, the high lamp and its radiance inclined over a blind plate, you were to lift toward your anguished throat the old table with its fruits. As if you were reliving your escapades in the morning haze toward the beloved revolt, which better than all tenderness, could succor you and raise you. As if condemning, while your love sleeps, the sovereign portal and the path leading toward it.

From what do you suffer?

From the unreal intact in reality laid waste. From their venturesome deviations circled with cries and blood. From that which was chosen and left untouched, from the shore of the leap to the coast attained, from the unreflecting present that disappears. From a star which, foolish, came close and will die before me.

[tr by Mac From *Rene Char: Selected Poems*, ed Mary Ann Caws and Tina Jolas, New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992. © New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992.]

THE SORGUE

Song for Yvonne

*River rushing out without companion, too soon, at a bound,
Give the children of my country the face of your passion.
River where the lightning ends, and my home begins,
That rolls the rubble of my reason down the frontiers of my forgetfulness.
River, in you the earth quivers, the sun is uneasy.
Let every poor man harvest your bread in his night.
River, often punished, often left alone.
River of the apprentices to our calloused condition,
There is no wind that doesn't bend to the crest of your wake.
River of the empty soul, of rags and of suspicion,
Of old misfortunes, unwinding of elm trees, of compassion.
River of the hare-brained, of the feverish, of flayers,
Of the sun leaving its plough to sink to the level of lies.
River of one's betters, river of the clear fog,
Of the lamp which freezes the fear around its shade.
River of regard for dreams, river that rusts iron,
Where the stars keep the shadow they hold back from the sea.
River of powers yielded, of cries entering its watery mouth,
Of the hurricane that gnaws the grape and announces the new wine.
River with an indestructible heart in this mad prison-world,
Keep us violent and friends to the bees on the horizon.*

[tr by MR. From, Rene Char: Selected Poems, ed Mary Ann Caws and Tina Jolas, New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992. © New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992.]

THE EPTE WOODS

I was nothing more that day than two legs walking.
My vision drained, a zero at the centre of my face,
I took to following the stream that ran through the valley.
Low-lying, that dreary hermit had kept well clear
Of the formlessness into which I kept on pushing on.

From the cornerstone of a ruin formed once by fire,
Two wild rose-shrubs filled with great tenderness and determination
emerged,
Plunging abruptly down into the gray water.
You could somehow sense the bustle of the departed, on the point of coming

forward once more.

The harsh vermilion of a rose as it struck the water
In a rapture of questions restored the sky on its original aspect,
Rousing the earth to a chorus of loving tongues
And like a famished, feverish tool urging me on into the future.

At the next turning, the Epte woods began.
There would be no need to cross them, though my beloved seed-sowers of
recovery!
Half-turning, I breathed the damp must of the meadows where a beast was
merging;
I heard the slither of the fearful grass-snake;
I did then—do not treat me harshly—what everyone, I knew, was hoping
would be done.

[tr by MH. From, *Rene Char: Selected Poems*, ed Mary Ann Caws and Tina Jolas, New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992. © New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992.]

THE SWIFT

Swift with wings too wide, wheeling and shrieking his joy as he circles the
house. Such is the heart.
He dries up thunder. He sows in the serene sky. If he touches ground, he
tears himself apart.
His response is the swallow, the familiar, whom he detests. What value
has face from the tower?
His pause is in the most somber hollow. No one lives in space more narrow
than he.
Through the summer of long brightness, he will streak his way in,
shadows, by the blinds of midnight.
No eyes can hold him. He shrieks for his only presence. A slight gun is
about to fell him. Such is the heart.

[tr by MAC. From, *Rene Char: Selected Poems*, ed Mary Ann Caws and Tina Jolas, New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992. © New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992.]

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Simone de Beauvoir (1908 – April 1986)

Simone-Lucie-Ernestine-Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir, commonly known as Simone de Beauvoir was a French writer, intellectual, existentialist philosopher, political activist, feminist, and social theorist. While she did not consider herself a philosopher, Beauvoir had a significant influence on both feminist existentialism and feminist theory. Beauvoir wrote novels, essays, biographies, an autobiography, and monographs on philosophy, politics, and social issues. She is best known for her novels, including *She Came to Stay* and *The Mandarins*, as well as her 1949 treatise *The Second Sex*, a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational tract of contemporary feminism.

Simone de Beauvoir was born in Paris, the elder daughter of Georges Bertrand de Beauvoir, a legal secretary Françoise (née) Brasseur, a wealthy banker's daughter and devout Catholic. The family struggled to maintain their bourgeois status after losing much of their fortune shortly after World War I, and Françoise insisted that the two daughters be sent to a prestigious convent school. Beauvoir herself was deeply religious as a child — at one point intending to become a nun — until she experienced a crisis of faith at age 14, after which she remained an atheist for the rest of her life.

Beauvoir was intellectually precocious, fueled by her father's encouragement. After passing baccalaureate exams in mathematics and philosophy in 1925, she studied mathematics at the Institut Catholique and literature/languages at the Institut Sainte-Marie. She then studied philosophy at the Sorbonne, writing her thesis on Leibniz for Leon Brunschvicg. She worked with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Claude Levi-Strauss during her practice teaching requirements at the secondary school. It was while studying for the *agrégation* that she met *École Normale* students Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Nizan and René Maheu (who gave her the lasting nickname "Castor", or beaver). The jury for the *agrégation* narrowly awarded Sartre first place instead of Beauvoir, who placed second and, at age 21, was the youngest person ever to pass the exam.

During October 1929, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir became a couple and Sartre asked her to marry him. One day while they were sitting on a bench outside the Louvre, he said, "Let's sign a two-year lease". Near the end of her life, Beauvoir said, "Marriage was impossible. I had no dowry." So they entered a lifelong relationship. Beauvoir chose never to marry and did not set up a joint household with Sartre. She never had children. This gave her time to earn an advanced academic degree, to join political causes, to travel, to write, to teach, and to have lovers (both male and female – the latter often shared). Sartre and Beauvoir always read each other's work. Debates range on about the extent to which they influenced each other in their existentialist works, such as Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Beauvoir's *She Came to Stay*. However, recent studies of Beauvoir's work focus on influences other than Sartre, including Hegel and Leibniz.

Beauvoir published her first novel *She Came to Stay* in 1943. It is a fictionalized chronicle of her and Sartre's sexual relationship with Olga Kosakiewicz and Wanda Kosakiewicz. Olga was one of her students in the Rouen secondary school where she taught during the early 30s. In the novel, set just before the outbreak of World War II, Beauvoir creates one character from the complex relationships of Olga and Wanda. The fictionalized versions of Beauvoir and Sartre have a *ménage à trois* with the young woman. The novel also delves into Beauvoir and Sartre's complex relationship and how it was affected by the *ménage à trois*. Beauvoir's metaphysical novel *She Came to Stay* was

followed by many others, including *The Blood of Others*, which explores the nature of individual responsibility. Published in 1954, *The Mandarins* is set just after the end of World War II and won her France's highest literary prize, the Prix Goncourt. The book follows the personal lives of philosophers and friends among Sartre and Beauvoir's intimate circle, including her relationship with American writer Nelson Algren, to whom the book was dedicated. Algren was outraged by the frank way Beauvoir described their sexual experiences in both *The Mandarins* and her autobiographies. He vented his outrage when reviewing American translations of her work. Much material bearing on this episode in Beauvoir's life, including her love letters to Algren, entered the public domain only after her death. She was also awarded the Jerusalem Prize in 1975, and the Austrian State prize for European Literature in 1978.

Principal works: *The Second Sex* (1953); *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (1958); *The Prime of Life* (1960); *Force of Circumstance* (1963); *The Woman Destroyed*, 1967; *The Coming of Age*, 1970; *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*, 1981; *All Said and Done*, 1972

‘I am a woman ...’

To state the question is, to me, to suggest, at once, a preliminary answer. The fact that I ask it in itself significant. A man would never set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. But if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: ‘I am a woman’; on this truth must be based all further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. The terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. In the midst of an abstract discussion it is vexing to hear a man say: ‘You think thus and so because you are a woman’; but I know that my only defense is to reply: ‘I think thus and so because it is true,’ thereby removing my subjective self from the argument. It would be out of the question to reply: ‘And you think the contrary because you are a man’, for it is understood that the fact of being a man is no peculiarity. A man is in the right being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong. It amounts to this: just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine. Woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature.

[*The Second Sex* translated and edited by H.M. Parshley, Vintage, 1997, tr © not mentioned. This tr. first published in Great Britain by Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1953] p. 15

‘... reproductive role and productive labour’

One of the basic problems of woman, as we have seen, is the reconciliation of her reproductive role and her part in productive labour. The fundamental fact that from the beginning the history doomed woman to domestic work and prevented her taking part in the shaping of the world was her enslavement to the generative function. In female

animals there is a physiological and seasonal rhythm that assures the economizing of their strength; in women, on the contrary, between puberty and menopause nature sets no limits to the number of her pregnancies. Certain civilizations forbid early marriage, and it is said that in certain Indian tribes a rest of at least two years between childbirths is assured to women; but in general, woman's fecundity has been unregulated for centuries. [...] contraceptives were practically unknown to the Middle Ages in Europe; scarcely a trace of them is to be found up to the eighteenth century. For many women life in those times was an uninterrupted succession of pregnancies; even women of easy virtue paid for their licentious love-making by frequent child-bearing.

[*The Second Sex* translated and edited by H.M. Parshley, Vintage, 1997, tr © not mentioned. This tr. first published in Great Britain by Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1953] pp. 148-149

lugubrious admonitions ...

Pradelle had warned her that his brother had just left for Togoland and that for the next week he would be fully occupied in consoling his mother. Again she seemed to find it quite natural that he should sacrifice her for his mother; but I was sure that she was obsessed by fresh doubts and I felt dismayed that during the next week there would be no word from him to counteract the 'lugubrious admonitions' doled out by Madame Mabile.

Ten days later I met her by accident in the Pocard bar; I had been working in the Nationale, and she was doing some shopping in the neighbourhood: I accompanied her. To my great astonishment, she was bubbling over with gaiety. She had been thinking things over very carefully during the past week, and gradually everything had fallen into place in her mind and heart; she was no longer terrified even at the thought of her departure for Berlin. She would have lots of free time there, and would try to write the novel she had so long been contemplating; she would read and study: never had she felt such a longing for books. She had just rediscovered Stendhal, and admired him immensely. Her family detested him so completely that until now she had never quite succeeded in surmounting their objections to him: but while reading him again during the last few days she had finally come to understand him and love him without reserve. She felt a need to revise many of her former judgements: she had the impression that an important change had taken place inside her. She talked to me with an almost incredible warmth and exuberance; there was something frenzied in her optimism. All the same, I felt glad for her sake that she had drawn fresh reserves of strength from somewhere and I felt that she was going to be even closer to me than before. I said good-bye to her, and my hopes were high.

Four days later, I received a note from Madame Mabile: Zaza was gravely ill; she had a high temperature and frightful pains in the head. The doctor had had her moved to a clinic at Saint-Cloud; she needed absolute quiet and solitude; she was not allowed to receive any visits: If her temperature did not come down, there was no hope for her.

I went to see Pradelle. He told me all he knew. The day after my meeting with Zaza, Madame Pradelle had been alone in the flat when there came a ring at the bell; she opened the door, and found a well-dressed young lady standing there, but who wasn't wearing a hat: in those days, this was 'not done'. 'Are you Jean Pradelle's mother?' the young woman asked. 'May I speak to you?' She introduced herself and Madame Pradelle

asked her to come in Zaza stared all round her; her face was white as chalk, except for the cheeks which had patches of bright red on them. 'Isn't Jean here?' She asked. 'Why isn't he here?' Has he gone to heaven already?' Madame Pradelle, who was frightened out of her wits, told her that he would be back soon. 'Do you hate me, Madame?' Zaza had asked. The old lady said of course not. 'Then why do you not want us to get married?' Madame Pradelle did her best to calm her down; she was in a less confused state when Pradelle came in a little later, but her forehead and hands were burning. 'I'm going to take you home,' he told her. They took a taxi and while they were on the way to the rue de Berri, she asked him reproachfully: 'Won't you give me a kiss? Why have you never kissed me? He kissed her.

Madame Mabile put her to bed and called the doctor; she had a long talk with Pradelle: she didn't want to be the cause of her daughter's unhappiness, and she was not opposed to their marriage. Madame Pradelle wasn't against it either; she too didn't want to cause anyone unhappiness. It would all be arranged. But Zaza had a temperature of 104 and was delirious.

During the next four days in the clinic at Saint-Cloud she kept calling out for 'my violin, Pradelle, Simone, champagne'. The fever did not abate. Her mother had the right to spend the final night with her. Zaza recognized her and knew then what she was going to die. 'Don't cry for me, Mama darling,' she said. 'There are outcasts in all families; I'm the outcast in ours.'

When next I saw her, in the chapel at the clinic, she was laid on a bier surrounded by candles and flowers. She was wearing a long nightdress of rough cloth. Her hair had grown, and now hung stiffly round a yellow face that was so thin, I hardly recognized her. The hands with their long, pale fingernails were folded on the crucifix, and seemed as fragile as an ancient mummy's. Madame Mabile was sobbing. 'We have only been instruments in God's hands,' Monsieur Mabile told her.

The doctors called it meningitis, encephalitis; no one was quite sure. Had it been a contagious disease, or an accident? Or had Zaza succumbed to exhaustion and anxiety? She has often appeared to me at night, her face all yellow under a pink sun-bonnet, and seeming to gaze reproachfully at me. We had fought together against the revolting fate that had lain ahead of us, and for a long time I believed that I had paid for my own freedom with her death.

[*Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* tr by James Kirkup, Penguin Books 1986 reprint. © The World Publishing Company, 1959 (pp. 358-360)]

Literature means absolutely nothing ...

Set just after the end of World War II *The Mandarins* looks at Parisian intellectual society at the end of World War II. Drawing on those surrounding her including, Jean-Paul Sartre (Robert Drubreuilh), Albert Camus (Henri Perron) Beauvoir (Anne Drubreuilh) dissects the emotional and philosophical currents of her time. The intellectuals also question their value and place in society and whether what they do make any difference any more or if they are simply just heard as empty words.

"... I,m the only writer ... I'm the only one who can steer things in the direction I want them to take," Robert said cheerfully. "You of all people ought to understand me.

The vigilance committees and the Resistance were useful, all right, but they were negative things. To-day, it's a question of building, and that's much more interesting."

"I understand you very well, but your writing interests me more."

"Haven't we always agreed that one doesn't write just for the sake of writing?"

Robert said. "At certain times, other forms of actions become more urgent."

"Not for you," I replied. "First and foremost, you're a writer."

"You know that's not true", Robert said reproachfully."

"For me, the revolution comes first."

"Yes," I said, "but you can best serve the revolution by writing your books."

Robert shook his head. "That depends on the circumstances. We're at a critical moment of history just now; first we have to win the political battle."

"And what happens if we don't win it?" I asked. "Do you really believe there's a chance of a new war?"

"I don't believe a new war is going to start to-morrow," Robert replied. "But what has to be avoided at all cost is the creation of a situation in the world which might easily lead to war. If that happens, then we'll sooner or later come to blow again. And we also have to prevent this victory from being exploited by capitalism." He shrugged his shoulders. "There are a lot of things that have to be prevented before one can afford to amuse oneself writing books that no one might ever read."

I stopped dead in the middle of the street. "What? Do you believe that too? That people will lose interest in literature?"

"Believe me, they'll have a lot of other things to keep themselves busy with,"

Robert said in a voice that again seemed to me too reassuring.

"The prospect doesn't seem to bother you at all," I said indignantly. "But a world without literature and art would be horribly sad."

"In any event, there are millions of men at this very moment to whom literature means absolutely nothing,"

Robert replied.

"Yes, but you always expected that to change."

"I still expect it to. What makes you think I don't?"

Robert asked. "But that's precisely it," he went on without waiting for me to answer. "If the world decides to change, there's no doubt we'll go through a period in which literature will be almost completely out of the picture."

We went into the study and I sat down on the arm of one of the leather chairs. Yes, I had certainly drunk too much punch; the walls were spinning crazily. I looked at the table on which Robert had been writing night and day for twenty years. He was sixty now, and if this period of political upheaval dragged on for very long he ran the risk of never seeing the end of it. He couldn't possibly be as indifferent to such a prospect as he tried to appear.

"Let's look into this thing a little," I said. "You believe your major works are still ahead of you and just five minutes ago you said you were going to begin a new book. That implies that you believe there are people around who want to read what you've written ..."

"Oh, I suppose that's more than likely," Robert said. "But the opposite view can't be rejected out of hand."

He sat down next to me in the chair. “It’s not really as horrible as you might think,” he added cheerfully. “Literature is created for men and not men for literature.”

[The Mandarins, tr by Leonard M. Friedman, London, Flamingo, 1984 © William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1957pp. 52-54]

Jean Anouilh (1910 – 1987)

Born in Cerisole, a small village on the outskirts of Bordeaux, Jean Marie Lucien Pierre Anouilh was the last of the 1930s playwrights, but also the first of the post-war generation, noted for his brilliant artistry, the source of which, he said, was his father. Anouilh's father was a tailor and Anouilh maintained that he inherited a pride in conscientious craftsmanship from him.

One of France's most prolific writers after World War II Anouilh's plays range from high drama to absurdist farce. Much of his work deals with themes of maintaining integrity in a world of moral compromise.

Anouilh's early works were "naturalistic studies of a sordid and corrupt world." Many of these plays present the reader with the striking and inescapable dichotomy between pragmatism and a sort of transcendent idealism. In the 1940s, Anouilh turned from contemporary tales to more mythical, classic, and historic subjects. With protagonists who assert their independence from the fated past, themes during this period are more closely related to the existential concerns of writers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Basing on their dominant tone Anouilh himself grouped his plays in five distinct categories, *Pièces noires* or "Black plays" being tragedies or realistic dramas and included *Antigone*, *Jézabel*, and *La Sauvage (The Restless Heart)*. This category typically featured young, idealistic, and uncompromising protagonists who are able to maintain their integrity only by choosing death; 'pieces roses' or pink plays, were comedies where fantasy dominated with an atmosphere similar to that of fairy tales, like *Le Bal des voleurs (Carnival of Thieves)*, *Le Rendez-vous de Senlis (Dinner with the Family)* and *Léocadia (Time Remembered)*. In these plays the focus is on the burden of the environment and especially of the past on a protagonist seeking a happier, freer existence. Third category was, 'pieces brillantes' such as 'L' Invitation au Chateau', 'L' Amour Puni. Fourth, 'Pieces Grincantes' or Angry plays like, *Ardele ou La Marguerite*, and *La Grotte*; and lastly, 'pieces Costumées' like *L' Alouette (The Lark)*, and *Beckett ou L' Honneur de Dieu*.

Writing in his final years, in *La Grotte (The Cavern)* Anouilh comments on his own progress as a writer and a theatre artist. The central character is a playwright suffering from writers' block who in his frustration recalls the foibles of Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in search of an Author*.

In 1970 Anouilh received the award, 'Prix mondial Cino Del Duca' and the Nobel records opened in 2012 reveal that he was among a shortlist of authors considered for the 1962 Nobel Prize in Literature along with John Steinbeck (winner), Robert Graves, Lawrence Durrell, and Karen Blixen.

Principal works: *L' Hermine (1932)*, *Antigone (1946)*, *Jézabel*, *La Sauvage (The Restless Heart)*, *Le Bal des voleurs (Carnival of Thieves)*, *Le Rendez-vous de Senlis (Dinner with the Family)*, *Léocadia (Time Remembered)*, *Le Voyageur sans bagage*, 'L' Invitation au Chateau', 'L' Amour Puni. *Ardele ou La Marguerite*, and *La Grotte*; *L' Alouette*, *Beckett ou L' Honneur de Dieu*, *Cher Antoine*, *Le Directeur de L' Opera (1972)*, and *Le Nombriil (1981)*.

I am here to say no to you ...

Last of the 1930s playwrights Jean Anouilh was the first of the post-war generation. For the spectators of 1944 *Antigone*, transposed into modern décor and costume, presented a contemporary political parable and a thinly veiled attack on Marshal Petain's Vichy government. The Nazis, actually, censored the play immediately upon its release.

ANTIGONE. Poor Creon. And I, with my broken nails, and the bruises your guards have made on my arms, and my stomach all knotted up with fear- I'm a queen.

CREON. Have pity on me, then, and live. Your brother's body rotting under my windows is a high enough price to pay for law and order. My son loves you. I've paid enough. Don't force me to pay with you too.

ANTIGONE. No. You said yes. You'll never stop paying!

CREON (*suddenly shaking her, beside himself*). For God's sake! Try to understand for a minute, you little fool! I've tried hard enough to understand you! Someone has to say yes. Someone has to steer the ship. It's letting in water on all sides. It's full of crime and stupidity and suffering. The rudder's adrift. The crew won't obey orders-all they're interested in is looting the cargo. The officers are busy building a comfortable raft for themselves and cornering all the fresh water. But the mast's split, the wind's howling, the sails will soon be in shreds, and the whole lot of them will die together because they think of nothing but their own skins and their own petty concerns. And do you really think this is the moment for fine distinctions? Do you think there's time to debate whether you say yes or no, to wonder whether some day the price isn't going to be too high, whether afterwards you're going to be able to call yourself a man again? No! You grab the tiller, you stand up to the mountains of water, you shout an order-and if you're attacked you shoot the first comer. The first comer! He hasn't got a name. He's like the wave that's just broken over the deck, like the wind tearing at your limbs. He may be the man who smiled at you and gave you a light yesterday. He hasn't got a name any more. And neither have you, as you hang on desperately to the tiller. The only things that have got a name now are the ship and the storm. Do you understand?

ANTIGONE (*shaking her head*). I don't want to. It's all very well for you, but I'm not here to understand. I'm here to say no to you, and to die.

CREON. It's easy to say no!

ANTIGONE. Not always.

CREON. To say yes you have to sweat, roll up your sleeves, grab hold of life, plunge in up to the neck. It's easy to say no, even if it means dying. All you have to do is keep still and wit. Wait to live. Wait to die, even. It's feeble!-something human beings have thought up for themselves. Can you imagine a world where trees have said no to the sap? Where the animals have said no to the instincts of hunting and love? Brute beasts at least are good and natural and tough. They all jostle each other bravely along the same path. If any fall, others trample them. No matter how many die there'll always be one of every species left to reproduce and follow the same path with the same courage.

ANTIGONE. What a dream for a king! To be like an animal! Wouldn't that make life easy!

Pause. CREON looks at her.

You and your happiness disgusts me ...

ANTIGONE (*a murmur, staring into space*). Happiness....

CREON (*suddenly rather ashamed*). Just a word, eh?

ANTIGONE (*softly*). And what will my happiness be like? What kind of a happy woman will Antigone grow into? What base things will she have to do, day after day, in order to snatch her own little scrap of happiness? Tell me - who will she have to lie to? Smile at? Sell herself to? Who will she have to avert her eyes from, and leave to die?

CREON (*exasperated*). That's enough. You're crazy.

ANTIGONE. I won't be quiet! I want to know what I have to do to be happy! Now, right away, because now is when I have to choose. You say life's so wonderful. I want to know what I have to do to live.

CREON. Do you love Haemon?

ANTIGONE. I love a Haemon who's tough and young ... A Haemon who's demanding and loyal, like me. But if that life of yours, that happiness of yours, are going to pass over him and erode him - if, he's not going to turn pale any more when I turn pale - if he won't think I must be dead if I'm five minutes late - if he doesn't feel alone in the world and hate me if I laugh and he doesn't know why - if he's going to become just a conventional spouse and learn to say yes like the rest - then no, I don't love Haemon any more!

CREON. That'll do. You don't know what you're saying.

ANTIGONE. I know what I'm saying, all right! It's just that you don't understand. I'm speaking to you from too far away now - from a country you can't enter any more, with your wrinkles, your wisdom and your belly. (*Laughs.*) I suddenly see you as you were when you were fifteen! Helpless, but thinking you're important. All life has added are those furrows in your face, that fat around your waist!

CREON (*shaking her*). Will you shut up!

ANTIGONE. Why do you want to shut me up? Because you know I'm right? Don't you think I can see it in your eyes? You know I'm right, but you'll never admit it because you're trying to defend that happiness of yours - like a dog crouching over a bone.

CREON. Your happiness as well as mine, you fool!

ANTIGONE. You disgust me, all of you, you and your happiness! And your life, that has to be loved at any price. You're like dogs fawning on everyone they come across. With just a little hope left every day - if you don't expect too much. But I want everything, now! And, to the full! Or else I decline the offer, lock, stock and barrel! I don't want to be sensible, and satisfied with a scrap - if I behave myself! I want to be sure of having everything, now, this very day, and it has to be as wonderful as it was when I was little. Otherwise I prefer to die

CREON. There you go - just like your father!

ANTIGONE. Exactly! Neither of us ever stops asking questions! Right up to the moment when there's not a spark of hope left to stifle. We're the sort who jump right on your precious, lousy hope!

CREON If you could see how ugly you look, shouting!

ANTIGONE. Very Vulgar, isn't it? Father was only beautiful afterwards - when he knew for certain that he'd killed his father and slept with his mother, and that nothing, now, could save him. He grew suddenly silent. Smiled. He was beautiful. It was all over. He had only to shut his eyes not to see you any more - all you craven candidates for happiness! It's you who are ugly, even the handsomest of you! There's something ugly about the corners of your eyes and mouths. You used the right words for it just now, Creon, when you talked about cooking up plots. You all look like cooks, with your fat faces. Cooks! Scullions!

CREON. (*twisting her arm*). I order you to be silent!

ANTIGONE. You order me, scullion? Do you imagine you can give me orders?

CREON. The ante-room's full of people. They'll hear you. Do you want to destroy yourself?

ANTIGONE. Open the door! Let them hear!

[*Antigone*, translated by Barbara Bray, Methuen Publishing Ltd. 2000 © Methuen Publishing Ltd. London] pp 45-48

All on my own

ANTIGONE (*more humbly*). Have you been in the guards long?

JONAS. Since the end of the war .I was a sergeant. I signed on again.

ANTIGONE. Do you have to be a sergeant to join the guards?

JONAS. In theory. A sergeant or a special. But if you're a sergeant you lose your rank when you join the guards. So if, for the sake of argument, I meet an army recruit, he might not salute me.

ANTIGONE. Really?

JONAS. Of course they generally do. They know you're really an NCO. As for the pay, you get ordinary guard's pay, plus, as a bonus for the first six months, the extra you used to get as a sergeant. But of course there are other advantages. Living quarters, heating, family allowances. All in all a married guard can earn more than a sergeant in the regular army.

ANTIGONE. Really?

JONAS. Yes. That's why there's such rivalry. As you may have noticed, sergeants pretend to look down on guards. Because of the promotion, mainly. They're right, in a way. It's much slower and more difficult in the guards. But you mustn't forget that a lance-sergeant in the guards is more important than a quarter-master- sergeant in the army ...

ANTIGONE (*suddenly*). Listen.

JONAS. I'm listening.

ANTIGONE. I'm going to die very soon.

He doesn't answer. Pause. He goes on pacing. Then:

JONAS. Of course, people look up more to a guard. He's a sort of official as well as a soldier...

ANTIGONE. Do you think it hurts?

JONAS. What?

ANTIGONE. Dying. Does it hurt?

JONAS. Couldn't say. I know it hurt during the war, when men were wounded in the stomach. But I was never wounded myself..... May be that's what's stood in the way of my promotion.....

ANTIGONE. How will they do it?

JONAS. I believe I heard they were going to wall you up, so as not to stain the city with your blood.

ANTIGONE Wall me up? Alive?

JONAS At first.

Silence. The GUARD makes himself a quid of tobacco.

ANTIGONE. Hail, then, my grave, my marriage bed, my underground home! *(She looks very small in the middle of that big base room. She looks cold. She wraps her arms around herself. Then, as it to herself.)* But all on my own....!

JONAS *(finishing his quid)* It'll be in the caves of Hades, outside the city gates. Right out in the sun. Another lousy job for whoever's on sentry duty. The last I heard it was going to be the guards again. They put everything on us!

ANTIGONE *(low, weary)*. Two animals.....

JONAS. What about them?

ANTIGONE. Two animals would huddle together for warmth. I'm all on my own.

[*Antigone* , translated by Barbara Bray, Methuen Publishing Ltd. 2000 © Methuen Publishing Ltd. London] pp 54-55.

Julien Gracq (1910 – 2007)

Julien Gracq was a distinguished French novelist known for his surrealism and solitude who refused all literary honours. He also wrote critiques, a play, and poetry.

Gracq, whose real name was Louis Poirier, was born in St Florent-le-Vieil, in the Loire, in 1910. He was primarily a geographer and historian. He spent 23 years of his life teaching these subjects at the Lycee Claude Bernard in Paris, a meticulously ordered calling that he kept strictly apart from his creative writing. Gracq never married, and his references to women are guarded, abstract. There are no sexually provocative scenes. In an interview, he said: "I never married, you know, because I could never have endured the permanent presence of another by my side. I have too much need to be alone, and for long periods of time." In his 80s, Gracq gave up his Paris flat to live a quiet life in his native town of Saint-Florent-le-Vieil, on the banks of the river Loire. On 22 December 2007, a couple of days after suffering a dizzy spell, he died at the age of 97 in a hospital in Angers.

Gracq remained a subject of mystery all his life persisting in a life of refusals, the most notable of which was his unprecedented refusal of the prestigious Prix Goncourt for his third and best novel, *Le Rivage des Syrtes* (*The Opposing Shore*). He refused Le Grand Prix National des Lettres in the 1980s, and refused to perform on Bernard Pivot's television book show, causing a publishing scandal. At first he even disdained to appear in the monumental Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, but later relented. His refusal to accept the Goncourt prize was based on his dislike of the publicity that he saw surrounding literature in the 1950s. He refused to make promotional tours, complaining that the writer was now doing all the publisher's work for him, had become a walking billboard for books. Gracq's life was to be one of refusals of all kinds of "prestigious" literary and academic honours. He refused invitations to appear on French radio and television and politely turned down three invitations from President Mitterrand to dine at the Élysée. He believed, "A writer is one who writes instead of talking, who reads rather than making public appearances, who meditates at home rather than droning away about himself on TV."

As a novelist Gracq was a creator of mystery dealing with themes of exile, fatality, transgression, and sombre yearning. His first novel, *Au Chateau d'Argol* is set on the Isle de Crozon, western Brittany. To its dark forests and deserted moors, he added a labyrinthine chateau of the title. In a note to the reader in *Au Chateau d'Argol*, he describes surrealism as "the one literary school to revive the exhausted delights of the eternally child-like paradise of the explorers... When it is not a dream, and, like a dream, perfectly incorporating its own truths, the novel is a falsehood". *Le Rivage des Syrtes* (1951), the winner of the spurned Goncourt, is a haunting novel with characters marked by the shadow of a past. Only at the end, as the principal character says, does the decor fall into place. *Un Balcon en Foret* (1958), the most accessible of the novels, tells the story of the war which has not yet become a war, that of 1939 to 1940, when ill-equipped French soldiers wait on events. Then the waiting ends; the Germans launch their devastating attack. The hypnotic atmosphere of the novels sustains a curious tension amid torpor, the sensation of being on the brink of either catastrophe or sublime fulfilment: the protagonists spend long hours confined alone or in small groups, as in *Un beau ténébreux* (1945), where people linger out of season in a seaside hotel in Brittany, in the grip of foreboding and expectancy. Psychologically implausible, Gracq's characters are invariably exceptional beings, brooding loners and devotees of impassioned gestures, like

the hero of *Le Rivage des Syrtes* (1951), who launches a naval attack on an unseen enemy and sparks off a war.

Gracq was also a lucid critic. His work comprises novels, *récits*, and prose poetry, two plays (of which one is an adaptation of Kleist's *Penthesilea*), literary essays, and leisurely books devoted to elective places such as the Nantes he knew as a schoolboy in the 1920s (*La Forme d'une ville*, 1985) or the Rome he first visited at the age of 66 (*Autour des sept collines*, 1989). An adept of a prose of great acuity and gracefulness which advances with an almost somnambulistic equipoise, Gracq constantly slows down the action in his fictions with poetic descriptions of a world steeped in psychic resonances and hermetic symbolism.

Principal works : *The Castle of Argol* or *Château d'Argol* (*Au Château d'Argol*, 1938); *The Opposing Shore* (*Le Rivage des Syrtes*, 1951); *Balcony in the Forest* (*Un Balcon en forêt*, 1958); *Un beau ténébreux*, 1945; *Liberté grande*, (prose poems) 1947; *Le Roi pêcheur* (play), 1948; *André Breton, quelques aspects de l'écrivain*, 1948 (critique); *Preferances*, 1961; *Lettrines* 1967-1974; *En lisant en écrivant* 1981.

The Opposing Shore

Observer of the seignury of Orsenna, *where the Admiralty keeps the seas constantly patrolled to defend the demarcation between two powers still officially at war*, Aldo, the young narrator of this story, decides one day to visit the ruins of the 'dead city', Sagra and meets a formidably baroque spectacle:

I had a long afternoon of fine weather ahead of me, and I decided to devote it to an often-postponed visit to the remote ruins of Sagra. Giovanni had described this forsaken town where his hunter's forays had occasionally taken him, as having a altogether reverted to the wild, so that you could shoot game in weedy streets. This prospect of solitude allured me; the sun was still high when I thrust a hunting-rifle into my saddle holster and set out.

The nearly washed-out trail which wound between the reeds and led to the ruins crossed one of the dreariest parts of Syrtes. Hard-stemmed rushes which were green in spring for a few weeks but dry and yellow all the rest of the year, and which the slightest breeze rattled like knucklebones, grew hereabouts in dense clumps, and no scythe had ever thinned out these disinherited fields. I made my way along the narrow slit through the dry stems, their rustling vivifying these solitudes in a sinister fashion, distracted only now and then by a glimpse, to my left, over dull lagoons that looked like a pewter blade edged with yellow where the even duller yellow of those obsessive stems died out. Yet even the melancholy of that flaming sun over a dead land failed to extinguish in me a throb of happiness; I felt in complicity with the tendency of this country to absolute desolation. It was both end and beginning. Beyond these realms of lugubrious reeds extended the desert sands, ever more sterile, and-like the décor of a navigable death-behind a sparkling mirage of mist, the peaks to which I could no longer deny a name. Like savage peoples who recognize an active virtue in certain orientations, I kept walking southward ever more intently: a secret magnetism was leading me in *the right direction*.

Yet the sun was already beginning to move down the sky. I had ridden for what seemed hours, and nothing on these naked plains hinted at the proximity of the ruins whose broken silhouette I was trying to discern on the far, flat horizon. I had been

heading these last few moments toward an isolated and tree-covered hillock overlooking the lagoon and toward which, to my amazement, were also leading quite recent traces of a carriage which seemed to have followed this narrow trail and to have knocked down in passing the rushes whose broken stems I noticed everywhere. As I pondered what it could be that had lured Marino or his lieutenants toward these forsaken woods, I made out quite distinctly, at no distance at all, the surprising murmur of a stream; the reeds gave way to various bushes, then to a thick growth of trees, and all at once I found myself in the very streets of Sagra.

Giovanni had not lied. Sagra was a baroque marvel, an improbable and disturbing collision of nature and art. Very old underground canals, between their disjointed stones, had ultimately managed to spew through the streets the waters from an underground spring which they had brought from leagues away; and slowly, with the centuries, the dead city had become a paved jungle, a hanging garden of wild trunks, a frenzied gigantomachia of tree and stone. Orsenna's taste for massive and noble materials, granite and marble, produced the singular character of lavish violence, even of exhibitionism which this struggle everywhere assumed-the same complacent muscle-effects displayed by a county-fair wrestler constantly appeared here in the ostentatious resistance, in the overhangs which here opposed a balcony to an enlacing branch, there a half-collapsed wall suspended above the void, to the turgescence thrust of a tree trunk-until weight was flouted altogether, and the disturbing obsession of a slowed combustion, an earthquake snapshot, was imposed.

[*The Opposing Shore (Le Rivage des Syrtes)* tr by Richard Howard Rupa & Co.2006. © Columbia University Press, 1996]

“A living caryatid”

In the mythical manor of Argol in Brittany, three enigmatic persons, Albert, Herminien, and Heide love each other,talk to each other, and tear themselves to the rhythm of a cruel and subtle ”dialectic” of body and minds. This short Faustian novel culminates in the ‘Swim’ episode in fifth chapter where the figure of a beautiful woman starts taking shape on the apotheosized beach.

ONE MORNING when the light mist that lingered among the trees presaged the advent of a torrid day, they started out for a swim in the gulf, whose watery and eternally deserted wastes could be seen sparkling from the castle. A powerful car took them jolting over stony roads. The landscape, which had first appeared to Albert as so intensely dramatic, was now covered with a soft translucent mist. The air was full of a salty tingling freshness that came to them from the chasms of the sea, redolent of an odour headier than the smell of earth after rain: it seemed that each particle of skin simultaneously consumed all these profound delights, and if one closed one's eyes, the body suddenly to the senses had the form of wine skin wholly closed around with warm darkness, whose marvelous living wall could be felt everywhere and at the same time by its contact with a coolness, no longer accidental but telluric, seeming to be radiated by all the pores of the planet, as its intolerable heat is radiated by the sun.

The driving wind from the sea in long smooth waves whipped their faces and tore from the damp sand a sparkling dust-and great sea birds with long wings seemed, by their jerky flights and sudden stops, to mark, like the sea, their ebb and flow on invisible

beaches of the sky where, with outspread, motionless wings, they appeared to be stranded at times like white medusae. The wet shores were hidden by endless banks of fog which the unruffled sea, reflecting the almost horizontal rays of the sun, lighted from below with a powdery radiance, and the smooth streamers of mist could hardly be distinguished by the marvelling eye from the pools of water and the uniform expanses of wet sand-so in the morning of creation the charmed eye might have watched the unfolding of the native mystery of the *separation of the elements*.

They undressed among the graves. The sun burst through the mist, lighting the scene with its rays just as Heide in her dazzling nudity walked toward the sea with a step more mettlesome and light than that of a mare of the desert sands. In that shimmering landscape formed by those long watery reflections, in the omnipotent *horizontal* of those banks of mist, of those smooth flat waves, of those gliding rays of the sun, she suddenly startled the eye by the miracle of her *verticality*. All along the sun-devoured shore from which all shadows had fled, she set sublime reflections flowing. It seemed as though she were *walking on the waters*. In front of Herminien and Albert, whose eyes ran lingeringly over her strong, shadowy smooth back, over the heavy masses of her hair, and whose chests rose and fell to the marvelous slow rhythm of her legs, she stood out against the disc of the rising sun which sent streaming to her feet a carpet of liquid fire.

She raised her arms and without an effort, like a living caryatid, supported the sky on her hands. It seemed that the flow of that captivating and mysterious grace could not continue another instant without the vessels bursting in their perilously pounding hearts. Then she threw back her head, and in a frail sweet gesture raised her shoulders, and the foam that blew against her breasts and against her belly sent such an intolerably voluptuous sensation coursing through her that her lips drew back over her teeth in a passionate grimace-and to the surprise of the two spectators, at that instant there burst from this exultant figure the disordered and fragile movements of a woman.

[*Chateau d' Argol* or *Castle of Argol* tr by Louise Varese, Lapis Press, 1991]

“He was afraid of breaking the spell”

During the second World War, in the forests of Ardennes, the midshipman Grange is awaiting a German offensive. One day he meets a young girl:

Suddenly the figure planted itself in the middle of the road and, standing in a puddle that reached to her ankles, the girl began washing the sides of her rubber boots in the water; when he reached her, Grange discovered under the hood tilted in his direction two bright blue eyes as sharp and warm as a spring thaw-and, deep inside, as if in a crib, the soft straw of her yellow hair.

“You keep your woods p-pretty wet, don’t you?” asked a fresh, abrupt little voice, while the person in the cloak shook herself with puppyish unconcern, showering Grange-then all at once the chin rose gently, tenderly holding up the face to the rain as if for a kiss, the eyes dancing.

“Let’s walk together,” she continued, in a voice that admitted no contradiction. “It’s more fun.”

She began laughing again-her fresh, rainy laugh. Now that he had caught up with her, she walked beside him at a good speed. From time to time Grange glanced at her surreptitiously; around the edge of the hood he could see only her glistening nose and

mouth and the short chin set against the rain, but he was stirred to feel her near him, young and vital, supple as a fawn in the warm scent of wet wool. She had fallen in step with him of her own accord: it was as if she had taken his arm. Sometimes she turned her head slightly and the dark hood's edge revealed eyes the color of a brightening sky; whenever their eyes met they laughed a little without speaking, a laugh of pure delight. She had thrust her hands deep into the pockets of her cloak with the simple gesture of a farm girl afraid of frostbite. "But she's not a country girl," Grange decided, his heart leaping, "and she's not really a girl at all. How old is she? Where is she going?" Merely walking beside her was so delightful he dared not question her: he was afraid of breaking the spell:

"I was waiting for you back there on the hill. You didn't walk fast then!" she said suddenly, tossing her offended head and at the same time glancing at him obliquely. There was a kind of conscious mockery in her voice that exposed Grange's stratagem. The tone of voice indicated that she hadn't been deceived about such things for a long time. She was quite aware how attractive she was.

[*Balcony in the Forest* tr by Richard Howard, Columbia University Press 1987 ©1959
George Braziller, Inc.]

"... who knows what is happening there? May be nothing at all ..."

Assigned to a blockhouse on a hilltop high above the Meuse River deep in the Ardennes Forest, Lt. Grange at first finds his new home "perfectly improbable." It's nothing more than a concrete bunker comically topped by a little house where a handful of men live. It feels as if they were perched in a children's tree house, "as if they were on a roof and the ladder had been taken away." The time is the autumn of 1939. The German invasions of Poland, Norway, and Denmark seem far away and France is preparing as if this is going to be a rematch of the trench warfare of the First World War. "The war? Who knows if there is a war? May be nothing at all?"

And the fear returned, no longer the hot, brutal breath of panic that had catapulted them inside the blockhouse, but a marvelous, almost appealing terror that Grange felt rising from the depths of his childhood- from fairy tales: the terror of children lost in the woods at twilight, listening to the faraway branches crack beneath the dreadful heels of the seven-league boots.

They waited. Once they had picked it out, the rumble of cannon-fire filled their ears wherever they were: there was nothing else to hear; it was as if all life in this corner of the earth were escaping, leaking toward the one awakened site. On each side of the road, the forest walls hid the columns of smoke: when Grange put his fingers in his ears for a second, all he could see down the road was a gentle May afternoon already warm under the golden haze, marvelously flowing toward the blue distances. As the moments passed, Grange felt braced by unreal security, a paradoxical result of the battle's giant strides which had overstepped them. The air grew deliciously cool; the filmy light, slanting through the late-afternoon forest, was so rich, so unaccustomed, that he had a sudden, irresistible desire to bathe in it, to steep his limbs in the coppery glow.

"What's to stop me?" he asked himself, with another burst of vague jubilation. "The bridges are cut. I'm alone here. *I can do what I want... .*"

He lit a cigarette and with his hands in his pockets began to walk down the middle of the road. "Stay there," he shouted back at the blockhouse. "I'll take a look." The cannon had begun rumbling from farther away now; there were long silences when they could hear the crows resuming their racket in the oak trees. "There's probably not more than one French soldier east of the Meuse by now," Grange thought as he walked along. "Who knows what's happening? Maybe nothing at all!" But at this notion, which seemed almost plausible to him, Grange's heart beat with dim excitement; he felt his mind floating high on the waters of catastrophe. "May be nothing at all!" The earth seemed fair and pure to him, as it must have been after the flood; two magpies alighted together beside the road ahead, looking like fabled creatures, carefully smoothing their long tails on the grass. "How far could I walk like this?" he wondered with astonishment, and it seemed to him that his eyes pressed against their sockets to the point of pain: there must be *faults*, unknown veins in the earth, into which he could vanish for once and all. At moments he stopped and listened: he could hear nothing for several minutes; the world seemed to go back to sleep, having shaken itself free of men with a sluggish wriggle of its shoulders. "Maybe I'm on the *other side*," he mused happily; never had he felt so close *to himself*.

[*Balcony in the Forest* tr by Richard Howard, Columbia University Press 1987 ©1959
George Braziller, Inc.]

... the last scion of a rich and noble family

He was the last scion of a rich and noble family, little worldly however, who jealously and long had kept him within the lonely walls of an isolated provincial manor. At the age of fifteen all the gifts of mind and physical beauty were seen to flower in him, but he turned from the triumphs which everyone, with singular assurance, predicted for him in Paris. Already the demon of knowledge had taken possession of all his mental powers. He visited the universities of Europe and preferably the most ancient ones, those in which the masters of Middle Ages had left traces of a philosophical learning rarely surpassed in modern times. He was seen at Halle, Heidelberg, Padua, Bologna. Everywhere he went he was conspicuous for the extent of his knowledge, the brilliant originality of his views, and, while he made few friends, what was matter for even greater astonishment was his unalterable disdain for women. Not that he fled from them, but without ever deviating from a calm and constantly restrained demeanour, he knew the art, once he had entered into intimate relations with them, of defying them with such abnormal and coldly extravagant challenges that even the bravest in the end would pale, vexed at having displayed what he was quick to stigmatize as fear, and would, although regretfully, leave him to pursue elsewhere his consistently nomadic and nonchalant career. Sometimes an essay, rich in particularly valuable subject-matter, an article testifying to a unique and masterly documentation, would appear delighting and, at the same time, troubling, because of all it revealed of fantasy in the tastes and in the soul of its author, the few loyal friends he still possessed in the Parisian world of letters.

In these last few years the beauty of his countenance, with its ever-increasing pallor, had assumed an almost fatal character. The firm lines of the forehead, formed of two prominent lobes, were lost in the gossamer blond hair, of so tenuous a texture that the wind playing through it would untwine and stretch out each dry, divided curl- an

extremely rare phenomenon peculiar to certain physiognomies consecrated to the always wearing pursuit of abstract speculation. The delicate straight nose was made of a velvety, matt substance with mobile and extremely contractile nostrils. In his eyes nature had set an insidious snare: their axes not having been made rigorously parallel, they fascinated by their air of looking *behind* the person at whom he was looking, and seemed to convey, as though physically, the burden of an illimitable inner reverie-and in his sidelong glances, the pure white then showing, would disconcert like the sudden and inhuman sign of a demigod. A peculiar propensity to swelling was noticeable in his full lips.

The set of his neck was graceful, and the broad deep chest seemed made to *sink* emotions *to the bottom*. The long thin fingers of the ardent and unquiet hands appeared endowed each with a separate life and, with every slightest movement, marvelously expressive, graceful and infinitely flexible. Such was this angelic and meditative visage: an air from loftier regions volatile and keen, wreathed the forehead where light had its abode, but at every instant the spirituality of this countenance was exorcised by the carnal, the mortal elegance of the body and the long well-knit limbs; there, too, snares were set; an importunate elasticity, a slumbering heat, the mysteries and magic of too rich a blood invested his arteries: a woman would have longed to fall helpless into those arms as into sanctuary, a prison. Such was this magnetic figure qualified to penetrate life's subtlest arcana, to embrace its most exhilarating realities.

[*Chateau d' Argol* or *Castle of Argol* tr by Louise Varese, Lapis Press, 1991]

Jean Genet (1910 –1986)

Jean Genet was a prominent, provocative, and most original French writer of his generation. He wrote poetry, plays, novels, essays, and was also a political activist.

Born in Paris, Genet was a foundling, abandoned by his mother at seven months, raised in state institutions. He was charged with his first crime when he was barely ten. From 15 to 18 he was in the Mettray penitentiary, a place of hard labour, where a code of love, honour, gesture and justice was enforced by the inmates, and where his sexual awakening occurred. After spending many of his teenage years in the reformatory, he was enrolled in the Foreign Legion which he deserted for a life of thieving and pimping that resulted in repeated jail terms, and eventually, a sentence of life imprisonment.

In the prison he began to write poems and prose that combined pornography and an open celebration of criminality with an extraordinary baroque, high literary style. It was in the prison that he wrote his first play, *Our Lady of the Flowers*. It was discovered and destroyed. Genet re-wrote it from memory. This handwritten manuscript was smuggled out of his cell and eventually came to the attention of literary luminaries like Jean Cocteau and Jean-Paul Sartre, whose advocacy secured for him a presidential pardon in 1948. Sartre wrote a study of him in the book, *Saint Genet* which cemented his stature as an original and important writer.

Between 1944 and 1948 Genet wrote four novels, some boldly experimental and political plays. *The Thief's Journal* is, perhaps, his most famous work. It is part-fact, part-fiction autobiography that charting the author's wanderings in 1930s through Spain, Italy, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Nazi Germany, and Belgium, wearing nothing but rags enduring hunger, contempt, fatigue and vice, and everywhere it is the same story—bars, dives, flop-houses; robbery, prison and expulsion.

After a period of silence for several years, Genet re-emerged as a playwright in 1957 which further established his success. He wrote only a handful of plays, but all extremely popular and produced till today. They present highly-stylized depictions of ritualistic struggles between outcasts of various kinds and their oppressors. Social identities are parodied and shown to involve complex layering through manipulation of the dramatic fiction and its inherent potential for theatricality and role-play. In *The Balcony* Genet creates a drama as intense, heightened and claustrophobic as boudoir in high summer.

Principal works: *The Thief's Journal* (*Journal du voleur* 1949); *The Maids* (1947); *Deathwatch* (*Haute surveillance*, 1949); *The Balcony*, 1966 (*Le Balcon*, 1957); *The Blacks* (*Les Negres*, 1959); *Our Lady of the Flowers*.

The Balcony

The Themes treated are—justice, society, morals, and burlesque. The action takes place inside a brothel run by Madame Irma. In this excerpt from Scene II the Judge is carrying out the interrogation of the thief. The thief tells him that she very often entered through the tradesmen's entrance and stole from drawers, children's piggy-banks. Once, she says, she dressed up as a lady in a dark-brown suit, black straw hat with cherries, with a veil and a pair of black shoes with Cuban heels, and then went in... .

THE JUDGE (in a rush) : Where? Where? Where? Where—where— where? Where did you go in?

THE THIEF : I can't remember. Forgive me.

THE EXECUTIONER : Shall I let her have it?

THE JUDGE : Not yet. (To the girl) Where did you go in? Tell me where?

THE THIEF (in a panic) : But I swear to you, I don't remember.

THE EXECUTIONER : Shall I let her have it? Shall I, my Lord?

THE JUDGE (to the Executioner, and going up to him) : Ah! ah! your pleasure depends on me. You like to thrash, eh? I'm pleased with you, Executioner! Masterly mountain of meat, hunk of beef that's set in motion at a word from me! (He pretends to look at himself in the Executioner.) Mirror that glorifies me! Image that I can touch, I love you. Never would I have the strength or skill to leave streaks of fire on her back. Besides, what could I do with such strength and skill? (He touches him.) Are you there? You're all there, my huge arm, too heavy for me, too big, too fat for my shoulder, walking at my side all by itself! Arm, hundredweight of meat, without you I'd be nothing... . (To the Thief) And without you too, my child. You're my two perfect complements... . Ah, what a fine trio we make! (To the Thief) But you, you have a privilege that he hasn't, nor I either, that of priority. My being a judge is an emanation of your being a thief. You need only refuse—but you'd better not!—need only refuse to be who you are—what you are, therefore who you are—for me to cease to be ... to vanish, evaporated. Burst. Volatilized. Denied. Hence: good born of... . What then? What then? But you won't refuse, will you? You won't refuse to be a thief? That would be wicked. It would be criminal. You'd deprive me of being! (Imploringly) Say it, my child, my love, you won't refuse?

THE THIEF (coolly) : I might.

THE JUDGE : What's that? What's that you say? You'd refuse? Tell me where. And tell me again what you've stolen.

THE THIEF (curtly, and getting up) : I won't.

THE JUDGE : Tell me where. Don't be cruel... .

THE THIEF : Your tone is getting too familiar. I won't have it!

THE JUDGE : Miss... . Madame. I beg of you. (He falls to his knees.) Look, I beseech you. Don't leave me in this position, waiting to be a judge. If there were no judge, what would become of us, but what if there were no thieves?

THE THIEF (ironically) : And what if there weren't?

THE JUDGE : It would be awful. But you won't do that to me, will you? Please understand me: I don't mind your hiding, for as long as you can and as long as my nerves can bear it, behind the refusal to confess—it's all right to be mean and make me yearn, even prance, make me dance, drool, sweat, whinny with impatience, crawl ... do you want me to crawl?

THE EXECUTIONER (to the Judge) : Crawl.

THE JUDGE : I'm proud!

THE EXECUTIONER (threateningly) : Crawl!

(THE JUDGE, who was on his knees, lies flat on his stomach and crawls slowly towards the Thief. As he crawls forward, the Thief moves back.)

THE EXECUTIONER : Good. Continue.

THE JUDGE (to the Thief) : You're quite right, you rascal, to make me crawl after my judgeship, but if you were to refuse for good, you hussy, it would be criminal... .

THE THIEF (haughtily) : Call me Madame, and ask politely.

THE JUDGE : Will I get what I want?

THE THIEF (cooly) : It costs a lot—stealing does.

THE JUDGE : I'll pay! I'll pay whatever I have to, Madame. But if I no longer had to divide the Good from the Evil, of what use would I be? I ask you?

THE THIEF : I ask myself.

THE JUDGE (is infinitely sad) : A while ago I was going to be Minos. My Cerberus was barking. (To the Executioner) Do you remember? (THE EXECUTIONER interrupts the Judge by cracking his whip.) You were so cruel, so mean! So good! And me, I was pitiless. I was going to fill Hell with the souls of the damned, to fill prisons. Prisons! Prisons! Prisons, dungeons, blessed places where evil is impossible since they are the crossroads of all the malediction in the world. One cannot commit evil in evil. Now, what I desire above all is not to condemn, but to judge... . (He tries to get up.)

THE EXECUTIONER : Crawl! And hurry up, I've got to go and get dressed.

THE JUDGE (to the girl) : Madame! Madame, please, I beg of you. I'm willing to lick your shoes, but tell me you're a thief... .

THE THIEF (in a cry) : Not yet! Lick! Lick! Lick first!

(The stage moves from left to right, as at the end of the preceding scene, and plunges into the right wing. In the distance, machine-gun fire.)

The Maids

Set in an unnamed city that is experiencing a revolutionary uprising in the streets, full of blood symbolism, filth, incest, murder and the irredeemable corruption of the human condition this play is not for the faint-hearted. It seems to have struggled with the question, 'How far do we go?' Jean Genet's answer is 'All the way.' Most of the action takes place in an upmarket brothel. In the following opening scene, in the absence of 'Madam', the maids Solange and Claire play the role of the maid and the mistress:

Madame's bedroom. Louis-Quinze furniture. Lace. Rear, a window opening on the front of the house opposite. Right, a bed. Left, a door and a dressing table. Flowers in profusion. The time is evening.

[CLAIRE, wearing a slip, is standing with her back to the dressing table. Her gestures=arm extended-and tone are exaggeratedly tragic.]

CLAIRE:

Those gloves! Those eternal gloves! I've told you time and again to leave them in the kitchen. You probably hope to seduce the milkman with them. No, no, don't lie; that won't get you anywhere! Hang them over the sink. When will you understand that this room is not to be sullied. Everything, yes, everything that comes out of the kitchen is spit! So stop it! [During this speech, SOLANGE has been playing with a pair of rubber gloves and observing her gloved, hands, which are alternately spread fanwise and folded

in the form of a bouquet.] Make yourself quite at home. Preen like a peacock. And above all, don't hurry, we've plenty of time. Go!

[SOLANGE'S posture changes and she leaves humbly, holding the rubber gloves with her fingertips. CLAIRE sits down at the dressing table. She sniffs at the flowers, runs her hand over the toilet articles, brushes her hair, pats her face.]

Get my dress ready. Quick! Time presses. Are you there?

[*She turns round.*] Claire! Claire!

[SOLANGE enters.]

SOLANGE:

I beg Madame's pardon, I was preparing her tea. [*She pronounces it "tay."*]

CLAIRE:

Lay out my things. The white spangled dress. The fan. The emeralds.

SOLANGE:

Very well, Madame. All Madame's jewels?

CLAIRE:

Put them out and I shall choose. And, of course, my patent-leather slippers. The ones you've had your eye on for years. [SOLANGE takes a few jewels boxes from the closet, opens them and lays them out on the bed.] For your wedding, no doubt. Admit he seduced you! Just look at you! How big you are! Admit it! [SOLANGE squats on the rug, spits on the patent-leather slippers, and polishes them.] I've told you, Claire, without spit, Let it sleep in you, my child, let it stagnate, Ah! Ah! [*She giggles nervously.*] May the lost wayfarer drown in it. Ah! Ah! You are hideous. Lean forward and look at yourself in my shoes. Do you think I find it pleasant to know that my foot is shrouded by the veils of your saliva? By the mists of your swamps?

SOLANGE [*on her knees, and very humble*]:

I wish Madame to be lovely.

CLAIRE:

I shall be. [*She primps in front of the mirror.*] You hate me, don't you? You crush me with your attentions and your humbleness; you smother me with gladioli and mimosa. [*She stands up and, lowering her tone*] There are too many flowers. The room is needlessly cluttered. It's impossible. [*She looks at herself again in the glass.*] I shall be lovely. Lovelier than you'll ever be.

[*The Maids and Deathwatch, Jean Genet tr by Bernard Frechtman, New York : Grove Press, 1982.*]

Eugène Ionesco (1909 – 1994)

Eugène Ionesco was a French playwright and dramatist, and one of the foremost playwrights of the “Theatre of the Absurd”.

Ionesco was born in Romania to a Romanian father and French mother. He grew up on the Left Bank of Paris near the Luxembourg Gardens. He remembers his introduction to a world that would preoccupy him for a lifetime in his article, "Experience in the Theater, " how the Punch and Judy show in the Luxembourg Gardens fascinated him as the puppets “talked, moved, clubbed each other.” It was, he says, "the spectacle of the world itself ... presented itself to me in an infinitely simplified and caricatured form, as if to underline its grotesque and brutal truth."

In 1922, he returned to Romania, where he went to high school and later studied at Bucharest University. At first he wrote poetry, not plays. In 1939, he moved back to France and worked for a publisher, became a French citizen and remained there for the rest of his life. Around 1938 he wrote his doctoral thesis on “themes of sin and death in French literature since Baudelaire.” During this period perhaps, his thought process took a perceptible shape demonstrating a disgust for the tangible world, a distrust of communication, and the subtle sense that a better world lies just beyond our reach. Echoes of this experience can also be seen in references and themes in many of his important works: characters pining for an unattainable "city of lights" (*The Killer*, *The Chairs*) or perceiving a world beyond (*A Stroll in the Air*); characters granted the ability to fly (*A Stroll in the Air*, *Amédée*); the banality of the world which often leads to depression (the Berenger character); ecstatic revelations of beauty within a pessimistic framework (*Amédée*, *The Chairs*, the Bérenger character); and the inevitability of death as in *Exit the King*.

Ionesco turned to playwrighting quite by accident. The story goes that just before turning 40 he decided to learn English and stumbled on the ‘Methode Assimil.’ The repetition of simple grammatical constructions and vocabulary of domestic banality, reiterated essential properties about the world like the ceiling is above; the floor is below et al in his language textbook inspired his first adult play, *The Bald Soprano*. It was staged in 1950, and continued being performed for the next 25000 days. Ionesco immediately became a leading figure in the anti-theatre movement along with Beckett and Arthur Adamov. He was labeled a “tragic clown,” the “Shakespeare of the Absurd,” the “Enfant Terrible of the Avant-Garde,” and the “Inventor of the Metaphysical Farce.”

"The Bald Soprano" was quickly followed by "The Lesson" (1951), "Jack, or the Submission" and "The Chairs" (1952) and "Victims of Duty" (1953), all of which certified his avant-garde credentials. In "Amedee, or How to Get Rid of It" (1954), a corpse grows larger and larger until it takes over the stage, and in "The New Tenant" (1956), a man rents a new apartment and the furniture takes over the stage. These and other works are filled with sight gags and silent comedy as well as intricate plays on words.

Ionesco was a fervent believer in human rights and a longtime foe of political tyranny. His work conveyed what he viewed as man's struggle to survive in a society he said formed barriers between humans. Ionesco's international stature was confirmed with "Rhinoceros" (1959), a play in which everyone but the two protagonists turn into aggressive rhinos. The play was seen as Ionesco's response to the rise of fascism in prewar Romania. "When people no longer share your opinions, when you can no longer

make yourself understood by them, you have the impression of being confronted with monsters - rhinos, for example," he once said. "Rhinoceros" brought him his widest public. Jean-Louis Barrault starred in the play in Paris and Laurence Olivier in London. But it was the Broadway production that brought him his greatest celebrity. "Rhinoceros" and other plays charted the progress of Ionesco's *Everyman*, the character named Berenger.

Eugène Ionesco's wildly innovative plays, among them "Rhinoceros," "The Bald Soprano" and "The Chairs," overturned conventions of contemporary theater and had a profound effect on a new generation of playwrights. His "anti-plays" satirized modern society while discovering new uses of language and theatrical techniques. Inspired by silent film clowns and vaudeville, he was a playful playwright, clownish in his own personality as well as in his work onstage. With outrageous comedy, he attacked the most serious subjects: blind conformity and totalitarianism, despair and death. Repeatedly he challenged - and accosted - the audience and his critics. As he said, "The human drama is as absurd as it is painful."

Along with Samuel Beckett and Jean Genet, he was one of a trinity of pioneering experimental playwrights who lived and worked in Paris. Although there were thematic bridges among the three, Ionesco's distinction was in his fanciful surrealism and sense of Dada. Among the playwrights he influenced were Tom Stoppard, Fernando Arrabal, Edward Albee, Tina Howe and Christopher Durang. Ionesco was among the playwrights often grouped as practitioners of the Theater of the Absurd. He objected to the label, preferring, he said, the Theater of Derision. Like Shaw and Brecht, Ionesco also contributed to the theatre with his theoretical writings, although mainly to correct critics who, he felt, misunderstood his work and therefore wrongly influenced his audience. His *Notes and Counter Notes* is a collection of his direct responses to contemporary critics, his thoughts on how the contemporary theatre should be reformed, and why he chose to write for the theatre.

In 1970, he was elected a member of the French Academy. In his address to the Academy, he spoke of his faith in illogicality, the confusion of rules and the impotence of intelligence.

Principal Works: *The Bald Soprano (La cantatrice chauve)*; *Jack, or The Submission* (1955); *The Chairs (Les Chaises)* 1958; *The Lesson (La leçon)*; *Rhinoceros and Other Plays*; *The Future Is in Eggs* ; *Exit the King: A Play (Le roi se meurt)*, 1963; *Hunger and Thirst: A Play in Three Acts, (La soif et la faim)*, 1971 *Macbett, a play*, 1972.

“I’m the last man ... ”

[As BERENGER continues to examine himself in the mirror she goes quietly to the door, saying]

He isn’t very nice really, he isn’t very nice [She goes out, and is seen slowly descending the stairs.]

BERENGER [still looking at himself in the mirror]: Men aren’t so bad-looking, you know. And I’m not a particularly handsome specimen! Believe me, Daisy! [He turns round.] Daisy! Daisy! Where are you, Daisy? You can’t do that to me! [He darts to the door.] Daisy! [He gets to the landing and leans over the banister.] Daisy! Come back!

Come back, my dear! You haven't even had your lunch, Daisy! don't leave me alone! Remember your promise! Daisy! Daisy! [*He stops calling, makes a despairing gesture, and comes back into the room.*] Well, it was obvious we weren't getting along together. The home was broken up. It just wasn't working out. But she shouldn't have left like that with no explanation. [*He looks all around.*] She didn't even leave a message. That's no way to behave. Now I'm all on my own. [*He locks the door carefully, but angrily.*] But they won't get me. [*He carefully closes the windows.*] You won't get me! [*He addresses all the rhinoceros heads.*] I'm not joining you; I don't understand you! I'm staying as I am. I'm a human being. A human being. [*He sits in the armchair.*] It's an impossible situation. It's my fault she's gone. I meant everything to her. What'll become of her? That's one more person on my conscience. I can easily picture the worst, because the worst can easily happen. Poor little thing left all alone in this world of monsters! Nobody can help me find her, nobody, because there's nobody left.

[*Fresh trumpeting, hectic racings, clouds of dust.*]

I can't bear the sound of them any longer, I'm going to put cotton wool in my ears. [*He does so, and talks to himself in the mirror.*] The only solution is to convince them-but convince them of what? Are the changes reversible, that's the point? Are they reversible? It would be a labour of Hercules, far beyond me. In any case, to convince them you'd have to talk to them. And to talk to them I'd have to learn their language. Or they'd have to learn mine. But what language do I speak? What is my language? Am I talking French? Yes, it must be French. But what is French? I can call it French if I want, and nobody can say it isn't –I'm the only one who speaks it. What am I saying? Do I understand what I'm saying? Do I? [*He crosses to the middle of the room.*] And what if it's true what Daisy said, and they're the ones in the right? [*He turns back to the mirror.*] A man's not ugly to look at, not ugly at all! [*He examines himself, passing his hand over his face.*] What a funny-looking thing! What do I look like? What? [*He darts to a cupboard, takes out some photographs which he examines.*] Photographs? Who are all these people? Is it Mr Papillon- or is it Daisy? And is that Botard or Dudard or Jean? Or is it me? [*He rushes to the cupboard again and takes out two or three pictures.*] Now I recognize me: that's me, that's me! [*He hangs the pictures on the back wall, beside the rhinoceros heads.*] That's me, that's me!

[*When he hangs the pictures one sees that they are of an old man, a huge woman, and another man. The ugliness of these pictures is in contrast to the rhinoceros heads which have become very beautiful. BERENGER steps back to contemplate the pictures.*]

I'm not good looking, I'm not good-looking. [*He takes down the pictures, throws them furiously to the ground, and goes over to the mirror.*] They're the good-looking ones. I was wrong! Oh, how I wish I was like them! I haven't got any horns, more's the pity! A smooth brow looks so ugly. I need one or two horns to give my sagging face a lift. Perhaps one will grow and I needn't be ashamed any more-then I could go and join them. But it will never grow! [*He looks at the palms of his hands.*] My hands are so limp-oh, why won't they get rough! [*He takes his coat off, undoes his shirt to look at his chest in the mirror.*] My skin is so slack, I can't stand in that wonderful dull green colour –a skin that looks decent naked without any hair on it, like theirs! [*He listens to the trumpeting.*] Their song is charming – a bit raucous perhaps, but it does have charm! I wish I could do it! [*He tries to imitate them.*] Ahh, Ahh, Brr! No, that's not it! Try again, louder! Ahh, Ahh, Brr . . . No. That's not I, it's too feeble, it's got no drive behind it. I'm

not trumpeting at all. I'm just howling; Ahh, Ahh, Brr ...There's a big difference between howling and trumpeting. I've only myself to blame; I should have gone while there was still time. Now it's too late! Now I'm a monster, just a monster. Now I'll never become a rhinoceros, never, never. I'm gone past changing. I want to, I really do, but I can't. I just can't. I can't stand the sight of me. I'm too ashamed! [*He turns his back on the mirror.*] I'm so ugly! People who try to hang on to their individuality always come to a bad end! [*He suddenly snaps out of it.*] Oh well, too bad! I'll take on the whole of them! I'll put up a fight against the lot of them! I'm the last man left, and I'm staying that way until the end. I'm not capitulating!

[Rhinoceros, The Chairs, The Lesson / Eugène Ionesco, tr by Derek Prouse and Donald Watson, Penguin Books, 2000]

“Rhinoceros ! Rhinoceros !”

Completely confused and bewildered Berenger watches his friend Jean turn into a rhinoceros. The contagion soon begins to spread to the entire society. Berenger alerts the tenants in the building to the rhino's presence in the building, but everyone else has transformed as well. He looks out the window, where a herd of rhinos march. The bathroom door is on the verge of breaking. Berenger throws himself against the wall and breaks through it. He runs through the street, yelling "Rhinoceros! Rhinoceros "

JEAN : I tell you it's not as bad as all that. After all, rhinoceros are living creatures the same as us; they've got as much right to life as we have!

BERENGER: As long as they don't destroy ours in the process. You must admit the difference in mentality.

JEAN [*pacing up and down the room, and in and out of the bathroom*]: Are you under the impression that our way of life is superior?

BERENGER: Well at any rate, we have our own moral standards which I consider incompatible with the standards of these animals.

JEAN: Moral standards! I'm sick of moral standards! We need to go beyond moral standards!

BERENGER: What would put in their place?

JEAN [*still pacing*]: Nature!

BERENGER: Nature?

JEAN: Nature has its own laws. Morality's against Nature.

BERENGER: Are you suggesting we replace our moral laws by the law of the jungle?

JEAN: It would suit me, suit me fine.

BERENGER: You say that. But deep down, no one ...

JEAN [*interrupting him, pacing up and down*]: We've got to build our life on new foundations. We must get back to primeval integrity.

BERENGER: I don't agree with you at all.

JEAN [*breathing noisily*]: I can't breathe.

BERENGER: Just think a moment. You must admit that we have a philosophy that animals don't share, and an irreplaceable set of values, which it's taken centuries of human civilization to build up..

JEAN [*in the bathroom*]: When we've demolished all that, we'll be better off!

BERENGER: I know you don't mean that seriously. You're joking! It's just a poetic fancy.

JEAN: Brrr. [*He almost trumpets.*]

BERENGER: I'd never realized you were a poet.

JEAN [*comes out of the bathroom*]: Brrr. [*He trumpets again.*]

BERENGER: That's not what you believe fundamentally-I know you too well. You know as well as I do that mankind ...

JEAN [*interrupting him*]: Don't talk to me about mankind!

BERENGER: I mean the human individual, humanism ...

JEAN: Humanism is all washed up! You're a ridiculous old sentimentalist. [*He goes into the bathroom.*]

BERENGER: But you must admit that the mind ...

JEAN [*from the bathroom*]: Just clichés! You're talking rubbish!

BERENGER: Rubbish!

JEAN [*from the bathroom in a very hoarse voice, difficult to understand*]: Utter rubbish!

BERENGER: I'm amazed to hear you say that, Jean, really! You must be out of your mind. You wouldn't like to be a rhinoceros yourself, now would you?

JEAN: Why not? I'm not a victim of prejudice like you.

BERENGER: Can you speak more clearly? I didn't catch what you said. You swallowed the words.

JEAN [*still in the bathroom*]: Then keep your ears open.

BERENGER: What?

JEAN: Keep your ears open. I said what's wrong with being a rhinoceros? I'm all for change.

BERENGER: It's not like you to say a thing like that ...

[*BERENGER stops short, for JEAN'S appearance is truly alarming. Jean has become, in fact, completely green. The bump on his forehead is practically a rhinoceros horn.*]

Oh! You really must be out of your mind!

[*JEAN dashes to his bed, throws the covers on the floor, talking in a fast and furious gabble, and making very weird sounds.*]

You mustn't get into such a state-calm down! I hardly recognize you anymore.

JEAN [*hardly distinguishable*]: Hot ... far too hot! Demolish the lot, clothes itch, they itch! [*He drops his pyjama trousers.*]

BERENGER: What are you doing? You're not yourself! You're generally so modest!

JEAN: The swamps! The swamps!

BERENGER: Look at me! Can't you see me any longer? Can't you hear me?

JEAN: I can hear you perfectly well! I can see you perfectly well! [*He lunges towards Berenger, head down. BERENGER gets out of the way.*]

BERENGER: Watch out!

JEAN [*puffing noisily*]: Sorry! [*He darts at great speed into the bathroom.*]

BERENGER [*makes as if to escape by the door left, then comes back and goes into the bathroom after Jean, saying*]: I really can't leave him like that-after all he is a

friend. [*From the bathroom*] I'm going to get the doctor! It's absolutely necessary, believe me!

JEAN [*from the bathroom*]: No!

BERENGER [*from the bathroom*]: Calm down, Jean, you're being ridiculous! Oh, your horn's getting longer and longer-you're a rhinoceros!

JEAN [*from the bathroom*]: I'll trample you, I'll trample you down!

[*A lot of noise comes from the bathroom, trumpeting, objects falling, the sound of a shattered mirror; then BERENGER reappears, very frightened; he closes the bathroom door with difficulty against the resistance that is being made from inside.*]

BERENGER [*pushing against the door*]: He's a rhinoceros, he's a rhinoceros!

[*BERENGER manages to close the door. As he does so, his coat is pierced by a rhinoceros horn. The door shakes under the animal's constant pressure and the din continues in the bathroom; trumpeting is heard, intercepted with indistinct phrases such as: 'I'm furious! The swine!' etc. BERENGER rushes to the door right.*]

I never would have thought it of him-never!

[*He opens the staircase door and goes and knocks at the landing door; he bangs repeatedly on it with his fist.*]

There's a rhinoceros in the building! Get the police!

OLD MAN [*poking his head out*]: What's the matter?

BERENGER: Get the police! There's a rhinoceros in the house!

VOICE OF OLD MAN'S WIFE: What are you up to, Jean?

Why are you making all that noise?

OLD MAN [*to his wife*]: I don't know what he's talking about. He's seen a rhinoceros.

BERENGER: Yes, here in the house. Get the police!

OLD MAN: What do you think you're up to, disturbing people like that. What a way to behave! [*He shuts the door in his face.*]

BERENGER [*rushing to the stairs*]: Porter, porter there's a rhinoceros in the house, get the police! Porter!

[*The upper part of the porter's lodge is seen to open; the head of a rhinoceros appears.*]

Another!

[*BERENGER rushes upstairs again. He wants to go back into Jean's room, hesitates, then makes for the door of the Old Man again. At this moment the door of the room opens to reveal two rhinoceros heads.*]

Oh, my God!

[*BERENGER goes back into Jean's room where the bathroom door is shaking. He goes to the window which is represented simply by the frame, facing the audience. He is exhausted almost fainting; he murmurs.*]

My God! Oh my God!

[*He makes a gigantic effort, and manages to get astride the window (that is, toward the audience) but gets back again quickly, for at the same time, crossing the orchestra pit at great speed, move a large number of rhinoceros heads in line. BERENGER gets back with all speed, looks out of the window for a moment.*]

There's a whole herd of them in the street now! An army of rhinoceroses, surging up the avenue ... ! [*He looks all around.*] Where can I get out? Where can I get out? If

only they'd keep to middle of the road! They're all over the pavement as well. Where can I get out? Where can I get out?

[Distracted, he goes from the door to door and to the window, whilst the bathroom door continues to shake and JEAN continues to trumpet and hurl incomprehensible insults. This continues for some moments; whenever BERENGER, in his disordered attempts to escape, reaches the door of the Old People's flat or the stairway, he is greeted by rhinoceros heads which trumpet and cause him to beat a hasty retreat. He goes to the window for the last time and looks out.]

A whole herd of them! And they always said the rhinoceros was a solitary animal! That's not true, that's a conception they'll have to revise! They've smashed up all the public benches. *[He wrings his hands.]* What's to be done?

[He goes once more to the various exits, but the spectacle of the rhinoceros halts him. When he gets back to the bathroom door it seems about to give way. BERENGER throws himself against the back wall, which yields; the street is visible in the background; he flees, shouting:]

Rhinoceros! Rhinoceros!

[Noises. The bathroom door is on the point of yielding]

[Rhinoceros, The Chairs, The Lesson / Eugène Ionesco, tr by Derek Prouse and Donald Watson, Penguin Books, 2000]

“Words ... dive downwards and always succumb in the end ...”

PROFESSOR: I shall ask you then to follow this prepared course of mine with the closest attention ...

PUPIL: Yes, Sir!

PROFESSOR: ... thanks to which you may, in fifteen minutes, acquire the fundamental principles of the comparative and linguistic philology of the neo-Spanish languages.

PUPIL: Oh Sir, How marvellous! *[Clapping her hands]*

PROFESSOR *[with authority]*: Silence! What's all this for?

PUPIL: I'm sorry, Sir! *[Slowly, she lays her hands on the table again.]*

PROFESSOR: Silence! [He gets up and paces the room, his hands behind his back, now and again he stops, in the centre of the room or close to the pupil, and reinforces his words with a gesture of the hand; he declaims his lecture, but without overdoing it; the PUPIL follows him with her eyes, sometimes with difficulty, for she is always having to twist her head round; once or twice, but no more, she makes a complete turn.] Spanish, then, Mademoiselle, is actually the mother language that gave birth to all the neo-Spanish languages, among which we include Spanish, Latin, Italian, our own French, Portuguese, Romanian, Sardinian or Sardanapalus, Spanish and neo-Spanish, and in certain respects we may add Turkish, itself however rather closer to Greek, which is after all perfectly logical, Turkey being Greece's neighbor and Greece laying closer to Turkey than either you or I: this is but one more illustration of a very important linguistic law, according to which geography and philology are twice ... You may take notes, Mademoiselle.

PUPIL *[in a strangled voice]*: Yes, Sir!

PROFESSOR: What distinguishes the neo-Spanish languages one from the other and separates them from other linguistic groups, such as the groups comprising the

Austrian and neo-Austrian or Hapsburgian languages, or such groups as the Esperantist, Helvetic, Monegasque, Swiss, Andorran, Basque, Pelota, not to speak of the diplomatic and technical language groups- what distinguishes them, I say, is their striking resemblance to one another, so that is extremely difficult to tell them apart- I am speaking of the neo-Spanish themselves, which, however, can be differentiated, thanks to their distinctive characteristics, unquestionable and indisputable evidence of that remarkable resemblance that renders their common origin indisputable and, at the same time, clearly differentiates them- through the conservation of those distinctive characters

I have just mentioned.

PUPIL: Oooh! Ooooooh, Sir!

PROFESSOR: But let us not linger over generalities ...

PUPIL [regretfully, fascinated]: Oh, Sir ...

PROFESSOR: You seem to be interested in this. All the better.

PUPIL: Oh yes, Sir, I am ...

PROFESSOR: Don't worry, Mademoiselle. We shall come back to it later ... unless of course we don't come back to it all. Who can say?

PUPIL [delighted anyway]: Oh yes, Sir.

PROFESSOR: Every language, Mademoiselle- note this carefully, and remember it till the day you die ...

PUPIL: Oh! yes, Sir, till the day I die ... Yes, Sir ...

PROFESSOR: ... and again, this is another fundamental principle, every language is in fact only a manner of speaking, which inevitably implies that it is made up of sounds, or ...

PUPIL: Phonemes ...

PROFESSOR: I was just about to say so. Don't show off, airing your knowledge! You'd better just listen.

PUPIL: Very well, Sir. Yes, Sir.

PROFESSOR: Sounds, Mademoiselle, should be caught in flight by their wings so that they do not fall on deaf ears. Consequently, when you have made up your mind to articulate, you are recommended, in so far as possible, to stretch your neck and your chin well up, and stand right on the tips of your toes, look now, like this, you see ...

PUPIL: Yes, Sir.

PROFESSOR: Be quiet. Sit where you are. Don't interrupt ... and to let the sounds out as loud as you can, with the full force of your lungs, assisted by your vocal cords. Like this. Watch me: 'Butterfly', 'Eureka', 'Trafalgar', 'Pepperpot'. In this way the sounds, filled with warm air weighing lighter than air all around, will float on and on, no longer in danger of falling on deaf ears, bottomless pits that are the veritable graves of lost sonorities. If you emit several sounds at an increased speed, they will automatically grapple on to one another, thus constituting syllabus, words, phrases if need be, and by that I mean groupings of more or less importance, sounds arranged in a purely irrational way, devoid of all sense, and yet for that very reasonable to maintain themselves in the upper air, without risk of falling, at quite high altitudes. Only words that are charged with significance, heavy with meaning, dive downwards and always succumb in the end, crumpling up and ...

PUPIL: ... falling on deaf ears.

[Rhinoceros, The Chairs, The Lesson / Eugène Ionesco, tr by Derek Prouse and Donald Watson, Penguin Books, 2000]

“Oh no! ... La, la! I’m trembling all over”

Slowly the invisible beings, represented by unoccupied chairs, begin to arrive ... (excerpt from the tragic-comedy, *The Chairs*.)

[*The OLD COUPLE should now be behind the chairs, very close to each other, almost touching, but back to back: they are both talking; the OLD MAN to Mrs. Lovely, the OLD WOMAN to the Photographer. Every now and again they turn their heads to the remark to one of the guests.*]

OLD MAN [*to Mrs. Lovely*]: I’m quite overwhelmed ... You really are you, after all ... I was in love with you a hundred years ago ... there’s been such a great change in you ... there’s been no change in you at all ... I was in love with you then, I love you now ...

OLD WOMAN [*to the Photographer*]: Oh! Really, Sir! ...

OLD MAN [*to the Colonel*]: I quite agree with you there.

OLD WOMAN [*to the Photographer*]: Oh, really, Sir, really! ...

[*To the first Lady*] Thank you for hanging it up ... I’m sorry to have disturbed you.

[*The lighting in stronger now. It goes on getting stronger and stronger as more of the invisible guests arrive.*]

OLD MAN [*almost sniveling, to Mrs Lovely*]: Where are the snows of yesteryear?

OLD WOMAN [*to the Photographer*]: Oh, really! Really! ... Really! Really! ...

OLD MAN [*pointing the first Lady out to Mrs Lovely*]: A young friend of ours ... a very sweet girl ...

OLD WOMAN [*pointing the Colonel out to the Photographer*]: Yes, he’s a Colonel in the Civil Service, cavalry ... an old friend of my husband’s ... a subordinate, my husband’s a General ...

OLD MAN [*to Mrs Lovely*]: Your ears weren’t always so pointed! ... do you remember, my lovely?

OLD WOMAN [*to the Photographer, mincing grotesquely. She should become more conquettish as the scene goes on: showing her thick red stockings, lifting her numerous skirts, revealing a petticoat full of holes, uncovering her ancient breasts; then, throwing head back, hands on hips, uttering erotic cries, thrusting her pelvis forward, standing with legs apart, she laughs like an old whore. This aspect of the OLD WOMAN is quite different from anything we have seen up to now or are to see later; it should suggest something in the OLD WOMAN’S character that normally remains hidden and it vanishes abruptly.*]*I’m too old for that now ... you don’t think so?*

OLD MAN [*to Mrs Lovely, romantically*]: When we were young, the moon was a living planet; ah! yes, yes, if we had dared, but we were only children. Would you like to live those long-lost days again ... can we go back? Can we go back? Oh, no! no! It’s too late now. Time has raced past us like a train. It has left its lines in our skin. Do you think plastic surgery can work miracles? [*To the Colonel*] I am a soldier, and so are you; soldiers are always young, general are like gods ... [*To Mrs Lovely*] That’s how it ought to

be ... But alas! We have lost everything. We could have been so happy, I tell you; perhaps there are flowers coming up through the snow! ...

OLD WOMAN [*to the Photographer*]: Flatterer! Naughty boy! Aah! I look young for my age? You're a dashing little dago, a really exciting man.

OLD MAN [*to Mrs Lovely*]: May I play Tristan to your Isolde? Beauty lies in the heart ... you see, we could have had our share of bliss, beauty and eternity ... eternity ... Why didn't we dare? We didn't want it enough ... now ... everything is lost to us, lost, lost, lost.

OLD WOMAN [*to the Photographer*]: Oh no! Oh! No, oh! La, la! I'm trembling all over. Are you tickled, too? A tickler or just ticklish? I really shouldn't ... [She laughs] Do you like my petticoat? Or do you prefer the skirt?

OLD MAN [*to Mrs Lovely*]: It's a wretched life, a Quarter-master-General's!

OLD WOMAN [*looking towards the first invisible Lady*]: How do you make crepes de Chine? The egg of an ox, an hour of flour, and some gastric juices. [To the Photographer] You've got very feeling fingers, ah! ... well, I mean to s-a-a-y! ... oh-oh-oh-oh!

OLD MAN [*to Mrs Lovely*]: My worthy spouse, Semiramis, has taken the place of my mother. [He turns to the Colonel.] But, Colonel, I told you that before: Truth is where you find it. [*He turns back to Mrs Lovely.*]

OLD WOMAN [*to the Photographer*]: You really, really believe you can have children at any age? children of any age?

OLD MAN [*to Mrs Lovely*]: That's exactly what saved me: the inner life, a quiet home, austerity, my scientific research, philosophy, my message ...

OLD WOMAN [*to the Photographer*]: I've never been unfaithful to my husband the General ... not so hard! You'll have me on the floor ... I'm only his poor old mother! [*She starts sobbing.*] A grand, great, grand [*She repulses him.*] great ... mother. It's my conscience that's protesting like this, For me, the branch of the apple-tree is broken. You must ask someone else to show you the way. I don't want to gather life's roses ...

OLD MAN [*to Mrs Lovely*]: ... preoccupations of a nobler kind ... [*The OLD COUPLE lead Mrs Lovely and the Photographer up to the other two invisible guests, and bid them sit down.*]

OLD COUPLE [*to the Photographer and Mrs Lovely*]: Sit down, at down, please.

[*The OLD PAIR sit down, he on the left, she on the right, with the four empty chairs between them. A long scene that is almost silent, except for an occasional Yes or No. The OLD COUPLE are listening to what the invisible guests are saying.*]

OLD WOMAN [*to the Photographer*]: We've had one son ...still alive, of course ... he went away ... It's the usual story ... a bit strange perhaps ... he left his parents ... had a heart of gold ... a very long time ago... And we loved him so much he slammed the door ... My husband and I struggled with him to try and stop him going ... he was seven years old, the age of discretion. We called after him: My son, my child, my son, my child ... and he never looked round ...

OLD MAN: No ... no ... I'm sorry to say we never had children ... I should have liked a son ... so would Semiramis ... we did what we could ... poor 'semiramis, she's such a motherly woman. Perhaps it was better that way. I myself was an ungrateful child ... Oh dear! ... Grief, regrets, and remorse, that's all there is ... all that's left ...

OLD WOMAN: He used to say: You kill the birds! Why do you kill the birds? ... We don't kill birds ... we've never hurt a fly ... His eyes were full of tears. He wouldn't let us wipe them away. He wouldn't let us near them. He would say: Yes, you do, you kill all the birds, all the birds ... and he would wave his little fists at us ... You're telling lies, you're trying to deceive me! The streets are full of the birds you've killed and the little children dying. Can't you hear the birds singing? ... No, I can only hear moaning and groaning. The sky is red with blood ... No, my child, the sky is blue ... And again he would cry: You've deceived me, and I loved you so much, I thought you were good ... the streets are full of dead birds, you've put out their eyes ... Daddy, mummy, you're wicked, wicked! ... I won't stay with you anymore ... I threw myself at his feet ... His father was weeping. But we couldn't hold him back ... We could still hear him shouting: It's all your fault ... but what does that mean?

OLD MAN: I left my mother to die all alone in a ditch. She called after me, crying feebly: My little boy, my beloved child, don't leave me to die all alone ... Stay with me. I'm not long for this world. Don't worry, mother, I said, I'll soon be back. I was in a hurry ... I was going to a dance. I'll be back soon.

[Rhinoceros, The Chairs, The Lesson / Eugène Ionesco, tr by Derek Prouse and Donald Watson, Penguin Books, 2000]

Albert Camus (1913-1960)

Albert Camus was a journalist, editor and editorialist, playwright and director, novelist and author of short stories, political essayist and activist—and arguably, although he came to deny it, a philosopher. He didn't much care for systematic philosophy, had little faith in rationalism, asserted rather than argued many of his main ideas, presented others in metaphors, and brooded over meaning of life and happiness in the face of death. He denied belief in God but 'had a sense of the sacred.' He forcefully separated himself from existentialism, but posed one of the twentieth century's best-known existentialist questions, which launches his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "There is only one really serious philosophical question, and that is suicide."

Camus was born in Drean (then known as Mondovi), French Algeria to a 'Pied-Noir' family. His mother was of Spanish descent and half-deaf. His father Lucien, a poor agricultural worker, died in the Battle of the Marne in 1914 during World War I, while serving as a member of the Zouave infantry regiment. Camus and his mother lived in poor conditions during his childhood in the Belcourt section of Algiers. In 1923, Camus was accepted into the lycee and studied at the University of Algiers, where he was goalkeeper for the university team until he contracted tuberculosis in 1930. Because of poor financial conditions he took odd jobs such as private tutor, car parts clerk and assistant at the Meteorological Institute. He completed his *licence de philosophie* (B.A.) in 1935. In May 1936, he successfully presented his thesis on Plotinus entitled, *Néo-Platonisme et Pensée Chrétienne* (Neo-Platonism and Christian Thought), for his *diplôme d'études supérieures* (roughly equivalent to an M.A. thesis). In 1937 he founded an amateur theatrical company, *L'Equipe* and joined the newspaper, *Alger republicain* as an editor. In 1937 he published *L'Envers et l'endroit* (The Wrong Side and the Right Side) and one year later, *Noces* (Nuptials). In 1942 he brought out *L'Etranger* (The Outsider) and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (The Myth of Sisyphus). With the publication of *L'Etranger* he achieved recognition as the voice of a generation with dizzying speed. Next came his plays, *Caligula* and *The Misunderstanding*. During World War II he participated in the Resistance movement with Pascal Pia, as the editor of the newspaper, *Combat*. In 1947 his novel, *La Peste* (The Plague) was hailed as the great post-war novel. The protagonist, Dr. Rieux tirelessly attends the plague-stricken citizens of Oran, enacts the revolt against a world of the absurd and of injustice, and confirms Camus's words: "We refuse to despair of mankind. Without having the unreasonable ambition to save men, we still want to serve them." In 1949, Camus founded the Group for International Liaisons within the Revolutionary Union Movement after his split with Garry Davis's Citizens of the World movement, of which the surrealist Andre Breton was also a member. The formation of this group, according to Camus, was intended to "denounce two ideologies found in both the USSR and the USA" regarding their idolatry of technology. When *L'Homme revolte* (*The Rebel*) came out in 1951 Sartre accused him of taking an "idealist, moralizing, and anti-communist" attitude. He retaliated as caustically. This caused a rift between the two.

The Algerian war caused him agonies of conscience and the political positions he took alienated him from a segment of leftist intellectual opinion. In 1956 Camus published, *La Chute* (*The Fall*), followed by a collection of short stories, *L'Exil et le royaume* (*The Exile and the Kingdom*). Camus was awarded the 1957 Nobel Prize for Literature "for his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times." Camus' austere search

for moral order found its aesthetic correlative in the classicism of his art. He was a stylist of great purity and intense concentration and rationality. Although controversial, Camus was, and remains, indisputably one of the greatest French writers of, not only the post World War II period, but of the twentieth century .

Principal works: *The Outsider* aka *The Stranger* (*L'Étranger*,1942);*The Plague* (*La Peste*,1947); *The Fall* (*La Chute*,1956); *A Happy Death*, (*La Mort heureuse*, written 1936–1938, published posthumously 1971); *The First Man* (*Le premier homme*,1995); *Exile and the Kingdom* (*L'exil et le royaume*,1957); *Nuptials* (*Noces*, 1938); *The Myth of the Sisyphus* (*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*,1942); *The Rebel* (*L'Homme révolté*,1951); *Notebooks I, II, III*(*Carnets Tome I, II, and III*, 1962-1989); *Plays: Caligula* (*Caligula* , 1945); *Requiem for a Nun* (*Requiem pour une nonne*,,1956); *The Misunderstanding* (*Le Malentendu*, 1944); *The State of Siege* (*L' Etat de Siege*, 1948); *The Just Assassins* (*Les Justes*,1949); *The Possessed* (*Les Possédés*,1959);*Essays: Create Dangerously* (1957); *Reflections on the Guillotine* (*Réflexions sur la guillotine*,1957); *Neither Victims Nor Executioners* (*Combat*,1946); *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (1970); *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (1961).

“There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.”

You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth. Nothing is told us about Sisyphus in the underworld. Myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them. As for this myth, one sees merely the whole effort of a body straining to raise the huge stone, to roll it and push it up a slope a hundred times over; one sees the face screwed up, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder bracing the clay-covered mass, the foot wedging it, the fresh start with arms outstretched, the wholly human security of two earth-clotted hands. At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments towards that lower world whence he will have to push it up again towards the summit. He goes back down to the plain.

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step towards the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks towards the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.

If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, Proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition; it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.

[*Myth of Sisyphus* tr by Justin O' Brien, Penguin Books, 1975 © not mentioned]

“People die. And they are not happy.”

The stage is empty for a moment. Then Caligula enters stealthily. His legs are caked with mud, his clothes dirty; his hair is wet, his look distraught. He brings his hand to his mouth several times. Then he approaches a mirror, stopping abruptly when he catches sight of his reflected self. After muttering some unintelligible words, he sits, letting his arms hang limp between his knees. Helicon enters. On seeing Caligula, he stops and contemplates him in silence. Caligula turns and sees him. A short silence.

HELICON (*across the stage*) Good morning, Caius.

CALIGULA (*in quite an ordinary tone*) Good morning, Helicon. (*a short silence*)

HELICON You seem tired.

CALIGULA I've walked a lot.

HELICON Yes, you were away for quite a while. (*another short silence*)

CALIGULA It was hard to find.

HELICON What was?

CALIGULA What I wanted.

HELICON And what did you want?

CALIGULA (*in the same matter-of-fact tone*) The moon.

HELICON What?

CALIGULA I wanted the moon.

HELICON I see ... (*Another silence. Helicon approaches Caligula.*) What for?

CALIGULA Well ... it's one of the things I haven't got.

HELICON Right. And now everything is taken care of?

CALIGULA No. I couldn't get it.

HELICON Too bad.

CALIGULA Yes, that's why I'm tired. (*Pauses. Then*) You probably think I'm insane ...

HELICON You know I never think. I'm much too intelligent for that.

CALIGULA ... But I'm not insane. In fact I've never been so lucid. It's just that I suddenly felt a desire for the impossible. (*Pauses.*) Things as they are don't strike me as satisfactory.

HELICON That's a widespread opinion.

CALIGULA I suppose it is. But I didn't know it before. *Now I know.* (*Still in the same matter-of-fact tone.*) The world as it is is unbearable. That's why I need the moon, or happiness, or immortality, or something that may sound insane, but would help correct this world.

HELICON That sounds fine. But no one could ever act on it.

CALIGULA (*rising to his feet, but still with perfect calmness*) You know nothing about it. It's because no one *dares* to be logical and carry it through to its conclusion that nothing is ever achieved. (*He studies Helicon's face.*) I can see what you're thinking. What a fuss over the death of a woman! No, that's not it. I do recall that a few days ago a woman I loved died. But love is a side issue. Her death is no more than the symbol of a truth that makes the moon necessary to me. A childishly simple and obvious truth, a little stupid even, but hard to discover and harder to bear.

HELICON And what is this truth you've discovered, Caius?
CALIGULA (*his eyes averted, in a toneless voice*) People die. And they are not happy.

[*Caligula* tr by Stuart Gilbert in **Albert Camus: Caligula and Other Plays**, Penguin Books, 1984 © Hamish Hamilton Ltd. 1965]

Existentialism

Caligula, end of the play. *A room in the imperial palace. The stage is in semidarkness.*

CALIGULA (to CAESONIA)

... I have won the god-like lucidity of the solitary man. (*His exaltation grows as little by little he strangles Caesonia, who puts up no resistance. Bending his head, he goes on speaking, into her ear.*) I live, I kill, I exercise the rapturous power of a destroyer which makes child's play of the power of a creator. *This* is happiness -- this unparalleled isolation of a man who sees his whole life at once, the measureless joy of the unpunished assassin, this ruthless logic that crushes human lives (*he laughs*), that's crushing yours out, Caesonia, to complete at last the eternal solitude I desire.

CAESONIA (*struggling feebly*) Caius .

CALIGULA (*more and more excitedly*) No, no sentiment. I must have done with it, for there is no time to waste. There is no time to waste, dear Caesonia. (*Caesonia has stopped breathing. He stares wildly at her; his voice grows harsh and grating.*) You, too, were guilty. But killing is not the solution. (*He spins round and gazes crazily at the mirror.*) Caligula! You too, you too are guilty. Well, what can a little more or less matter? But who would dare condemn me in this world where no one is innocent and nobody is judge? (*He brings his eyes close to his reflected face. He sounds genuinely distressed.*) You see, Helicon has failed you. I won't have the moon. Never, never, never! But how painful it is to know that and to have to go through to the bitter end! Listen! Innocence arming for the fray, preparing for its final triumph. Why am I not in their place, among them? I'm afraid. (*Sound of his pain*) After despising others, to recognize the same cowardice in myself. But that doesn't matter. Fear doesn't last either. I'm about to enter that great emptiness where the heart has rest. (*He seems calmer. When he speaks again his voice is steadier, less shrill.*) Everything seems so complicated. Yet everything is quite simple. If I'd had the moon, if love were enough, all would be changed. But where can I quench this thirst? What heart, what god would be as deep and pure for me as a great lake? (*Kneeling, weeping.*) Neither this world nor the other world has a place for me. Yet I know, and you know (*still weeping, he stretches out his arms toward the mirror*) that all I needed was for the impossible to be. The impossible! I've searched the confines of the world, along all my secret frontiers. I stretched out my hands (*Screaming, now at the moon*). See, I still stretch out my hands, but I always find you confronting me, and I've come to loathe you. Helicon! Nothing, nothing yet. Helicon! Oh, this night is heavy, heavy as all of human suffering. Helicon will not come. We shall be guilty forever. (*The shadows turn into Caligula's killers. The patricians watch, but hold their coats over their faces while others surround Caligula and repeatedly stab him. Caligula*

chokes and laughs as if embracing death.) In history, Caligula! In history! (Caligula's body drops and the killers move triumphantly, but he pulls himself up to his knees) I'm still alive! (He dies, but the killers begin to strike at his body again until he turns into a bloody mass blending into the red gloom).

[*Caligula* tr by Stuart Gilbert in **Albert Camus: Caligula and Other Plays**, Penguin Books, 1984 © Hamish Hamilton Ltd. 1965]

“The plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good”

Rieux was already half-way up the stairs. Cold, fathomless depths of sky glimmered overhead, and near the hill-tops stars shone hard as flint. It was much like the night when he and Tarrou had come to the terrace to forget the plague. Only, to-night the sea was breaking on the cliffs more loudly and the air was calm and limpid, free of the tang of brine the autumn wind had brought. The noises of the town were still beating like waves at the foot of the long line of terraces, but tonight they told not of revolt, but of deliverance. In the distance a reddish glow hung above the big central streets and squares. In this night of new-born freedom desires knew no limits, and it was their clamour that reached Rieux's ears.

From the dark harbour soared the first rocket of the firework display organized by the municipality, and the town acclaimed it with a long-drawn sigh of delight. Cottard, Tarrou, the men and the woman Rieux had loved and lost — all alike, dead or guilty, were forgotten. Yes, the old fellow had been right; these people were ‘just the same as ever’. But this was at once their strength and their innocence, and it was on this level, beyond all grief, that Rieux could feel himself at one with them. And it was in the midst of shouts rolling against the terrace wall in massive waves that waxed in volume and duration while cataracts of coloured fire fell thicker through the darkness, that Dr Rieux resolved to compile this chronicle, so that he should not be one of those who hold their peace but should bear witness in favour of those plague-stricken people; so that some memorial of the injustice and outrage done them might endure; and to state quite simply what we learn in a time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise.

None the less, he knew that the tale he had to tell could not be one of the final victory. It could be only the record of what had had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again in the never-ending fight against terror and its relentless onslaughts, despite their personal afflictions, by all who, while unable to be saints but refusing to bow down to pestilences, strive their utmost to be healers.

And, indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books : that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and enlightening of men, it roused up its rats again and sent them forth to die in a happy city.

[*The Plague* tr by Stuart Gilbert Penguin Books, 1948 © Stuart Gilbert, 1948]

Claude Simon (1913–2005)

Claude Simon is identified as one of the first of the French new or ‘nouveau roman’ novelists. Like Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor and others connected with the new novel movement that emerged after World War II Simon doesn’t attempt to impose artistic order on the chaos of human experience. Instead, his works reflect the fragmented, disordered nature of reality. He said in an interview, “In one sense my novels are autobiographical, at least as far as the material. But where is truth? To begin with, our perception of the novel is deformed, incomplete. Then our memory is selective. Finally writing transforms.” So, ‘one doesn’t reproduce, one produces something that relates to what one has lived, but also to language itself. It is the moment when I begin to battle with words that something comes to me.’”

Born in Tananarive, Madagascar and raised in Perpignan, France Simon’s father died in battle when he was less than a year old and mother ten years later. Left an orphan he studied in a boarding school in Paris, but spent summers with relatives. In his youth he had a brief stint as a painter, fought with the Republicans in the Spanish war, got disillusioned. Later, as a cavalryman in World War II he was one of the four French survivors of the Battle of the Meuse in 1940. Claude Simon wrote about this incident in *The Flanders Road* which is considered his finest novel. Simon has written more than a dozen novels, which many readers find challenging because he often ignores literary conventions like narrative structure or plot.

In his major novels Simon dispenses with conventional narrative structures and concentrates on the essential processes of language, memory, and perception. The destructive effects of war as well as the ravages of time itself are themes repeated throughout in his work. He received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1985 and the Nobel committee said, in its citation, that Simon's work combined "the poet's and the painter's creativeness with a deepened awareness of time in the depiction of the human condition," and that “Claude Simon’s narrative art may appear as a representation of something that lives within us whether we will it or not—something hopeful, in spite of all the cruelty and absurdity which ... seem to characterize our condition, and which is so perceptively, penetratingly, and abundantly reproduced in his novels.” Even his earlier books, like "The Cheat," "The Wind," "The Grass" which are considered conventional Simon doesn’t seek so much to tell a story but to weave webs of words and associations that have no apparent relationship but tumble along, one description leading to the next. They evidence his disregard for linear plot in favour of evocative descriptions full of sensory details.

Claude Simon’s literary career lasted over 50 years during which he churned out about 20 dense and demanding novels, most of which got translated into several world languages but a few months before he died, he desired that his profession be recorded as that of a ‘viticulteur’ or grape farmer, and not that of writer. In the manner of A.E. Housman who once remarked that malt does more than Milton can, to justify the dark ways of the Creator, Claude Simon took the line that to press grapes into wine was a more honest, more genuinely remedial trade than to press words into novels.

Principal Works: *The Wind* (*Le Vent*, 1957); *The Grass* (*L'herbe*, 1958); *The Flanders Road* (*La Route des Flandres*, 1960); *The Palace* (*Le Palace*, 1962); *Histoire* (*Histoire*, 1967); *The Battle of Pharsalus* (*La bataille de Pharsale*, 1969); *Triptych*

(*Triptyque*, 1973); *The Georgics* (*Les Georgiques*, 1981); *The World About Us* (1983); *The Acacia* (*L'Acacia*, 1989); *The Trolley* (*Le tramway*, 2001).

The World About Us (1983)

The novel, *The World About Us* is a loosely related series of scenes from the past and the present combined in a fictional collage. The following extract provides a good example of the highly complicated structure of Simon's later novels:

The owl hoots again. The ammunition-server repeats again in a single breath there did you hear did you hear? The gunner's eyes search the night. The blurred shapes of the group consisting of the three soldiers with their faces turned towards the window is dimly outlined in the darkness room. The dark mass of the woods seems to float like an island above the wraiths of mist. The abrupt jolting which shakes the man's pelvis culminates in a final thrust after which he holds himself clamped hard to the young woman's buttocks, gripping her hips, while within her dark flesh the long, stiff penis stiffens still further, releasing long spurts of black sperm. After a while the man's muscles relax and he gently stokes the naked hips while the woman's back and shoulders continue to shake and quiver. Gradually, as evening draws on, the sea is tinged with a leaden, greenish color. In front of the cliffs, the rocks which the sea is successively covers and uncovers appear and disappear, gleaming and darkly violet, surrounded by foaming froth which each new wave draws lazily out behind it like a train. Eyes accustomed to the darkness make out the broad, black and white patches with sinuous, overlapping contours which take the shape of the powerful body with its swelling belly, its bones jutting under the thick hide. The cow's left eye is lost in a dark patch about the size of a plate. The pink conjunctiva and the long, pale lashes of the right eye merge into the light-colored coat surrounded it. The violent din of the blood in the ears gradually calms down. With his chin lifted up, his Adam's apple jutting under the gray, unshaven skin the old workman carefully buttons his shirt collar. The little pearly button with its blue-green and mauve reflections several times evades his clumsy fingers. Fumbling, he moves his chin, still lifted, a little to the right and to the left, while with his eyelids half-lowered, his gaze directed downwards, he says something to the young builder. Ready to go, the latter puts down his bag, fetches a practically bristleless broom leaning against one of the walls and clears the center of the room, sweeping the rubbish under one of the scaffoldings. Clouds of dust rise up at each of his movements. The old workman has finished buttoning up his collar and says that's fine so long as there's a pathway. One corner of his collar is still sticking up. The jacket's shiny lapels, secured only by the lower button which tugs on the cloth at the level of the waist, gape like a pouch.

[*The World About Us* / translated from the French by Daniel Weissbort. – Princeton, N.J. © Ontario Review Press, 1983]

The Flanders Road is Claude Simon's best known book. It is about the death of one aristocratic and thoroughly idiosyncratic World War II cavalry captain named de Reixach and looks to piece together an account of the mysterious captain through the shared and personal memories of his war-time subordinates. But by distancing his

narrative from the very event which the narrative is looking to explore and define, Claude Simon dramatically subverts and distorts the centre of his own story mixing memories and stories, entering into and leaving the thought patterns of his core characters, and playing with punctuation in a way that makes the novel incredibly difficult to follow:

He was holding a letter in his hand, he raised his eyes looked at me then the letter again then once more at me, behind him I could see the red mahogany ochre blurs of the horses being led to the watering trough, the mud was so deep you sank into it up to your ankles but I remember that during the night it had frozen suddenly and Wack came into the bedroom with the coffee saying The dogs ate up the mud, I had never heard the expression, I could almost see the dogs, some kind of infernal, legendary creatures their mouths pink-rimmed their wolf fangs cold and white chewing up the black mud In the night's gloom, perhaps a recollection, the devouring dogs cleaning, clearing away: now the mud was grey and we twisted our ankles running, late as usual for morning call, almost tripping in the deep tracks left by the hoofs and frozen hard as stone, and a moment later he said Your mother's written me.

[*Flanders Road*, tr by Richard Howard New York : Braziller, 1961© Braziller]

“ ... incoherent, casual, impersonal and destructive work of time.”

Though the descriptions of the war are haphazard and chaotic but they were appreciated as factual and there are some key events –the main being the death of de Reixach, who is shot from behind a wall by a lowly German soldier-- was it a suicide because his wife, Corinne, was having an affair with Iglésia? Is the death of de Reixach a symbol of the end of the old-fashioned, aristocratic France? One can keep looking for answer to these questions in the following excerpt which closes the novel, Here the story ceases to be anecdotal (Claude Simon himself had served in a cavalry unit) to take the tragic dimension of an eternal return:

probably he preferred not to have to do it himself, hoped that one of them would take care of it for him, would spare him that nasty interval but maybe he still doubted that she (that is, Reason, that is, Virtue, that is, his little pigeon) was unfaithful to him, perhaps it was only when he came in that he found something like a proof, for example that groom hidden in the closet, something that convinced him, indicating in an irrefutable way what he refused to believe or perhaps what his honour forbade him to see, the very thing that leaped to his eyes since Iglésia himself said that he had always pretended to notice nothing telling about the time when he had almost caught them, when trembling with fear or unsatisfied desire she had scarcely had time to pull down her dress in the stable and he not even glancing at her going straight towards that filly leaning down to feed her hocks saying only Do you think that revolutive will be enough it seems to me that the tendon is still swollen I think we'd better give her a little heat, and still pretending to see nothing pensive and futile on that horse as he advanced to meet his death whose finger was already pointed at him laid on him his stiff bony body cambered on his saddle at first a blur no larger than a fly for the concealed sniper a thin vertical figure above the gun sight,

growing larger as he approached the motionless and attentive eye of his patient murderer index finger on the trigger seeing so to speak the reverse of what I could see or I the back and he the front, that is, between us – I following him and the other man watching him advance – we possessed the totality of the enigma (the murderer knowing what was going to happen to him and I knowing what had happened to him, that is, after and before, that is, like the two parts of an orange cut in half and that fit together perfectly) in the centre of which he rode ignoring or wanting to ignore what had happened as well as what would happen, in that kind of nothingness (as it is said that in the centre, the eye of a hurricane there exists a perfectly calm zone) of knowledge, that zero point; he would have needed a mirror with several panels, then he could have seen himself, growing larger until the sniper gradually made out the stripes, the buttons of his coat even the features of his face, the gun sight now choosing the best spot on his chest, the barrel shifting imperceptibly, following him, the glint of sunlight on the black steel through the sweet-smelling hawthorn hedge. But did I really see him or think I saw him or merely imagine him afterwards or even only dream it all, perhaps I was asleep had I never stopped sleeping eyes wide open in broad daylight lulled by the monotonous hammering of the shoes of the five horses trampling their shadows not walking at quite the same gait so that it was like a crepitation alternating catching up with itself superimposing mingling at moments as if there were now only one horse, then breaking apart again disintegrating starting over apparently running after itself and so on over and over, the war somehow stagnant, somehow peaceful around us, the sporadic cannon-fire landing in the deserted orchards with a muffled monumental and hollow sound like a door flapping in the wind in an empty house, the whole landscape empty uninhabited under the motionless sky, the world stopped frozen crumbling collapsing gradually disintegrating in fragments like an abandoned building, unusable left to the incoherent, casual, impersonal and destructive work of time.

[*Flanders Road*, tr by Richard Howard New York : Braziller, 1961© Braziller]

“ ... the monotonous trampling that filled the night ... ”

Georges had taken part in the military debacle of 1940. Riding on his horse he discovered dead bodies of men and animals along the muddy road. In front of him arose the rigid and enigmatic silhouette of his cousin, Reixach. The night lent a fantastic bearing to this retreating ride.

... and at one point the rain began falling, it too monotonous, infinite and black, and not falling but like the night itself uniting in its depths men and horses, adding mingling its imperceptible patter to that enormous patient and dangerous murmur of thousands of horses on the roads, like the

nibbling sound thousands of insects would make gnawing away the world (besides, don't the horses, the old army horses, the ancient and immemorial hacks that walk through the rain at night along the roads, shaking their heavy heads, don't they have something crustacean, the stiffness of shellfish about them, that vaguely ridiculous, vaguely frightening look of grasshoppers with their stiff legs their projecting bones their ringed flanks suggesting the image of some heraldic beast made not of flesh and muscles but instead like –animal and armour united, combined—those old rickety carriages with metal sides and rusty fittings, chattering, mended with a few pieces of wire, threatening to fall to pieces at any moment?) a murmur which in Georges's mind had finally become identified with the very notion of war, the monotonous trampling that filled the night like a clatter of bones, the black air harsh as metal against their faces, so that he seemed to feel (remembering those accounts of polar expeditions where the skin was described sticking to frozen iron) the cold solidified shadows sticking to his flesh, as if the air and time itself were only a single, solid mass of chilly steel (like those dead worlds extinct for billions of years and covered with ice) in whose density they were caught, immobilized for ever, their old walking horsemeat beneath them, their spurs, their sabres, their steel weapons: everything standing and intact, like the day when he would wake and discover them through the transparent, glaucous thickness appearing like an army on the march surprised by a cataclysm and which a slow invisibly advancing glacier would restore, would spit out a hundred or two hundred thousand years from now pell-mell with all the old lansquenets, reiters and cuirassiers of long ago tumbling down breaking in a faint tinkle of glass ...

[*Flanders Road*, tr by Richard Howard New York : Braziller, 1961© Braziller]

Romain Gary (1914-1980)

Romain Gary was born Romain Kacew of Russian parents and was educated in France. He joined the RAF in Great Britain and flew for the French resistance during the Nazi occupation. After serving with French embassies in England, Bulgaria, and Switzerland he became first secretary of the French delegation to the United Nations and French Consul-General in Los Angeles. Under pseudonyms, Émile Ajar, Shatan Bogat, Lucien Brûlard, René Deville, and Fosco Sinibaldi he wrote more than thirty novels, essays and memoirs in French and in English and became one of France's most popular and prolific writers. He is the only writer ever to have won the Prix Goncourt twice—first, in 1956 for *Les raciness du ciel* (*The Roots of Heaven*), and second in 1975 when he published, *La vie devant soi*, originally titled, *Madame Rosa* (*The Life Before Us*) under the pseudonym, Emile Ajar. The Prix Goncourt committee discovered the author's real identity only after his death.

Gary wrote fast and illegibly on messy scattered sheets and then dictated his books to secretaries. He himself denied that he actually had a literary style: 'I think I have no real talent, just a way of telling a story.' His main literary influences remained the classics of his adolescent reading-- Dickens, Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Conrad, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Victor Hugo.

His novels mix humour with tragedy and faith with cynicism. His first two novels, *The Colors of the Day* (*Les Couleurs du jour*, 1952) and *The Dance of Genghis Cohn* (*La Danse de Gengis Cohn*, 1967) are comic stories nonetheless informed by serious moral considerations. *The Roots of Heaven* (*Les Racines du ciel*, 1956), winner of the Prix Goncourt, balances a visionary conception of freedom and justice against a pessimistic comprehension of man's cruelty and greed. Published in 1975, with 'Emile Ajar' as the author, his novel, *The Life Before Us* (*La Vie devant soi*) was a French literary sensation. It is a fictionalized memoir of an Arab boy growing up in a Parisian suburb, and is packed with extraordinary slang, aggressive jokes and almost unbelievable characters. The book was lathered with praise by critics, and eventually won the 'second' Goncourt.

His first wife was the British writer, Lesley Blanch. In 1962 he married the actress, Jean Seberg who committed suicide in 1979. Unable to bear his depression following this tragedy he shot himself dead in Paris on December 2nd. 1980, although he is believed to have left a note saying specifically that his death had no relation to Seberg's suicide.

Principal works: *The Roots of Heaven* (1956); *The Life Before Us*, 1975; *Lady L*; *The Dance of Genghis Cohn*; *Promises at Dawn*, and a fictionalized memoir, *White Dog*, 1970

The Roots of Heaven, tells the story of Morel, a crusading environmentalist who sets out to preserve the elephants from extinction as a lasting symbol of freedom for all humanity. He is helped by the barmaid Minna and Forsythe, a disgraced British military officer hoping to redeem himself. Another character, the naturalist Peer Quist beseeches us to save trees which the Islam calls the roots of heaven, "planted in the earth and also in the depths of human hearts [...] like a foreboding, an aspiration, and a requirement of the justice, the dignity, and the love of the Infinite." To protect these roots of heaven is also like saving the values threatened by the evolution of our civilization. This is how the novel ends:

He was sorry not to be bringing back more encouraging news from his expedition, but he was used to patience and one must not be in too much of a hurry. He kept thinking of the last words Saint-Denis had said to him as they parted, standing there beside his horse and looking up at him, with eyes in which the last glow from the night seemed still to be burning. 'They say. Father, that you hid our friend at one of your excavation sites, and that he's merely getting back his breath before going on, but I can't see very clearly why you should show so much sympathy for a man whose aim after all was to take the protection of nature into his own hands. That seems to me to go against what one has heard about your Order-and even about your writings. If I have understood them, you don't seem to expect much from our efforts, and it might be said that you consider even Grace as a biological mutation which will in the end give man the organic means he needs for completing himself as he wants himself to be. If that is so. Morel's struggle, his stubborn endeavour, must appear to you both comic and futile. And perhaps all you have been trying to get from my company and from these memories we have been invoking together, is a brief moment of amusement. With his petitions, his manifestoes, his defence committees, and finally, his armed organized maquis, it must seem to you that he is after something that is not yet possible and will not be for a long time except as a hymn of hope. But I can't resign myself to such scepticism, and I prefer to believe that you are not untouched by a certain secret sympathy for that rebel, whose idea is to extract from Heaven itself this minimum of respect for our condition. After all, our race emerged from the mud some millions of years ago, and although we got rid of our scales, there is still a long way to go before we become really human-but one of these days we shall triumph over our limitations, over the harsh law which is still imposed upon us. For our friend was right, there can hardly be any doubt that it's an inhuman law and it's high time to change it. Then all that will be left of the infirmity and of the challenge of being a man will be one more cast skin by the side of our track.'

[The Roots of Heaven, tr by Jonathan Griffen, pub. Michael Joseph, Ltd. London, 1958. tr © Michael Joseph Ltd.]

The Life Before Us is the story of an orphaned Arab boy, Momo and his devotion to Madame Rosa, a dying 68 year-old survivor of Auschwitz and retired 'lady of the night'.

I found Madame Rosa in her state of stupor, but it was easy to see she was afraid and that's always a sign of intelligence. She even pronounced my name like she was calling for help.

"Here I am, Madame Rosa, here I am ..."

She was trying to say something. Her lips moved, and her head trembled, she was trying hard to be a human being. But nothing much came of it, only her eyes got bigger

and bigger and she sat there with her mouth wide open and her hands on the arms of her chair, looking straight ahead as if she could already hear the doorbell ...

“Momo ...”

“Don’t worry, Madame Rosa. I won’t let them take you to the hospital and turn you into the world’s champion vegetable ...”

I don’t know if I’ve told you that Madame Rosa still had her portrait of Monsieur Hitler under her bed. When she felt really bad, she’d take it out and look at it, that always picked her up. I pulled out the portrait and put it under Madame Rosa’s nose.

“Madame Rosa, Madame Rosa, look who’s here ...”

I had to shake her. She sighed a little. Then she saw Monsieur Hitler’s face and it didn’t take her long to recognize him. She let out a yell, which revived her and she tried to get up.

“Quick, Madame Rosa, we’ve got to be going.”

“Are they here?”

“Not yet, but we have to leave. We’re going to Israel, remember?”

She started functioning, because in old people memories are always the strongest.

“Help me, Momo ...”

“Easy does it, Madame Rosa. Plenty of time. They haven’t phone yet, but we can’t stay here ...”

I had a hard time dressing her, and to make things worse she insisted on fixing herself up, and I had to hold the mirror while she was painting her face. It was beyond me why she had to be her Sunday best just then, but you can’t argue with a woman’s female nature. She had a pile of finery in her closet that didn’t look like anything ever seen, she’d bought the stuff at the Flea Market when she was in the chips, not to put on but to dream over. The only thing the whole of her would fit into was her Japanese-type kimono all covered with birds, flowers and the rising sun. It was red and orange. She also put her wig on. Then she wanted to look at herself in the mirror, but I didn’t let her, I thought I’d better not.

It was eleven o’clock that night before we started down the stairs. I’d never have thought she could make it. How could anybody suspect how much strength Madame Rosa had left when it came to dying in her Jewish hideaway? I’d never believe in this Jewish hideaway. I’d never realized what she’d fixed it up for and why she went down there from time to time and sat down and looked around her and breathed. Now I understood. I hadn’t lived enough yet to have enough experience, and even now talking to you I know that even after years of taking it on the chin there’s always something left to learn.

[The Life Before Us (La Vie devant soi, par Emile Ajar) tr by Ralph Manheim, 1977 © Doubleday & Company, Inc. NEW Directions paperback, 1986. pp. 172-73]

Portrait of racism and hypocrisy

Both a personal memoir and a sensitive novelist’s encounter with social facts ‘*White Dog*’ is an unforgettable portrait of racism and hypocrisy. It was made into a film

by Sam Fuller in 1982, but was suppressed as ‘inflammatory’ but was released later in an edited form on HBO

One afternoon, while I was writing. I heard a sudden, long howl from the direction of the pool, followed by angry, staccato barks. This is how dogs signal the presence of an intruder and the imminence of the attack they intend to carry out within the second. It is often only a canine equivalent of our “Hold me back, someone, or I’ll kill him,” but with true, well-trained watch dogs it means business. I know of nothing more nerve-racking than these sudden, violent outbursts of rage. Their purpose is to paralyze you, and to keep you there without making a move, or else... . I ran out onto the patio. A black worker who had come to check the filter stood on the other side of the iron gate. Batka was hurling himself against the gate, foaming at the mouth, in a paroxysm of hatred. It was so frightening that Sandy had crawled whimpering under a bush with only his limp yellow tail showing.

The black worker stood completely motionless, his face shining with sweat. A young man, and somehow the expression of fear is always more painful when you see it on a young face. He was safe behind the gate, but this was more a matter of shock than of danger. The good-natured gray giant, always so nice with our visitors, had changed into a primeval fury howling like a starved beast who sees the meat but can’t reach it.

[*White Dog*, University of Chicago Press 1970 © Romain Gary, pp. 8-9]

Marguerite Duras (1914 – 1996)

Marguerite Donnadiou, known as Marguerite Duras was a French writer and film director. She was born in Gia-Dinh (a former name for Saigon), French Indochina (now Vietnam), after her parents responded to a campaign by the French government encouraging people to work in the colony. Marguerite's father fell ill soon after their arrival, and returned to France, where he died. Her mother stayed behind with her three children, living in relative poverty. The difficult life that the family experienced during this period made a deep impact on Marguerite's later work. An affair between the teenaged Marguerite and Huyn Thuy Le, a rich merchant, was treated several times, in quite contrasting ways in her subsequent memoirs and fiction. She also reported being beaten by both her mother and her older brother during this period.

At 17, Marguerite went to France, her parents' native country, where she began studying for a degree in mathematics which she soon abandoned to concentrate on political science, and then law. After completing her studies, she became an active member of the PCF (the French Communist Party). In the late 1930s she worked for the French government office representing the colony of Indochina. During the war, from 1942 to 1944, she worked for the Vichy government in an office that allocated paper to publishers (in the process operating a de facto book censorship system), but she was also a member of the French Resistance. Her husband, Robert Antelme, was deported to Buchenwald for his involvement in the Resistance, and barely survived the experience.

Marguerite Duras published her first novel, *Les Impudents* in 1943 using as pen name the surname of 'Duras'. She was the author of many novels, plays, films, interviews, essays and short fiction, including her best-selling, apparently autobiographical work, *L'Amant*, (1984), translated into English as *The Lover*, which describes her youthful affair with the Chinese man, described above. This text won her the Goncourt prize in 1984. The story of her adolescence also appears in three other forms: *The Sea Wall*, *Eden Cinema* and *The North China Lover*.

A film version of *The Lover*, produced by Claude Berri and directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud was released to great success in 1992. Set against the backdrop of French colonial Vietnam it reveals the intimacies and intricacies of a clandestine romance between a pubescent girl from a financially strapped French family and an older, wealthy Chinese man. Other major works also made into films include *Moderato Cantabile*, *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, and her play *India Song*, which Duras herself later directed as a film (1975). She was also the screenwriter of the 1959 French film, *Hiroshima mon amour* which was directed by Alain Resnais.

Duras's early novels were fairly conventional in form. However, with *Moderato Cantabile* she became more experimental, paring down her texts to give ever-increasing importance to what was not said. She was associated with the 'nouveau roman' French literary movement, although she did not belong definitively to any group. Her films are also experimental in form; most eschew synchronized sound, using voice over to allude to, rather than tell, a story; spoken text is juxtaposed with images whose relation to what is said may be more-or-less indirect. Marguerite Duras is at once a prolific and a parsimonious writer. She is the author of some fifteen novels, most of which are as brief as short stories and many of which she has converted into movies, plays, or other novels. The literary manner of these slender and oblique tales of heat, languor, and betrayal is simple. The sentences are short, dialogue is reduced to an exchange of obsessively

repetitive soliloquies, scenes are brief and surreal. She is frequently commended for her beautiful prose style. She is noted for her command of dialogue. Duras did not publish a manifesto of her ideas like so many representatives of the *nouveau roman* did, but her final work, *Ecrire* (1995, Writing), gave a brief account of her life and theory of writing: “The solitude of writing is a solitude without which writing could not be produced, or would crumble, drained bloodless by the search for something else to write.” (*Writing*, tr.by Mark Polizzotti, 1998). Despite her success as a writer, Duras's adult life was marked by personal challenges, including a recurring struggle with alcoholism. She died of throat cancer in Paris, aged 81.

Principal works: *Moderato Cantabile*, 1977 (*Moderato Cantabile*, 1958); *Hiroshima mon amour* 1961 (*Hiroshima mon amour*, 1960); *The Vice-Consul*, 1968 (*Le Vice-Consul*, 1965); *India Song*, 1976 (*India Song*, 1973); *The Lover (L' Amant*, 1984); *The Man Sitting in the Corridor*, 1980; *The War* (1985).

The girl in the felt hat

The girl in the felt hat is in the muddy light of the river, alone on the deck of the ferry, leaning on the rails. The hat makes the whole scene pink. It's the only colour. In the misty sun of the river, the sun of the hot season, the banks have faded away, the river seems to reach to the horizon. It flows quietly, without a sound, like the blood in the body. No wind but that in the water. The engine of the ferry's the only sound, a rickety old engine with burned-out rods. From time to time, in faint bursts, the sound of voices. And the barking of dogs, coming from all directions, from beyond the mist, from all the villages. The girl has known the ferry-man since she was a child. He smiles at her and asks after her mother, the headmistress, Madame la Directrice. He says he often sees her cross over at night, says she often goes to the concession in Cambodia. Her mother's well, says the girl. All around the ferry is the river, it's brimful, its moving waters sweep through, never mixing with, the stagnant waters of the rice-fields. The river's picked up all it's met with since Tonle Sap and the Cambodian forest. It carries everything along, straw-huts, forests, burned-out fires, dead birds, dead dogs, drowned tigers and buffaloes, drowned men, bait, islands of water hyacinths all stuck together. Everything flows towards the Pacific, no time for anything to sink, all is swept along by the deep and headlong storm of the inner current, suspended on the surface of the river's strength.[...]

Outside it's the end of the day, you can tell by the sound of the voices, the sound of more and more passers-by, more and more miscellaneous. It's a city of pleasure that reaches its peak at night. And night is beginning now, with the setting sun.

The bed is separated from the city by those slatted shutters, that cotton blind. There's nothing solid separating us from other people. They don't know of our existence. We glimpse something of theirs, the sum of their voices, of their movements, like the intermittent hoot of a siren, mournful, dim.

Whiffs of burnt sugar drift into the room, the smell of roasted peanuts, Chinese soups, roast meat, herbs, jasmine, dust, incense, charcoal fires, they carry fire about in baskets here, it's sold in the street, the smell of the city is the smell of the villages up-country, of the forest.

I suddenly saw him in a black bathrobe. He was sitting drinking a whiskey, smoking.

He said I'd been asleep, he'd taken a shower. I'd fallen asleep almost unawares. He'd switched on a lamp on a low table.

He's a man of habit - I suddenly think of him - he must come to this room quite often, he's a man who must make love a lot, a man who's afraid, he must make love a lot to fight against fear. I tell him I like the idea of his having many women, the idea of my being one of them, indistinguishable. We look at each other. He understands what I've just said. Our expressions are suddenly changed, false, caught in evil and death.

I tell him to come over to me, tell him he must possess me again. He comes over. He smells pleasantly of English cigarettes, expensive perfume, honey, his skin has taken on the scent of silk, the fruity smell of silk tussore, the smell of gold, he's desirable. I tell him of this desire. He tells me to wait awhile. Talks to me, says he knew right away, when we were crossing the river, that I'd be like this after my first lover, that I'd love love, he says he knows now I'll deceive him and deceive all the men I'm ever with. He says as for him he's been the cause of his own unhappiness. I'm pleased with all he's foretold, and say so. He becomes rough, desperate, he throws himself on me, devours the childish breasts, shouts, insults. I close my eyes on the intense pleasure. I think, he's used to it, this is his occupation in life, love, nothing else. His hands are expert, marvelous, perfect. I'm very lucky, obviously, it's as if it were his profession, as if unwittingly he knew exactly what to do and what to say. He calls me a whore, a slut, he says I'm his only love, and that's what he ought to say, and what you do say when you just let things say themselves, when you let the body alone, to seek and find and take what it likes, and then everything is right, and nothing is wasted, the waste is covered over and all is swept away in the torrent, in the force of desire.

The sound of the city is so near, so close, you can hear it brushing against the wood of the shutters. It sounds as if they're all going through the room. I caress his body amid the sound, the passers-by. The sea, the immensity, gathering, receding, returning.

I asked him to do it again and again. Do it to me. And he did, did it in the unctuousness of blood. And it really was unto death. It has been unto death.

He lit a cigarette and gave it to me. And very quietly, close to my lips, he talked to me.

And I talked to him too, very quietly.

Because he doesn't know for himself, I say it for him, in his stead. Because he doesn't know he carries within him supreme elegance, I say it for him.

Now evening comes. He tells me I'll remember this afternoon all my life, even when I've forgotten his face and name. I wonder if I'll remember the house. He says, take a good look at it. I do. I say it's like everywhere else. He says yes, yes, it's always the same.

I can still see the face, and I do remember the name. I see the whitewashed walls still, the canvas blind between us and the oven outside, the other door, arched, leading to the other room and to an open garden-the plants are dead from the heat-surrounded by blue balustrades like those at the big villa in Sadec with its tiers of terraces overlooking the Mekong.

[*The Lover*, tr Barbara Bray, Harper perennial, 2006, pp. 25-26; 45-48]

One day, having been ten years on the way, she arrives in Calcutta.

She will never again return to the north, writes Peter Morgan. She will follow the Mekong River upstream, meaning to travel north, but one morning she will turn back.

She will follow on tributary of the Mekong after another.

One night, she will find herself in a forest.

Another night, she will come to a river. She will follow this river too. It is a very long river. She wanders away from it. Another forest. She sets off again. Rivers. Roads. She passes through Mandalay, follows the Irrawaddy downstream, goes through Prome and Bassein, and comes to the Bay of Bengal.

One day she finds herself sitting on the ground, facing the sea.

She sets off again.

She reaches the north by way of the plains stretching away from the Chittagong and Arakan mountains.

One day, having been ten years on the way, she arrives in Calcutta.

She stays.

At the start, when she still had the freshness of youth, she was sometimes taken on board a junk. But the stench of her infected foot got steadily worse, and for weeks and months on end no one would take her. At this time, on account of her foot, men rarely wanted her. From time to time, however, there were men, foresters. Somewhere up in the mountains, she got treatment for her foot. She stayed for ten days or so in the forecourt of a medical centre. In spite of being fed and cared for, she ran away from there too. When the foot heals, things will be better. Later there was the forest. Madness in the forest. She always sleeps close to a village. But sometimes there are no villages, and then she sleeps in a gravel pit or under a tree. She dreams: she is her dead child, or a buffalo in the rice-field. Sometimes she is the rice-field itself, or a forest. She who, night after night, will swim in the poisonous waters of the Ganges and survive, dreams that she too is dead, drowned.

Many things combine to strip her of the last vestiges of sanity: hunger in Pursat, and other places since, of course, but also the sun, the lack of anyone to talk to, the oppressive buzzing of insects in the forest, the stillness of the clearings. She grows more and more confused, until at last, suddenly, all confusion ceases, because she no longer seeks to understand anything. What does she get to eat on this long, long journey? A little rice on the outskirts of a village, and sometimes, yes, the carcasses of birds killed by tigers and left lying on the ground to ripen, fruit and fish. She learnt to hunt for fish before she ever saw the Ganges.

How many children were born to her on the way? By the time she got to Calcutta, with its abundance of food in the overflowing dustbins of the Prince of Wales Hotel, and hot rice whenever she wanted it at a little garden gate she knew she was sterile.

Calcutta.

She says

It is ten years since she left home.

[*The Vice Consul*, tr by Eileen Ellenbogen, Pantheon Books, 1987] pp. 52-53

Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922 - 2008)

Alain Robbe-Grillet is one of the best-known post-war French novelists, the principal theoretician and spokesman of the 'nouveau roman', the most important school of French contemporary fiction that looks at reality in a new subjective way and has changed our conception of the novel.

His argument was straightforward - that the time had passed for novels to be about characters and individuals. The idea of telling a story, the novel as a narration, was no longer relevant, and any ambition to write a novel that would support a cause or put forward an argument had become inappropriate. The individual no longer played a part in the world, and the rise and fall of men and women or the destiny of families, belonged to a previous time. It was only possible to write like Stendhal if you were actually writing in 1830, and if a modern composer wanted to produce music exactly like that of Beethoven, he would find that no one wanted to listen to it. According to Robbe-Grillet what counted was creation. A novel (or a film) should show imagination at work. It should create a mental world not to be confused with the real world. A portrait of society that was related to reality, that sought to represent real life, was the preoccupation only of traditional novelists. When Robbe-Grillet described a seagull in his novels, he never sought to verify his portrait by looking at a real seagull. His imagined seagull had the quality of art. Realism was sterile. The real should be kept at a distance, and the artist be freed of it. In 'Jealousy' Robbe-Grillet's most famous and perhaps his most typical novel, he explores his principal pre-occupation, the meaning of reality. The novel is set on a tropical banana plantation and the action is seen through the eyes of a narrator who never appears in person, never speaks, and never acts. He is a point of observation, his personality only to be guessed at, watching every movement of the other two characters actions and events as they flash like moving pictures across the distorting screen of a jealous mind. The result is one of the most important and influential book of our time, a completely integrated masterpiece that has already become a classic.

The writing style of Robbe-Grillet has been described as "realist" or "phenomenological" (in the Heideggerian sense) or "a theory of pure surface." Methodical, geometric, and often repetitive descriptions of objects replace (though often reveal) the psychology and interiority of the character. The reader must slowly piece together the story and the emotional experience of jealousy, for example, in the repetition of descriptions, the attention to odd details, and the breaks in repetitions, a method that resembles the experience of psychoanalysis in which the deeper unconscious meanings are contained in the flow and disruptions of free associations. Timelines and plots are fractured, and the resulting novel resembles the literary equivalent of a cubist painting. Yet his work is ultimately characterized by its ability to mean many things to many different people. His novels are, in a sense, a game. He invites the reader to take part in a mind-testing exercise. The narrative is in search of its own coherence. The reader must understand why it takes the form that it does. This is particularly clear in the later novels, especially in those published in the late 1960s, such as *La Maison de Rendez-Vous* (1965) and *Projet Pour Une Revolution à New York* (1970). From 1966 to 1968, Robbe-Grillet was a member of the High Committee for the Defense and Expansion of French. In addition, he also led the Centre for Sociology of Literature at the Université Libre de Bruxelles from 1980 to 1988. From 1971 to 1995, he worked as a professor at New York University, lecturing on his own novels.

Robbe-Grillet was born in Brest, the son of an engineer, and began his working life as a biological scientist and botanical expert. After education in Brest and Paris, and some time at the National Institute of Statistics, he studied at the Institute of Colonial Fruits and Vegetables and worked in Morocco, French Guiana, Martinique and Guadeloupe from 1949 to 1951. He retained his botanical interest all his life, and liked nothing better than to leave a literary discussion and to visit a garden, where he would tell people the names of plants and flowers. In 1955 he became an editor with the publishing house Les Éditions de Minuit. But this and his emergence as a novelist did not exhaust his versatility. In 1962 when he wrote the script and the dialogue for Alain Resnais's film, *Last Year at Marienbad*— an international success at the time—Robbe-Grillet became part of cinema's nouvelle vague, new wave, as well as the nouveau roman. He then devoted his time equally to novel writing and film-making. He was elected a member of the Académie Française in 2004.

As a novelist and film-maker, he was always controversial and it was not always easy to understand the full implications of his work. In 1984 he published what he described as an intentionally traditional autobiography, entitled 'Le miroir qui revient', translated into English as 'Ghosts in the Mirror' by Jo Levy (1988).

Principal Works: A Regicide (1949); The Erasers (1900); The Voyeur (0000); Jealousy (1960); In the Labyrinth (1967); Djinn (1981); Towards a New Novel (1963); Ghosts in the Mirror (1984); Snapshots (1962).

In the labyrinth

Outside it is snowing. A soldier trudges through the streets of an unfamiliar city, carrying a mysterious package on a journey to a street he can't remember. He pauses for rest in an empty tavern, observing in detail the dust and the circular traces of a wine glass on the tabletop. On the wall is a picture of a bar scene. Separated from the raucous patrons are three forsaken soldiers-or is this a snapshot from the past, a fragment of memory? A child stands at a lamppost, silent and unhelpful. This is the same child that once led him to the tavern. It is the beginning of Occupation. He enters and is inspected by the patrons and bartender. The woman takes him home and gives him medical aid.

He'd asked for me, I arrived too late, a few minutes. They gave me the box on his behalf Then someone telephoned for him. I took the call. His father, I think, or not quite. They didn't have the same name. I wanted to know, what to do, with the box.'

'And he arranged to meet you.'

Yes; the man on the telephone arranged the meeting in his own town, this one, which the soldier was to try and reach, now that it was everyone for himself, with the army in full flight. The place of the rendezvous was not the man's home, for family reasons or something of that sort, but in the street, for all the cafes were closing one after another. The soldier found an army lorry transporting old uniforms which was going that way. But he had to do some of the journey on foot.

He did not know the town. He may have mistaken the spot. It was at the intersection of two perpendicular streets, near a lamp-post. He had not heard very well or had not remembered the names of the streets. He had relied on the topographical directions, following the prescribed route as best he could. When he thought he had

arrived he waited. The crossroads looked like the description given, but the name did not rally with the vague sound he had memorized. He waited a long time. He saw nobody.

He was sure of the day at any rate. As for the time, he had no watch. Perhaps he arrived too late. He searched the neighbouring streets. He waited again at another crossroads identical to the first. He wandered through the whole district. He went back several times to the first place, at least in so far as he was able to recognize it, that day and the following days. It was in any case too late by then.

‘A few minutes only. He had just died, without anyone noticing. I had stayed in a café with some N.C.O.s, some strangers. I didn’t know. They told me to wait for a friend, someone else, a conscript. He was at Reichenfels.’

‘Which one was at Reichenfels?’ the woman asks.

She leans a little further towards the bed. Her deep voice fills the whole room as she insists:

‘Who? What regiment was he in?’

‘I don’t know. Another man. The doctor was there too, with his grey ring, leaning against the counter. And the woman, the disabled man’s wife perhaps, serving wine.’

‘What are you talking about?’

Her face is close to his. Her pale eyes, darkly ringed, are made larger still by the widening of the eyelids.

‘Must go and fetch the box,’ he says. ‘It must still be at the barracks. I’d forgotten it. It’s on the bed, behind the bolster... .’

‘Now relax. Lie quiet. Don’t try and talk anymore.’

[*In the labyrinth* / Alain Robbe-Grillet, tr by Christine Brooke-Rose, London, Calder Publications, 2000]

Jealousy

In *Jealousy* there is no plot. The book is propelled along by the compulsive energy to observe, keeping to the surface of things, examining without emphasis. The scene takes place in a banana plantation somewhere in a tropical country. The action is seen through the eyes of a narrator who never appears in person, never speaks, and never acts. He is a point of observation, his personality only to be guessed at, watching every movement of the other two characters actions and events as they flash like moving pictures across the distorting screen of a jealous mind.

On the strength of his three years’ experience, Franck believes there are good drivers, even among the Negroes here. A ...is also of this opinion, of course.

She has kept out of the discussion about the comparative quality of the machines, but the question of the drivers provokes a rather long and categorical intervention on her part.

Besides, she might be right. In that case, Franck would have to be right too.

Both are now talking about the novel A ... is reading, whose action takes place in Africa. The heroine cannot bear the tropical climate (like Christiane). The heat actually seems to give her terrible attacks:

‘It’s all mental, things like that,’ Franck says.

He then makes a reference, obscure for anyone who has not even leafed through the book, to the husband’s behaviour. His sentence ends with ‘take apart’ or ‘take a part,’

without its being possible to be sure who or what is meant. Franck looks at A ..., who is looking at Franck. She gives him a quick smile that is quickly absorbed in the shadows. She has understood, since she knows the story.

No, her features have not moved. Their immobility is not so recent: the lips have remained set since her last words. The fugitive smile must have been a reflection of the lamp, or the shadow of a moth.

Besides, she was no longer facing Frank at that moment. She had just moved her head back and was looking straight ahead of her down the table, towards the bare wall where a blackish spot marks the place where a centipede was squashed last week, at the beginning of the month, perhaps the month before, of later.

Franck's face, with the light almost directly behind it, does not reveal the slightest expression.

The boy comes in to clear away the plates. A ... asks him, as usual to serve the coffee on the veranda.

Here the darkness is complete. No one talks any more. The sound of the crickets has stopped.

[*Jealousy* /Alain Robbe-Grillet, tr by Richard Howard, John Calder Publisher, 1960 ©
English tr , Grove Press Inc.,New York]

In *Jealousy* Robbe-Grillet plays on the double sense of the title word—the jealousy of an anonymous husband, who observes his wife, A . . and her friend whom she receives without his wife, Franck; and the jealousy with which he observes this colonial house. Following lines occur towards the end of the novel, where we see three or four scenes all jumbled up.

It is almost time for cocktails, and A ... has not waited any longer to call the boy, who appears at the corner of the house, carrying the tray with the two bottles, three large glasses, and the ice bucket. The route he follows over the flagstones is apparently parallel to the wall and converges with the line of shadow when he reaches the low, round table where he carefully puts down the tray, near the novel with the shiny paper jacket.

It is the latter which provides the subject for the conversation. Psychological complications aside, it is a standard narrative of colonial life in Africa, with a description of a tornado, a native revolt, and incidents at the club. A ... and Franck discuss it animatedly, while sipping the mixture of cognac and soda served by the mistress of the house in the three glasses.

The main character of the book is a customs official. This character is not an official but a high-ranking employee of an old commercial company. This company's business is going badly, rapidly turning shady. This company's business is going extremely well. The chief character—one learns—is dishonest. He is honest, he is trying to re-establish a situation compromised by his predecessor, who died in an automobile accident. But he had no predecessor, for the company was only recently formed; and it was not an accident. Besides, it happens to be a ship (a big white ship) and not a car at all.

Franck, at this point, begins to tell an anecdote about a truck of his with engine trouble. A ... , as politeness demands, asks for details to prove the attention she is paying to her guest, who soon stands up and takes his leave, in order to return to his own plantation, a little farther east.

A ... is leaning on the balustrade. On the other side of the valley, the sun rakes the isolated trees scattered over the brush above the cultivated zone. Their long shadows stripe the terrain with heavy parallel lines.

[Jealousy /Alain Robbe-Grillet, tr by Richard Howard, John Calder Publisher, 1960 ©
English tr , Grove Press Inc.,New York]

Yves Bonnefoy (June 1923)

The most important and perhaps, the greatest of living French poets today, Yves Bonnefoy is also a respected critic, scholar, and translator. He was born in Tours where his father was a railroad employee and his mother a teacher. After studying mathematics at the University of Poitiers he moved to Paris, where he started writing poetry.

His first book of poems, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve* (*Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve*) was published in 1953 and won him immediate recognition as a new, major voice. Three other books appeared at irregular intervals and were collected in one volume under the title of *Poèmes*. In 1987 he published *In the Shadow's Light* (*Ce qui fut sans lumière*) followed by *Début et fin de la neige* in 1991. His poems in *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve* showing slight trace of Surrealism explore the relation of poetry to life and contain the concept central to his work, that is, the poet's capacity to fully express the essence of being called by him 'presence'. Most of these poems focus on the death, decomposition, and rebirth of the enigmatic female figure, Douve. In his next collection, *Yesterday's Desert Dominion* (*Hier régnaient deserts*, 1958), Bonnefoy expresses dissatisfaction with his previous poetry. Utilizing stark imagery of an iron bridge or black clay, he once again explores thematic concerns of death, survival, and redemption. In *Words in Stone* (*Pierre écrite*, 1958) he turns to the fertile imagery of a garden to express ideas about 'presence' and to impart a fuller and more accurate perception of reality. Commentators assert that this rich garden imagery and the more optimistic tone of the poetry in this collection can be traced to his experiences with his wife at his country home at Valsaintes in Provence. In the *Shadow's light* (*Dans le leurre du Seuil*, 1975), his next major collection, he uses the same affirmative vision and garden imagery to describe the journey through stages of self-doubt, revision, regeneration, and affirmation. His 1987 collection *In the Shadow's Light* (*Ce qui fut sans lumière*) touches on the themes of abandonment, love, and mortality. His poems in this collection also underscore another of his recurring thematic concern, the connection between art and poetry.

Bonnefoy has frequently discussed in his critical and poetic work the unique ability of art and the act of painting to express 'presence'. He has explored the visual arts as well as literature in *Alberto Giacometti: A Biography of His Work* (*Alberto Giacometti: biographie d'une œuvre*, 1991), and in *Goya, the Black Paintings* (*Goya, les peintures noires*, 2006). He has compiled the *Dictionary of Mythologies and Religions of Traditional Societies and the Ancient World* (*Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés traditionnelles et du monde antique*, 1981). He has also translated many of Shakespeare's most significant works, including *Julius Caesar* (1960), *Hamlet* (1962), *King Lear* (1965), and *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), and works by John Donne and William Butler Yeats. He analyzed the complexities of the translation process in *Theatre and Poetry: Shakespeare and Yeats* (*Théâtre et poésie: Shakespeare et Yeats*, 1998) and *Beneath the Horizon of Language* (*Sous l'horizon du langage*, 2002). He has taught at numerous universities in France and the United States and held the chair in comparative poetics at the Collège de France between 1981 and 1994. Bonnefoy has been awarded a number of prizes, most notably the Prix des Critiques in 1971, the Balzan Prize (for Art History and Art Criticism in Europe), the Prix mondial Cino Del Duca in 1995 and Franz Kafka Prize in 2007. His name is regularly mentioned among the prime favourites for the

Nobel Prize. In 2011, he received the Griffin Lifetime Recognition Award, presented by the trustees of the Griffin Poetry Prize.

Principal Works: *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve* (1968; *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve*, 1953); *New and Selected Poems* ed by John Naughton and Anthony Rudolf University of Chicago, 1995; *Words in Stone* (*Pierre écrite*, 1965); *In the Lure of the Threshold* (*Dans le leurre du Seuil*, 1975); *The Beginning and the End of the Snow* (*Debut et fin de la neige*, 1991); *The Wandering Life* (*La Vie Errante*, 1993); a selection from his essays under the title, *The Lure and the Truth of Painting*, 1993).

Poems:

TRUE NAME

I will name wilderness the castle which you were,
Night your voice, absence your face,
And when you fall back into sterile earth
I will name nothingness the lightening which bore you.

Dying is a country which you loved. I approach
Along your dark ways, but eternally.
I destroy your desire, your form, your trace in me,
I am your enemy who shows no mercy.

I will name you war and I will take
With you the liberties of war, and I will have
In my hands your dark-crossed face,
In my heart this land which the storm lights.

[tr by Galway Kinnell From, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, Ohio University Press, 1968 © Galway Kinnell & Ohio University Press]

A VOICE

Hear me come to life again in these forests
Under the leaves of memory
Where green I pass by,
Burnt smile of ancient plants upon the earth,
Day's charry blood.

Hear me come to life again,
Lead you
Into the garden of presence,
Abandoned at evening, overcast by shadows,
Where, in this new love, you may find a dwelling.

Yesterday as desert reigned
I was wild leaf and free to die,
But time was ripening, black moan in the valleys,
The wound of water in the stones of day.

[tr. by Anthony Rudolf. From *Yves Bonnefoy: New and Selected Poems* ed by John Naughton and Anthony Rudolf, The University of Chicago Press, 1995 © University of Chicago]

A VOICE

We grew old, he the leaves and I the pool,
He a patch of sunlight and I the depths,
He death and I the wisdom that chose life.

I consented that time would show us in the dark
His fawn's face with its unmocking laugh,
I was glad that the dark-bearing wind would rise

And that dying was but a troubling
Of the fathomless water where the ivy drank.
I was glad, I stood in the eternal dream.

[tr. by Richard Pevear and Emily Grosholz. From *Yves Bonnefoy: New and Selected Poems* ed by John Naughton and Anthony Rudolf, The University of Chicago Press, 1995 © University of Chicago]

I cry, Look,

I cry, Look,
The almond tree
Is covered suddenly with thousands of flowers.
Here
The gnarled, the forever earthly, the torn,
Reach port. I the night
I consent. I the almond tree
I enter the bridal chamber, brightly adorned.

And look hands
From higher in the sky
Take,
Like passing rain, from every flower
The imperishable part of life.

They split open the kernel
Gently. They touch, they lift out the seeds.

They carry them off, beginnings already
Of other worlds,
In the forever of the ephemeral flower.

[tr. by John Naughton. From *Yves Bonnefoy: New and Selected Poems* ed by John Naughton and Anthony Rudolf, The University of Chicago Press, 1995 © University of Chicago]

PLACE OF THE SALAMANDER

The startled salamander freezes
And feigns death.
This is the first step of consciousness among the stones,
The purest myth,
A great fire passed through, which is spirit.

The salamander was halfway up
The wall, in the light from our windows.
Its gaze was merely a stone,
But I saw its heart beat eternal.

O my accomplice and my thought, allegory
Of all that is pure,
How I love that which clasps to its silence thus
The single force of joy.

How I love that which gives itself to the stars by the inert
Mass of its whole body,
How I love that which awaits the hour of its victory
And holds its breath and clings to the ground.

[tr by Galway Kinnell From, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, Ohio University Press, 1968 © Galway Kinnell & Ohio University Press]

A VOICE

I have carried in you my word like a flame,
A darkness more brutal than winds are to flames.
And nothing has quelled me in such deep struggle,
No bad star, no straying from the path.
In this way have I lived, yet strong with a flame.
What have I known but its bending,

And the night, which I know will come when the windows
Fall again, cur from the fate of its yearning?
I am only word, acting against absence.
Absence will destroy my endless returning.
Yes, soon it will perish for having been but word,
A fatal task, a futile crowning.

[tr by Paul Auster From *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry*,
ed by Paul Auster, Vintage Books, 1984 © Paul Auster]

QUIET ...

Quiet, for we too are of the night,
The most shapeless, gravitating stumps,
Cleansed matter, returning to the old
Ideas, resounding where the fire falters,
The ravaged face of a blind presence
With all hunted fire serving a home,
And the word, alive, but infinitely dead
When at last the light is made nocturnal wind.

[tr by Paul Auster From *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry*,
ed by Paul Auster, Vintage Books, 1984 © Paul Auster]

WHAT WORD SPRINGS ...

What word springs up beside me,
What cry is forming on an absent mouth?
I hardly hear this cry against me,
I hardly feel that breath saying my name.

And yet the cry comes from myself,
I am walled up in my extravagance,
What divine or what strange voice
Would have agreed to live in my silence.

[tr by Galway Kinnell From, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, Ohio University
Press, 1968 © Galway Kinnell & Ohio University Press]

THE SAME VOICE, STILL

I am like the bread you will break,
Like the fire you will make, like the pure water
That will go with you on the earth of the dead.

Like the foam
That ripened the harbor and the light for you.

Like the evening bird that blots the shores.
Like the colder, brusquer, sudden evening wind.

[tr by Paul Auster From *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry*,
ed by Paul Auster, Vintage Books, 1984 © Paul Auster]

... forgetfulness

at the centre
where

stone
an instant of water
has been gripped.

... and motionless

after the centre.

... the heart of the mountain will be stone

Or water.

[tr by Hoyt Rogers, in *Poetry 2000* rep. in *Yale Anthology of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Mary Ann Caws, Yale University Press, 2004, p. 375 © Hoyt Rogers]

The Light of the Blade

This glacier that creaks

to utter
the cool of the earth
without breathing.

=====

Like paper flat against this earth,
or a bit above the earth,
like a blade I stop breathing. At night I return to
myself, for a moment, to utter it.

In place of the tree.

In the light of the stones.

I saw all along the day,
the dark blue rafter that bars the day rise up to reach us in the motionless light

=====

I walk in the gleams of dust
that mirror us.
In the short blue
breath
of the clattering air

far from breath

the air trembles and clatters.

[tr Paul Auster Yale Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry ed. Paul Auster, 1984, p. 465 © Paul Auster]

Postponement

Alone I inhabit this white
place

where nothing thwarts the wind
if we are what cried
and the cry

that opens this sky
of ice
this white ceiling
we have loved under this ceiling

=====

I almost see,
in the whiteness of the storm, what will come to pass without me.
I do not diminish. I breathe at the foot of arid light.

=====

If there were not the force
of dust
that severs arms and legs

but only the white
that spills

I would hold the sky

deep rut
with which we turn

and which knocks against the air.

=====

In this light that sun
abandons, all heat resolved in fire, I ran, nailed to the light of roads, till wind
buckles under.

=====

Where I rend the air,

you have come through with me. I find you in the heat.

In the air, even farther, which uproots itself, with a single jolt, away from the
heat.

The dust lights up. The mountain,
frail lamp, appears.

[tr Paul Auster, *Yale Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Paul Auster, Vintage Books, 1984 p. 461© Paul Auster]



Michel Tournier (1924)

A multifaceted and prolific author, Michel Tournier was born in Paris to parents who met at the Sorbonne while studying German. His own early years too were deeply marked by traditional German culture, music, and Catholicism. He was educated at St.-Germain-en Laye and at a large number of private schools, mostly religious. After completing his undergraduate studies he continued working towards a higher degree in philosophy with the plan to become a teacher of philosophy, but failed to pass the *aggregation*. That turned him to literature. Before authoring a book of his own he worked for about twenty years writing and producing for the French radio and television, as chief editor with the publishing firm, Plon, as press attaché at the Radio Europe I, and hosting the television series on photography, *La Chambre Noir*.

Michel Tournier published his first novel, *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique* (*Friday, or the Other Island*) in 1967. It won him the Grand Prix de Roman and considerable renown in the literary circles. Three years later came *Le Roi des aulnes* (1970, *The Ogre*). It was awarded the Prix Goncourt and became an international bestseller. Tournier often borrows his ideas from the folklore, fairy tales, literary masterpieces, and the Bible and then rewrites and re-interprets them to bring metaphysics to children's literature. *Friday, or the Other Island* is an ingenious reworking of the classic Robinson Crusoe theme. *The Ogre* or the *Elf King* was inspired by Goethe's famous ballad, 'Der Erlkönig' (1782), and Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959). Tournier brought together the myths of St Christopher and the Erl King, set against the background of East Prussia during the Third Reich. In the novel the ogre, Abel Tiffauges, is a monstrous and innocent character, a French prisoner in Germany who assists the Nazis by searching for boys for a Nazi military camp. Tiffauges is obsessed by his conviction that everything in the world is a sign. In the end he perishes while rescuing a little Jewish boy.

One of the most popular novelists in France, Tournier writes provocative fiction that blends myth and symbolism with realistic depictions of character and setting. No subject or theme is a taboo for him. The first story in his short story collection, *The Fetishist and Other Stories* (*Le Coq de bruyère*) he rewrites Genesis where God is portrayed as a narcissist and Adam, as bisexual before God creates Eve, his female half. Noted as one of the first major French novelists to avoid stylistic complexity, an important characteristic of post-war *nouveau roman*, Tournier creates classics inventively adapting old myths and legends to modern circumstances. Sometimes his parodic and disturbing works can be read as comments upon the contemporary world.

Tournier was elected member of the Académie Goncourt in 1972. His literary autobiography, *Le Vent Paraclét* (1977) was translated and published as *The Wind Spirit* (Beacon Press, 1988). He was nominated for the Man Booker International Prize in 2007.

Principal works: *Friday*, 1971 (*Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique*); *The Erl-King* aka *The Ogre*, 1972 (*Le Roi des Aulnes*); *Gemini*, 1975 (*Les Météores*); *Friday and Robinson*, 1977 (*Vendredi ou la Vie sauvage*); *The Fetishist and Other Stories*, 1978 (*Le Coq de bruyère*); *The Four Wise Men*, 1980 (*Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar*); *The Golden Droplet*, 1986 (*La Goutte d'or*); *The Midnight Love Feast*, 1989 (*Le Medianoche amoureux*); *The Mirror of Ideas*, 1994 (*Le Miroir des idées*).

The Ogre (Le Roi des Aulnes)

Abel Tiffauge, formerly a simple garage owner has become a recruiting officer of young boys into Hitler's army. He maintains a record of his reflections on children and war which he calls his 'écrits sinistres'. A passage from the same:

The war and the child

It was during the month of July that the *Jungmannen*¹ were given the magnificent toy they had been promised months ago: an anti-aircraft battery made up of four heavy coupled machine guns, four light 200-mm. rapid-firing pieces (two to three hundred rounds a minute), a 3.7, and three 10.5s for long-range firing. There was also a sound detector, but they still had to wait for the last item, the searchlight battery. The "Flak" was camouflaged in a pinewood on a height overlooking the village of Drosselwalde, two miles from the citadel, from which it could cover the road from Arys, which would be the route taken by an invader from the east. The battery was commanded by two training officers and serviced by a roster of four columns taken from different groups of boys.

Every so often from then on, training shots would be fired filling the sky with little white clouds, their triumphant thunder constantly recalling the nearness of the war. Sometimes shrapnel could be heard pattering down on the roofs of the castle. Tiffauges regularly took supplies to the columns on duty. He would find the boys either in shorts, dotted about the woods sunbathing, or else, wearing helmets with felt earflaps to muffle the noise, busy about huge howling guns. They had never had such fun and were only sorry no enemy aircraft put in an appearance to act as live target.

S.W. Shocking though it may appear at first, the fundamental affinity that exists between war and boys cannot be denied. The spectacle of the *jungmannen* serving and feeding the monstrous idols of steel and fire that raise their monumental jaws amidst the trees is irrefutable proof of this affinity. And boys always insist on playing with toy guns, swords, cannon and tanks, or tin soldiers and various kinds of killer's outfits. It might be said they are only imitating their elders, but I wonder whether the truth isn't really the opposite, for in fact grownups make war less often than they go to the factory or office. I wonder whether wars don't break out with the sole object of allowing adults to "act like children," to regress with a sigh of relief to the age of tin soldiers and dressing up. When he's called up, the adult, weary of all his burdens as head of department, husband and father, puts off all his duties and virtues and sets about amusing himself freely and carelessly with friends of his own age, manipulating cannon, tanks and airplanes which are only enlarged copies of the toys of his childhood.

The trouble is that the regression doesn't work. The adult takes up the toys of the child, but he no longer possesses the instinct for play and storytelling that gave them their original meaning. In his great clumsy hands they take on the monstrous proportions of so many giant tumors, devouring flesh and blood. The death-dealing seriousness of the adult has replaced the playful gravity of the child, of which it is a caricature or inverted image.

But what's going to happen now, when children are given these hypertrophied toys conceived by a morbid imagination and brought into being by the activity of madmen? We see the answer in what is happening on the heights of Drosselwalde, in the Napola at Kaltenborn, and all over the Reich: the phoria that expresses the ideal relationship between the adult and the child is being established in monstrous fashion

between the child and the grown-up toy. The toy is no longer carried by the child-drawn, pushed, tilted, rolled, as an imaginative object in destructive little hands. Now it is the child who is carried by the toy-swallowed up in a tank, shut in the cockpit of a plane, imprisoned in the swiveling turret of a machine gun.

1. Youngman in German

[*The Ogre (Le Roi des aulnes)* translated by Barbara Bray, John Hopkins paperback edition, 1997 pp. 290-292]

Climbing up ...

In *Friday* Tournier, in a way, inverses the legend of Robinson Crusoe by turning his relationship with Friday inside out: after Robinson fails in his efforts to subjugate Friday, it is Friday who takes charge of the game. The passage quoted below shows how climbing up to the summit of the tree, Robinson, the 'civilized' man comes in contact with the higher and more profound aspect of nature. Gradually he takes part in the life and function of this forest giant, becoming one with this 'grand ship' assimilating his respiration with that of the tree. And, instead of feeling dizzy and anguished as in the tower in York he feels at peace, and supreme ecstasy with the sun giving him warmth and fresh lightness with its rays.

On this particular day, however, finding himself at the foot of the tallest of the trees and gazing up through its branches, he calculated that it must be at least 150 feet in height. The brightness of the morning, after several days' rain, heralded the return of fine weather. The forest was steaming like an animal and the splash of invisible rivulets in the depths of its mossy undergrowth set up an unaccustomed rippling sound. Always observant of changes in himself, Robinson had noted during the past weeks that he now impatiently awaited the rising of the sun, and that the appearance of its first rays had for him the solemnity of a festival which, though it happened daily, each time brought with it a feeling of intense novelty.

Gripping the lowest branch of the araucaria, he hoisted himself onto it, first kneeling and then standing upright, with the half-formed thought that by climbing to the top he would witness the sunrise a few minutes earlier. He continued to climb, doing so without difficulty and with a growing sense of being the prisoner, and in some sort a part, of a vast and infinitely ramified structure flowing upward through the trunk with its reddish bark and spreading in countless large and lesser branches, twigs, and shoots to reach the nerve ends of leaves, triangular, pointed; scaly, and rolled in spirals around the twigs. He was taking part in the tree's most unique accomplishment, which is to embrace the air with its thousand branches, to caress it with its million fingers. As he went higher he became conscious of the swaying of the giant architectural complex through which the wind blew with the sound of an organ. He was near the top when suddenly he emerged into open space. The trunk, probably struck by lightning, was split and stripped at this point over a length of six feet. Robinson lowered his eyes in an attempt to overcome his dizziness. Beneath his feet, successive levels of branches seemed to spin away from him into terrifying depths. A nightmare of his childhood returned to him. He had resolved to climb to the top of the belfry tower of York Cathedral. After a long climb up the narrow circular stairway, built around a sculptured stone pillar, he had emerged suddenly from

that protective darkness into the open sky, surrounded by space that became even more dizzying when he spied the far-off silhouette of the town's roof-tops. He had had to come down wrapped up like a bundle, with his jacket pulled over his head... .

He shut his eyes and pressed his cheek against the trunk of the tree, his only solid support. The laboring of that living mast, with its great burden of branches carding the wind, was like a deep hum broken every now and then by a long moaning sound. He listened to this soothing music for a long time, and by degrees his terror left him. He dreamed. The tree became a great ship anchored to the earth and struggling under full sail to break away from its mooring. A warm touch fell upon his cheek and a red glow suffused his eyelids. He knew the sun had risen, but still waited a little before opening his eyes. He was absorbed in the strange new happiness rising within him, the warmth that enveloped him. After the paleness of dawn, the sun's savage light seemed to fecundate the world. He half-opened his eyes, seeing particles of brilliance dart beneath his lids. A warm breath set the leaves stirring. "The leaf is the lung of the tree which is itself a lung, and the wind is its breathing," Robinson thought. He pictured his own lungs growing outside himself like a blossoming of purple-tinted flesh, living polyparies of coral with pink membranes, sponges of human tissue... . He would flaunt that intricate efflorescence, that bouquet of fleshly flowers, in the wide air, while a tide of purple ecstasy flowed into his body on a stream of crimson blood

Across the stream a great bird shaped like a lozenge, the color of burnished gold, was dancing in the breeze. Friday had kept his mysterious promise to make Andoar fly.

[*Friday (Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique)* tr by Norman Denny, John Hopkins University Press, 1969 © 1969 William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. and Doubleday & Co., Inc.] pp. 192-194.

“I’m going to photograph you.”

“Hey, boy! Don’t move too much, I’m going to photograph you.”

“You might at least ask his opinion,” the man muttered. “Some of these people don’t like it.”

“You’re a fine one to say that!” the woman remarked.

Idris listened carefully and mustered up the oddments of French he possessed to try to understand what they were saying. It was obvious that he was the subject of an argument between the man and the woman, but that it was the woman who was interested in him, and this was what disturbed him the most.

“Don’t delude yourself,” said the man derisively, “he’s much more interested in the car than he is in you!”

It was true that the car was impressive; squat, white with dust, bristling with cans, spare wheels, jacks, fire extinguishers, tow ropes, shovels, perforated metal sheets for freeing it from the sand. As a connoisseur of the desert, Idris admired this long-distance cruising vehicle which was not without some remote affinity with a sumpter camel. Men who possessed such prestigious implements could only be seigneurs.

“I’m not deluding myself,” said the woman, “but I don’t think he sees any difference. The car and us- it’s the same foreign world. Both you and I are emanations of the Land-Rover.”

She had wound her camera several times and was once again focusing it on Idris and his sheep. She was smiling now as she looked at him, and without her camera she finally seemed to be seeing him normally.

“Give me the photo.”

These were the first words that Idris uttered.

“He wants his photo; only natural, isn’t it?” the man put in. “We should always bring a Polaroid camera, you know. The poor kid will be disappointed.”

The woman had put the camera back in the car. She brought out a map covered with cellophane. She went up to Idris.

“I can’t possibly, young man. I have to get the film developed and printed. We’ll send you your photo. Look. This is where we are, see? Tabelbala. The green patch is your oasis. Tomorrow Beni-Abbès. Then Bèchar. Then Oran. There, the car ferry. Twenty-five hours on the sea. Marseille. Eight hundred kilometers on the autoroute. Paris. And from there, we’ll send you your photo. What’s your name?”

After the Land-Rover had disappeared, raising a cloud of dust, Idris was no longer quite the same man. There was only one photograph in Tabelbala. In the first place because the oasis dwellers are too poor to bother about photography. And next because the image is feared by these Muslim Berbers. They attribute a maleficent power to it; they believe that it in some way materializes the evil eye. And yet this unique photo contributed to the prestige of Lance Sergeant Mogadem ben Abderrahman, Idris’s uncle, who had returned from the Italian campaign with a mention in dispatches and the Croix de Guerre. Mention, Croix de Guerre, and photo were displayed on the wall of his gourbi, and in the cracked and rather fuzzy image he could be seen, bursting with youth and high spirits, in the company of two facetious-looking comrades. Up till then there had been only one photo in Tabelbala, thought Idris; from now on there will be another-mine.

[*The Golden Droplet* tr by Barbara Wright, New York, Doubleday, 1987 © Doubleday]

Philippe Jaccottet (1925)

Philippe Jaccottet is a Swiss poet who has lived in the south of France since the 1950s. Born in Switzerland Philippe Jaccottet is one of the most prominent figures of the immediate post-war generation of French poets. He has lived in France since 1953, working as a translator and freelance writer. In addition to poetry he has also published prose meditations, notebooks, numerous essays on poets and a study of Rilke. He is a noted translator of Homer, Holderlin, Musil, Rilke, Ungaretti, Thomas Mann, Montale, Gongora and Mandelstam.

His three published notebooks form a series called *La Semailson* (“Sowing”)—taking notes “sows seeds” that in turn sprout into his poems and prose texts. Perusing these *Carnets*, one is struck by the way he seeks to avoid all superficial intellectuality. His self-admonishments are sharp. “What about all these unlimping, unfractured, unstuttering, unasthmatic sentences?” he asks in his latest collection of verse and prose, *Et, néanmoins* (Gallimard, 2001). “They seem to weave themselves together, all by themselves, in a way that prevents me from seeing anything else.” In his poems he focuses like Rilke on the simplest of “natural things”. Fluctuations of sensibility sometimes brings him to the brink of the ineffable. Studying the colors of dusk, he concludes in a significant parentheses: “(Never will I be able to tell you what I glimpsed, like a sentence that has been traced on a pane of glass, then too quickly wiped away.)” Despite this acknowledgment of language’s impotence, he admits that the urge to write piques him anew every time that he is filled “with wonder, amazement, perplexity, not to mention gratitude.” These positive emotions coexist in his writing with an underlying pessimism and grim meditations on death.

Philippe Jaccottet has won many distinguished prizes for his work both in France and elsewhere including the Grand Prix de Poesie de Paris in 1986, the Grand Prix National de Traduction in 1987, and the Prix Petrarque in 1988.

Principal works: *Requiem* (1947); *L’ Effraie et autre poesies* (1953); *L’ Ignorant* (1958); *Airs* (1967); *Lecons* (1969); *Paysages avec figures absentes* (1970); *A la lumiere d’ hiver* (1977); *Pensees sous les nuages* (1983); *La Semailson* (1983); *A travers un verger* (1984); *Cahier de verdure* (1990).

In English: *Breathings* tr by Cid Corman (1974); *Seedtime* tr by Michael Hamburger (1977); *Learning...*, Delos Press (1966-67); *Selected Poems of Jaccottet* tr by Derek Mahon (1988); *Philippe Jaccottet: Under Clouded Skies & Beauregard* tr by Mark Treharne (1994).

Poems

Don’t worry, it will come

Don’t worry, it will come! You are drawing near,
you are getting warm! For the word which is to end
the poem more than the first word will be near
your death which won’t be stopping along the way.

Don’t think that it will doze off under the branches

or pause to catch its breath while you are writing.
Even when you drink of the mouth which quenches
the deepest thirst, that soft mouth with its sweet

cries, even when you so make fast the knot
of your four arms that you can move no more
caught in the smouldering darkness of your hair,

it's coming, God knows how, towards both of you,
far off or here already, but don't worry,
it's coming: from one word to the next you age.

[tr by Donald Justice, online Google book]

After so many years

After so many years
really such meager knowledge,
faintheart?

not even the roughest obolus to pay
the ferryman, if he comes?

--I have made a store of grass and hurrying water,
I have kept myself light
so the boat will ride higher.

[tr by Mark Traherne, From *Philippe Jaccottet: Under Clouded Skies & Beauregard* tr by
Mark Treharne & David Constantine, French-English Bilingual edition, Bloodaxe Books,
Ltd. 1994 © Mark Treharne, 1994]

Daybreak

Night is not what we think, the reverse of fire,
sun-death and the negation of the light,
but a device to discover
whatever remains invisible in daylight.

The zealous servants of the visible
having withdrawn, the violet has made
its home now in the deepening shade,
the final refuge of the exiled soul.

Like the oil asleep in the lamp which suddenly'
beneath a moon swept by a flight of birds,

transforms itself to a glow and breathes,
you murmur and burn; and no human voice
can convey the quality of it.

You are the light rising on cold rivers,
the lark sprung from the field;
the very earth is laid bare and elated.

I speak to you, daybreak, although what I say
may weigh no more than a bird in flight.

Light is fugitive, embrace it
and it becomes a shade; but one
more time, as if it had heard me pray,
the sun rises and sends forth its first light.

[tr by Derek Mahon From, *Philippe Jaccottet: Selected Poems with translations* by Derek Mahon Wake Forest University Press, 1988 p. 35 © Derek Mahon 1988]

Ignorance

The older I grow the more ignorant I become,
the longer I live, the less I possess or control.
All I have is a little space, snow-dark
or glittering, never inhabited.
Where is the giver, the guard, the guardian?
I sit in my room and am silent. Silence
arrives like a servant to tidy things up
while I wait for the lies to disperse.
and what remains to this dying man
that so well prevents him from dying?
What does he find to say to the four walls?
I hear him talking still, and his words
come in with the dawn, imperfectly understood:

‘Love, like fire, can only reveal its brightness
on the failure and the beauty of burnt wood.’

[tr Derek Mahon From, *Philippe Jaccottet: Selected Poems with translations* by Derek Mahon Wake Forest University Press, 1988 p. 41 © Derek Mahon 1988]

I want Only to Remove

I want only to remove
whatever blocks the light,
only to clear space
for the despised gentleness.

I listen to old men,
their unanimous murmur,
and study patience at their feet.

They have no worse beginner.

[tr Derek Mahon From, *Philippe Jaccottet: Selected Poems with translations* by Derek Mahon Wake Forest University Press, 1988 © Derek Mahon 1988]

Michel Butor (1926)

French novelist and essayist born in Mons-en-Baroeul, France, to Emile and Anne Butor. He received both his undergraduate and graduate degrees in philosophy from the Sorbonne. Butor has taught French in Egypt and England and taught philosophy and literature at several universities in France and abroad.

Butor belongs to the group considered leading representative of *nouveau roman*, along with Alain Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon, Marguerite Duras, and Nathalie Sarraute. Perhaps the most experimental, most ingenious, and imaginative practitioner of the *nouveau roman* Butor appears to be a French version of that American phenomenon, the professor-novelist. writer of the New Novel movement and has also published books about dreams, several collections of poetry, and works on art, culture, and many other topics. As a writer, Butor has focused on novels and poetry and has been greatly influenced by Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, and James Joyce. He has also translated the work of other writers into French. Butor received the **Prix Renaudot** for *La Modification* (1957; *A Change of Heart*) in 1957. Other awards include, the **Prix Apollo**, the **Prix Feneon**, and the **Mallarme prize** in 2006.

Butor came to prominence in the 1950s with the novels *Passage de Milan* (1954) and *La Modification* (1957). Like Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, Simon and other writers of the new novelists, he refused to follow traditional concepts of plot and characterization. Instead of describing reality these writers have questioned our usual way of seeing reality. Exploring alternative alternative ways of representing "reality", Butor has tried to replace two-dimensional narrative with a three-dimensional spatial one. In *Passing Time (L'Emploi du temps)* the protagonist, Jacques Revel, tries to find sense of the streets and buildings of a strange city, but feels that he is imprisoned within a loom. He has come to work in an English town called Bleston. He wanders disorientated along rows of houses or passes on a bus the building he left just half an hour ago. "...little by little I came to feel that my bad luck was due to some malevolent will and that all these offers were so many lies, and I had to struggle increasingly against the impression that all my efforts were foredoomed to failure, that I was going round and round a blank wall, that the doors were sham doors and the people dummies, the whole thing a hoax."

Butor's best-known novel, *La Modification (Second Thoughts)*, which won the prestigious **Prix Renaudot**, is a story inside story, told throughout in the second person plural. Its plot is quite straightforward: a middle-aged man takes the train in Paris to visit his lover, Cécile whom he intends telling that he has decided to leave his wife, and that he is ready to live together with her in Paris. During the train journey from Paris to Rome, his mind changes and he decides not to leave his wife for his mistress. Instead, he elects to write an account of it which becomes, *La Modification*. Considered by many to be his greatest book, Michael Butor's *Mobile* is the result of the six months the author spent traveling across America. The text is composed from a wide range of materials, including city names, road signs, advertising slogans, catalog listings, newspaper accounts of the 1893 World's Fair, Native American writings, and the history of the Freedom land theme park. Butor weaves bits and pieces from these diverse sources into a collage resembling an abstract painting which by turns is both humorous and disturbing.

Journalists and critics associate his novels with the *nouveau roman*, but Butor himself has long resisted that association. The main point of similarity is a very general one. Like exponents of the *nouveau roman*, he is experimental in his works. In the

summer of 1991 he retired from his post at the University of Geneva after a long career of lecturing, during which he was never allowed to talk about his own work. Authorial must never, the university told him, disrupt professorial. Just before he retired, though, his colleagues pressed him to do a Butor on Butor, which he did, and the result was *Improvisations on Butor: Transformation of Writing*. One should note in passing that Butor did not write a novel since 1960, though he had plenty to say about the four he produced before then: *Passage de Milan*, *L'Emploi du temps*, *La Modification*, and *Degrés*. Butor is a designer, a hunter for schematics, a man who does nothing without first creating a blueprint. He adores grids, timetables, schedules, almost always working some such into the skeleton of his book. He says on his fourth novel, *Degrés*: "The whole book centers on one hour in a French eleventh-grade class. In the second week of the school year, Tuesday, October 12, 1954, a teacher will tell his students, aged fifteen or sixteen, about Christopher Columbus's first crossing. Around this fundamental class will cluster the preceding, following, and concurrent classes. The whole system will thus appear, little by little, playing on the resonances existing in this network."

Butor's career is loosely divided into three stages. The novels of the first stage confront traditional notions of character in modern narratives and work to diminish the typical importance of the protagonist: *Passing Time* (*L'Emploi du temps*, 1956) employs first-person narration and is structured as a memoir of one year in the life of a man named Jacques Revel. The book alternates between Revel's reminiscences of his early days in Bleston, England, his present life, and finally his revelations about what he has discovered upon rereading what he has already written in the journal; *La Modification* takes place during a train trip from Paris to Rome. The main character, Léon Delmont is travelling to Rome to tell his mistress that he has found a job for her in Paris and he hopes they can live together after he leaves his wife. During the trip, he has second thoughts about his decision lapsing between daydreams and remembrances, and regret. The story ends with Delmont deciding that he wants to give his marriage a second chance. Butor uses second-person narration in the work, with Delmont constantly referring to himself as *vous* ("you"). Next novel *Degrees* (*Degrés* 1960) concerns the various degrees of relationships in a Parisian school among thirty-one students and their eleven professors. The narrative is preoccupied with an examination of the concept of "degrees," which can refer to the students' academic degrees, degrees of longitude and latitude, or varying degrees of sobriety. The dominant plot revolves around a teacher, Pierre Vernier, who decides to write a complete account of one hour at the school for the benefit of his nephew, Pierre Eller, who happens to be a student in his class.

In the second stage of Butor's writing, his focus shifts to creating poetry and novels in which the individual is fully integrated into his environment. The works are characterized by a chaotic element both in the writing and in the lack of focus on any plot or person. This radical break in form can be seen in *Mobile* (1962), *Niagara* (*6810000 Litres d'eau par seconde* 1965), *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Ape* (*Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*, 1967). The last one is a parody of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in which Butor fantasizes about a trip to the castle of Harburg in his youth. The castle is filled with an assortment of texts on alchemy and magic. As Butor reviews the books, he begins contemplating about his own development as an individual artist and wonders if he'll ever become anything more than a mere imitator of art. In his third career stage, Butor becomes a character in his own work and his writing develops a

preoccupation with how he interacts with the world around him. This stage is most notably marked by works like, *Le Genie de lieu* (1958–92) and *The Stuff of Dreams* (*Matière de rêves* (1975–85) in which he himself is the protagonist relating how his dreams allow him to change into different people and animals.

Reviewers have generally agreed that the hallmark of Butor's work is his creation of an active relationship between the author and the reader. Butor's most widely acclaimed novel, *La Modification*, has been embraced by a number of critics, although it is one of Butor's more traditional works. Reviewers have argued, however, that in *La Modification*, Butor provides his readers with a storyline and a protagonist with which to identify, but is still able to subvert the traditional genre of the novel from within.

Principal works: *Passage de Milan* (1954); *Passing Time* (tr Jean Stewart, 1960, *L'Emploi du temps*, 1956); *Second Thoughts* (UK title, tr by Jean Stewart, 1958; U.S. title, *A Change of Heart* tr by Jean Stewart, 1959, *La Modification*, 1957); *Degrees* (tr by Richard Howard, 1961; *Degrés*, 1960); *Mobile* (tr by Richard Howard, 1962; *Mobile*, 1962); *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Ape: A Caprice* (tr by Dominic Di Bernardi, 1995; *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe*, 1967); *Improvisations on Butor: Transformation of Writing* (tr by Elinor S. Miller, 1996; *Improvisations sur Michel Butor: L'écriture en transformation*, 1993); *L'utilité poétique*, (1995).

Degrees

That was yesterday, Tuesday,
in this classroom where I took his place after leaving you, where I hung over the
blackboard a map of the United States,
in order to talk about New England and New York, the Great Lakes and Chicago, the
south, Faulkner's country, Florida, the TVA, the Mississippi delta, New Orleans, Texas
and its oil wells,
while you, with all your classmates, had climbed to the floor above, passing the physics
students coming down, on your way to the amphitheater where Monsieur Hubert, in a
white lab coat, was waiting for you behind his long, tiled counter, and you sat down in
the third row, next to a window overlooking the roofs, under the big chart of Mendeleev's
periodic classification:

“Hydrogen, helium, lithium, bore ...”

While your Uncle Henri, who had finished his day at lycee, waved to the concierge,
crossed the boulevard in long strides without waiting for the light to turn red, his raincoat
flapping in the wake of a long Cadillac he had grazed, swaying his black briefcase,
Had stopped for a moment, looked at the trees, the house fronts, the line of the roofs and
chimneys, the clouds passing, the shifting patches of blue, the places where the sun
glittered here and there,

And had taken the Rue du Marche-Saint-Hilaire, crossed the little Place d'Espagen to
terrace of the old Café Saint-Andre-des-Arts, taking his pipe out of one pocket, a book
out of another, sitting over a glass of beer for almost an hour.

That was yesterday, and now he is once again on the other side of the wall behind me, with his seniors who are doing neither Latin nor Greek, trying to help them understand and enjoy the first scene of Racine's Iphigénie:

"Yes, it is Agamemnon, you king, who awakens you ..."

The weather is almost as beautiful as it was eight days ago, and the sun, shining through the tree whose leaves have already turned yellow, some of which have fallen in the narrow courtyard littered with heaps of coal (the iron door is open; a truck is pouring out its black load; we all hear it, but none of us can see it),

falls gently on your hands and the page of your book open to the beginning of Chapter III: the representation of the earth;

I close the rollbook, in which I noted today's two absentees (Guillaume is back, but Francis Hutter is missing in the first row), and I ask Bruno Verger:

"Where is the earth located?"

Then I ask Maurice Tangala (a Negro):

"Can you tell me what a day is?"

"And you, Georges Tannier, explains to the class what an hour is."

[*Degrees*/Michel Butor, tr by tr by Richard Howard, Elmwood Park : Dalkey Archive Press, 2005. © Richard Howard & Dalkey Archive Press]

It's not often that I notice the color of someone's eyes, at least not among my acquaintances, which seems at first somewhat odd because I am very sensitive to the colors of objects—paintings, birds, flowers, clouds—and because it stands to reason that eyes would interest me more than any flower could; similarly I can be captivated by a head of hair without noticing its color.

These objects may in fact fascinate me *too* much; I'm so attracted to them that I cannot separate the color from the overall effect, especially in memory. Yes, in the middle of a crowd, among strangers, I may be struck by a certain blondness, a certain redness, seduced by a certain blackness; a country, a city, a street, or a beach may arrest my attention by the yellow of its corneas, a certain hour may be notable for the sea green of its irises. But when it comes to people I know, I have to make a deliberate effort to "see" the color of their eyes, especially the eyes.

The reason is that I can look at a person's hands, feet, or forehead without being in his gaze, but if I focus on the eyes, I'm not simply looking at the eyes but at him: I look at him through his eyes.

The eye blinds me to itself, and I fully understand why the ancients often compared the eye to the sun.

Only when I fail to look at someone properly, only when I don't see him as a person, does his eye become a glass eye, one object among others, not the source illuminating the person's depths, leading me to his secret.

Consequently, it doesn't surprise me at all that the color of eyes is one of the most important parts of the description on identification papers; a policeman's scrutiny, his way of studying a face, is exactly what allows him to isolate the color of an eye. But using this manner of perception to describe people in everyday conversation perturbs me. Some people seem to disengage themselves at the earliest opportunity from that haunting, questioning little pupil by blocking it out behind the tint that surrounds it, which one has

noted and captured once and for all. They take cover behind that thin film, find refuge behind that ready-made means of identity; they know right away how to “identify” that other, that intruder, if something ever goes wrong, if something new and incriminating suddenly arises in their way of seeing things.

But for the person who knows and wants to look into the eyes, the color of the iris will always be a problem, a danger zone, because someone will ask him the color of his lover’s eyes, and that person will be surprised that he has never “noticed” what will lead to another surprise: really, am I as fascinated as that?

This color becomes his quest: he begins by overcoming somehow his usual way of seeing things, lunges into the waters of this gaze to go and pluck that flower from the islands of that other shore, closes his own in order to bring it back to his own island, there to display it in his public square or on his quay, so that he can study it in the absence of the other.

Here we should praise the old masters of portrait-painting. Surely no one would dream of accusing them of having neglected their models, of failing to look “into their eyes.” It is obvious that if they had contended themselves with applying the “identifying” color to the iris on the canvas, that which had been noted and used in conversation, their painting would not have had the least bit of life, because of all the face’s features the eye is the only one that can’t be painted “from nature,” especially with the intense expressivity that the greatest succeed in giving to it, in guarding intact.

For a quarter of an hour of posing, no model could continue to look at an artist in such a way, and it was only after the eye was averted that the artist took up the task of rediscovering it alive on the canvas.

First, he had to lose the color of the eyes, to blur it into the background of his focus, before he could reconstruct it, to use it to create the necessary liaison between the black of the pupil and all the easily verifiable coloration of the cheeks, cheekbones, eyebrows, even the eyelids, the only kind of liaison that permits us to “dwell” in that black double point in the same way one dwelled in the stare of that man during its moments of greatest intensity, which is to say, during those moments when it was impossible to pay attention to the color of the eyes.

It is from the other side of those eyes into which he so passionately plunged (lovingly, malevolently, devotedly, curiously) that he rediscovered it emerging in his work, like an alchemist bent over his athanor, surprised at its appearance, completely new, the unique solution to an equation whose terms consisted of his complete knowledge of humanity and what he had already painted.

I knew Doctor H—too well to be able to tell the color of his eyes; I had not studied him enough to be able to paint them.

[*Portrait of the Artist As a Young Ape: A Caprice*/Michel Butor tr by Dominic Di Bernardi, DALKEY ARCHIVE Press, 1995 © DALKEY ARCHIVE Press, 1995]

Jacques Dupin (1927 – 2012)

Along with Philippe Jaccottet, Yves Bonnefoy, and Andre du Bouchet, Dupin was one of the foremost French poets of the 1950s. Like them he is concerned with the interrelations of language and art. Georges Braque, among other artists illustrated his work. He was also an art critic and a cultural eminence in France. As an art historian he is celebrated for his major works on Joan Miro, Alberto Giacometti, and many other artists. He was, for a long time, one of the directors of the renowned Galerie Maeght in Paris, which represented Joan Miro, Marc Chagall, Alberto Giacometti, Francis Bacon, Wassily Kandinsky and other modern artists.

Jacques Dupin was born on in the Ardeche, a mountainous region in the South of France which turns up in his work. He is fascinated with the relationships between landscapes and people. At the end of the war he moved to Paris. René Char helped Jacques Dupin publish his first collection of poems in 1950. Beginning with this, his very first collection in 1950, Dupin's poetry earned him a parallel rank among France's postwar avant-garde writers. It emerged in a stark postwar period of re-evaluation at all levels of French society, art included. It has been described as intentionally ambiguous, but also, succinct, laconic, impersonal. Often conjuring up a primitive or, more precisely, nascent state of being in which sensations, sentiments, perceptions, thoughts, and acts are depicted as emerging before language categorizes and conceptualizes them, Dupin's stark poems and prose poems foster paradoxes. They suggest potential narratives that are left untold, willingly verge on what he calls "illegibility," and appear "cubist" in their juxtaposition of fragments and rejection of natural or logical transitions.

The renowned American novelist Paul Auster is an ardent admirer and translator of Dupin's poetry. His *Fits and Starts: Selected Poems of Jacques Dupin* (1974) first introduced Dupin's often difficult work to American readers. His advice to the readers was that, "Uncompromisingly hermetic in attitude and rigorously concise in utterance, Dupin's poetry demands of us not so much a reading as an absorption." Jacques Dupin co- founded the influential poetry quarterly, *L'Éphémère* in 1966 with André du Bouchet, Yves Bonnefoy and Paul Celan.

Principal Collections of poetry: *Gravir* (1963); *L'embrasure* (1969); *Dehors* (1975); *Histoire de la lumière*, *L'Ire des Vents* (1978); *De singes et de mouches* (1983); *Les Mères* (1986); *Chansons troglodytes* (1989); *Coudrier* (2006); *Rien encore, tout déjà* (1991).

In English: *Of Flies and Monkeys*, tr John Taylor (2011); *Selected Poems* tr Stephen Romer and David Shapiro (1992); *Selected Poems*, Wake Forest University Press (1992); *Fits and Starts: Selected Poems of Jacques Dupin*, tr Paul Auster (1974).

Poems:

'Even so, bring home your burnt harvest'

Even so, bring home your burnt harvest.
And go away, your hands open, your blood hard.

An unknown enclave remains in this severed body.

A road in my road.

And the hoarse jubilation of starving space.

The light fondles the withered torrents,

The shattered lips ...

Go away, the house is in order,

The wind's lance is crossing it.

[Tr by Paul Auster , from *20th. Century French Poems* ed by Stephen Romer, Faber and Faber 2002 © Paul Auster]

'Earth-tongue of black bread and pure water'

Earth-tongue of black bread and pure water,

Whenever a spade turns you

The sky falls into action.

Our lover's arms darken,

Our worker's arms knot.

Just the force

To topple into the ravine

Our redundant cadaver

And my library of stones.

[tr by Paul Auster, From, *20th. Century French Poems* ed by Stephen Romer, Faber and Faber 2002 © Paul Auster]

Mineral Kingdom

In this country lightening quickens stone.

On the peaks that dominate the gorges

Ruined towers rise up

Like nimble torches of the mind

That revive the nights of the high wind

The instinct of death in the quarryman's blood.

Every granite vein

Will unravel in his eyes.

The fire that never be cured of us.

The fire that speaks our language.

[tr Paul Auster , The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry ed. Paul Auster, 1984, p. 483 © Paul Auster]

Lichens (8)

To climb you, and having climbed you - when the light is no
longer supported by words, when it totters and crashes down- climb you
again. Another crest, another lode.

Ever since my fears came of age, the mountain has needed me.

Has needed my depths, my ties, my step.

[Tr by Paul Auster in “The Cruel Geography of Jacques Dupin's Poetry” in
Books Abroad, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Winter, 1973), pp. 76-78 © Paul Auster]

Thirst

I summon the landslide
(In its clarity you are naked)
And the dismemberment of the book
Among the uprooting of stones.

I sleep so the blood your torture lacks
Will struggle with scents, the gorse, the torrent
Of my enemy mountain.

I walk endlessly.

I walk to alter something pure,
This blind bird upon my fist
Or this too clear face, glimpsed
At a stone's throw.

I write to bury my gold,
To close your eyes.

[Tr by Paul Auster in “The Cruel Geography of Jacques Dupin's Poetry” in
Books Abroad, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Winter, 1973), pp. 76-78 © Paul Auster]

of a shadow sinking into sadness

of a shadow sinking into sadness
gone is the time when I remembered time
ill-famed places, betrayals, colours
before the sun we were summoned without our shirts

a sun heavy with fruit, between the poverty
of an idiot from the hinterland and what leaps forth
from a vacant gaze – a volcano always,
an apostasy, distant without, close within
a spring with no maybugs, no gossamer
yellow meadow of madness, tongue cleft
in neutrality, they massacre, they sacrifice
the open man I am fond of, I express
his tracks and he endlessly disappearing

[tr by Andrew Rothwell. From *Nothing Yet, Everything Already*, (1990) rep in *The New French Poetry* ed. David Kelley, Jean Khalifa, Bloodaxe Books, 1996 p.83 © Andrew Rothwell]

I am forbidden ...

I am forbidden to stio to see. As if I were condemned to see while walking. While speaking. To see what I speak, and to speak precisely, because I do not see. Thus to show what I do not see, what I am forbidden to see. What language, unfolding, strikes and discovers. Blindness signifies the obligation to invert the terms, and to posit walking and word before the eyes. To walk in the night, to speak through din and confusion, so that the shaft of the rising day fuses and answers my step, designates the branch, and picks the fruit.

[Tr by Paul Auster, *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Paul Auster, 1984, p. 489 © Paul Auster]

The Wave ...

The wave of limestone and the white of wind
cross the sleeper's chest

whose flooded nerves are shaking below
propping the gardens in tiers
parting the thorns and prolonging
the harmonies of nocturnal instruments
toward comprehension f the light
--and its breaking

His forked passion on the anvil
He breathes
Like thunder
Without food without venom among the junipers
On the slope, and the ravine makes him breathe
A dark air

To compensate for the violence of his chains

[Tr by Paul Auster, *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed.
Paul Auster, 1984, p. 489 © Paul Auster]

Jacques Réda (born 1929)

A cultural icon and eminent poet, Jacques Réda is the author of over thirty books, including works of poetry, autobiographical prose, short novels, and essays on topics ranging from jazz to city life to literature. He was chief editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* from 1987 to 1996.

Reda originally made his name as a jazz critic, and the rhythms of jazz swoop and dive through his poems. His subjects are a flâneur's subjects: "the lime tree in the narrow yard of the Jewish butcher"; "Laundry majestic above the radishes"; streets, houses, people's faces. Within his world, however, familiar objects are loaded with significance. His skies, in particular, reflect meaning; he pictures them frequently at dawn or twilight, preferring the softer ambiguities of "the day's equable rose already spiking through brambles" or "the rays of evening ... / Where sky leans over uncertain, waiting for a shadow" to midday's "haggard gaze". Réda's writing has always investigated the underside of everyday banality. With complete simplicity he declares that he loves supermarkets "for themselves," a love only natural for someone who has grown up in poverty (after all, to despise richness is a luxury only the rich can afford). But this confession is immediately followed by an unexpected critical reflection: supermarkets are "counter-museums" or "museums of the instant," Réda says, "whose instants are accessible, consumable, nearly straightaway consumed but indefinitely renewable ..." His writings, in verse and prose, record his urban and suburban explorations, on foot, bicycle or Solex. That is why the French sometimes call him a 'flâneur', that is a roamer or a wanderer who enjoys his anonymous status in a city's labyrinth. He is forever on the move, constantly setting off, stopping, beginning afresh, treasuring the movement itself while journeying from place to place—journeys that are at once exhilarating and familiar that mirror life and a world that ceaselessly rises anew from its own ruins. His poems in "*Return to Calm*" are his lyrical observations of the everyday life offering reflections on youth, travel in open country, seasons, Paris and on remembrance itself.

Jacques Réda has been an active and much-admired presence in French literature since the 1960s. He is the author of more than thirty books, including works of poetry, autobiographical prose, short novels, and essays on topics ranging from jazz to writing to city life. He is the recipient of numerous honors, including the prestigious Grand Prix de l'Académie Française (1993) and the Prix Goncourt (1999), both awarded in recognition of his lifetimes work.

Principal works: *Amen* (1968); *Récitatif* (1970); *The Ruins of Paris (Les Ruines de Paris)*, 1977); *L'Improviste, une lecture du jazz* (1980); *L'Herbe des talus* (1984); *Treading Lightly (Celle qui vient à pas légers)*, 1985); *Jouer le jeu (L'Improviste II)*, (1985); *Return to Calm (Retour au calme)*, 1989); *Le Sens de la marche* (1990); *The Mirabelle Pickers (Aller aux mirabelles)*, 1991).

Poems:

Earth's Books

Long after the last rockets have ripped away,
Left in the sheltered corners of our ruined houses

To keep watch over the billions of dead, books will be
 All that remains on the planet.
 But will the eyes of the billions of words that used to
 read into ours,
 Still trying to see,
 Raise a forest breeze with their lashes
 On an earth made mute again?
 Why not ask if the sea will remember our legs kicking;
 the wind,
 A naked Ulysses stepping into the circle of young girls.
 O sleeping beauty,
 Light will have fled like an eyelid closing,
 And the sun as it lifts its helmet off
 Will see a tear fall between feet that have ceased to move.
 No one will hear the blind cane of the poet
 Touch the stone's edge on the deserted threshold;
 Already stumbling in the imperfect, he was there before us
 While we were still at play under your eyes,
 Unbelieving stars.

[Tr by Jennie Feldman in *Treading Lightly* : Jacques Reda: Selected Poems 1961-1975 tr by Jennie Feldman, Anvil Press Poetry 2005 © Jennie Feldman 2005] p.63

What I wanted

What I wanted was to keep the words that are everyone's;
 A passerby among others, then : nobody (unless it's
 That blind man's cane probing the depths of each memory)
 So that anyone can say is it me, yes, it's me talking –
 But with that slight variance in the music
 Passing through him, forever on its own, abstracted.

[Tr by Jennie Feldman in *Treading Lightly* : Jacques Reda: Selected Poems 1961-1975 tr by Jennie Feldman, Anvil Press Poetry 2005 © Jennie Feldman 2005] p.125

I' M LOOKING

I' M LOOKING and can't see which way the river goes:
 Too many glimmers or birds' shadows confusing me
 Among the reeds where animals can be heard drinking
 Water that courses thick as blood and soaks their fur.
 They prowl along the banks defending them
 And I keep a distance with handfuls of stones.
 Across this river I can't get down to
 There' s another traveler following the same road.
 I' ve lost all hope of a boat to take me to him
 And our arm signals above the dogs' jaws

[Tr by Jennie Feldman *inTreading Lightly* : Jacques Reda: Selected Poems 1961-1975 tr
by Jennie Feldman, Anvil Press Poetry 2005 © Jennie Feldman 2005] p.55

Michel Deguy (1930)

Michel Deguy, born in Paris in 1930, is a French poet and philosopher. The ability to bring together poetic practice and theoretical reflection turned him into a major figure on the French intellectual scene in the 1970s. He is currently a professor of French literature at the Université de Paris VII (Saint-Denis), the founder and editor-in-chief of *Poésie*, the major French journal of poetry and poetics, and the editor of *Les Temps Modernes*, the journal founded by Jean-Paul Sartre. He is the former president of the Collège international de philosophie and of the Maison des écrivains. He is also active as a translator of, among others, Heidegger, Gongora, Sappho, Dante, and various American poets.

Michel Deguy prefers to be named a 'writer of poems' or 'the poet I am seeking to be'. A trained philosopher, he is called a nomad poet, traversing all spaces and times, and his poems act as a space to bring interaction, rather than a fusion of disparate things. His creativity is located between the impossibility and necessity of thinking, refusing to see poetry as a genre. Rather, poetry is a given, a critical dialogue of thought. Named by Jacques Derrida to be 'a poet of promised lands', Michel Deguy's attitude is not curiosity but concern, a painful attention to what is, to what happens to be. He is a poet at the forefront of experiment and change, and yet steeped in a warm sensitivity to the literature and aesthetics of the past. While his early collections were occupied with his constant exploration of the space outside the periphery of Being, his succeeding works give central stage to the language and role of metaphor. Famous for a lively style abundant in neologisms, rare words and coinages, his late works show the poet as a traveler, lover and mass media consumer, with his poetry bearing the signs and discourses of the reality of the modern world.

Michel Deguy has written over thirty books published in France and translated into many languages, and he has received numerous awards, among them the Prix Mallarme (1989), the 1998 Grand Prix National de la Poésie, the 2000 Grand Prix de la Société des Gens de Lettres, and the 2004 Grand Prix de poésie de l'Académie Française.

Principal works: *Fragments du cadastre* (1960), *Poèmes de la presqu'île* (1962), *Biefs* (1964); *Figurations* (1969), *Tombeau de Du Bellay* (1973), *Jumelages suivi de Made in USA* (1978), *Donnant donnant* (1981), *Gisants* (1985), *Aux affaires d'affluence* (1993) *A ce qui n'en finit pas* (1995); *La Raison poétique* (2000), *Spleen de Paris* (2000), *Au jugé* (2004), *Sans retour* (2004), *Desolatio* (2007), *Réouverture après travaux* (2007).

In English: *Recumbents* (*Gisants*, 1985) tr by Wilson Baldrige, Wesleyan University Press, 2005; *Given Giving: Selected Poems of Michel Deguy* tr by Clayton Eshelman, with an Introduction by Kenneth Koch, University of California Press, 1989.

Poems:

At sunrise I arose ...

At sunrise I arose
To the sound the machine animals make
passing by in the streets over heads

Was it briefly interminable or
interminably brief or both
It was the face ever undone by the mouth
that sentences me to the blinking
of the apparition that slips away in itself,
to erasure, on the edge of the world
It was five o'clock it is six o'clock my love says
One more hour went by an hour has passed
Where the *e* is not the voice inserts it
and wherever mute phonemes may be they muzzle
My error is ancient my love
To the stalactites of the ages was added
one more micron between your shore and mine
The error of one who hides in a corpse
pulling on the death mask but
Often I understand what people say to me

[*Recumbents* (poems by Michel Deguy) tr by Wilson Baldrige, Wesleyan
University, 2005 © Wesleyan University, 2005]

Recumbents

I keep losing you since the time in that hotel room
When naked and turned aside you shouted at me get out
I no longer recall our quarrel, my mistake
But the paper, your curved back,
The still life of daylight and the wardrobe,
And my painless belief uprisen I would see you again

[*Recumbents* (poems by Michel Deguy) tr by Wilson Baldrige, Wesleyan
University, 2005 © Wesleyan University, 2005]

May Day

Poland in France with the sound of a centaur going into water
To *thou* your misfortune
in the collective amnesia of dates, of Nocturnes
of Shakos, of blackened fragments of icons and films
in the shame of an asymmetrical love
or of my private imagery of a Vistula night
with Stachura
“Oh dark ingratitude ...”?

Twisting the cries
The bird
Engulfs itself in the sun

All is ruin
And the ruin
A spiritual contour

[Tr by Clayton Eshleman From, *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Paul Auster, 1984 © Clayton Eshleman]

Who What

For a long time you have not existed
Face occasionally celebrated and sufficient
How I love you I don't know For a long time
I have been loving you indifferently I love you to hate
Through an omission through a murmur through cowardice
Obstinately Against all likelihood

I love you in losing you in order to lose
This me who refuses to be one of us carried away
From the stern (this jig-sawed balcony over the salt)
Ex-who dragged by the back between surface and depth

Now what
Punished mouth
Punished mouth heart surveying the orbit
A question for all wearing the third thing in vain

[Tr by Clayton Eshleman From *Given, Giving*, University of California Press, 1984 rep in *Yale Anthology of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Mary Ann Caws, Yale University Press, 2004. © University of California Press]

The Wall

The wall is massive, of solid stone, hard, finished; yet it oozes The wall is smooth, new and old, durable and yet it is cracked, and through the fault welling and sliding a drop, a beast, a moss The wall performs its role, it borders, it blocks, it separates, it conceals, it obstructs, and yet must it do it, it protects, it upholds the insect 100%, it laments, it offers the decision backing, it is reckoned to the bone, it pierces the waters, it has just allowed the inscribing hand to pass through, it makes one mortal in one's mind

Here fell

Here lived
Here died
Here passed

[Tr by Clayton Eshleman From *Given, Giving* , University of California Press, 1984 rep in *Yale Anthology of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Mary Ann Caws, Yale University Press, 2004. © University of California Press]

Jacques Roubaud (born 1932)

Jacques Roubaud is a poet, novelist, translator, and essayist. He was born in the town of Caluire, in the Provence region of southern France. He once called himself a 'manufacturer of mathematics and poetry'. At twenty-two Roubaud abandoned his literature studies to devote himself to mathematics.

Jacques Roubaud is a playful, puzzling, erudite, at times obscure, yet at other times thoroughly moving "composer" (as he puts it) of poetry and prose. An algebraist by trade (he long taught mathematics at the University of Paris), Roubaud has surpassed all other French writers (with the possible exceptions of his mentor, Raymond Queneau, and the ingenious Georges Perec) in entwining these two disparate manifestations of human mind: on the one hand writing, which try as it might can hardly avoid dealing with experienced feelings, memory, perceived reality; and on the other hand mathematics, which involves not only numbers and calculations and vertiginous logical constructs.

From his first book published in 1967, of which the mathematical symbol for "belonging" entitles a volume of multiform "sonnets" arranged according to the moves in a masters match of the Japanese game of go, Roubaud has emerged as an original voice. He is not only a resourceful connoisseur of the history of poetic forms, but also a member of Oulipo, the French "Workshop of Potential Literature," a group of writers and mathematicians which was founded in 1960 by Queneau and François Le Lionnais and still remains active today. As Roubaud explains in his provocative collection of theoretical dialogues about poetry and fiction, *Poesie, etcetera: menage* (1995), never has a literary movement lasted so long in the history of French writing as Oulipo.

Apart from poetry, Jacques Roubaud has published numerous translations, of modern American as well as traditional Japanese poetry. He has rewritten texts from France's ancient heritage, notably the tales of the Holy Grail; he is the author of prose books, such as the Hortense trilogy, and an ongoing semi-autobiographic project, begun in 1989, which has produced four books so far. Finally, Jacques Roubaud is an untiring champion of poetry in, among other publications, *Poesie, etcetera: ménage* (1995), in which he makes a clean sweep of popular prejudices about contemporary poetry. Roubaud's work has been widely translated.

Principal works: *Our Beautiful Heroine* (1987); *Hortense is Abducted* (1989); *Some Thing Black* (1990); *The Great Fire of London: A Story with Interpolations and Bifurcations* (1991); *Hortense in Exile* (1992); *The Princess Hoppy, or The Tale of Labrador* (1993); *The Plurality of Worlds of Lewis* (1995); *Poetry, etcetera: Cleaning House*. (2006); *The Loop* (2009); *Exchanges on Light* (2009); *Mathematics* (2012).

Some Thing Black is Roubaud's moving, focused, meditation on the untimely death of his wife, Alix Cleo Roubaud. Roubaud doesn't wallow in his grief, but it clearly exerts a fascination on him, memory lingers, and much remains. For Roubaud the loss is in many ways a loss of part of himself, Alix Cleo haunting him like a phantom limb:

I' ll Turn Away

I' ll Turn Away and write down words to address you with
words of address my only way now of reconstructing
an identity which might be yours without compartments

your printed photographs the printed pages from
your journal with its peculiar punctuation: one.

shreds of your body decomposing crumbling
toward disolution's sober, rigid flowering unimaginable
utterly except via the archaic the resurrection of certain
words biblical which are not my tradition: two.

this box of a room papered with brown Japanese wall-
paper and the arrangement of things in it yours
almost untouched for almost thirty months where I
catch the light by the handful: three.

three times thee three of your irredudibly separate
realities ousted lost in a scatter held together only
by this pronoun: thee

can't slow down now but by saying it your name
with its syllables drifting apart, your name which

[*Something Black* , tr by Rosmarie Waldrop, Dalkey Archive Press, 1990 © Rosmarie Waldrop]

Writing as a poet-philosopher, Roubaud, who taught mathematics at the University of Paris, casts a delicate net of language to apprehend ideas that most compel him. Here, as in *Some Thing Black*, he struggles with the premature death of his wife:

Identity

What identity could be yours, that of your death?
you are, some would say, your grave and its inside,
the gravestone with your name

but that only means saying:
alive, you were this body dressed and undressed
this body that contained your thought (or soul)
this body that also bore this, your, name

identity doesn't last in the world except by this analogy
you are, others would say, as you are in the memory,
if they remember, of those who had,
even just for a moment, known you

thus you would be, but parceled out, changeable, contra-

dictory, dependent, an intermittent light,

and once all those are dead you would no longer be.

and, surely, here again the idea of afterlife borrows its very
characteristics from the world that was your life

but for me, it is quite different:
each time I think of you, you cease to be.

[*The Plurality of Worlds of Lewis* tr by Rosmarie Waldrop, Dalkey Archive Press, 1995
© 1995 Rosmarie Waldrop]

***Exchanges on Light*, drama by Jacques Roubaud**

Cast as a dialogue among six interlocuters, this lyric, pensive blend of poetry and prose considers light from a variety of perspectives. Their discussions are sometimes scientific, sometimes theological, sometimes rhetoric, sometimes lovely nonsense. Some of the characters' speech breaks, at times, into poems. The piece is thus many things at once: philosophical meandering, poetry, dialogue; and so the genre proves difficult to pin down.

PROLOGUE
The Form of the Poem
or
The Play of Light

Houses along the edge of the road, empty; nothing on the road; no one.

I to 0 for her.

A lit window, just one; its rectangle.

I everywhere.

Night, and silence; and silence; silence.

2-I for her.

Rain stopped, no rain; wind died down, no wind.

3-I.

Stars go out, one after the other; no stars.

4-I.

A lit window, only one, rectangle; the same rectangle.

4-2.

Houses and nothing; behind, nothing; above, nothing; nothing.

5-2.

A lit window, the only one; in the window's rectangle, a shape begins.

5-3.

Window goes out

[soufl'ee].

play.

[An excerpt from EXCHANGES ON LIGHT (ECHANGES DE LA LUMIÈRE) tr by Eleni Sikelianos, Beard of Bees, Chicago, Number14, April 2004, freely re-distributable by publishers]

Françoise Sagan (1935-2004)

French novelist, playwright, and screenwriter, whose dispassionate portrayals of bored, amoral middle-class youth have been translated into many languages. Françoise Sagan became a sensation at 18 for writing *Bonjour Tristesse*, her mega-selling novel of a rich teenager's treachery toward her father's mistress. In August 1953, the bored and bohemian author, having flunked out of the Sorbonne, secluded herself in her room and typed out 200 pages that made her a celebrity for the next half-century. Published in 1954 it was a *succes de scandale* for its depiction of a young woman breaking up her father's affair.

Françoise Sagan was the pseudonym of Françoise Quoirez born in the village of Cajarc, in southwestern France to Pierre and Marie Quoirez. Her father, was a prosperous industrialist. The family moved to the provinces at the outbreak of World War II and returned to Paris after the liberation of France in 1944. Sagan was educated at convent schools, attended the University of Sorbonne. In August 1953, the bored and bohemian author flunked out of the Sorbonne, secluded herself in her room and typed out a 200 pages' script that made her a celebrity for the next half-century. It was her first novel, *Bonjour tristesse*, a first person account by Cécile, a bored and pampered teenager who sets out to keep her philandering widowed father from marrying again. After this novel Sagan became a spokesperson of disillusioned youth, bored but potentially rebellious teenagers. She lived a bohemian life, took cocaine and wrote prolifically for the next fifty years, most of them reaching the best seller list and soon made into popular films. Françoise Sagan won the Prix des Critiques in 1954 for *Bonjour Tristesse* and the Prix de Monaco 30 years later for her work as a whole.

Principal works: *Bonjour Tristesse* (1954); *A Certain Smile* (1956); *Those Without Shadows* (1957); *Do You Like Brahms?* (1960), *La Chamade* (1966), *The Heart-Keeper* (1968), *A Few Hours of Sunlight* (1971), *In a Month, in a Year* ; *The Unmade Bed*; *The Painted Lady* (1983), *Incidental Music and Salad Days* (1984).

'like a beautiful serpent she will rob us of everything'

In the summer vacations Cecile had to prepare for her baccalaureat, something she could never take seriously. Carefree enjoyment and freedom mattered more to her. Her father's new mistress, Anne tried to check this irresponsible existence. Cecile detests Anne:

I am surprised how clearly I remember everything from that moment. I acquired an added awareness of other people and of myself. Until then I had always been spontaneous and lighthearted, but the last few days had upset me to the extent of forcing me to reflect and to look at myself with a critical eye. However, I seemed to come no nearer to a solution of my problems. I kept telling myself that my feelings about Anne were mean and stupid, and that my desire to separate her from my father was vicious. Then I would argue that after all I had every right to feel as I did. For the first time in my life I was divided against myself. Up in my room I reasoned with myself for hours on end in an attempt to discover whether the fear and hostility which Anne inspired in me were justified, or if I were merely a silly, spoiled, selfish girl in a mood of sham independence.

In the meantime I grew thinner every day. On the beach I did nothing but sleep, and at meal-times I maintained a strained silence that ended by making the other feel uneasy. And all the time I watched Anne. At dinner I would say to myself, 'Doesn't every movement she makes prove how much she loves him? Could anyone be more in love? How can I be angry with her when she smiles at me with trace of anxiety in her eyes?' But suddenly she would say, 'When we get home, Raymond...' and the thought that she was going to share our life and interfere with us would arouse me again. Once more she seemed calculating and cold. I thought: 'She is cold, we are warm-hearted, she is possessive, we are independent. She is indifferent; other people don't interest her, we love them. She is reserved, we are gay. We are full of life and she will slink in between us with her sobriety; she will warm herself at our fire and gradually rob us of our enthusiasm; like a beautiful serpent she will rob us of everything.' I repeated 'a beautiful serpent ...'

[*Bonjour tristesse*, tr by Irene Ash Penguin Books 1958 © not mentioned] pp 51-52, 80-81 and 98.]

Bonjour tristesse ...

Seventeen-year-old Cécile is spending her summer together with her father Raymond and his latest mistress, Elsa. Then arrives Anne Larsen by way of an earlier invitation from Raymond. The next morning Anne and Raymond announce their impending marriage. Cecile and Elsa get on well. Cécile devises a plan to prevent the marriage. She arranges for Elsa and Cyril (her own young lover) to pretend to be a couple with Elsa, and to appear together at specific moments in the hopes of making Raymond jealous of Cyril so that if Raymond decides he wants Elsa back, he'll leave Anne. In the end nobody is happy. Cécile and her father return to the empty, desultory life they were living before Anne interrupted their summer:

The next morning I took my father for a walk along the road. We talked gaily of insignificant things. I suggested going back to the villa by way of the pine wood. It was exactly half past ten; I was on time. My father walked in front of me on the narrow path and pushed aside the brambles, so that I should not scratch my legs. When he stopped dead in his tracks I knew he had seen them. I went up to him; Cyril and Elsa were lying apparently asleep on the pine needles. Although they were acting entirely on my instructions, and I knew very well that they were not in love, they were nevertheless both young and beautiful, and I could not help feeling a pang of jealousy. I noticed that my father had become abnormally pale. I took him by the arm:

'Don't let's disturb them. Come on!'

He glanced once more at Elsa, who was looking particularly pretty with her red hair spread out, and a half-smile on her lips: then he turned on his heel and walked on at a brisk pace. I could hear him muttering: 'The bitch! the bitch!'

'Why do you say that? She's free, isn't she?'

'That's not the point! Did you find it very pleasant to see her in Cyril's arms?'

'Neither do I love Elsa,' he answered furiously. 'But it hurts all the same. After all, I've lived with her, which makes it even worse.'

I knew very well what he meant. He must have felt like dashing up to separate them and seizing his property, or what had once been his property. 'Supposing Anne were to hear you?'

‘What do you mean? Well, of course, she wouldn’t understand, she’d be shocked, that’s normal enough! But what about you? Don’t YOU understand me anymore? Are you shocked too?’

How easy it was for me to steer his thoughts in the direction I wanted! It was rather frightening to know him so well.

‘Of course I’m not shocked,’ I said. ‘But you must see things as they are: Elsa has a short memory, she finds Cyril attractive, and that’s the end of it as far as you’re concerned. After all, look how you behaved to her, it was unforgivable!’

‘If I wanted her ...’ my father began, and then stopped short.

‘You’d have no luck,’ I said convincingly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for me to discuss his chances of getting Elsa back.

‘Anyhow it is out of the question,’ he said in a more resigned voice.

‘Of course it is!’ I answered with a shrug of my shoulders, which was meant to convey that he, poor chap, was out of the running now.

[*Bonjour tristesse*, tr by Irene Ash Penguin Books 1958 © not mentioned] pp 51-52, 80-81 and 98.]

The Unmade Bed narrates a very French love affair between Beatrice and her somewhat younger lover, Edouard. She is an actress and he, a playwright. When it was first published in English in 1978 Lyn Macdonald considered it ‘The novel of the decade’ and *The Times* commented that it was ‘compulsively readable.’

Propped up on an elbow, Edouard watched her sleep. He’d left the french windows open, and from time to time the wind lifted the hair of the stranger next to him. He’d heard her say ‘I love you’ on stage. He’d seen her wounded, hesitant, pursued, vulnerable. In fact, odd as it seemed, he’d seen her resemble the image he had of himself in relation to her. He’d wanted to ask: ‘Who hurt you? When? And why haven’t you got it yet?’ But that woman up there wasn’t the woman he loved. It was another one, the one who’d made fun of him, who’d deceived him with Gino and been unmoved by his pain. So why had he been so upset when she’d looked so anxiously at that green plastic plant? Why had he suffered with her when she’d had to leave that idiot? And why had he wished she’d stayed behind the piano after her opening lines, as if behind a barricade? Beatrice was an actress and a good one. That he already knew. There was nothing so strange about her expressing a feeling she herself didn’t recognize, and refused to recognize. And so, leaning motionless over the blind and mysterious face now turned away from him, he asked himself where this terrible anxiety had come from, this pretence of remorse that was keeping him awake at her side like a spy or a criminal. What was he guilty of? Ever since he’d known her, he’d loved her, and he’d always told her so. He’d always suffered because of her and he’d always accepted his suffering. He knew she trusted him more than his predecessors; he knew he was not only a friend but a superior lover. And he knew that in Beatrice’s uncertain, impulsive, and egocentric life, he represented the only certainty, the only security, and perhaps the only tenderness. But what of it? All he wanted was the revival to be over and Beatrice to take off her mask and become once again the brutal and disconcerting object of his passion.

[*The Unmade Bed* tr by Abigail Israel, Allison & Busby, 1992 © Aidan Ellis/Dell publishing Co.Inc.1978] pp.105-106

Georges Perec (1936 –1982)

Georges Perec was a French novelist, filmmaker, essayist, and an important member of the 'Oulipo' group. Perec was born the only son of Icek Judko and Cyrla (Schulewicz) Peretz – Polish Jews who had emigrated to France in the 1920s. Perec's father died in 1940 and mother perished in the Nazi holocaust, after which he was taken into the care of his paternal aunt and uncle in 1942, who formally adopted him in 1945. He started writing reviews and essays for *La Nouvelle Revue Francaise* and *Les Lettres nouvelles* while studying history and sociology at the Sorbonne. During 1958-59 Perec served in the army and married Paulette Petras after being discharged. They spent one year in Sfax in Tunisia where Paulette worked as a teacher.

Georges Perec joined Oulipo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle –a group devoted to the study of literary form) in 1967 meeting Raymond Queneau to whom he later dedicated his masterpiece, *Life A User's Manual (La Vie mode d'emploi)*. This novel won him **the Prix Medici** in 1978 and brought him some financial and critical success which allowed him to turn to writing full-time. He was a writer in residence at the University of Queensland, Australia in 1981, during which time he worked on the unfinished *53 Jours (53 Days)*. He died of lung cancer shortly after his return from Australia.

Perec's novels and essays abound in experimental word play and are usually tinged with melancholy. He is noted for his distinctive use of the technique of 'constrained writing': His 300-page novel *A Void (La disparition)* is a lipogram written without ever using the letter "e". His novella *Les revenentes* (1972) is a complementary univocalic piece in which the letter "e" is the only vowel used. This constraint affects even the title, which would conventionally be spelt *Revenantes*. His first novel, *Things: A Story of the Sixties (Les Choses)* was **awarded the Prix Renaudot** in 1965. Another novel—in fact, his masterpiece and most famous work, *Life, A User's Manual (La Vie mode d'emploi)* won him the Prix Medici in 1978. It is an immensely complex and rich work—a tapestry of interwoven stories and ideas as well as literary and historical allusions, based on the lives of the inhabitants of a fictitious Parisian apartment block. *W, or the Memory of Childhood (W, ou le souvenir d'enfance, (1975)* is a semi-autobiographical work hard to classify. Two alternating narratives make up the volume: one, a fictional outline of a totalitarian island country called "W", patterned partly on life in a concentration camp; and the second, descriptions of childhood. Both merge towards the end when the common theme of the Holocaust is explained.

Georges Perec is perhaps best described as a literary experimentalist, one who was intrigued by the question of form. He produced a score of major works, each one quite different from the others. Although he is best known for his novels, he also wrote plays, poetry, essays, filmscripts, opera librettos, and many other texts which confound traditional generic categories.

Principal works: *Things : A Story of the Sixties (Les Choses: Une histoire des années soixante, 1965)*; *A Void (La Disparition, 1969)*; *The Exeter Text: Jewels, Secrets, Sex (Les Revenentes ,1972)*; *Life A User's Manual (La Vie mode d'emploi, 1978)*; *W, or the Memory of Childhood (W ou le souvenir d'enfance, 1975)*; *A Man Asleep (Un homme qui dort, 1967)*; *Je me souviens, (1978)*; *Je suis né, (1990)*.

On the Stairs, I

In the beginning of this voluminous book the author describes the building in which all the personages of the novel live and whose lives he recounts later.

Yes, it could begin this way, right here, just like that, in a rather slow and ponderous way, in this neutral place that belongs to all and to none, where people pass by almost without seeing each other, where the like of the building regularly and distantly resounds. What happens behind the flats' heavy doors can most often be perceived only through those fragmented echoes, those splinters, remnants, shadows, those first moves or incidents or accidents that happen in what are called the "common areas", soft little sounds damped by the red woolen carpet, embryos of communal life which never go further than the landing. The inhabitants of a single building live a few inches from each other, they are separated by a mere partition wall, they share the same spaces repeated along each corridor, they perform the same movements at the same times, turning on a tap, flushing the water closet, switching on a light, laying the table, a few dozen simultaneous existences repeated from storey to storey, from building to building, from street to street. They entrench themselves in their domestic dwelling space – since that is what it is called- and they would prefer nothing to emerge from it; but the little that they do let out – the dog on a lead, the child off to fetch the bread, someone brought back, someone sent away, - comes out by way of the landing. For all that passes, passes by the stairs, and all that comes, comes by the stairs: letters, announcements of births, marriages and deaths, furniture brought in or taken out by removers, the doctor called in an emergency, the traveler returning from a long voyage. It's because of that that the staircase remains an anonymous, cold and hostile place. In old buildings there used to be stone steps, wrought-iron handrails, sculptures, lamp-holders, sometimes a bench to allow old folk to rest between floors. In modern buildings there are lifts in walls covered in would-be obscene graffiti, and so-called "emergency" staircases in unrendered concrete dirty and echoing. In this block of flats where there is an old lift almost always out of order, the staircase is an old-fashioned place of questionable cleanliness, which declines in terms of middle-class respectability as it rises from floor to floor: two thicknesses of carpet as far as the third floor, thereafter only one, and none at all for the two attic floors.

Yes, it will begin here: between the third and fourth storey at 11 Rue Simon-Crubbellier.

[*Life A User's Manual*, tr by David Bellos, London, Collins Harvill, 1989 © David Bellos 1987, pp 3-4]

Servants' Quarters, 2 Morellet

Morellet had a room in the eaves, on the eighth floor. On his door could still be seen the number 17, in green paint.

After plying diverse trades which he enjoyed reciting in an accelerating list—bench, hand, music hall singer, baggage handler, sailor, riding instructor, variety artist, musical conductor, ham stripper, saint, clown, a soldier for five minutes, verger in a spiritualist church, and even a walk-on in one of the first Laurel and Hardy shorts—Morellet, at the age of twenty-nine, had become a technician in the chemistry lab at the

Ecole Polytechnique, and would no doubt have remained so until retirement if, like so many others', his path had not been crossed one day by Bartlebooth.

When he returned from his travels in December nineteen fifty-four, Bartlebooth sought a process which would allow him, once he had reassembled his puzzles, to recover the original seascapes; to do that, first the pieces of wood need to be stuck back together, then a means of eliminating all the traces of the cutting lines would have to be found, as well as a way of restoring the original surface texture of the paper. If the two glued layers were then separated with a razor, the watercolour would be returned intact, just as it had been on the day, twenty years before, when Bartlebooth had painted it. It was a difficult problem, for though there were on the market even in those days various resins and synthetic glazes used by toyshops for puzzles in window displays, they left the cutting lines far too visible.

As was his custom, Bartlebooth wanted the person who would help him in this search to live in the same building, or as near as possible. That is how, through his faithful Smautf, whose room was on the same floor as the lab technician's, he met Morellet. [...]

Relieved of all financial cares, but bitten by the research bug, Morellet took advantage of his free time to devote himself, in his flat, to the sort of physical and chemical experiments of which his long years as a technician seemed to have left him particularly frustrated.

In all the local cafes he gave out his visiting card, which described him as "Head of Practical Services at the Ecole Polytechnique", and he offered his services generously; he obtained innumerable orders for superactive hair and carpet shampoos, stain removers, energy-saving devices, cigarette filters, martingales for 421, cough potions, and other miracle products.

One evening in February 1960 whilst he was heating a pressure cooker full of a mixture of rosin and diterpene carbide destined to produce a lemon-flavoured toothpaste, the apparatus exploded. Morellet's left hand was torn to shreds, and he lost three fingers.

This accident cost him his job—preparing the metal grid required some minimal dexterity—and all he had to live on was a part-pension meagrely paid by the Ecole Polytechnique, and a small pension from Bartlebooth. But his vocation for research did not abate; on the contrary, it grew sharper. Though severely lectured by Smautf, by Winkler, and by Valene, he persevered with experiments which turned out for the most part to be ineffective, but harmless save for a certain Madame Schwann who lost all her hair after washing it in the special dye Morellet had made for her exclusive use; two or three times, though, these manipulations ended in explosions, more spectacular than dangerous, and in minor fires which were quickly brought under control.

These incidents filled two people with glee: his neighbours on the right, the Plassaert couple, young traders in printed cotton goods, who had ingeniously converted three maids' rooms into a pied-a-terre (in so far as a dwelling situated right under the eaves may be referred to as a foot on the ground), and who were reckoning on Morellet's room for further expansion. After each explosion they made a complaint, and took a petition around the building demanding the eviction of the former technician. The room belonged to the building manager, who, when the property had gone into co-ownership, had bought up almost all of the two top floors in his own name. For several years the manager held back from putting the odd man out on the street, for he had many friends in

the building – to begin with, Madame Nochere herself, who regarded Monsieur Morellet as a true scientist, a brain, a possessor of secrets, and who had a personal stake in the little disasters which now and again struck the top floor of the building, not so much because of the tips she sometimes got on these occasions as for the epical, sentimental, and mysterious accounts she could give of them to the whole *quartier*.

[*Life A User's Manual*, tr by David Bellos, London, Collins Harvill, 1989 © David Bellos1987, pp 21-24]

On the memory of the stairs

Life A User's Manual is a detailed history, across time, of a building and its inhabitants. At the end of the novel Perec furnishes to the reader, a plan of the building, an index of names and works, and chronological references from 1833 to 1974.

There were of course people who knew nothing about, whom he wasn't even sure of having identified properly, people he passed from time to time on the stairs and of whom he wasn't certain whether they lived in the building or only had friends there; there were people he couldn't manage to remember anymore, others of whom only a single derisory image remained: Madame Appenzell's lorgnette, the cork figurines that Monsieur Troquet used to get into bottles and sell on the Champs-Elysses on Sundays, the blue enamel coffee pot always kept hot on a corner of Madame Fresnel's cooker.

He tried to resuscitate those imperceptible details which over the course of fifty-five years had woven the life of this house and which the years had unpicked one by one: the impeccably polished linoleum floors on which you were only allowed to walk in felt undershoes, the oiled canvas tablecloths with red and green stripes on which mother and daughter shelled peas; the dishstands that clipped together, the white porcelain counterpoise light that you could flick back up with one finger at the end of dinner; evenings by the wireless set, with the man in a flannel jacket, the woman in a flowery apron, and the slumbering cat rolled up in a ball by the fireplace; children in clogs going down for the milk with dented cans; the big old wood-stoves of which you would collect up the ashes in spread-out sheets of old newspaper ...

Where were they now, the Van Houten cocoa tins, the Banania cartons with the laughing infantryman, the turned wood boxes of Madeleine biscuits from Commercy? Where were they gone the larders you used to have beneath the window-ledge, the packets of Saponite, that good old washing powder with its famous Madame-Don't-Mind-If-I-Do, the boxes of thermogene wool with the fire-spitting devil drawn by Cappiello, and the sachets of good Dr. Gustin's lithium tablets?

The years had flowed past, the removal men had brought down pianos and trunks, rolled carpets and boxes of crockery, standard lamps and fish tanks, birdcages, hundred-year old clocks, soot-blackened cookers, tables with their flaps, the six chairs, the ice-makers, the large family portraits.

The stairs, for him, were, on each floor, a memory, an emotion, something ancient and impalpable, something palpitating somewhere in the guttering flame of his memory: a gesture, a noise, a flicker, a young woman singing operatic arias to her own piano accompaniment, the clumsy clickety-clack of a typewriter, the clinging smell of cresyl disinfectant, a noise of people, a shout, a hubbub, a rustling of silks and furs, a plaintive

miaow behind a closed door, knocks on partition walls, hackneyed tangos on hissing gramophones, or, on the sixth floor right, the persistent droning hum of Gaspard Winkler's jigsaw, to which, three floors lower, on the third floor left, there was now by way of response only a continuing, and intolerable silence.

[*Life A User's Manual*, tr by David Bellos, London, Collins Harvill, 1989 © David Bellos 1987, pp. 61-62]

“Killer of words”

The sixtieth chapter of the novel describes the kitchen of Cinoc on the sixth floor of the building. A strange person, with a name that can be pronounced in any number of ways (like ‘Perec’) Cinoc is, like the novelist, a lover of words. This chapter provides him an occasion to recall a new, unusual kind of collection—that of obsolete words which are no more in use.

Cinoc, who was then about fifty, pursued a curious profession. As he said himself, he was a “word-killer” : he worked at keeping Larousse dictionaries up to date. But whilst other compilers sought out new words and meanings, his job was to make room for them by eliminating all the words and meanings that had fallen into disuse.

When he retired in nineteen sixty-five, after fifty-three years of scrupulous service, he had disposed of hundreds and thousands of tools, techniques, customs, beliefs, sayings, dishes, games and nicknames, weights and measures; he had wiped dozens of islands, hundreds of cities and rivers, and thousands off townships off the map; he had returned to taxonomic anonymity hundreds of varieties of cattle, species of birds, insects, and snakes, rather special sorts of fish, kinds of crustaceans, slightly dissimilar plants, and particular breeds of vegetables and fruit; and cohorts of geographers, missionaries, entomologists, Church Fathers, men of letters, generals, Gods & Demons had been swept by his hand into eternal obscurity.

Who would know ever again what a *vigigraphe* was, “a type of telegraph consisting of watchtowers communicating with each other”? And who could, henceforth imagine there had existed for perhaps many generations a “block of wood on the end of a stick for flattening watercress in flooded ditches” and that the block had been called a *schuele* (shu-ell)? Who would recall the *velocimane* ?

VELOCIMANE (masc.nm.)

(from Lat. *velax*, *-ocis*, speedy and *manus*, hand).

Special locomotive device for children, resembling a horse, mounted on three or four wheels, also called *mechanical horse*.

Where had all the *abunas* gone, patriarchs of the Abyssinian Church, and the *palatines*, fur tippet worn by women in winter, so named after the Princess Palatine who introduced their use in France in the minority of Louis XIV, and the *chandernagors*, those gold-spangled NCOs who marched at the head of Second Empire processions?

[*Life A User's Manual*, tr by David Bellos, London, Collins Harvill, 1989 © David Bellos 1987, pp 287-288]

Vowl is willing to try anything that might assist him in dozing off

The hero Anton Vowl suffers from a strange disease which prevents him from sleeping. The first chapter describes several things he tries to get sleep. Finally, his insomnia proves to cover the anguish of a mysterious absence—that of the letter 'e'. But, the moment Anton will understand that, he will disappear. However, here, it is the comic sense that predominates:

Vowl is willing to try almost anything that might assist him in dozing off – a pair of pyjamas with bright polka dots, a night shirt. A body stocking, a warm shawl, a kimono, a cotton sari from a cousin in India, or simply curling up in his birthday suit, arranging his quilt this way and that, switching to a cot, to a crib, a foldaway, a divan, a sofa, and a hammock, lying on his back, on his stomach, or with arms akimbo, casting off his quilt or placing a thick, hairy tartan rug on top of it, borrowing a plank of nails from a fakir or practicing a yoga position taught him by a guru(and which consists in forcing an arm hard against your skull whilst taking hold of your foot with your hand) and finally paying for your room in lodgings- but without anything satisfactory to show for it.

It's all in vain. His subconscious vision starts buzzing around him again, buzzing around and within him, choking and suffocating him.

Sympathizing with his unusual condition, a good Samaritan living two doors away opts to accompany him to a local hospital for a consultation. A young GP jots down his particulars and insists on his submitting to palpations, auscultations and X-rays, a diagnosis with which Vowl is happy to comply. "Is your condition painful?" this young GP asks him. "Sort of," Vowl blandly informs him. And what is its principal symptom? Chronic insomnia. What about taking a syrup last thing at night? Or a cordial? "I did," says Vowl, "but it had no impact." Conjunctivitis? No. A dry throat? Occasionally. An aching brow? And how! A humming sound in his auditory ducts?"No , but all last night an odd kind of wasp was buzzing around my room." A wasp—or possibly, an imaginary wasp? "Isn't it your job to find out," asks Vowl laconically.

At which point Vowl pays a visit to an otolaryngologist, Dr. Cochin, a jovial sort of chap, balding, with long, auburn, muttonchops, bifocals dangling on a chain across his plump stomach, a salmon pink cravat with black polka dots, and, in his right hand, a cigar stinking of alcohol. Cochin asks him to cough and say "Ahhhh", puts a tiny circular mirror into his mouth, draws a blob of wax out of his auditory organs (as doctors say) , starts poking at his tympanum and massaging his larynx, his nasopharynx, his right sinus and his nasal partition. It's a good, thoroughgoing job and it's a pity that Cochin can't stop irritatingly whistling throughout. [...]

Noon rings out. A wasp, making an ominous sound, a sound akin to a klaxon or a tocsin, flits about. Augustus, who has had a bad night, sits up blinking and purblind. Oh what was that word (is his thought) that ran through my brain all night, that idiotic word that, hard as I'd try to pun it down, was always just an inch or two out of my grasp - fowl or foul or Vow or Voyal? - a word which, by association, brought into play an incongruous mass and magma of nouns, idioms, slogans and sayings, a confusing, amorphous outpouring which I sought in vain to control or turn off but which wound around my mind a whirlwind of a cord, a whiplash of a cord, a cord that would split again and again, would knit again and again, of words without communication or any possibility of combination, words without pronunciation, signification or transcription but out of which, notwithstanding, was brought forth a flux, a continuous, compact and lucid

flow: an intuition, a vacillating frisson of illumination as if caught in a flash of lightning or in a mist abruptly rising to unshroud an obvious sign - but a sign, alas, that would last an instant only to vanish for good.

[*A Void (La Disparition)* tr by Gilbert Adair, The Harvill Press, 1994 © The Harvill Press, 1994, pp. 7-8 and p. 116]

“ ... the path I travelled is written down”

I do not have any childhood memories. Up to about my twelfth year, my story takes up only a few lines: I lost my father at the age of four, my mother at six, I spent the war in different boarding schools in Villard-de-Lans. In 1945, the sister of my father and her husband adopted me.

This absence of a story reassured me for a long time: its objective dryness, its apparent clarity, its innocence, protected me but from what, if not precisely from my story, my lived story, my real story, my own story that, one can imagine, was neither dry nor objective, not apparently clear, nor evidently innocent?

“I do not have any childhood memories”: I stated that assertion with assurance, with almost a sort of defiance. It was not necessary to ask me that question. It was not written down in my curriculum. I was excused from it: another story, the Great One, History with its big axe, had already answered in my stead: the war, the camps.

At thirteen, I invented, related, and sketched a story. Later, I forgot it Seven years ago, one night, in Venice, I suddenly remembered that this story was called “W” and that it was, in a certain way, it not the story, at least one of the stories of my childhood.

Beyond the suddenly restored title, I had practically no memory of W. All that I knew about it takes up fewer than two lines: the life of a society exclusively preoccupied with sport, on a small island in the Tierra del Fuego.

Once again, the writing’s traps were sprung. Once again, I was like a child who plays hide and seek and does not know what he fears or desires most: staying hidden or being discovered.

I later found some of the drawings that I had done at around thirteen. Thanks to them, I reinvented W and wrote it down, publishing it gradually in installments in *La Quinzaine litteraire*, between September 1969 and August 1970.

Today, four years later, I am trying to put an end-I mean by that just as much the “tracing of limits” as “giving a name”-to this slow deciphering. W no more resembles my Olympic phantasm than this Olympic phantasm resembles my childhood. But in the network that they weave as in the reading of it that I do, I know that the path I travelled is written down and described, the progress of my story and the story of my slow progress.

[*W ou le souvenir d’ enfance* tr by Leonard R. Koos, YALE FRENCH STUDIES 1988 ,
Special Issue © Yale University]

Anne-Marie Albiach (1937-2012)

Anne-Marie Albiach was one of France's most distinguished poets in the second half of the 20th century, and a pioneer of the post-1960 avant-garde. Mysterious and haunting on the page and in person, her art was so elegant, logical, spare, and austere it almost disappeared. She developed a technique and terminology as difficult as any.

For her composition was a material process keying on the physical presence of a breathing person. "I live the text as a *body*," she had said. Her work has also been described as a combat between "the trace and the blank page" (Jean Tortel). Her poetry, (in *Anawratha* as much as in *Figured Image*) is the site of dismemberment, violent incision, both the space of the page and the marks on the page scoring the language in the double sense of "score" or "cut" and "score" or "arrange" (Donald Wellman). Albiach has been fortunate in her American translators, Keith Waldrop, Joey Simas, Lydia Davis, Anthony Barnett, Douglas Oliver and Rosmarie Waldrop. Keith Waldrop in *Figured Image* has created perfectly lucid translations of her poems. His limpid immediacy negotiates with deliberate grace the complexities of Albiach's lexicon.

She lived most of her life in Neuilly-sur-Seine on the outskirts of Paris, spent some years in London and a short while in Paris. A known recluse she, however, regularly held court in her apartment in Neuilly-sur-Seine almost like the Tuesday sessions of Mallarme to whose poetry, as well as in theory of poetry she resembles. Author of about a dozen most complex poetry collections she also translated poetry by Louis Zukofsky and Keith Waldrop.

Principal works: *Flammigere* (1967; English, *Flammigere*, 2004); *Etat* (1971; Eng. *Etat* 1989); *Mezza voce* (1984; Eng. *Mezza Voce*, 1988), *Anawratha* (1984); *Le Chemin de l' ermitage* (1986) and *Figure vocative* (1985; Eng. *Vocative Figure*, 1992); *Travail Vertical et Blanc* (1909); *Figurations de l'image* (2004; Eng. *Figured Image*, 2006)

Poem:

ENIGMA

I
availability

doesn't mean

likewise
absence

Practical endeavour: for we must know

epigraph:

some a from c
from the letter an adjective or a noun

How compact is the displacement

(the movement)
(its opaque
rebellion)

near A
breath here of the angles
(of ascent)

enigma

imponderables of desire

irradiation
the paroidal transparency

their present two-dimensional
eternity four

for heavy things the perspective of duration
fear in the face of speed
and its strange
nakedness
the subject's vacancy

TALE

the other
the first
from the plot its purity
one

all the clues are mystery to him

For if it's a theme state it
this interference of numbers
no more natural
than its disappearance

have we been

given the simplicity power to enjoy
which makes
the dry tree matter

the ridged fall exists only in

the outline absolves it
the nearer focus burns at the edges of logic
its structures unremain
calming the irregular
direction of his quest and
discontinued
the valid tenor of our estrangement ceaselessly deferred

geometrician
breaking the bind
of this concord
heavy labor

they regard each other in suspense
terror

among disjointed movements
these necessities
chance terms
female presences that disturb the
data
they upwrench
and the protest
where you habituate

in the movement
that you dare specify where amazement
here for a fiction
we find only our craze for desertion

IV

EPIGRAPH

the unspecifiable
the inexhaustible novel

of a situation
the rain had that colour

body caught
by knowing
the exposures

elucidation

to this envelopment

the forms
recover from their
most circumspect slowness
become heavy

attention is crude
(managed to stay awake somewhere the studious
odium
of doing)

pretense

our censure
for the white nakedness of the letter

This maturation
and full cadence

a hyphen

“to bring the band down on the side of sidewalks”

Antecedent:
the horizontal

in the statement
horizontally
enigmas would be stated
were it not confusing
and this absence

I have perpetrated on you
by my incompetence
this lapsus

IX
and the emphasis
its ineluctable
destruction
 of metaphors
the penury of
necessity
she doesn't get
 refuses

its chance
in defection
extreme

OF HER ARRIVAL

 and the simplicity
extension without relation
by comparisons
for which we have no criterion

weariness

 of our

indistinguishable
measures

Towards their article

metaphor

given

 the most

unceasing contrast

for benefit of other

modes
notations

So the impulse

to covet
we counterfeit them

rejects syntaxes
precision

of the gesture

forms us infirm

So much for

the above suspicion

its substance

Enigma

This second
person
through which it
doesn't belong
if not
this
perpetual

[Enigma (I, II, IV, IX) from *Etat* , Mercure de France, 1971. tr. by Keith Waldrop, *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry* ed. Paul Auster, Vintage Books, 1984. © Keith Waldrop]

Hélène Cixous (1937)

A major figure in contemporary feminist critical theory it is not an easy to describe Hélène Cixous. She is a doctorate on James Joyce, Chair in the department of English literature at the University of Paris VIII, critically acclaimed author of numerous articles, essays, fiction, plays, screenplays, an opera libretto, and books in both literary criticism and philosophy. Hélène Cixous is best known internationally as a feminist. In 1974 she created the *Centre d'Etudes Féminines* at the University of Paris VIII which offered the first doctoral program in women's studies in Europe. Cixous celebrates a theory of *écriture féminine* -- an ethical writing style (which women in particular can access) that is able, through a phonetic inscription of the feminine body, its pulsions and flows, to open up and embrace the difference of the other.

Helene Cixous's first published work of criticism was her doctoral thesis, *The Exile of James Joyce* but the most famous came out in 1975, "Le rire de la Méduse" translated into English as, "The Laugh of the Medusa". In this essay she examines Freud's concept of castration anxiety. Freud argued that this anxiety stems from a fear of female genitalia, perceived by males at a subconscious level as the result of castration—the female body understood subconsciously as "lacking" a phallus. Freud suggested that the mythical story of Medusa, in which people turn to stone when they look at the snake-entwined head of the Gorgon, could be read as addressing this psychoanalytic fear. In "The Laugh of the Medusa" Cixous argues, following many theorists, that this masculine view of women as "lacking" has broad social and political implications and manifestations. In *Coming to Writing and Other Essays* she explores how the problematics of the sexes - viewed as a paradigm for all difference, the organizing principle behind identity and meaning - manifest and write themselves in texts. Hélène Cixous' first novel, *Inside* (Dedans) won her the Prix Médicis in 1969. It is a semi-autobiographical story of a daughter's obsession with her dead father.

Combined, Cixous has produced well over 40 books and more than 100 articles each united and infused by the solitary voice of a poet. As Cixous states herself, "I give myself a poet's right, otherwise I would not dare to speak." Her writing style, with its complex play on words and intense emotions, makes her poetry, dramatic writing and fiction difficult to translate. Reaction to her critical works has been mixed. Many critics have praised her attempts to revolutionize traditional beliefs about women and writing. Others, however, have castigated what they consider the contradictoriness of her work and her intentional resistance to analysis.

Cixous was born in Oran, Algeria. Her father was a physician, and mother, a midwife. Belonging to a family of Sephardic Jews she grew up with a sense of kinship with persecuted groups. She moved to France in her late teens, earned an *agrégation d'anglais* degree in 1959 and *docteur dès lettres* in 1968.

Principal Works: *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975); *Angst* (1985); *Inside* (1986); *The Book of Promethea* (*Le livre de Promethea*, 1983), tr by Betsy Wing University of Nebraska Press, 1991; *Coming to Writing and Other Essays* (*La Venue a ecriture*, 1977), tr by Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle, and Susan Sellers, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1991; *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (1993). *The Newly Born Woman* (1975).

The writer is a secret criminal

The writer is a secret criminal. How? First because writing tries to undertake that journey toward strange sources of art that are foreign to us. “The thing” does not happen here, it happens **somewhere** else, in a strange and foreign country. The writer has a foreign origin; we do not know about the particular nature of these foreigners, but we feel they feel there is an appeal, that someone is calling them back.

The author writes as if he or she were in a foreign country, as if he or she were a foreigner in his or her own family. We don’t know the authors, we read books and we take them for the authors. We think there must be an analogy or identification between the book and the author. But you can be sure there is an Immense difference between the author and the person who wrote; and if you were to meet that person, it would be someone else. The foreign origin of the book makes the scene of writing a scene of immeasurable separation. Is Rembrandt “Dutch”? He always painted “in foreign countries.” His paintings, which paint painting, are inhabited by extraordinary people, foreigners. Everyone has been struck by the fact that Rembrandt constantly painted Jews, imaginary Jews, bedecked Jews: calm, doubly foreign as Jews as bedizened beings, triply hyper-oriental and foreign in their looks. It is as if this strange man had passed through the painting’s shadow toward the far distant source, the foreign source from which he painted, he who was more than a man of his country, more than the issue of Dutch soil.

Look for instance at Rembrandt’s picture entitled “The Jewish Fiancee.” It is softly strange. It is also a metaphor for Rembrandt’s entire work, which is full of familiar foreigners, full of Jews and oriental people who do not belong to Rembrandt’s family. Yet they belong to this other world or be to theirs. As if he were painting to discover his secret foreign origin. We write, we paint, throughout our entire lives as if we were going to a foreign country, as if we were foreigners inside our own families, “hinaus in die Fremde der Heimat,” as Celan writes, that is where we go¹⁴. Between the writer and his or her family the question is always one of departing while remaining present, of being absent while in full presence, of escaping, of abandon. It is both utterly banal and the thing we don’t want to know or say. A writer has no children; I have no children when I write. When I write I escape myself, I uproot myself, I am a virgin; I leave from within my own house and I don’t return. The moment I pick up my pen –magical gesture–I forget all the people I love; an hour later they are not born and I have never known them. Yet we do return. But for the duration of the journey we are killers. (Not only when we write, when we read too. Writing and reading are not separate, reading is a part of writing. A real reader is a writer. A real reader is already on the way to writing.)

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Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing tr by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993 © 1993 Columbia University Press.

“Writing ... does not come from outside”

Writing is not put there, it does not happen out there, it does not come from outside. On the contrary, it comes from deep inside. It comes from what Genet calls the “nether realms.” The inferior realms (*domains inferieurs*). We’ll try to go there for a time, since this is where the treasure of writing lies, where it is formed, where it has stayed since the beginning of creation: down below. The name of the place changes according to our writers. Some call it hell: it is of course a good, a desirable hell. This is what Clarice calls it: *inferno*. She does not always use the word hell but all kinds of parallel denominations (“*the other side*” cited in *The Stream of Life* is Tsvetaeva’s abyss). It is deep in my body, further down, behind thought. Thought comes in front of it and it closes like a door. This does not mean that it does not think, but it thinks differently from our thinking and speech. Somewhere in the depth of my heart, which is deeper than I think. Somewhere in my stomach, my womb, and if you have got a womb-then it is something “else.” You must climb down in order to go in the direction of that place. But as I said yesterday, this sort of descent is much more difficult to achieve, much more tiring, much more physically exacting (*physically* because the soul is body), than climbing up. It is a climb, but it requires the whole strength of everything that is you-which I don’t want to call “body,” since it is more complex than the body-to go through the various doors, obstacles, wall, and distances we have forged to make a life. I know

besides that what also prevents us in our society from going there is not our inability- because *all of us* are able-but our cowardice, our fear. Our fear, since we know perfectly well that we will reach the dangerous point where those who are excluded live-and we hate exclusion. This is our emotional, our personal, and political problem, the fact that we can't bear exclusion. We are afraid of it, we hate to be separated that is why we are apt to commit all kinds of small crimes, self-denials, and treachery.

[*Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* tr by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993 © 1993 Columbia University Press.]

It is time for women to start scoring their feats in written and oral language.

Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away - that's how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak - even just open her mouth - in public. A double distress, for even if she transgresses, her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine.

It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech that has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic; that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain that is the margin or the harem.

Listen to a woman speak at a public gathering (if she hasn't painfully lost her wind). She doesn't 'speak', she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the 'logic' of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materialises what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she *inscribes* what she's saying, because she doesn't deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking. Her speech, even when 'theoretical' or political, is never simple or linear or 'objectified', generalised: she draws her story into history.

There is not that scission, that division made by the common man between the logic of oral speech and the logic of the text, bound as he is by his antiquated relation - servile, calculating - to mastery. From which proceeds the niggardly lip service that engages only the tiniest part of the body, plus the mask.

In women's speech, as in their writing, that element that never stops resonation, which, once we've been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it, retains the power of moving us - that element is the song; first music from the first voice of love that is alive in every woman. Why this privileged relationship with the voice? Because no woman stockpiles as many defences for countering the drives as does a man. You don't build walls around yourself, you don't forego pleasure as 'wisely' as he. Even if phallic mystification has generally contaminated good relationships, a woman is never far from 'mother' (I mean outside her role functions: the 'mother' as non-name and as source of goods.) There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink.

[*The Laugh of the Medusa*/Hélène Cixous, tr by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, 1976, *Signs*, pp. 875-893 ; reprinted in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, University of Massachusetts Press, Cambridge, MA, 1981, pp. 245-264, *Online*.]

Love relationship

The novel *The Book of Promethea* is an account of the love relationship lived and experienced by the narrator 'I', her old writing ally 'H', and the heroine of the action, Promethea, who have come together to produce a text. The love relationship is lived in totality and with a sense of infinity and is described through the physical presence of all the three characters. Whose identities often overlap. Traversing through contradictions, still yet not culminating at a dead end, the text opens up vast areas of thought and writing practice.

Let us be ruthless: I am loved by you, Promethea. And it is love to say that. I love you, Promethea. This is how it is, so immodest and so unmerciful, love. What a hard time I had getting up the courage to accept! Giving requires no courage, but to receive love so much strength, so much patience, and so much generosity must be extended. Only then can love descend upon us the way it wants, in one of its bewitching forms. Sometimes it opens eagle wings and swoops down on a heart to rip it out with one thrust of its beak. And sometimes it slips between our breasts like my tame squirrel. And always it makes itself felt, warm, sometimes merrily cruel, sometimes frail, and always feverish, savage. And with flesh and bone and sharp talons and with all its big or little body it weighs and weighs, it dies not leave itself to the imagination.

Oh, Promethea, how I am loved by you! How you weigh upon me, how you heave me and crush me, how you besiege me and feed me, a transfusion that is marvelous but frightening, but intoxicating. So this is what that herbal potion was all about. What a drunken binge! Sometimes I would like not to drink anymore. Sometimes I am completely steeped in proud exultation.

[*The book of Promethea (Le livre de Promethea)* tr by Betsy Wing. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. P. 105]

Annie Ernaux (1940)

French novelist, autobiographer, memoirist, critic, and essayist.

A critically acclaimed and best-selling author in France, Ernaux was born in rural Normandy in 1940 and was brought up in the *café-épicerie* on the outskirts of Yvetot that her parents had acquired in their journey from the ranks of farm-hand and factory worker to that of small shopkeeper. She was educated at a private Catholic school and developed a passion for literature obtaining a Licence de Lettres Modernes at Rouen University.

Since 1974, Annie Ernaux has published more than a dozen books, most of them available in English, and each a brief, intense first-person narrative that flares up like a lighted match in the space between memoir and fiction. Based in her own life, most only a hundred pages in length, Annie Ernaux's slim volumes make powerful, fascinating reads. Her parents were simple folk, running a grocery store and café in the French countryside, trying to make something better for their daughter. She goes on to study, becomes a teacher, and moves into an intellectual world completely alien to that of her parents. It's difficult to imagine what this must have felt like, when your cultural background is so different from that of your parents. It was difficult for Ernaux. Her parents mean well and do right, but a gulf opens between daughter and parents that cannot be bridged. Her first novel, *Cleaned out* is a semi-autobiographical reflection on her childhood. *La Place* tells the story of her father, and *A Woman's Story* talks about her mother who died of Alzheimer's disease. It reads like an aching requiem for her. From her young age Ernaux felt completely estranged from her mother, at times ashamed of her, at the same time grateful. In a later novel, *Shame* (*La honte*) she explores these feelings.

Ernaux writes simply, clearly, to the point. There is no great embellishment. From book to book the same territory is re-visited, re-examined as she tries to come to terms with her childhood, her parents, her love affairs, abortion, marriage, yet she manages to create something new each time. Ernaux's self-reflection is surprisingly detached, a change from the usual obsessive autobiographical first-person fictions. She was awarded the Prix Renaudot in 1984 for *La Place*. Today she is considered one of the most important and essential writers of the human condition. Her memoirs about her childhood and her parents are compelling and insightful even though their lives were not particularly unique or fascinating. Her latest novel, *Les années* (Gallimard, 2008) is considered her 'magnum opus' and was very well received by the French critics. Here, for the first time, she adopts the third person point of view and gives a vivid look of the French society from after the second World War until today.

Principal Works: *Cleaned Out*, 1990 (*Les armoires vides*, 1974); *A Frozen Woman*, 1995 (*La femme gelée*, 1981); *A Man's Place* 1992 (*La place*, 1984, awarded Prix Renaudot); *A Woman's Story* 1991 (*Une Femme* 1987); *Se perdre*, personal journals, 2001; *L'occupation*, 2002; *Shame*, 1998 (*La honte*, 1997); *Les Années* - novel, 2008.

My mother is dirty ...

Cleaned Out is Annie Ernaux's first novel. The narrator, Denise Lesur, a thinly disguised version of the author herself, is a young university student who has just had an abortion following which she re-examines her life. Centered around the shop and its many customers, it is an interesting picture of life on the fringes between working and

middle class. When she starts going to the more exclusive school Denise realizes that her world is very different from the middle-class households her classmates live in. Her extraordinary academic success that ultimately allows for acceptance, but she moves uneasily between the two worlds. She can never fit in completely with her classmates, nor can she forsake her roots entirely. As she grows older, moving on a path that will lead to university (a path hardly any of her classmates take, regardless of background), her alienation grows. In her own words it is “a quest as well as an explanation of the social and cultural divide that I had experienced. Born of working-class parents who became small shop-keepers, I had gradually changed in my tastes, my habits, my interests and my whole outlook on the world, as a result of an education which took me away from my original background.” She can express her indignation better in a foreign language:

In English, I feel that I can call them all the names under the sun. “My mother is dirty, mad, they are pigs!” I hate the way they wave their arms around, like the lowest of the low, like people who have no idea how to behave and talk properly. There’s no getting away from it. They don’t care, above all, they don’t try to be better. I wish I never had to watch them eat, especially when it’s a nice meal, chicken, cream cakes, they dig in, elbows out, slurping noises, they don’t speak. Shove it all in and chew noisily, let out a little sigh of relief, every drop of gravy mopped up with little bits of bread, sucked, reused, soggy... My mother pokes around her gums with her finger... A total disaster!

[tr Carol Sanders, From *Cleaned Out*, Dalky Archive, paperback, 1991, © Dalky Archive]

A Woman’s Story

In *A Woman’s Story* Annie Ernaux gives a deeply affecting account of mothers and daughters, youth and age, and dreams and reality. Upon her mother’s death from Alzheimer’s, Ernaux embarks on a daunting journey back through time, as she seeks “to capture the real woman, the one who existed independently from me, born on the outskirts of a small Normandy town, and who died in the geriatric ward of a hospital in the suburbs of Paris.” The novel explores the cruel realities of old age, the bond between mother and daughter, tenuous and unshakable at once, the alienating worlds that separate them, and the inescapable truth that we must lose the ones we love. In this quietly powerful tribute, Ernaux attempts to do her mother the greatest justice she can: to portray her as the individual- vibrant, powerful and radiating - she was.

I shall continue to write about my mother. She is the only woman who really meant something to me and she had been suffering from senile dementia for two years. Perhaps i should wait until her illness and death have merged into the past, like other events in my life – my father’s death and the break-up with my husband – so that I feel the detachment which makes it easier to analyse one’s memories. But right now I am incapable of doing anything else.

It’s a difficult undertaking. For me, my mother has no history. She has always been there. When i speak of her, my first impulse is to ‘freeze’ her in a series of images unrelated to time – ‘she had a violent temper’, ‘she was intense in everything she did’ - and to recall random scenes in which she was present. This brings back only the fantasy woman, the one who has recently appeared in my dreams alive once more, drifting ageless through a tense world reminiscent of psychological thrillers. I would also like to

capture the real woman, the one who existed independently from me, born on the outskirts of a small Normandy town, and who died in the geriatric ward of a hospital in the suburbs of Paris. The more objective aspect of my writing will probably involve a cross between family history and sociology, reality and fiction. This book can be seen as literary venture as its purpose is to find out the truth about my mother, a truth that can be conveyed only by words. (Neither photographs, nor my own memories, not even the reminiscences of my family can bring me this truth.) And yet, in a sense, I would like to remain a cut below literature.

Yvetot is a cold town, situated on a windswept plateau lying between Rouen and Le Havre. At the turn of the century, it was an important administrative centre and the trading capital of a region entirely dependent on farming, controlled by a group of wealthy landowners. My grandfather who worked as carter on one of the local farms, and my grandmother, who earned a living from cottage weaving, moved to Yvetot a few years after they were married. Both came from a village three kilometres away. They rented a small cottage with a courtyard in a rural area on the outskirts of town. They were located beyond the railway, somewhere between the last cafes near the station and the first fields of colza. It was there that my mother was born in 1906, the fourth in a family of six. She prided herself on telling people: ‘I wasn’t born in the country.’

Four of the children never left the town at all and my mother spent three quarters of her life in Yvetot. They moved closer to the town centre but never actually lived there. They would ‘go into town’ to attend mass, to buy meat and to send postal orders. One of my cousins now has a flat in the town centre, cut across by the N15, a main road streaming with lorries night and day. She gives her cat sleeping-pills to stop it from going out and getting run over. The area where my mother spent her childhood is very much sought-after by people with high incomes because of its quiet atmosphere and old buildings.

My grandmother laid down the law and made sure her children were taught their place, shouting at them and hitting them when necessary. She was an energetic worker, and a difficult person to get on with. Reading serials was her only relaxation. She had a gift for writing and came top in her canton when she passed her primary certificate. She could have become a schoolmistress but her parents wouldn’t let her leave the village. Parting with one’s family was invariably seen as a sign of misfortune. (In Norman French, ‘ambition’ refers to the trauma of separation; a dog, for instance, can die of ambition.) To understand this story – which ended when she turned eleven – one must remember all those sentences beginning with ‘in the old days’: In the old days, one didn’t go to school like today, one listened to one’s parents, and so on.

She was a good housekeeper, in other words, she managed to feed and clothe her family on practically no money at all. When the children lined up in church, they were dressed decently (no holes or stain), approaching a state of dignity which allowed the family to live without feeling like paupers. She turned back the collars and cuffs of the boys’ shirts so that they would last twice as long. She kept everything, stale bread, the skin off the milk for making cakes, ashes for doing the laundry, the dying heat of the stove for drying plums and dishcloths, and the water used for our morning wash so that we could rinse our hands during the day. She knew all the household tips which lessened the strain of poverty. This knowledge – handed down from mother to daughter for many centuries – stops at my generation. I am only the archivist.

My grandfather, a strong, gentle man, died of a heart attack at the age of fifty. My mother was thirteen at that time and she adored him. After he died, my grandmother's attitude hardened and she became suspicious of everyone. (She was haunted by two visions of horror – going to prison, for boys, and having an illegitimate child, for girls.) When cottage weaving died out, she took in people's laundry and cleaned offices.

Towards the end of her life, she moved in with the youngest daughter and her husband. They lived down by the railway, in a prefab without electricity which was once used as a refectory for the factory next door. My mother took me to see her on Sundays. She was a small, plump woman remarkably agile despite being born with one leg shorter than the other. She read novels, spoke little and was brusque in her manner. She enjoyed drinking eau-de-vie, which she mixed with the coffee dregs in the bottom of her cup. She died in 1952.

[tr by Tanya Leslie From, *A Woman's Story*, Quartet , 27/29 Goodge Street, London, WIP 1FD © Quartet Books Limited]

1. _____ Afterword, *Cleaned Out*, tr Carol Sanders, Dalky Archive, pb, 1991, p. 124-125)

J.M.G. Le Clezio (1940)

J.M.G. Le Clezio is an eminent French-Mauritian writer heralded as the most prolific and extraordinarily open in his ideology. His work reflects an insatiable restlessness and sense of wonder about other places and other cultures. The Swedish Academy praised him in its Nobel Prize citation as the “author of new departures, poetic adventure and sensual ecstasy, explorer of a humanity beyond and below the reigning civilization” and Horace Engdahl, the permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, described Le Clézio as a cosmopolitan author, “a traveler, a citizen of the world, a nomad.”

Le Clézio is an avid world traveler interested in foreign cultures other than Western cultures. For the Nobel committee his work is a "critique of civilisations". He has written more than 40 books of fiction, memoir, children's literature and essays – from *The Mexican Dream* (1988) on the rupture of pre-Columbian cultures, to *Ballaciner* (2007) on his love of cinema. When the prize was announced, his books were already in 36 languages, though only a dozen had made it into English. His early fiction, from *Fever* (1965) to *The Giants* (1973), was formally experimental, plumbing states of fear, crisis and madness amid mechanized urban dystopias and ecological disaster. *War* (1970), sparked by Vietnam, was skewered by Martin Amis as a "torment to read". Yet his style grew more lyrical as he reflected on his wide travels. His mature fiction often draws on his childhood memories and family tree to trace Europe's encounters with other cultures. For Adam Gopnik of *The New Yorker*, while Le Clezio's lesser work can "sound like the narration of a Unicef documentary", his greatest conveys with a "classical poise" the "empathetic description of entire worlds". Le Clézio provides a global vision in whatever he writes. His work defies easy characterization, but his favourite themes remain—exile and self-discovery, cultural dislocation and globalization, the clash between modern civilization and traditional cultures, or transnational encounters. Having lived and taught in many parts of the world, he writes as fluently about North African immigrants in France, native Indians in Mexico and islanders in the Indian Ocean as he does about his own past.

Le Clézio became a literary sensation with his first novel, “Le Procès-verbal” (1963), published in English as “The Interrogation.” The novel follows the meanderings around town of a sensitive young man who winds up for a time in a mental hospital. Winning for him the Prix Renaudot in 1963, it was an immediate sensation. *The Interrogation* is, like the other books he wrote till the mid-1970s, very experimental but his style changed after *Terra Amata* (1969). In his subsequent writings he abandoned experimentation, took up themes like childhood, adolescence, and travelling which attracted a broader, more popular audience. In 1980 Le Clézio published “Désert,” the story of a young nomad woman from the Sahara and her clashes with modern European civilization. The book was considered his definitive breakthrough, and it became the first winner of the Grand Prix Paul Morand, awarded by the Académie Française. However, the English translation of this singular novel appeared in February 2009—a good thirty years after the original.

Desert was partly inspired by tales told him by Jémia, who was born in Morocco. "They spoke to me about the resistance of people to colonial power, and against Moroccan conquest and the modern world," he says. "That's why there are two epochs: the French and Spanish in northern Morocco; and what's survived of the spirit of

resistance in a young girl, an immigrant in France." He also reused a story about resisting colonial rule, "The White Sheik", which he wrote aged 15 after a trip to French Morocco with his father. In *Desert*, the Tuareg wage a holy war against Christian invaders whose true religion is money. "They linked religion and rebellion, while on the other side, it was more about being rational, believing in firepower," he says. "When France sent machine guns and ships against people armed only with shotguns, they were preparing the situation today, when people want to get free of old rulers, and use religion to feed their anger. But it's not the same; there's been a misuse of anger by people who organize terrorism."

With the publication of *Désert* (of which a translation can be expected next year), the laureate's writing took a turn toward more traditional style and storylines. *Onitsha*, published twelve years later, is a semiautobiographical account of a boy's journey with his mother to Nigeria, where the boy's estranged father is stationed.

J.M.G. Le Clézio was born in 1940 in Nice and raised in a nearby village, speaking English and French. His father, a British doctor with strong family connections on the island of Mauritius, lived in Africa for many years while Jean-Marie was growing up. When he was seven Jean-Marie traveled to Nigeria with his family and spent a year out of school, an experience he recalled later in his semiautobiographical novel "Onitsha" (1991). He studied English at the University of Bristol, graduated from the Institut d'Études Littéraires in Nice, received a master's degree at the University of Aix-en-Provence and wrote his doctoral thesis for the University of Perpignan on the early history of Mexico. He has taught at colleges in Mexico City, Bangkok, Albuquerque and Boston; has lived among the Embera Indians in Panama; and has published translations of Mayan sacred texts.

In his personal nature Le Clézio is said to be reclusive, keeps a low profile, and works absolutely on his own terms. With the money he received for the Nobel Prize, Le Clézio developed the Intercultural and Peace Foundation (IPF). The proceeds from this fund help impoverished children in Mauritius.

Major works: *The Interrogation*, 1964 (Le procès-verbal); *Fever*, 1966 (La fièvre); *The Flood*, 1967 (Le deluge); *Desert*, 2009 (*Désert*); *Terra Amata*, 1969 (Terra amata); *Onitsha*, 1997 (Onitsha); *The Mexican Dream, or, The Interrupted Thought of Amerindian Civilizations*, 1993 (Le rêve mexicain ou la pensée interrompue); and *Wandering Star : a Novel*, 2004 (Étoile errante).

Excerpts

1. Lalla knows all the paths ...

The little girl Lalla lives in the shanty town but keeps the memory of her ancestors, "the Blue Men", ancient warriors of the Sahara desert safe in her mind. She often escapes from the city to meet a dumb young shepherd boy, Hartani, and especially to find the solitude in which she caher contact with nature which is powerful, fascinating and sometimes disquieting.

THE SUN RISES over the earth, the shadows stretch over the gray sand, over the dust in the paths. The dunes stand motionless before the sea. The small succulent plants

quiver in the wind. In the cold, deep blue sky there's not a bird, not a cloud. There's the sun. But the morning light wavers a little, as if it weren't quite sure.

Along the path sheltered by the line of gray dunes, Lalla walks slowly. From time to time she stops, looks at something on the ground. Or she picks a leaf from a fleshy plant, squishes it between her fingers to smell the sweet peppery odor of the sap. The plants are dark green, shiny, they look like seaweed. Sometimes a big golden bumblebee is sitting on a clump of hemlock, and Lalla runs to chase it. But she doesn't get too close because she's a little frightened all the same. When the insect flies away, she runs after it, hands outstretched, as if she really did want to catch it. But it's just for fun.

Out here, that's all there is the light in the sky, as far as you can see. The dunes quake with the pounding sea that can't be seen but can be heard. The little succulent plants are shiny with salt, as if from sweat. There are insects here and there, a pale ladybug, a sort of wasp with such a narrow middle looks like it is cut in two, a centipede that leaves tiny marks in the dust, and louse flies, the color of metal, that try to land on the little girl's legs and face to eat the salt.

Lalla knows all the paths, all the dips in the dunes. She could go anywhere with her eyes closed and she'd know where she was right away, just from feeling the ground with her bare feet. At times the wind leaps over the barrier of dunes, throwing handfuls of needles at the child's skin, tangling her black hair. Lalla's dress clings to her moist skin, she has to pull at the cloth to make it come loose.

Lalla knows all the paths, the ones that follow the gray dunes through the scrub as far as the eye can see, the ones that curve around and double back, the ones that never go anywhere. Yet every time she walks out here, there is something new. Today it was a golden bumblebee that led her far away, out beyond the fishermen's houses and the lagoon of stagnant water. A little later, in the brush, that sudden carcass of rusted metal with its threatening claws and horns uplifted. Then, in the sand on the path, a small tin can with no label and with two holes on either side of the lid.

[Desert, tr by C. Dickson, Atlantic Books, London 2009 © C. Dickson 2009] pp 51-52

2. The last free men

Then the silence ceased, and the cries of the living could be heard, the wounded men and animals, the women, children, like a single interminable wail, like a song. It was a sound filled with horror and suffering that rose from all sides at once, on the plain and on the riverbed.

Now Nour was walking over the shingles, amongst the felled bodies. The voracious flies and wasps were already buzzing in black clouds above the cadavers, and Nour felt nausea tightening in his throat.

With very slow movements, as if they were emerging from a dream, women, men, children, drew back the brush and walked over the riverbed without speaking. All day long, until nightfall they carried the bodies of the men to the riverbanks to bury them. When night came, they lit fires on each bank, to ward off the jackals and bread and sour milk, and Nour ate and drank with relief. Then he slept, lying on the ground, without even thinking of death.

The next day, at the crack of dawn, the crack of dawn, the men and women dug more graves for the warriors, then they also buried their horses. Over the graves, they placed large rocks from the river.

When everything was finished, the last blue men started walking again, on the southern trail, the one that is so long that it seems to never end. Nour was walking with them, barefoot, with nothing but his woolen cloak and a little bread tied in a moist cloth. They were the last Imazighen, the last free men, the Taubalt, the Tekna, the Tidrarin, the Aroussiyyine, the Sebaa, the Reguibat Sahel, the last survivors of the Berik Allah, those who are blessed by God. They had nothing but what their eyes saw, what their bare feet touched. Before them, the flat earth stretched out like the sea, glistening with salt. It undulated, created white cities with magnificent walls, with domes that burst like bubbles. The sun burned their faces and their hands, the light hollowed out its dizziness at the time of day when the shadows of men are like bottomless wells.

Each evening, their bleeding lips sought the cool wells, the brackish mud of alkaline rivers. Then, the cold night enveloped them, crushed their limbs and took their breath away, weighed down on their necks. There was no end to freedom, it was as vast as the wide world, beautiful and cruel as the light, gentle as the eyes of water. Each day, at the first light of dawn, the free men went back towards their home, towards the south, towards the place where no one else could live. Each day, with the same motions, they erased the traces of their fires, they buried their excrement. Turned towards the desert, they carried out their wordless prayer. They drifted away, as if in a dream, disappeared.

[*Desert*, tr by C. Dickson, Atlantic Books, London 2009 © C. Dickson 2009, pp 351-52]

3. Description of the fugitive Jews

Wandering Star (written in 1992) begins with the story of a Jewish girl fleeing France for Italy towards the end of the Second World War, then making her way to a kibbutz in Jerusalem. The chilling scene in which the fugitive Jews are captured and herded into boxcars by the SS:

They soon started out again because night was already gathering on the floor of the valley. As they entered Borgo San Dalmazzo on the road to the train station, the soldiers of the Wehrmacht captured them. It all occurred very quickly, before they really knew what was happening. In front of them, at the end of the long, cold, narrow street, stood soldiers wearing green coats. Behind them, trucks advanced slowly with their headlights lit, pushing them forward like a herd. That's how they reached the train station. There, the soldiers had them go into a big building to the right of the station. They all went in, one after the other, until the large rooms were full. Then the Germans closed the doors.

It was right. Voices rang out around the station. There was no light save the glow of the truck headlights. The women sat down on the floor next to their bundles and the children crouched near them. There were children crying, sobs, whispers. The broken windowpanes let the cold night air into the large rooms through wire grates. There was not a piece of furniture, not a bed. At the end of the largest room, the overflowing latrines smelled foul. The night wind blew over the frightened children. Then the youngest ones fell asleep.

Around midnight, they were awakened by the noise of trains pulling in, maneuvering, squeaking, boxcars bumping together, locomotives blowing off steam. There were some whistle calls. The children tried to see what was happening; the youngest started whimpering again. But there were no human voices, only the sounds of machines. They were on the middle of nowhere.

At dawn, the soldiers opened the doors on the side of the railroad tracks and they pushed the men and the women into windowless boxcars painted in camouflage colors. It was cold, the steam from the locomotives hung in phosphorescent clouds. The children clung to their mothers. maybe they said, "Where are we going? Where are they taking us?" Everything was empty, the platforms, the buildings around the station, and the surrounding city. There were only the scattered, ghostly figures of soldiers wearing their long coats, standing in the steam from the trains. Maybe the men dreamt of escaping, all they had to do was forget about the women and children and run across the tracks, jump over the embankment, and very silent, no cries and no voices, no birds and no dogs barking, only the low hissing of the locomotives and the screeching of the couplings, then the shrill sound of wheels when they began slipping and scraping on the rails and the train struck out on that journey to nowhere, Turin, Genoa, Ventimiglia, the children hugging their mothers, the acrid smell of sweat and urine, the jolting boxcars, the smoke seeping into the blind cars and the light of dawn showing through the cracks in the door, Toulon, Marseille, Avignon, the clattering of the wheels, the children crying, the muffled voices of women, Lyon, Dijon, Melun, and the silence that followed when the train stopped, and still another cold night, the numbing stillness, Drancy, the long wait, all of those names and all of those faces that were disappearing, as if they'd been brothers and sisters torn from Esther's memory.

[*Wandering Star*, tr by C. Dickson, Curbstone Press, Inc., Connecticut, 2004 © C. Dickson,2004] pp. 110-111

Tahar Ben Jelloun (1944)

Tahar Ben Jelloun is a Moroccan, French poet, novelist and essayist. Born in Fez, Morocco he is one of North Africa's most successful post-colonial writers. Except for his Ph.D. degree he received his education in Morocco. After attending a bilingual (Arabic-French) elementary school, he studied French in Tangier, Morocco until he was eighteen, completed his studies in philosophy at Université Mohammed V in Rabat in 1963, taught philosophy for a few years, then in 1971 immigrated to France where he attended the Université de Paris and received a Ph.D. in psychiatric social work in 1975.

A prolific writer, Ben Jelloun has regularly been publishing from 1973 onwards, and has, as regularly been also receiving awards, but it was only with the publication of his novel *L'Enfant de Sable*, (*The Sand Child*, 1985) that he became well-known and recognized. In 1987 he published *La Nuit Sacree* (*The Sacred Night*), the sequel to *L'Enfant de Sable*, for which he received the Prix Goncourt.

Tahar Ben Jelloun writes expressively about Moroccan culture, the immigrant experience, human rights, and sexual identity. Much of his fiction is set in Morocco, though his main inspiration, Tangier - "where it's possible to see the Atlantic and the Mediterranean at the same time" - is "more a memory than a city". His novel *The Sand Child* (1985) probes the constraints on women in traditional Muslim society through the ambiguous tale of Ahmed/Zahra, a lamented eighth daughter passed off as a boy by her parents, who trades integrity and sanity for male privilege. In his other novels he charts extreme states of powerlessness and invisibility, entrapment and rebellion through the characters of women, migrants, prostitutes, the illiterate, the imprisoned, madmen and seers, or as he says in his fictional meditation on ageing, *Silent Day in Tangier*, he writes of solitude "so absolute the self dissolves". In *Leaving Tangier* the invisible, omnipresent character is Morocco itself, as he skillfully demonstrates the difficulty of ever really "leaving" your country. Although most of the plot takes place in Spain, the characters' thoughts continually turn back to Morocco, a country that remains the "dearest and greatest" of their anxieties. "Leaving Tangier" is a brave, unflinching look at the issues underlying economic migration from North Africa—and the hard choices people make between roots and wings.

Principal works: *Harrouda* (1973); *Moha le Fou, Moha le Sage* (1978); *The Sand Child* (1985); *The Sacred Night* (1987); *Silent Day in Tangiers* (1990); *With Downcast Eyes* (1991); *L'Auberge des pauvres* (1997); *This Blinding Absence of Light* (2000); *Islam Explained* (2002); *Leaving Tangier s* (2009); *The Rising of the Ashes* (2009) *A Palace in the Old Village* (2010)

'Your belly cannot conceive a male child'

In the Moroccan society boys are valued higher than the girls and are considered superior to them. Traditionally a woman runs the risk of being repudiated by her husband if she doesn't produce a boy:

His idea was a simple one, but difficult to realize, to maintain in all its strength: the child to be born was to be a male even if it was a girl! That was his decision, his unshakable determination. One evening he summoned his pregnant wife, shut himself up with her in a room on the terrace, and said to her in a firm, solemn voice: "Until now we have done nothing with our lives but wait stupidly, arguing with fate. Our bad luck is not

our fault. You are a good woman, a submissive, obedient wife, but after you had your seventh daughter I realized that you carry some infirmity within you: your belly cannot conceive a male child; it is made in such a way that it will produce only females.

“I do not hold this against you. I am a good man. I shall not cast you off and take a second wife. I, too, bitterly resent that inhospitable womb. It will be cured, as habit reversed. I have issued it a challenge: It will give me a boy. My honor will at last be restored; the color will return to my cheeks, that of a man, a father who may die in peace, keeping his rapacious brothers from looting his fortune and leaving you in need. I have been patient with you. We have been all over the country to try to cure you. Even when I was angry, I restrained myself from being violent.

“Of course, you may reproach me with lacking tenderness towards your daughters. They are yours. I have given them my name, but I cannot give them my affection, because I never wanted them. They arrived by mistake, in place of the boy I have yearned for. You will understand why I no longer see them or concern myself with their fate. They have grown up with you. They have no father.

“I have decided that the eighth birth will be marked by a festival, the greatest of ceremonies, a celebration of joy that will last for seven days and seven nights. You will be a mother, a true mother, you will be a princess, for you will have brought to birth a boy. The child you shall bring into the world will be a male, it will be a man, it will be named Ahmed—even if it is a girl! I have arranged everything. Lalla Radhia, the old midwife, will be sent for; she will last only another year or two, and anyway I shall give her enough, money so she will keep the secret. I have already talked to her about it, and she said that this idea had occurred to her, too. We soon came to an agreement. You, of course, will be the well and tomb of this secret. Your happiness, and even your life, will depend on it. The child will be welcomed as a man who will illuminate this sad house with his presence, he will be brought up according to the tradition reserved for males, and of course he will govern and protect you after my death. Ahmed will rule over this household of women when I am gone.

“We shall now seal a pact of secrecy: give me your right hand; let our fingers intertwine, and let us bear these two clasped hands to our mouths, then to our foreheads. Now let us swear fidelity unto death! Let us perform our ablutions. We shall pray and swear our pact on the open Koran.”

And so the pact was sealed. The woman had to acquiesce. She obeyed her husband, as usual, but this time felt involved in a common action. At last she had her husband’s confidence. Her life would have a meaning.

[*The Sand Child* tr by Alan Sheridan, John Hopkins University Press, 2000 © 1987, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. (pp.12-15)]

I said, “So long.”

Confiding the truth to his daughter, Zahra’s father tells her how she was ‘my joy, my light’, and how ‘after the fake circumcision I started to lose my mind’ [...] you dressed up as a girl, as a nurse, as a mother. You liked dressing up. I kept having to remind you that you were a little boy’. After his death Zahra, renounces her role as an only son and heir.

I opened my bedroom door quietly, took a few things I had kept in a bag, and left through the same terrace.

Wearing a jellaba and a scarf I headed for the cemetery. It was a clear night. I stepped over a low wall to avoid being seen by the guard and went to my father's grave.

It was the eve of the end of Ramadan. More stars than usual. The earth covering the grave was still fresh. I dug quickly and methodically, by hand. I was careful not to disturb the dead man or to attract the guard's attention. When I saw a piece of white shroud, I slowly moved the soil away with my fingers. The body was icy, the shroud damp from the soil. I shivered, though it was not cold. I stopped for a moment and stared at the dead man's head. It looked like the white material near his nostrils was moving. Was he still breathing, or was it just a hallucination? I emptied the bag, which contained almost everything I possessed: a man's shirt, a pair of trousers, a piece of a birth certificate, a photograph of the circumcision ceremony, my identity card, the marriage certificate for me and poor Fatima, the medicine I had made my father take, socks, shoes, a ring of keys, a belt, a tin of snuff, a packet of letters, an account book, a ring, a handkerchief, a broken watch, a vial, a half-burned candle.

Before filling in the grave, I squatted down to pack the objects in and felt a pain in my chest, as though something were squeezing my rib cage. My breasts were still wrapped tight to stop them from growing. In a rage i tore off the wretched disguise, several yards of white cloth. I unrolled it and wrapped it around the dead man's neck, then knotted it and pulled it tight. I was sweating. I got rid of all my life, a time of lies and deception. I tamped the objects down on the body with my hands and feet, stepping on it a little. I filled in the grave. The mound was bigger now. I covered it with heavy stones and meditated for a moment, not to pray or to ask God's mercy on that poor man's soul, but to soak up the new air I now breathed. I said, "So long." Or maybe it was "Fare well, fictive glory ..."

The Sacred Night, tr by Alan Sheridan, John Hopkins University Press, 2000 © 1989,
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. (pp.50-51)

Daniel Pennac (1944)

Daniel Pennac (real name Daniel Pennacchioni) is a French novelist and essayist. One of the most translated authors in France, he has written books for both adults and children. He was born in Casablanca, Morocco. After completing his education in Nice he became a school teacher. He began to write for children and then wrote his “La Saga Malaussène”. Written between 1985 and 1999, this book series is hilarious, sometimes heartbreaking, but always a great read. It tells the amazing stories of the Malaussène family—Benjamin, the professional scapegoat in a big Paris department store, his friends and the mix of crazy characters who surround it.

Pennac’s writing style is generally humorous and imaginative. Along with fiction he has also written pedagogical essays like, *Reads Like Novel (Comme un roman)*, and *Rights of the Reader*. *The Rights of the Reader* grew from his teaching experiences in “challenging” schools. The central idea of the essay is his belief that readers have rights: to read what, how, where and when they want, and - if they choose - the right NOT to read. has sold over a million copies in France. His Comic, *Débauche*, written jointly with Jacques Tardi treats the topic of unemployment, revealing his social preoccupations. Daniel Pennac received the Prix du Livre Inter in 1990 for *La petite marchande de prose*, le Prix Renaudot in 2007 for *School Blues (Chagrin d’ecole)*.

Principal Works : *The dictator and the hammock* (2006); *The Scapegoat* (1998); *School Blues* (2007); *Monsieur Malaussène* (2003); *Passion Fruit* (2001); *Reads like a novel* (1994); *The Rights of the Readers* (2008); *Write to Kill* (1999); *The fairy gunmother* , (1997).

He’d quite simply come to get his due and no messing:

Benjamin Malaussène’s official job title is Quality Controller but his real function at the Store is to be the scapegoat for the rage of the customers. . He excels at his job. So sweet is his nature, so pathetic and eloquent his contrition that most indignant victims withdraw their complaints. The Store doesn’t have to replace the goods, and everybody is happy. It is a fun idea, and Pennac spins it out nicely:

“Three days in hospital and a fortnight off work. I’m going to have your Quality Controller’s guts for garters.”

That was the customer speaking. In a neutral voice, just as I’d feared, full of deadly certainty. He wasn’t there to complain, nor to argue, nor even to demand anything—he’d quite simply come to get his due and no messing. You only had to glance at him to see that that was the way he always went about things. And you only had to glance at him again to see that this had not allowed him to clamber very far up the social ladder. His heart must have got in his way somehow. But Lehmann didn’t sniff characters out like that. He was used to doing the punching and so was only frightened of one thing: getting punched back. And seen from that angle, our man certainly looked impressive.

I put enough terror into my eyes for Lehmann finally to pluck up the courage to bring me into the conversation. The long and short of it was that our Mr So-and-So, a professional deep-sea diver (why tell me that? To guarantee the muscle?), had ordered a double bed the previous week from our solid wood furniture department.

“And solid wood’s your sector, isn’t it, Malaussene?”

My pate nodded timidly.

“So, he ordered a hand-sawn walnut double bed, reference number T.P.885, from your department, Monsieur Malaussene, and the two legs at the head of this bed snapped during the first night.”

A pause. I glanced at the deep-sea diver, whose lower jaw was massacring a scrap of chewing gum. Then I glanced at Lehmann, who was looking rather relieved at having passed me the parcel.

“The guarantee ... “ said I.

“The guarantee will be respected, but your responsibility goes further than that, otherwise I wouldn’t have called you in here.”

I took a good long look at my shoes.

“There was someone else in that bed.”

Even when shitting himself, Lehmann couldn’t resist this sort of amusement.

“A young lady, if you see what I mean ... “

But the rest evaporated under the blow torch from the colossus’s eyes. And he was the one who rounded off:

“A collarbone and two ribs. My fiancée. In hospital.”

[*The Scapegoat (Au Bonheur des Ogres)* tr by Ian Monk , The Harvill Press, London 1998 © Ian Monk 1998] pp.27-28

You’ ve got to read

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This teacher was not inculcating a knowledge of something, he was offering up what he knew. He was less a teacher than a master troubadour—one of those jugglers with words who used to haunt the hostleries of the road to Compostela, and sang chronicles of heroic exploits to the illiterate pilgrims.

Since everything needs to start somewhere, each year he’d lead this little flock back to the origins of the novel in the oral tradition. His voice, like that of the troubadours, would address itself to those *who didn’t know how to read*. He got eyes to open, lit lanterns, got his entourage to set off on the literary trail, on a pilgrimage without destination or certainties, the walk of one man towards another.

‘Most important of all was the fact that he would read everything to us loud. He had immediate confidence in our desire to understand. Anyone who reads out loud to you is telling you loudly that you can become worthy of the book being read. He’s really making you a *gift* of reading!’

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Instead of which, those of us who are readers, and who claim to spread a love for books, we too often prefer to see ourselves in the guise of commentators, interpreters, analysts, critics, biographers, or exegetes, of works which are struck dumb by the pious account we render of their greatness. Caught in the fortress of expertise, the words of the work yield to our own words. Rather than allowing the intelligence of the text to speak through our mouths, we rely on our own intelligence, and speak *about* the text. We are

not emissaries of the work, but sworn guardians of a temple whose marvels we extol, with the very words which close its doors: 'You've got to read, got to read!'

[*Reads Like A Novel (Comme un roman)* tr by Daniel Gunn Quartet Books Ltd. 1994 ©
by Daniel Gunn 1994 pp]

Patrick Modiano (1945)

Patrick Modiano was born outside Paris in 1945 to a Sephardic Jewish family. His father, Albert Modiano, survived the war in Paris dishonorably, as a clandestine black marketer profiting from business deals with the Nazis. Extremely conscious of this shameful legacy Modiano has always remained “distressed and tormented to be born in 1945.” In a 2010 magazine interview, he referred to himself as a “product of the dunghill of the Occupation, that bizarre time when people who should have never met did meet and by chance produced a child.” As a writer, he has spent decades sorting out his feelings about his heritage. Obsessed with the troubled and shameful period of the Occupation Modiano returns to this theme in all of his novels. “After each novel, I have the impression that I have cleared it all away,” he says between two silences. “But I know I’ll come back over and over again to tiny details, little things that are part of what I am.” Few European writers today have been more consistently haunted by modern Jewish history than Patrick Modiano. All his books are deeply influenced by World War II.

Young Patrick began to write when his talent was spotted by the renowned author Raymond Queneau who also happened to be his math teacher. Modiano’s first foray into literature, *La Place de l’Etoile*—a novel about a wartime Jewish collaborator—so displeased his father that he tried to buy up all the existing copies. A few years later the budding writer won the Académie Française’s Grand Prix du Roman for his novel *Les Boulevards de Ceinture* (Ring Roads). “Actually, I never thought of doing anything else,” he says of his literary career. “I had no diploma, no definite goal to achieve. Modiano’s novels all delve into the puzzle of identity: How can I track evidence of my existence through the traces of the past? In **Missing Person** (*Rue des Boutiques Obscures*), from Polynesia to Rome, an amnesiac tries to collect data on his past and his acquaintances. In **Out of the Dark** (*Du Plus Loin de l’Oubli*) Modiano’s narrator recalls his shadowy love affair in the 1960s with the enigmatic Jacqueline. Fifteen years after their breakup, they meet again, but she has changed her name and denies their past. What is real and what is not remain to be seen in this dreamlike novel that typifies Modiano’s obsessions and elegiac prose. At the core of his best-known and poignant novel, **Dora Bruder** is Modiano’s real-life investigation into the disappearance of a young Jewish girl, announced in a newspaper—back in 1941. Patrick Modiano’s fiction is intricately caught up in time, as he himself says. ‘The great, the inevitable subject of the novel, is always ... time.’ And more interestingly, less portentously: ‘I had the *mania* of looking back, always that feeling of something lost, not like paradise, but certainly lost.’

One of the few French writers to achieve both critical and public success Modiano has developed a rare combination of excellence and elegance so compelling that singer-songwriter Vincent Delerm evoked it in his 2004 song “Le Baiser Modiano.” Yet he shuns the limelight and remains humble. One can never stumble upon in a literary cocktail party or on popular talk shows. Patrick Modiano has published 22 novels and is a winner of the Grand prix du roman de l’ Academie francaise, in 1972, the Prix Goncourt in 1978 for his novel *Rue de boutiques obscures*, and was honored with the prestigious 2010 Prix Mondial Cino Del Duca by the Institut de France for his lifetime achievement and most recently the 2012 Austrien State Prize for European Literature.

Principal works: *La Place de L’ Etoile* (1968); *Night Rounds* (*La Ronde de nuit*,1969); *Ring Roads* (*Les Boulevards de ceinture*,1972); *Missing Person* (*Rue des boutiques*

obscures,1978); *Memory Lane* (*Une Jeunesse*,1981); *A Trace of Malice* (*Quartier Perdu*, 1984); *Honeymoon* (*Voyage de Noces*,1990); *Out of the Dark*(*Du plus loin de l' oubli*, 1998); *Dora Bruder, aka The Search Warrant* (*Dora Bruder*, 1997); *L' Horizon*, (2010); *L' Herbe de nuit* (2012)

“ ... she couldn't shake it off. Nor could I.”

Jean B is a successful explorer and documentary film-maker, who after 20 years roaming the world feels there is nothing left to explore. So one morning, instead of embarking on yet another trip to the jungles of Brazil, he hops planes, abandons wife and friends, and ends up in a cheap hotel in one of Paris's lost suburbs. In this hotel, he devotes his energies to following the traces of a woman he met briefly more than 25 years before. During the few hours spent with her and her husband on the Cote d'Azur he had been haunted by her lost gaze, by the overwhelming sense he had of life having drained from her, leaving her totally empty and lost. Then a few years later he had learnt by chance that she had committed suicide. Now Jean tries to climb back through time and distance to find the reasons for her death, sensing that her story may also contain the secret of his own disenchantment with life. He tracks her life back to the Second World War, and the time she spent with her father as Jewish refugees in Paris. He imagines her marriage and honeymoon on the same Cote d'Azur where he met her years later as being based on a betrayal of her father and her past. Somehow he feels her to be a kindred spirit, unable to shake off a sense of guilt that gradually erodes the meaning of her life. The closing lines of the brief novel fall like a heavy pall: “in the end it returns in force, and she couldn't shake it off. Nor could I”

A woman had committed suicide in one of the hotel rooms two days before, on the eve of fifteenth of August. The barman was explaining that they had called an ambulance, but in vain. He had seen the woman in the afternoon. She had come into the bar. She was on her own. After the suicide the police had questioned him. He hadn't been able to give them many details. A brunette. The hotel manager had been rather relieved because the event had escaped notice as there were so few guests at this time of year. There had been a paragraph, this morning, in the *Corriere della sera*. A French woman. What was she doing in Milan in August? They turned to me, as if they expected me to be able to tell them. Then the barman said to me in French:

“People shouldn't come here in August. In Milan everything 's closed in August.”

The other agreed, with his dismal “Mah!” And they both turned a reproachful eye on me, to make me fully realize that I had been guilty of an indiscretion, and even worse than an indiscretion, of a rather serious offence, in landing up in Milan in August. [...]

I had bought the *Corriere della sera*. I wanted to read the paragraph about that woman. She had no doubt arrived from Paris at the platform where I now was, and I was going to make the journey in reverse, five days later ...What a strange idea to come and commit suicide here, when friends are waiting for you in Capri ... What had caused her to do it I might never know.

[...]

There was a warm breeze – almost a sirocco-and a few dead leaves that it had blown off the trees were whirling around in the air. The first sign of autumn. I felt fine on the bike. I had been afraid I wouldn't be able to get up the slope of the Boulevard

Mortier. But I did. It was easy. I didn't even need to pedal any more. A mysterious force carried me along. No cars. Silence. And even when the street lights became rather too far apart, I could see clearly, because of the full moon.

I hadn't imagined that it would be such a short way. To think that I had been reluctant to leave the porte Doree for the Fieve hotel, near the Buttes Chaumont, as if it were the eve of a journey to Mongolia ... They are very close, the Buttes-Chaumont, and, if I wanted to, in a few minutes I could get to 19, Rue d' Atlas, where Ingrid lived with her father when she was a child. I had already reached the La Chapelle station, whose tracks and sheds I could just make out in the shadow below. Another few hundred meters along groups of sleeping blocks, and there was the Porte de Clignancourt. It was so very many years since I had been in this district that coming back to it that night I understood why all I had to do was let myself freewheel on the red bike: I was going back in time.

I started down the Boulevard Ornano and braked a little farther on, at the crossroads. I left the bike against the window of the chemist's. Nothing broke the silence. Except the water flowing along the gutter, murmuring like a fountain. That winter at the beginning of the sixties, when it had been so cold in Paris, we were living in an hotel in the Rue Championnet, whose name I have forgotten, A few steps in the street and I'd be outside it, but I preferred to carry straight on. In January that year, Annette had had a favourable reply from the couture house and she had to go there one afternoon to be taken on for a trial period.

The previous day was a Sunday. It had been snowing. We went for a walk in the district. So one of us was beginning to work: we were becoming adult. We went into a café at the Porte Clignancourt. We chose a table between two banquettes, right in the back, where a little jukebox had been stuck against the wall. That evening we wanted to go to the Ornano 43 cinema, but it was better to go to bed early so Annette would be on form the next day.

And now here I was arriving at that cinema, which had been turned into a shop. On the other side of the road, the hotel where Ingrid had lived with her father was no longer an hotel but a block like all the others. The café on the ground floor she had told me about no longer exists. One evening she too had returned to this district, and for the first time she had felt a sense of emptiness.

Circumstances and settings are of no importance. One day this sense of emptiness and remorse submerges you. Then, like a tide, it ebbs and disappears. But in the end it returns in force, and she couldn't shake it off. Nor could I.

[*Honeymoon*, tr by Barbara Wright, Verba Mundi, David R. Godine Publisher Inc., Boston, 1995 © Harper Collins Publishers, 1992 pp. 1-4 & 118-120]

'Hello Jacqueline.'

The narrator, writing in 1995 looks back thirty years to a time when, having abandoned his studies and selling off his old art books to get by, he came to know Gerard and Jacqueline—a young, enigmatic couple who seem to live off roulette winnings. He falls in love with Jacqueline, they run off to England where they share a few sad, aimless months until one day Jacqueline disappears. Fifteen years later they meet again in Paris. They spend a few hours together recalling the haunting inaccessibility of the past, and

Jacqueline disappears again. Almost fifteen years after that he spots her again, this time only from a distance.

Someone was ringing the doorbell. Darius stood up and walked toward the front door. He smiled at me as he passed by. The others went on talking, and in the heat of discussion the man in the blazer was making broad gestures, as if he were trying to convince them of something.

Voices in the entryway. They were coming nearer. I heard Darius and a woman speaking in low tones. I turned around. Darius was standing with a couple, and all three of them were at the threshold of the living room. The man was tall, brown-haired, wearing a gray suit, with rather heavy features, his blue eyes shallow-set. The woman was wearing a yellow summer dress that left her shoulders bare.

‘We’ve come too late,’ the man said. ‘Everyone has already left... .’

He had a slight accent.

‘No, no,’ said Darius. ‘They’re waiting for us upstairs.’

He took each of them by the arm.

The woman, whom I had seen in three-quarters profile, turned around. My heart jumped. I recognized Jacqueline.

They were walking toward me. I stood up, like a robot.

Darius introduced them to me:

‘George and Thérèse Caisley.’

I greeted them with a nod. I looked the so-called Thérèse Caisley squarely in the eyes, but she didn’t blink. Apparently she didn’t recognize me. Darius seemed embarrassed not to be able to introduce me by name.

‘These are my downstairs neighbors,’ he told me. ‘I’m happy they came... .And in any case, they wouldn’t have been able to sleep because of the noise... .’

Caisley shrugged:

‘Sleep? ... But it’s still early,’ he said. ‘The day is only beginning.’

I tried to make eye contact with her. Her gaze was absent. She didn’t see me, or else she was deliberately ignoring my presence. Darius led them across the room to the couch where the others were sitting. The man in the blazer stood up to greet Thérèse Caisley. The conversation started up again. Caisley was very talkative. She hung back a little, with a sullen or bored look. I wanted to walk toward her, take her aside, and quietly say to her:

‘Hello, Jacqueline.’

[*Out of the Dark* tr by Jordan Stump, University of Nebraska Press, 1998 © 1998
University of Nebraska Press (pp. 124-5)]

Pierre Michon (1945)

Pierre Michon is a widely-acclaimed French writer. Raised by his mother, he studied literature at Clermont -Ferrand, but decided to join a travelling theatre company. He entered the world of literature at the age of 37 with the book, *small Lives*, a collection of interlocking stories looking at eight lives. Even though it is a short book at just 97 pages it is one that Michon spent fifteen years working on. Divided into eight novella-length « lives » set in various historical period , these mini-biographies—"vies minuscules"—are short in length, and humble in their choice of subjects. Michon makes the everyday French countryside come alive with the silent, throbbing transcendence of a Van Gogh painting.

Michon's prose tends to slow down in order to oblige you to hear its rhythms and also to see and touch and smell what is happening beneath it. He strives simultaneously for an opaqueness that calls attention to the verbal coloration of the prose and for a transparency that reveals a "real" sensuous world. In Renaissance painting, such a fusing of surface and depth emerged with the development of glazes-layers of varnish that one both sees and sees through. In his best narrative and descriptive passages, Michon gives the effect of a painter building up his glazes. Out of flatness he creates high relief. In a book of literary essays, *Trois Auteurs* (1997), Michon tells us that it was William Faulkner who opened the doors of literature for him. Michon also speaks with respect of Proust, Melville, and Balzac. After the symbolist poet Mallarmé, Michon defines prose by saying, "There is no such thing as prose. There is only verse with differing degrees of rhythm." Two additional voices from twentieth-century French novel are audible through Michon's prose, that of Alain Fournier, (n particular his *Le Grand Meaulnes*, a schoolboy fantasy of escape to a bucolic paradise), and that of Jean Giono, in particular his early Alpine novels of farmers and shepherds whose closeness to the land and to nature gives them a corresponding closeness to the supernatural and the transcendent.

Pierre Michon is considered by some to be one of the great masters of contemporary French prose. He has won numerous prizes, including the **Prix France Culture** for his first novel, *Small Lives (Vies minuscules)*, the **Prix Louis Guilloux** for *The Origin of the World*, and the **Prix de la Ville de Paris** for his body of work (1996), **Prix Decembre** in 2002 for *Corps du roi*, Verdier, 2002, **Grand prix du roman de l'Academie francaise** in 2009, and **Petrarca-Preis** in 2010. . His novels and stories have been translated into German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Portuguese, Polish, Serbian, Czech and English. In contrast to writers of the generations between Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus on the one hand, and Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes on the other, Pierre Michon, in spite of having won an array of French literary prizes, has remained little known in English.

Principal works: *Small Lives*, 2008 (*Vies minuscules*, Gallimard,1984) ; *The Eleven (Les onze*, Verdier, 2009); *The Origin of the World*, 2002 (*La Grande Beune*, Verdier 1996); *La Vie de Joseph Roulin*, Verdier, 1988; *Abbés*, Verdier, 2002. *Corps du roi*, Verdier, 2002; *Masters and servants*, 1997 (*Maîtres et serviteurs*, Verdier, 1990).

Everything about her screamed desire ...

Lust is a common theme in literature, but rarely has it been expressed as poetically and profoundly as in Pierre Michon's novel, *The Origin of the World*. Told in the voice of a 20-year-old grammar school teacher in a small French town in the Dordogne, it reveals the instructor's obsession with the single mother behind the counter at the local tabac.

Everything about her screamed desire, something that people say enough that it's almost meaningless, but it was a quality that she gave of generously to everyone, to herself, to nothing, when she was alone and had forgotten herself, setting something in motion while settling a fingertip to the counter, turning her head slightly, gold earrings brushing her cheek while she watched you or watched nothing at all: this desire was open, like a wound: and she knew it, wore it with valor, with passion. But what are words? She wasn't clay: more the beating of wings in a storm, and yet no flesh could conceivably have been more perfectly ample, more substantial, more bound by its weight. The weight of this torso, so slender despite the blossoming of her breasts, was considerable.

[*The Origin of the World* tr Wyatt Alexander Mason, Rupa & Company pb 2005 © Wyatt Alexander Mason 2002]

He alone understood nothing ...

Divided into eight mini-biographies, these "vies miniscules" are short in length, and humble in their choice of subjects. Michon makes the everyday French countryside come alive with the silent, throbbing transcendence of a Van Gogh painting. An illiterate old man sits at the window of a provincial hospital:

Father Foucault would not go to Paris. Already this provincial town, and no doubt even his own village, seemed to him inhabited by the erudite, fine connoisseurs of the human soul and users of its common currency, which was written; teachers, door-to-door salesmen, doctors, even farmers, all knew, signed, and decided, with varying degrees of boastfulness; and he did not question that learning, which others possessed in so flagrant a fashion. Who knows, perhaps they could name the date of their deaths, those who knew how to write the word, "death." He alone understood nothing, hardly decided anything; he could not bear that vaguely monstrous incompetence, and perhaps with good reason; life and its authorized annotators had certainly made him well aware that to be illiterate, today, was some kind of monstrosity, and to admit to it, monstrous. What would **it be** like in Paris, where every day he would have to repeat that admission, without a young, obliging employer at his side to fill out the famous, formidable "papers"? What new disgraces would he have to swallow, ignoramus without equal, and old, and sick, in that city where even the walls were lettered, the bridges historic, and the merchandise and signs in the shops incomprehensible? This capital where the hospitals were parliaments, the doctors the most learned in the eyes of the learned doctors here, the lowest nurse a Madame Curie? What would he be in their hands, he who could not even read a newspaper?

He would stay here, and die of it, there perhaps, he could be cured, but at the cost of his shame; above all, he would not have atoned for, magnificently paid with his death

for his crime of not knowing. That view of things was not so naïve; it helped me to understand myself. I too had hypostatized learning and letters into mythological categories, from which I was excluded; I was the forsaken illiterate at the foot of Olympus where all the others the Great Authors and Difficult Readers, read and made child's play of incomparable pages, and the divine language was forbidden to my rough tongue.

[*Small Lives*, tr by Jody Gladding and Elizabeth Deshyas, Archipelago Books, 2008 ©
Jody Gladding and Elizabeth Deshyas] pp. 135-136

Jean Echenoz (1947)

Jean Echenoz, born in Orange, Vaucluse, France is a French novelist. Son of a psychiatrist, Echenoz studied in Rodez, Digne-les-Bains, Lyon, Aix-en-provence, Marseille and Paris, where he has lived since 1970. He published his first book, *Le meridian de Greenwich* in 1979. He has published twelve novels to date and has received about ten literary prizes, including the prix Medici 1983 for *Cherokee*, the prix Goncourt 1999 for *I'm off* (*Je m'en vais*), and the prix Aristeion for *Lac* in 1989.

Since the publication of his first novel, *Le Méridien de Greenwich* (*The Greenwich Meridian*, 1979), Jean Echenoz's reputation is steadily rising. With eleven books well received by critics as well as by general readers he can lay claim to a body of work that is as distinguished and as varied as that of any living novelist in France. The principal hallmarks of Echenoz's style are his laconism, dry wit, and the precision with which he chooses words and images. He is now recognized as one of the best storytellers among the "serious" novelists of his generation. Each of his novels puts pungent and multilayered ironies into play, complementing and destabilizing one another simultaneously, and consequently demanding that the reader remain very much on the alert. Echenoz's books are not to be enjoyed swaying in a hammock on balmy summer afternoons.

The themes Echenoz primarily treats are, varieties of daily tedium, meaning lessness and absurdity of modern life. Few writers have been able to convey the multiform varieties of daily tedium in a language so rich and layered that the experience seems almost delightful. Flaubert too was a transcriber of boredom, but in *Madame Bovary*, boredom—or rather, ennui—is a cultural disease, of which Emma's affairs are a symptom. In the Echenoz worldview, by contrast, tedium, ambivalence and equivocation are the fundamental traits of existence. In his art-heist novel *I'm Gone* the muddling hero, Ferrer, is discouraged to find himself locked into a morning routine of brushing his teeth and shaving; and because "he asked himself every morning how to break out of this ritual, the question itself became incorporated into the ritual."

Echenoz closely resembles his contemporary, Michel Houellebecq in his outlook on life but he is neither as overtly bleak nor as complacently provocative as him, and therefore more popular. His best known novel, *I'm off* is a crime story, as well as a whimsical tale of the eternal (and eternally rewarding) midlife search for new partners and a deadpan commentary on its own contrivances with nearly every sentence crackling with sly humor. It was an immediate bestseller in France, and since been translated into English, it has made a significant impact in that world too. *The New York Times'* book review described it as 'vivid and entertaining' and the *Washington Post* hailed Echenoz as 'the distinctive voice of his generation' and 'the master magician of the contemporary French novel.'

Principal Works: *Cherokee* (*Cherokee*, 1983); *Double Jeopardy* (*L'Equipe malaise*, 1986); *Chopin's Move* (*Lac*, 1989); *Big Blondes* (*Les Grandes Blondes*, 1995); *Un an* (1997); *I'm Gone*, aka *I'm Off* (*Je m'en vais*, 1999); *Piano* (*Au Piano* (2003); *Ravel* (*Ravel*, 2006); *Running* (*Courir*, 2008); *Lightning* (*Des éclairs*, 2010); *14* (2012).

“It’s always the same ones”

A recreational atmosphere threatened to corrupt the proceedings.

“Do something, Raymond,” the Duke hissed, leaning across Luce, whom a dream made moan at that very instant. “Say something, you see how unruly they’re getting. Pretty soon we won’t be able to keep them in line.”

First Jouvin, then his interpreter looked at Pons with indecision ~~border~~. The interpreter was a Negrito from a tribe near the Siamese border. His skin was dark, his hair had gone white, his good will was fading. Jouvin’s hesitation, which interrupted his accounting, allowed for the formation in the back of the room of a more distinct movement, in which the Chinese did not join at first. In measured tones, one of the peasants had just launched into a little speech. Jouvin pedagogically tapped the edge of the table with his fingers-in vain. Careful to echo the boss’s slightest nuance, the interpreter did the same with the tips of his fluted nails, producing no effect other than Luce’s startled awakening, the lifting of her heavy eyelids under all her diopters.

Luce had a large, wide mouth containing a disproportionately voluminous tongue; no doubt it was tiring always to keep one inside the other, and so Luce occasionally had to let this tongue out, the way one stretches one’s limbs or walks the dog. She ran it over her thick lips, swollen like chapped tires, then grumbled something for the interpreter’s benefit. Happy to be relieved of his translation duties, the latter blinked, smiled, disappeared, and returned carrying a metal goblet whose contents Jouvin did not care to identify. He turned away, whereas Pons leered at Luce with teeth agleam. Profiting from these excesses, from the diminished lucidity that was their natural consequence, the Duke had ventured five or six times toward those exceptional mucous membranes, which downed the contents of the goblet in one gulp, and which then articulated: “What’s with him, what’s he want?”

“It’s always the same ones,” Jouvin observed. “What’s his problem, Jean-Francois?”

“Hard to hear, “Pons pretended. “ I can’t make out all of it.”

[*Double Jeopardy*. Tr by Mark Polizzotti. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1994
© Mark Polizzotti]

They were glad to see each other again.

They were glad to see each other again. The captain congratulated the Duke, the tales of the storm impressed Bob. Before so much sudden animation Garlonne rubbed emotive hands together, steeped in a matchmaker’s sentiment; he scurried off to find more deck chairs and cold drinks.

“Well,” said Pons, “we haven’t seen much of the town. We just got here. Maybe we’ll have time to catch a few sights, what do you say? The pyramids, for example, are they far?”

But they would be leaving that very evening, and already the sun was beginning to wane: the men returned one after the other, worn out but happy, each one on his bike. From afar they saw Darousset pedalling at top speed; erect as a dancer he mounted the gangplank without braking, as if it were a diving board at the end of which, after a short hyperbole, his machine collapsed with a crash. Garlonne ran to help the acrobatic

Sudanese, whose exercise everyone saluted: young Gomez uncovered all his teeth, Sapir himself brightened up a little; only Lopez showed a hermetic face. "He's sulking," sighed the first mate. "He's always sulking."

The two cabins adjacent to Paul's were given to Bob and Pons, who had already been put to the test in the airplane by several pockets of turbulence. For this part, Paul had not fully recovered from the parallel phenomena of the humid night before, and so everyone went to bed early. Then life on board resumed as in the preceding days, soon tiresome when the sea behaved itself; but with three of them, they could at least resort to games. They met up again in the officers' salon for dinner, after which the captain did not refuse to be the fourth for a few hands of stud poker.

[*Double Jeopardy*. Tr by Mark Polizzotti. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1994 © Mark Polizzotti]

"...all of Felix Ferrer's days except Sun-days had been spent in exactly the same way," A window onto comic tedium :

For five years, until the January evening when he'd left the house in Issy, all of Felix Ferrer's days except Sun-days had been spent in exactly the same way. Up at seven-thirty; ten minutes in the toilet with some kind of printed matter, from a treatise on aesthetics to a humble flyer; then preparing a breakfast for Suzanne and himself that was scientifically balanced in vitamins and minerals salts. Next, twenty minutes of gymnastics while he listened to the news on the radio. After that, he woke Suzanne and aired out the house.

After which, in the bathroom, Ferrer brushed his teeth to the point of hemorrhage without even looking at himself in the mirror, letting two and a half gallons of cold city water run for no reason. He always washed in the same order, inalterably from left to right and top to bottom. He always shaved in the same order, inalterably right cheek then left cheek, chin, lower then upper lip, neck. And since Ferrer, subject to these immutable orders, asked himself every morning hot to break out of this ritual, the question itself became incorporated into the ritual. Without ever managing to resolve it, at nine o'clock he left for his studio.

[*I'm Gone*, tr by Mark Polizzotti , The New Press, New York, 2001 © 2001 Mark Polizzotti]

Bernard Marie Koltès (1948-1989)

Born in a middle-class family in Metz, Bernard-Marie Koltès was a French playwright and director. His life was violent and anchored in revolt. He tried his hand at writing at a very young age but later renounced it, and didn't take to the stage until the age of twenty.

Koltès's work, based in real-life problems, expresses the tragedy of being alone and of death. His plays present a vision of the harsh realities of late twentieth-century life. Epithets like, 'Sarah Kane of his day', 'Bruce Lee of drama' are showered on him. Influenced by Genet and Fugard, combined with a formal approach to dramatic dialogue in the French classical tradition, he is often touted as the true spiritual heir of Samuel Beckett. With a focus on marginality and on the perennial questions of human existence in civilization, his works are distinguished by a compact, almost terse, language that is simultaneously extremely poetic. Koltès' plays are almost classical in their existential, emotional and intellectual sharpness, but they are set in explicitly contemporary time. There is nothing accidental, anecdotal, or even personal about them. Koltès always aimed at creating a *theatre of the world*: rich, complex plays which only an ambitious theatre company could take on. In "Black Battles with Dogs" the battles take place not only between individuals but also between societies, cultures, ideologies. "Return to the Desert" enacts a conflict that is to do with ownership: Adrien and Mathilde (brother and sister) fight about who can lay claim to the family property, his last play "Roberto Zucco" pits the outlaw Roberto Zucco against the whole of law-abiding society. It is because of its power, and its fascinating poetic fervor that it is so frequently produced.

Today a cult-like reverence has formed around Koltès' work, not as a result of a dramatically spectacular or shocking approach but because of his uncompromising questioning of the borders of human power and nothingness. Koltès is phenomenally popular in continental Europe. He is, according to *Le Monde*, "a classic of our time, who since 1990 is the French author most performed abroad." Ironically, however, Koltès felt deeply at odds with himself about being white and French. This disposition is made stranger by a rough-hewn dialectical style that sounds peculiar even to French ears. "A French language which has been re-written and corrected—colonized—by a foreign culture," Koltès said, "would gain a new dimension and richness of expression in the same way that a classical statue without a head or limbs is made beautiful by their very absence." He may be the *dramaturge français* par excellence, but in a profound way—as per American theatre company, **7 Stages**, 'Koltès has never truly belonged to France.'

Principal works : *The Night Just Before the Forests (La Nuit juste avant les Forêts*, 1976); *Sallinger* (1977); *In the Solitude of Cotton Fields (Dans la Solitude des Champs de Coton*, 1986); *Quay West (Quai Ouest)*, *Black Battles with Dogs (Combat de nègre et de chiens)*; and *Roberto Zucco*.

“Difficult to understand each other ...”

The play is set in West Africa and treats the question of a man's life. Is a European more valuable than an African, or an engineer more useful than a labourer. It starts with Alboury's simple statement, 'I have come for the body'. The body he wants is

that of a dead worker, Alboury's brother or his friend, whose body has disappeared mysteriously. Alboury, the black has been having problems with Horn, Cal, and Leone.

Alboury No, it's not love.

Horn I knew it, I knew it. I've often noticed that lack of feeling. Of course it shocks many Europeans, although, personally, I don't condemn it; Asians are even worse. But then, why be so stubborn over such a small matter, eh? I've said I'll provide compensation.

Alboury Often the little people want a small thing, something very simple; but that is what they really want; nothing will make them change their minds; and they would die for it; and even if someone were to kill them they would still want it, even in death.

Horn Who was he, Alboury, and who are you?

Alboury A long time ago I said to my brother: I feel cold; he said to me: that's because there is a little cloud in between you and the sun; I said to him: how can that little cloud make me so cold, when all around me people are sweating and getting burned by the sun? My brother said to me: I too am cold; so we kept each other warm. Then I said to my brother: when will this cloud vanish, so that the sun may warm us once again? He said to me: it will never vanish, it is a little cloud that will follow us wherever we go, always in between us and the sun. And I felt it follow us everywhere, so that in the midst of people laughing, naked in the heat, my brother and I were still cold and still warmed one another. So, beneath this little cloud which deprived us of warmth, my brother and I grew used to each other, and used to sharing our warmth. If my back had an itch, my brother was there to scratch it, and when his back itched I scratched it; worry made me bite the nails on his hands and, in his sleep, he sucked my thumb. Our women stayed close to us and they too began to freeze, but we all kept warm because we remained close to one another under our little cloud, we became used to each other and if one of us shivered it spread from one side of the group to the other. Our mothers came to join us, and the mothers of their mothers and their children and our children, a countless family whose members were never torn away, not even the dead, but retained I our close embrace, sheltered from the cold under the cloud. The little cloud had risen closer and closer towards the sun, depriving the whole family of warmth as we grew ever larger and ever more used to each other, an innumerable family made up of the dead, the living and the unborn, each one ever more indispensable to the other, as we saw the edge of the sun-warmed lands moving away from us. That is why I have come for the body of my brother who has been torn from among us, because his absence has disturbed that closeness which allowed us all to keep warm, because, even though he is dead, we still have need of his heat to warm us and he needs ours if he is to remain warm.

Horn It's difficult for us to understand each other. (*They look at one another.*) However hard we try, I think we will always find it hard to live together. (*Silence.*)

Alboury I have been told that, in America, the black people go out in the morning and the white people go out in the afternoon.

Horn Is that what you were told?

Alboury If it's true, sir, it's a very good idea.

Horn Do you really think that?

Alboury Yes.

Horn No, it's a very bad idea. On the contrary, Mr Alboury, we have to work together, Mr Alboury, we have to force people to cooperate. That's what I think. Look here, my good man, this will leave you speechless. I have an excellent plan of my own, and I've never said a word about it to anyone before. You're the first. You must let me know what you think of it. It's about those three billion people they're always on about: I have worked out that if we housed them all in forty-storey blocks-there are some architectural details to sort out, but it won't need more than forty storeys, not even as tall as the Montparnasse tower – and in average-sized flats, I've allowed for a reasonable living space; and we imagine these blocks making up a town, one town with streets ten meters wide, which is fine. Well, imagine: this town would cover just half of France, not one square kilometer more. Everywhere else would be free, completely free. You can check the figures, I've gone over them again and again, they're quite precise. Do you think my plan sounds stupid? All that remains is to choose the site for this unique town; and then the whole thing is solved. No more wars, no more rich countries and poor countries, everyone in the same boat and plenty for all. You see, Alboury, I'm something of a Communist, in my own way. (A *pause*.) France seems ideal to me: it's a temperate country with good rainfall and no extremes in its climate, its flora and fauna, or the risks to health; yes, France is ideal. You could build it in the south, of course, where it's sunniest. On the other hand, I myself love the winter, a good old hard winter; here you don't know what a good old hard winter is. It would be best to build the town lengthways, running from the Vosges to the Pyrenees and bordering the Alps; people who love the winter would live in the part that used to be Strasbourg while those who can't stand the snow, bronchitis and the like, they could live in the parts where Marseilles and Bayonne used to stand. The last conflict facing humanity would be a theoretical debate between the charms of an Alsatian winter or of spring on the Côte d'Azur. As for the rest of the world, it would all be kept in reserve. Africa could be free, think of it; we could exploit her riches, her minerals, her land, solar energy, without treading on anyone's toes. Africa alone would provide enough food for my town for generations before we would ever need to venture into Asia or America. Technology would be greatly exploited, so that we could make do with the minimum workforce in well-organized shifts, as a sort of community service; they would bring back oil, gold, uranium, coffee, bananas, whatever you like, without the Africans suffering foreign invasion, because they won't be there anymore! France would be beautiful, with all the nations of the world mingling in her streets, and Africa too would be lovely, empty, generous, without suffering, nurturing the world!(A *pause*.) Does my plan make you laugh? At least it's friendlier than yours. Anyway, that's my idea and I'm sticking to it.

(They look at one another; the wind intensifies).

[“Black Battle with Dogs” in *Bernard –Marie Koltès: Plays Part I*, London, Methuen Contemporary Dramatists, 1997 © 1997 David Bradby and Maria M. Delgado]

“He is going to fall ...”

Generally inspired by true events, in “Roberto Zucco”, Koltès takes up the life and crimes of Robert Succo, the Italian serial killer to turn him into a great dramatic hero, a mythical character like Samson or Goliath whose death at the end of the play is heralded by a hurricane and an explosion in the heavens as ‘blinding as an atomic bomb’.

Voice You're a hero, Zucco.

Voice He's a Goliath

Voice He's a Samson

Voice Who's a Samson?

Voice A gangster from Marseilles.

Voice I knew him in prison. A real animal. He could lay out ten men at a time.

Voice Liar.

Voice With his bare hands.

Voice With the jawbone of an ass, actually. And he was'nt from Marseilles.

Voice Some woman dropped him in the shit.

Voice That's right. Delilah. The business with the hair.

Voice You can always trust a woman to betray you

Voice If it was'nt for women we'd all be free.

The sun climbs higher, shining with extraordinary intensity.

A great wind begins to blow.

Zucco Look at the sun.

The courtyard becomes completely silent.

Can't you see anything? Can't you see how it moves from side to side?

Voice We can't see a thing.

Voice The sun's hurting our eyes. It's dazzling us.

Zucco But look what's coming out of it. The sun has an erection. That's where the wind's coming from.

Voice The sun has a *what ? An erection ?*

Voice Shut your faces!

Zucco Move your head – see how it moves as you do.

Voice How what moves ? I can't see anything moving.

Voice How can anything up there be moving ? It's all been nailed and bolted into place since

the beginning of time.

Zucco It's the source of the wind.

Voice We can't see any more. There's too much light.

Zucco Turn to the East and it turns there too. Turn to the west and it follows you.

A hurricane begins to blow. Zucco sways.

Voice He's mad. He's going to fall.

Voice Stop it, Zucco – you're going to get yourself killed.

Voice He's crazy.

Voice He's going to fall.

The sun rises higher, with the blinding brilliance of an atomic explosion. Nothing else can be seen.

[“Roberto Zucco” in *Bernard – Marie Koltes: Plays, Part I*, London, Methuen Contemporary Dramatists, 1997 tr by Martin Crimp © 1997 David Bradby and Maria M. Delgado]

Amin Maalouf (1949)

Amin Maalouf is a Lebanese-born French author. He was educated at Notre Dame Jesuit College, Jamhour, and the French University of Beirut from where he received a master's degree in sociology. When the Lebanese civil war broke out in 1975 he moved to Paris and made it his permanent home. He began his career as a journalist working first for the Arab daily, An-Nahar and later as the editor-in-chief of *Jeune Afrique* magazine, Paris, subsequently made writing his career churning out engaging novels, two opera librettos, and several works of non-fiction, dealing with the question of migration and globalization and its offshoots—the question of identity and violence.

In essence Maalouf writes two kinds of books—the serious, scholarly, intense works of history and politics like *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* or *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, which show how ideology and religion are motivated and determined by hate and fear, and novels - diverting, entertaining historical like *Ports of Call*, *Samarkand*, *Balthasar's Odyssey*, which show how love can transcend ideology and religion to overcome hate and fear. His focus is always on the question of identity. He himself a Christian Lebanese considers himself both, as much a French as a Lebanese. As he has said in *In the Name of Identity* etc. "people who are arenas for allegiances in violent conflict with one another" have a bridging role to play," he and his work are perfect definition of synthesis.

Maalouf received the Prix Goncourt in 1993 for his fifth novel, *The Rock of Tanios* (*Le Rocher de Tanios*), the Prix Mediterranee in 2004, the Prince of Asturias Award for Literature in 2010, and honorary doctorates by several European universities. In 2011 he was elected to the Academie francaise, the first Lebanese to join the 'immortels'.

Principal works: *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, 1984 (*Les Croisades vues par les Arabes*); *Samarkand*, 1993; *The Rock of Tanios* (*Le Rocher de Tanios* 1993); *In the name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, 2000 (*Les Identités meurtrières*, 1998); *Balthasar's Odyssey*, 2002 (*Le Periple de Baldassare*, 2000); *Origins: A Memoir* 2004; *Le Dérèglement du monde : Quand nos civilisations s'épuisent*, Grasset, 2009.

In the name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong

This book is the result of Amin Maalouf's exploration into the question, why so many people commit crimes in the name of identity. Identity is the crucible out of which we come: our background, our race, our gender, our tribal affiliations, our religion (or lack thereof), all go into making up who we are. All too often, however, the notion of identity—personal, religious, ethnic, or national—has given rise to heated passions and even massive crimes. Moving across the world's history, faiths, and politics, he argues against an oversimplified and hostile interpretation of the concept. He cogently and persuasively examines identity in the context of the modern globalized world, where it can be viewed as both glory and venom. He spells out dangers of using identity as a protective—and therefore aggressive—mechanism, the root of racial, geographical, and colonialist subjugation throughout history:

How many times, since I left Lebanon in 1976 to live in France, have people asked me, with the best intentions in the world, whether I felt "more French" or "more

Lebanese"? And I always give the same answer: "Both!" I saw that not in the interests of fairness or balance, but because any other answer would be a lie. What makes me myself rather than anyone else is the very fact that I am poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions. It is precisely this that defines my identity. Would I exist more authentically if I cut off a part of myself?

To those who ask the question, I patiently explain that I was born in Lebanon and lived there until I was 27; that Arabic is my mother tongue; that it was in Arabic translation that I first read Dumas and Dickens and Gulliver's Travels; and that it was in my native village, the village of my ancestors, that I experienced the pleasures of childhood and heard some of the stories that were later to inspire my novels. How could I forget all that? How could I cast it aside? On the other hand, I have lived for 22 years on the soil of France; I drink her water and wine; every day my hands touch her ancient stones; I write my books in her language; never again will she be a foreign country to me.

So am I half French and half Lebanese? Of course not. Identity can't be compartmentalised. You can't divide it up into halves or thirds or any other separate segments. I haven't got several identities: I've got just one, made up of many components combined together in a mixture that is unique to every individual.

Sometimes, after I've been giving a detailed account of exactly why I lay claim to all my affiliations, someone comes and pats me on the shoulder and says "Of course, of course - but what do you really feel, deep down inside?"

For a long time I found this oft-repeated question amusing, but it no longer makes me smile. It seems to reflect a view of humanity which, though it is widespread, is also in my opinion dangerous. It presupposes that "deep down inside" everyone there is just one affiliation that really matters, a kind of "fundamental truth" about each individual, an "essence" determined once and for all at birth, never to change thereafter. As if the rest, all the rest - a person's whole journey through time as a free agent; the beliefs he acquires in the course of that journey; his own individual tastes, sensibilities and affinities; in short his life itself - counted for nothing. And when, as happens so often nowadays, our contemporaries are exhorted to "assert their identity", they are meant to seek within themselves that same alleged fundamental allegiance, which is often religious, national, racial or ethnic, and having located it they are supposed to flaunt it proudly in the face of others.

Anyone who claims a more complex identity is marginalised. But a young man born in France of Algerian parents clearly carries within him two different allegiances or "belongings", and he ought to be allowed to use both. For the sake of argument I refer to two "belongings", but in fact such a youth's personality is made up of many more ingredients. Within him, French, European and other western influences mingle with Arab, Berber, African, Muslim and other sources, whether with regard to language, beliefs, family relationships or to tastes in cooking and the arts. This represents an enriching and fertile experience if the young man in question feels free to live it fully - if he is encouraged to accept it in all its diversity. But it can be traumatic if whenever he claims to be French other people look on him as a traitor or renegade, and if every time he emphasises his ties with Algeria and its history, culture and religion he meets with incomprehension, mistrust or even outright hostility. [...]

The fact is, it's difficult to say where legitimate affirmation of identity ends and encroachment on the rights of others begins. Did I not say that the word identity was a "false friend"? It starts by reflecting a perfectly permissible aspiration, then before we know where we are it has become an instrument of war. The transition from one meaning to the other is imperceptible, almost natural, and sometimes we all just go along with it. We are denouncing an injustice, we are defending the rights of a suffering people—then the next day we find ourselves accomplices in a massacre.

All the massacres that have taken place in recent years, like most of the bloody wars, have been linked to complex and long-standing "cases" of identity. Sometimes the victims are forever desperately the same; sometimes the situation is reversed and the victimizers of yesterday become victims of today; or vice versa. Such words themselves, it must be said, are meaningful only to outside observers; for people directly involved in conflicts arising out of identity, for those who have suffered and been afraid, nothing else exists except "them" and "us." the insult and the atonement. "We" are necessarily and by definition innocent victims; "they" are necessarily guilty and have long been so, regardless of what they may be enduring at present.

[In the name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong, tr by Barbara Bray, Arcade Publishing, New York, 2000]

Balthasar's Odyssey

There are ninety-nine names for God in the Koran. And the knowledge of the hundredth name can ensure his salvation and the salvation of the world. Balthasar Embriaco, a Genoese Levantine merchant comes to know of the printing of a rare and most coveted book, *The Hundredth Name*. Before the dawn of the apocalyptic, the Year of the Beast, he sets out on a quest for this book which takes him across the breadth of the civilized world, from Constantinople, through the Mediterranean, and to London shortly before the Great Fire:

When the fire broke out. I had to hide to escape the fury of the mob—they wanted to cut the Papists' throats. With no other proof of guilt than the fact that I was a foreigner and from the same country as the "Antichrist", ordinary citizens would have seized, manhandled and tortured me, and then thrown my remains into the flames, feeling that they'd advanced the good of their souls. But I've already spoken of this madness in the notebook that was lost, and I haven't the strength to go over it again. What I do want to say something more about is my fear. Fears, rather. For I had two fears, and then one more. I was afraid of the raging flames and of the raging mob, but also of what this whole sinister episode might mean, happening as it did on the very day the Muscovites had indicated as that of the apocalypse. I don't want to speculate any more about "signs". But how can one fail to be terrified by such a coincidence? All day long on that accursed 11th of September the 1st of September according to the English calendar—I mulled over that wretched prophecy. I'd discussed it at length with the chaplain. I don't say we were expecting the world to explode from one minute to the next in the vast commotion announced in the Scriptures, but we were on the alert. And it was towards midnight at the end of that very day that the fateful clamour burst out. I could watch the progress of the flames, and hear the cries of the people, from my bedroom.

I had one comfort in my woe, in the devotion of the people round me, They'd become a family to me, whereas three weeks earlier they didn't even know I existed, any more than I knew they did: Bess, the chaplain and his young disciples.

Let no one think my gratitude to Bess was just that of a lonely man who found consolation in the naked arms of a sympathetic innkeeper! What her presence satisfied in me was not the carnal hunger of a traveler: it was my original, fundamental distress. I was born a foreigner, I have lived as a foreigner, and I shall die more of a foreigner still. I'm too proud to talk of hostility, humiliation, resentment, suffering-but I know how to recognize looks and gestures. Some women's arms are places of exile; others are a native land.

After having hidden, protected, fed and reassured me, on the third day of the fire Bess came and told me we must try to make a get-away. The fire was getting inexorably nearer, which meant that the mob was getting farther away. We could attempt to make our way between the two, aiming at London Bridge; there we'd board the first boat available to take us from the conflagration.

Bess said the chaplain approved of this course of action, though he himself preferred to stay on a while longer in the ale-house. If it escaped the flames, he could protect it from looters. His two disciples would stay on with him to keep watch, and to help him if, after all, he had to flee.

When the time came to leave, I wasn't thinking only of saving my life. I was also concerned about *The Hundredth Name*. The book had been on my mind during all those days and nights, and the clearer it became that my stay in London was approaching its end, the more I wondered if I'd be able to persuade the chaplain to let me take *The Hundredth Name* with me. I even thought of taking it against his will. Yes, of stealing it! I'd never have been capable of such a thing in other circumstances, during an ordinary year. In any case, I'm not sure I'd have gone through with such a despicable thing. Fortunately I didn't have to. I didn't even have to use the arguments I'd prepared. When I knocked at the door of his room to take my leave, the old man asked me to wait for a moment before asking me in. I found him sitting in his usual place, holding the book out towards me with both hands like a kind of offering. The gesture left both of us silent and motionless.

Then he said in Latin, with some solemnity:

"Take it. It's yours. You've deserved it. I promised it to you in return for your undertaking to translate it, and I know quite a lot now about what it says. Without you, I shan't be able to find out any more. Anyway, It's too late."

I was moved. I thanked him, and embraced him.

[*Balthasar's Odyssey* tr by Barbara Bray, Vintage Books, 2003 © Barbara Bray]

Michel Houellebecq (1956)

Michel Thomas Houellebecq (pronounced 'well-beck') is a controversial and award-winning French author, filmmaker and poet. He is best known as a novelist, especially after winning the Prix Goncourt in 2010 for *La Carte et le territoire*, (The Map and the Territory, 2012). but actually began his career as a poet, next published a biography of H. P. Lovecraft, then followed the novels, first, *Extension du domaine de la lutte*, in 1994, *Les Particules elementaires* in 1998, and *Plateforme* in 2001. A publicity tour for *Plateforme* took him to court for inciting racial hatred, after which he moved to Ireland and now resides in Spain.

His second novel caused quite a stir in the French literary circles. The story of its reception and recognition makes a singularly interesting, if not hilarious reading. The highly reputed magazine, *Lire* selected it as "the best book of the year 1998"; it sold hundreds of thousands of copies and vaulted Houellebecq into the French intellectual spotlight, but the graphic, almost pornographic descriptions of sex attracted severe criticism. Houellebecq himself earned both scorn and appreciation for his erratic proclamations and behaviour on television interviews. Eventually, he was also awarded the Prix Novembre overruling the objections of its founder, Michael Dennery. Disgusted Dennery resigned, the prize got a new patron, Pierre Bergé and a new name, 'Prix Decembre'. Prix Novembre saw its end with Houellebecq. This was not all. Houellebecq's estranged mother, Lucie Ceccaldi, returned to France from Reunion in April 2008 to publish *The Innocent One*, a rebuttal to Houellebecq's alleged mis-characterization of her parenting as contained in the novel. In press interviews, she declared that, "if he has the misfortune of sticking my name on anything again he'll get my walking stick in his face and that'll knock his teeth out."

In 2002 *Atomised* won one of the richest literary prizes in the world, the IMPAC award of Euros 100,000 jointly sponsored by Dublin, the city of Ireland and the company, IMPAC, and the film adaptation of the novel, premiered at the 2006 Berlin Film Festival, won it the Silver Bear award. Houellebecq's first novel, *Extension du domaine de la lutte* (*Whatever*, 1994) was a downbeat cult success, but it was *Les particules élémentaires* (*Atomised*, 1998) that made his reputation.

The story although described as having taken place mostly in 1999, is essentially, set some fifty or so years in the future. It is about the lives of Bruno Clément and Michel Djerzinski, two French half brothers born of a hippy like mother. Michel is raised by his paternal grandmother and becomes an introverted molecular biologist, who is ultimately responsible for the discoveries which lead to the elimination of sexual reproduction. Bruno grows up tragically shuffled from one abusive boarding school to another, finds himself stuck in a loveless marriage, and a teaching job at a high school. He, eventually, degenerates into a lecherous and insatiable sex addict whose dalliances with prostitutes and sex chat on Minitel leave him unsatisfied. And finally he lands up in a mental hospital.

The narrative focuses almost exclusively on the bleak and unrewarding day-to-day lives of the two half-brothers, children of broken homes and a broken society, floundering about, looking for a purpose. They barely know each other and seem devoid of love. Bruno wrecked by his upbringing and failure to mature, becomes a saddened loner and Michel's pioneering work in cloning removes love from the process of reproduction. In the end, humans are proven to be just 'particles', liable to decay as

bodies decay. They can also be created from the particles. Cloning as replacement for sexual reproduction of the human race seems to emerge as the subject of the novel. Much of the novel shows how horrible and empty modern life is.

Michel Houellebecq has been hailed as the most important French-language writer since Albert Camus (whom he admires) he has also been dismissed as an overhyped, sex-obsessed hack. As if to preclude debate—or to fan it—his newest novel, "The Map and the Territory", won France's most prestigious literary award in 2010, the Prix Goncourt.

Principal works: *Les Particules élémentaires* (1998, *Atomised*, 2000, in the US, *The Elementary Particles*); *Plateforme* (2001, *Platform*, 2002); *La Possibilité d'une île* (2005, *The Possibility of an Island*, 2006); *La Carte et le Territoire* (2010, *The Map and the Territory*, 2012).

Excerpt from **Atomised:**
Summer of '75

They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the LORD.

(Hosea, Ch.5,v.4)

The man who met them at the bus station at Carpentras seemed weak and ill. The son of an Italian anarchist who immigrated to America in the 1920s, Francesco di Meola's life was a success story—at least in the financial sense. Like Serge Clément, the young Italian realized that the society emerging at the end of the Second World War would be radically different, and that many pursuits once considered marginal or elitist would become economically important. While Bruno's father was investing in plastic surgery, di Meola was becoming involved in the music business. He did not make as much money as many in the industry, but he made his fair share. At forty, like many people in California, he sensed a new movement, something deeper than simply a passing fad, calling for the sweeping away of Western civilization in its entirety. It was this insight which brought luminaries like Alan Watts, Paul Tillich, Carlos Castaneda, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers to his villa at Big Sur. A little later, he had the privilege of meeting Aldous Huxley, the spiritual father of the movement. By then old and almost blind, Huxley paid him scant attention, but the meeting was to leave a profound impression on di Meola.

He himself was unclear as to the reason why he left California in 1970 and bought a property in Haute-Provence. Later, close to the end, he came to think that he had wanted, for some obscure reason, to die in Europe, though at the time, he was aware only of the most superficial reasons. The events of May '68 had impressed him, and as the hippie movement began to ebb in California, he turned his attention to the youth of Europe. Jane encouraged him in this. Young people in France were particularly repressed, a time bomb of resentment under the legacy of Gaullist patriarchy, which, according to Jane, a single spark would be enough to detonate. For some years now, Francesco's sole pleasure had been to smoke marijuana cigarettes with very young girls attracted by the spiritual aura of the movement and then fuck them among the mandalas and the smell of incense. The girls who arrived at Big Sur were, for the most part, stupid little WASP bitches, at least half of whom were virgins. Toward the end of the sixties the

flow began to dwindle and he thought that perhaps it was time to go back to Europe. He found it strange that he thought of it as "going back," since he had left Italy when he was no more than five years old. If his father had been a militant revolutionary, he was also a cultivated man, an aesthete who loved his mother tongue. This had undoubtedly left its mark on Francesco. In truth, he had always thought of Americans as idiots.

He was still a handsome man, with a tanned, chiseled face and long, thick, wavy hair, but his cells had begun to reproduce in a haphazard fashion, damaging the DNA of neighboring cells and secreting toxins into the body. The specialists he consulted differed on most points, but on one they were agreed: he was dying. The cancer was inoperable and would continue inexorably to metastasize. Overall his consultants were of the opinion that he would die peacefully and, with medication, probably would not suffer any physical pain; and to date he had experienced only a general tiredness. However, he refused to accept the diagnosis; he could not even imagine accepting it. In contemporary Western society, death is like *white noise* to a man in good health; it fills his mind when his dreams and plans fade. With age, the noise becomes increasingly insistent, like a dull roar with the occasional clang. In another age it was the expectant sound of the kingdom of God, it is now an anticipation of death. Such is life.

Huxley, he would always remember, had seemed detached about the prospect of his own death, though perhaps he was simply numbed or drugged. Di Meola had read Plato, the Bhagavad-Gita and the Tao Te Ching, but none of them had brought him the slightest comfort. He was barely sixty, but he was dying; the signs were there, there could be no doubt about it. He had even begun to be less interested in sex, and it was with a certain detachment that he noticed how beautiful Annabelle was. He did not notice the boys at all. He had lived around young people for a long time, and it was probably habit which made him curious to meet Jane's sons, though fundamentally he couldn't have cared less. He dropped them off in the middle of the estate and told them they could pitch their tent anywhere. He wanted to go to bed, preferably without meeting anyone. Physically, he was still the epitome of a sensual man, a man of the world; his eyes twinkled with irony and perception, a look certain exceptionally stupid girls thought of as radiant and benevolent. He did not feel in the least benevolent, and moreover thought of himself as a mediocre actor. How could they all be so easily taken in? Decidedly, he thought sometimes, a little sadly, these young people searching for spiritual values were really idiots.

Moments after they climbed down from the Jeep, Bruno realized he had made a mistake. The estate sloped gently toward the south, scattered with shrubs and flowers. A waterfall tumbled into a clear green pool; nearby, a woman lay naked, sunning herself on a flat rock while another soaped herself before diving in. Closer to them, on a rug, a bearded man was meditating or sleeping; against his tanned skin, his long blond hair was striking--he looked a little like Kris Kristofferson. Bruno felt depressed. But then, what had he expected? Perhaps he could still leave, as long as he did so immediately. He glanced across at his friends. Annabelle was calmly unfolding her tent; sitting on a tree stump, toying with the straps on his backpack, Michel seemed miles away.

Water follows the path of least resistance. Human behavior is predetermined in principle in almost all of its actions and offers few choices, of which fewer still are taken. In 1950 Francesco di Meola had a son by an Italian starlet, a second-rate actress who would never rise above playing Egyptian slaves; eventually, in the crowning achievement

of her career, she had two lines in *Quo Vadis*. They called the boy David. At fifteen, David dreamed of being a rock star. He was not the only one. Though richer than bankers and company presidents, rock stars still managed to retain their rebel image. Young, good-looking, famous, desired by women and envied by men, rock stars had risen to the summit of the social order. Nothing since the deification of the pharaohs could compare to the devotion European and American youth bestowed upon their heroes. Physically, David had everything he needed to achieve his ends: he had an animal, almost diabolical beauty; his eyes were a deep blue; his face masculine but refined; his long hair thick and black.

With the help of his father's contacts, David recorded his first single at seventeen; it was a complete flop. It was released, it must be said, in the same year as *Sgt. Pepper* and *Days of Future Passed*, to name only two. Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones and the Doors were at the height of their powers; Neil Young had just begun recording and great things were still expected of Brian Wilson. There was little room then for a bassist who was good but not gifted. David persisted. He played in four different groups, changed musical styles, and three years after his father, he too decided to try his luck in Europe. He got a regular gig in a club on the Riviera; that was no problem. Every night girls waited for him in his dressing room; that was no problem either. However, no one from any of the record companies so much as listened to his demos.

When David met Annabelle he had already slept with more than five hundred women; nevertheless, he could not remember ever seeing such Supple perfection. For her part, Annabelle found herself attracted to him just like all the rest. For days she resisted, finally giving in to him a week after they arrived. There were about thirty of them dancing outside at the rear of the house; the night was warm and starry. Annabelle was wearing a white skirt and a T-shirt with a sun drawn on it. David danced beside her sometimes twirling her in rock-and-roll fashion. They danced tirelessly for more than an hour to the beat of a tambourine--sometimes fast, sometimes slow. Bruno leaned against a tree, alert, vigilant, his heart in his mouth. At times Michel appeared at the edge of the bright circle, at others he disappeared into the darkness. Suddenly there he was, barely five yards away. Bruno watched Annabelle break away from the dancers and go over to him, and distinctly heard her ask, "Are you not dancing?" Her face as she said it was terribly sad. Michel declined, his gesture immeasurably slow, like some prehistoric animal recently roused. Annabelle stood looking at him for five or ten seconds longer, then turned and went back to the dancers. David put his hand on her waist and pulled her to him. She placed her hands on his shoulders. Bruno looked at Michel again and thought he saw a smile play on his lips; he looked down, and when he looked up again, Michel had disappeared. Annabelle was in David's arms, their lips close together.

Lying in his tent, Michel waited for daybreak. In the early hours a fierce storm broke and he was surprised to discover that he was a little afraid. When at last the sky cleared, a steady rain began to fall. Raindrops splashed dully on the canvas; though only inches from his face, they could not touch him here. He had a sudden premonition that all his life he would feel as he did at this moment. Emotion would pass him by, sometimes tantalizingly close. Others would experience happiness and despair, but such things would be unknown to him, they would not touch him. Several times that evening Annabelle had looked over at him while she danced. Though he had wanted to, he simply could not move; he felt as though his body were slipping into icy water. Still, everything

seemed strangely calm. He felt separated from the world by a vacuum molded to his body like a shell, a protective armor.

[from *Atomised*, by Michel Houellebecq Eng tr Frank Wynne, Vintage, 2001, pp 93-100.
© Vintage/Frank Wynne]

Atiq Rahimi (1962)

Atiq Rahimi is a French-Afghan writer and film-maker. Born in Kabul to a senior public servant, Rahimi completed school education in a Franco-Afghan lycée. His family began to fall apart after the coup d'état of 1973 in which the king was overthrown and Afghanistan declared a republic. He briefly joined his father in exile in Bombay, returned shortly following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to study literature at the university of Kabul, and worked as a cinema critic. In 1983 he fled Afghanistan, spent a year of refuge in Pakistan, reached France in 1984 upon receiving political asylum and settled there. He completed a degree course in film-making at the Sorbonne, and joined a Paris-based production company where he produced seven documentaries for the French television, as well as several commercials.

He began writing, in his mother-tongue, in 1996 and published his first novel in 2000, translated into English three years later as *Earth and Ashes*. It became an instant best-seller, as also his next novel two years later, translated first in French as *Les Mille Maisons du rêve et de la terreur* and then in English as *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear* (2007). He wrote his third book, *Syngue Sabour* in French which won him the prestigious award, Prix Goncourt in 2008. Rahimi has made excellent films on all the three novels. His film based on *Earth and Ashes* was awarded the *Prix du Regard vers l'Avenir* at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival. Subsequently, it featured in 50 festivals, winning a total of 25 awards including the one at Cannes and a Golden Dhow award for best feature film at the Zanzibar International Film Festival. He divides his time between Paris and Kabul.

Principal works: (except for *Syngue Sabour* all originally written in Persian) : *Terre et cendres*, 2000 (English, *Earth and Ashes*, 2003); *Les Mille Maisons du rêve et de la terreur*, 2002 (English, *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear*, 2007); *Le Retour imaginaire*, 2005; *Syngué Sabour. Pierre de patience*, 2008 (Eng. *Stone of Patience*, 2011, *The Patience Stone*, 2012)

The magic stone listens until one fine day it explodes

Two main themes treated in the book, *Syngue Sabour: The Patience Stone* are Islamic fundamentalism and subjugation of women in Afghanistan – ‘or anywhere else.’ Set “somewhere in Afghanistan or elsewhere” in the near-present, the action is confined to a room where a young woman is praying at her husband's bedside as he lies in a coma with a bullet in his neck. From outside come the sounds of tanks, gunshots, screaming and, most terrifying of all, silence. Inside, her two frightened daughters call to her from the hallway. As she tries to keep her husband alive, the woman rages against men, war, culture, God. Even as her mind appears to unravel, she becomes intensely clear-sighted. Now is her chance - her first ever - to speak without being censored. Spurred to new heights of daring, she spills out her most explosive secret.

Though the couple have been married for 10 years – the first three while he was away fighting – only his enforced silence frees her to speak. "Your breath hangs on the telling of my secrets," she says, savouring a reversal of power. "I can talk to you about anything, without being interrupted, or blamed!" The supine object of her dramatic monologue becomes her *sang-e sabur*, the patience stone of Persian lore to which "you confess everything in your heart, everything you don't dare tell anyone". The magic stone

"listens, absorbing all your words, all your secrets, until one fine day it explodes ... And on that day you are set free from all your pain, all your suffering." It is believed that the day it explodes, after having received too much hardship and pain, will be the day of the Apocalypse.

Rahimi writes in short staccato sentences, and as long as we follow the woman's movements in the room, we almost hold our breath, as Khaled Hosseini says in his introduction, "It is a rich read, part allegory, part a tale of retribution, part an exploration of honor, love, sex, marriage, war. It is without doubt an important and courageous book."

The room is small. Rectangular. Stifling, despite the paleness of the turquoise walls, and the two curtains patterned with migrating birds frozen mid-flight against a yellow and blue sky. Holes in the curtains allow the rays of the sun to reach the faded stripes of a kilim. At the far end of the room is another curtain. Green. Unpatterned. Concealing a disused door. Or an alcove.

The room is bare. Bare of decoration. Except between the two windows where someone has hung a small khanjar dagger on the wall, and above the khanjar a photo of a man with a moustache. He is about thirty years old. Curly hair. Square face, bracketed by a pair of neatly tended sideburns. His black eyes shine. They are small, separated by a hawklike nose. The man is not laughing, and yet seems as if he is holding back a laugh. This gives him a strange expression, that of a man inwardly mocking those who look at him. The photo is in black and white, hand-colored in drab tones.

Facing this photo, at the foot of a wall, the same man—older now—is lying on a red mattress on the floor. He has a beard. Pepper and salt. He is thinner. Too thin. Nothing but skin and bones. Pale. Wrinkled. His nose more hawklike than ever. He still isn't laughing, and still looks strangely mocking. His mouth is half-open. His eyes, even smaller now, have retreated into their sockets. His gaze is fixed on the ceiling, on the exposed, blackened, rotting beams. His arms lie passive along his sides. Beneath his translucent skin, the veins twine around the jutting bones of his body like sleeping worms. On his left wrist he wears a wind-up watch, and on his ring finger a gold wedding band. A tube drips clear liquid into the crook of his arm from a plastic pouch attached to the wall just above his head. The rest of his body is covered by a long blue shirt, embroidered at the collar and cuffs. His legs, stiff as two stakes, are buried under a white sheet.

A dirty white sheet.

A hand, a woman's hand, is resting on his chest, over his heart, rising and falling in time with his breath. The woman is seated. Knees pulled into her chest. Head sunk between them. Her dark hair—it is very dark, and long—covers her slumped shoulders, rising and falling with the regular movement of her arm.

In the other hand, the left, she holds a long string of black prayer beads. She moves them between her fingers, telling them. Silently. Slowly. In time with her shoulders. In time with the man's breath. Her body is swathed in a long dress. Crimson. Embroidered, at the cuffs and bottom hem, with a few discreet ears and flowers of wheat.

Within reach, open at the flyleaf and placed on a velvet pillow, is a book, the Koran.

A little girl is crying. She is not in this room. Perhaps she's next door. Or in the passage.

The woman's head moves. Wearily. Emerges from the crook of her knees.

The woman is beautiful. At the crease of her left eye, a small scar narrows the place where the eyelids meet, lending a strange wariness to her gaze. Her plump, dry, pale lips are softly and slowly repeating the same word of prayer.

A second little girl starts crying. She seems closer than the first, probably just behind the door.

The woman removes her hand from the man's chest. She stands up and leaves the room. Her absence doesn't change a thing. The man still does not move. He continues to breathe silently, slowly.

The sound of the woman's footsteps quiets the two children. She stays with them for some time, until the house and the world become mere shadows in their sleep; then she returns. In one hand, a small white bottle, in the other, the black prayer beads. She sits down next to the man, opens the bottle, leans over and administers two drops into his right eye, two into his left. Without letting go of her prayer beads. Without pausing in her telling of them.

The rays of the sun shine through the holes in the yellow and blue sky of the curtains, caressing the woman's back and her shoulders as they continue to rock to the rhythm of the prayer beads passing between her fingers.

Far away, somewhere in the city, a bomb explodes. The violence destroys a few houses perhaps, a few dreams. There's a counterattack. The retaliations tear through the heavy midday silence, shaking the window panes but not waking the children. For a moment—just two prayer beads—the woman's shoulders stop moving. She puts the bottle of eyedrops in her pocket. Murmurs "*Al-Qahhar*." Repeats "*Al-Qahhar*." Repeats it each time the man takes a breath. And with every repetition, slips one of the prayer beads through her fingers.

One cycle of the prayer beads is complete. Ninety-nine beads. Ninety-nine times "*Al-Qahhar*."

She sits up and returns to her place on the mattress, next to the man's head, and puts her right hand back on his chest. Begins another cycle of the prayer beads.

As she again reaches the ninety-ninth "*Al-Qahhar*," her hand leaves the man's chest and travels toward his neck. Her fingers wander into the bushy beard, resting there for one or two breaths, emerging to pause a moment on the lips, stroke the nose, the eyes, the brow, and finally vanish again, into the thickness of the filthy hair. "Can you feel my hand?" She leans over him, straining, and stares into his eyes. No response. She bends her ear to his lips. No sound. Just the same unsettling expression, mouth half-open, gaze lost in the dark beams of the ceiling.

She bends down to again to whisper, "In the name of Allah, give me a sign to let me know that you feel my hand, that you're alive, that you'll come back to me, to us! Just a sign, a little sign to give me strength, and faith." Her lips tremble. They beg, "Just a word..." as they brush lightly over the man's ear. "I hope you can hear me, at least." She lays her head on the pillow.

"They told me that after two weeks you'd be able to move, to respond.... But this is the third week, or nearly. And still nothing!" Her body shifts so she is lying on her back. Her gaze wanders, joining his vacant gaze, somewhere among the dark and rotting beams.

"Al-Qahhar, Al-Qahhar, Al-Qahhar..."

The woman sits up slowly. Stares desperately at the man. Puts her hand back on his chest. "If you can breathe, you must be able to hold your breath, surely? Hold it!" Pushing her hair back behind her neck, she repeats, "Hold it, just once!" and again bends her ear to his mouth. She listens. She hears him. He is breathing.

In despair, she mutters, "I can't take it any more."

With an angry sigh, she suddenly stands up and repeats, shouting: "I can't take it any more...." Then more dejected: "Reciting the names of God, over and over from dusk till dawn, I just can't take it!" She moves a few steps closer to the photo, without looking at it. "It's been sixteen days...." She hesitates. "No....," counting on her fingers, unsure.

Confused, she turns around, returns to her spot, and glances at the open page of the Koran. Checks. "Sixteen days...so today it's the sixteenth name of God that I'm supposed to chant. *Al-Qahhar*, the Dominant. Yes, that's right, that is the sixteenth name...." Thoughtful: "Sixteen days!" She takes a step back. "Sixteen days that I've been existing in time with your breath." Hostile: "Sixteen days that I've been breathing with you!" She stares at the man. "Look, I breathe just like you!" She takes a deep breath in, exhales it laboriously. In time with him. "Even without my hand on your chest, I still breathe like you." She bends over him. "And even when I'm not near you, I still breathe in time with you." She backs away from him. "Do you hear me?" She starts shouting, "*Al-Qahhar*," and telling the prayer beads again, still to the same rhythm. She walks out of the room. We hear her shouting, "*Al-Qahhar, Al-Qahhar...*" in the passage and beyond....

"Al-Qahhar..." moves away.

"Al-Qahhar..." becomes faint.

"Al..." Imperceptible.

Is gone.

A few moments drift by in silence. Then "*Al-Qahhar*" returns, audible through the window, from the passage, from behind the door. The woman comes back into the room and stops next to the man. Standing. Her left hand still telling the black prayer beads. "I can even inform you that while I've been away you have breathed thirty-three times." She crouches down. "And even now, at this moment, as I'm speaking, I can count your breaths." She lifts the string of prayer beads into what seems to be the man's field of vision. "And now, since my return, you have breathed seven times." She sits on the kilim and continues, "I no longer count my days in hours, or my hours in minutes, or my minutes in seconds... a day for me is ninety-nine prayer bead cycles!" Her gaze comes to rest on the old watch-bracelet holding together the bones of the man's wrist. "I can even tell you that there are five cycles to go before the mullah makes the call to midday prayer and preaches the hadith." A moment. She is working it out. "At the twentieth cycle, the water bearer will knock on the neighbor's door. As usual, the old woman with the rasping cough will come out to open the door for him. At the thirtieth, a boy will cross the street on his bike, whistling the tune of *'Laili, Laili, Laili, djân, djân, djân, you have broken my*

heart,' for our neighbor's daughter...." She laughs. A sad laugh. "And when I reach the seventy-second cycle, that cretinous mullah will come to visit you and, as always, will reproach me because, according to him, I can't have taken good care of you, can't have followed his instructions, must have neglected the prayers.... Otherwise you'd be getting better!" She touches the man's arm. "But you are my witness. You know that I live only for you, at your side, by your breath! It's easy for him to say," she complains, "that I must recite one of the ninety-nine names of God ninety-nine times a day... for ninety-nine days! But that stupid mullah has no idea what it's like to be alone with a man who...." She can't find the right word, or doesn't dare say it, and just grumbles softly "...to be all alone with two little girls!"

A long silence. Almost five prayer-bead cycles. Five cycles during which the woman remains huddled against the wall, her eyes closed. It is the call to midday prayer that snatches her from her daze. She picks up the little rug, unfolds it, and lays it out on the ground. Makes a start on the prayer.

The prayer complete, she remains sitting on the rug to listen to the mullah preach the hadith for that day of the week: "... and today is a day of blood, for it was on a Tuesday that Eve, for the first time, lost tainted blood, that one of the sons of Adam killed his brother, that Gregory, Zachary, and Yahya—may peace be upon them—were killed, as well as the Pharaoh's counselors, his wife Asiya Bint Muzahim, and the heifer of the Children of Israel..."

She looks around slowly. The room. Her man. This body in the emptiness. This empty body.

Her eyes fill with dread. She stands up, refolds the rug, puts it back in its place in the corner of the room, and leaves.

A few moments later, she returns to check the level of solution in the drip bag. There isn't much left. She stares at the tube, noting the intervals between the drips. They are short, shorter than the intervals between the man's breaths. She adjusts the flow, waits two drips, and turns around decisively. "I'm going to the pharmacy for more solution." But before stepping out the door, her feet falter and she lets out a plaintive sigh. "I hope they've managed to get hold of some..." She leaves the room. We hear her waking the children, "Come on, we're going out," and departing, followed by little footsteps running down the passage, through the courtyard...

After three cycles of the prayer beads—two hundred and ninety-seven breaths—they are back.

The woman takes the children into the next-door room. One is crying, "I'm hungry, Mummy." The other complaining, "Why didn't you get any bananas?" Their mother comforts them: "I'll give you some bread."

[*The Patience Stone* by Atiq Rahimi, translated by Polly McLean. Other Press, 2010 © by Polly McLean]

Amélie Nothomb (1966)

Born to a Belgian diplomat, novelist Amélie Nothomb is a literary and pop culture phenomenon in France and her native Belgium. A precocious author who made a splash with her debut publication, *Hygiène de l'assassin*, she continues to conquer the bestseller lists with her annual novels. Amélie Nothomb lived in Japan until five years old, and subsequently in China, New York, Bangladesh, Burma, Coventry and Laos. France discovered her with *Hygiène and the Assassin*. Though not a huge best seller, it was well received by both critics and general readers—successful enough to set her on the road to publishing a new novel every year. Her big breakthrough came seven years later with *Fear and Trembling*. Awarded the prestigious Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie Française, the novel sold half a million copies and swept its author into the French literary spotlight. Its main theme is the clash of cultures between East and West. Nothomb has ever since been a popular fixture of September's *rentrée littéraire*—the start of the literary season—and her novels regularly sell more than 200,000 copies each. Although her work has now been translated into 39 languages, Amélie Nothomb wasn't exactly predestined to rival Georges Simenon and Tintin's creator Hergé as Belgium's most successful writer. "My parents forced me to write to my grandfather," she recalls. "That's how I discovered the necessity and the pleasure of literature."

Nothomb's books tend to be fairly (and sometimes deceptively) simple and short, her audience quite (but not exclusively) young. The critics have not taken her too seriously, but after *Fear and Trembling* (*Stupeur et tremblements*) won the Grand Prix du roman de l'Académie in 1999 she is attracting the attention of literary establishments. With her fun, often far-fetched ideas, witty dialogues, clever wordplay, and a humorous side to almost every scene her books are enjoyable reads. Some themes appear over and over in her novels, like fascination with the grotesque, bond between women, a young girl and an older man in shifting positions of power, but there is still a great deal of variety to the books. Nothomb is at her best when fictionalizing autobiographical episodes (*Loving Sabotage*, *Stupeur et tremblements*, and *Métaphysique des tubes*) but also comes up with good ideas in her wilder fantasies (such as *Péplum*).

She claims to complete three or four novels every year but releases only selected works for publishing. Critics argue that this feat of productivity is possible mainly because of the brevity of her books. However, this art of the novella, is precisely, what has seduced her readers. She is always the main attraction at every literary fair, with hundreds of fans standing in line for hours at her book signings. Also noteworthy is Nothomb's massive correspondence: She receives several dozen letters every day, and says that she tries to answer most of them personally. Her newest, and 19th novel is, *Une Forme de Vie*, structured around imaginary letters between the author and an American soldier stationed in Baghdad, a man beset by fear and mired in obesity. While it is mainly a witty insight into the relationship between an author and a fan, the novel is also a fierce critique of US intervention in the Middle East. "I had already spoken out on the first Gulf War in a previous novel," recalls Nothomb. "These wars are appalling to me. But I'm just an average citizen, and the only way I can express my feelings about them is by writing."

She frequently visits the US either to meet her readers or just for pleasure and has a special affection for it. She admires the frank and straightforward nature of the American people. "I love the way Americans inhabit their language, keep things direct,

very literal, nothing like all the preciosities we're used to in Europe," she says. She lived there from age eight to ten, while her father was posted at the United Nations.

Principal works : *Hygiene and Assassin*, 2010 (*Hygiène de l'assassin*); *Loving Sabotage*, 2000 (*Le Sabotage amoureux*); *Les Combustibles*, 1994; *The Stranger Next Door*, 1998 (*Les Catilinaires*); *Fear and trembling*, 2001(*Stupeur et tremblements*); *The Book of Proper Names*, 2004 (*Robert des noms propres*); *Antichrista*, 2005 (*Antéchrista*); *The Life of Hunger* 2006 (*Biographie de la faim*) ; *Tokyo Fiancee*, 2009 (*Ni d'Ève Ni d'Adam*) ; *Le fait du prince*, 2008; *Le Voyage d'hiver*, 2009; *Tuer le père*, 2011; *Barbe Bleue* , 2012.

'Then why don't you get undressed?'

Antéchrista is narrated by Blanche, an only child who has just started university in Brussels. Younger than most of her classmates, and a solitary soul, she is frustrated, feels out of place and in need of approval and friendship. Eventually she makes a friend—the much stronger-willed fellow student Christa. One of the first things Christa does when she visits Blanche is to take off her clothes, and she demands Blanche do the same.

When I opened the door of my deserted flat, my heart was beating so hard that I felt sick. Christa came in and looked around her. She whistled:

'Not bad!'

I felt absurdly proud.

'Where are your parents?' she asked me.

'At work.'

'What do they do?'

'They teach at a middle school. My father teaches Latin and Greek, my mother Biology.'

'I see.'

I would have liked to ask her what exactly it was that she saw. I didn't dare.

The flat wasn't luxurious, but it had a lot of charm.

'Show me your room!'

Very moved, I took her to my lair. It was unimpressive.

She looked disappointed.

'It doesn't look like much,' she said.

'It's nice here, you'll see,' I commented slightly sadly.

She threw herself on my bed, leaving me with the folding one. I had certainly resolved to let her have mine; however, I'd have been happier if she hadn't

launched

a pre-emptive strike. I immediately reproached myself for having such base

thoughts.

'Have you always slept here?'

'Yes, I've never lived anywhere else.'

'Have you got any brothers and sisters?'

'No. What about you?'

'I've got two brothers and two sisters. I'm the youngest.

Show me your clothes.'

‘Pardon?’

‘Open your wardrobe!’

Stunned, I did so. Christa leapt to her feet to come and look.

Concluding her examination, she said: ‘You haven’t got one nice thing.’

She grabbed my only elegant item of clothing, a figure-hugging Chinese dress.

Before

my astounded eyes, she threw off her T-shirt, her jeans and her shoes.

‘It’s a tight dress, ‘she said, looking at it. ‘I’d better take off my panties as well.’

And she stood in front of me as naked as the day she was born. She slipped on the

Dress and looked at herself in the big mirror. It suited her. She admired herself.

‘I wonder what it looks like on you.’

The very thing I was dreading happened. She took off the dress and threw it to me.

‘Put it on!’

I was frozen, dumbfounded.

‘Put it on, I tell you!’

I couldn’t utter a sound.

Christa’s beaming eyes opened wide, as though she finally understood:

‘Are you bothered that I’m naked?’

I shook my head.

‘Then why don’t you get undressed?’

[*Antichrista* /Amélie Nothomb, tr by Shaun Whiteside, London, Faber and Faber, 2003]

“When I lived in Peking....”

Loving Sabotage is a compelling story of a seven year old girl who moves to China with her diplomat father. While the story includes insightful declarations about a young girl’s experience in a foreign country, it primarily focuses on the dynamics between and among children.

Some countries are like drugs. This is certainly the case with China, with its astonishing power to make all who have been there pretentious – even those who simply talk about the place.

Pretentiousness compels people to write. Witness the extraordinary number of books about China. In keeping with the country itself, these works are either the best (Leys, Segalen, Claudel) or the worst.

I was no exception to the rule. China made me very pretentious indeed. But I had an excuse that few minor sinologists can claim: I was five when I arrived and eight when I left. I remember very well the day I learned that I was going to live in China. I was only five, but already I understood the essential part, which was that I would be able to boast about it.

This is a rule with no exceptions: even China’s greatest critics look forward as enthusiastically to setting foot there as they would to the offer of a knighthood.

Nothing inflates a person's importance so much as the casually uttered words, "I've just come back from China." Even today, when I feel I'm not being treated with due admiration, I'll drop an indifferent sounding "When I lived in Peking...."

This has something concrete and specific to it; after all, I could also say, "When I lived in Laos," which would clearly be more exceptional. But it is less chic. China is the classic, the unconditional, the Chanel No. 5.

And yet, simple snobbery cannot provide the full explanation. Fantasy also plays an enormous and undeniable role. The traveler who disembarks in China without a goodly dose of illusions about the place will never see anything but a nightmare.

My mother always had the happiest temperament in the universe. The night of our arrival in Peking, the sheer ugliness struck her so strongly that she wept. And this was a woman who never wept.

Of course it also had the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, the Perfumed Mountain, the Great Wall, the Ming Tombs. But they were for Sunday. The rest of the week featured only filth, hopelessness, unending concrete, the ghetto and surveillance – all disciplines in which the Chinese excel.

No other country blinds one so thoroughly: everyone who has been there speaks of the splendors they have seen. Even the best-intentioned tend not to mention the creeping hideousness that could not have escaped them. It is a strange phenomenon. China is like a skillful courtesan who manages to make her innumerable physical imperfections disappear without even hiding them, and who infatuates all her lovers.

[*Loving Sabotage*/Amélie Nothomb tr by Andrew Wilson, London : Faber and Faber, 2005]

Appendices

A Note on the 'OULIPO'

Oulipo, short for French '*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*' roughly translated as "*workshop of potential literature*" is a loose gathering of (mainly) French-speaking writers and mathematicians which seeks to create works using constrained writing techniques. It was founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and Francois Le Lionnais. Other notable members include novelists Georges Perec, Italo Calvino, poets, Oskar Pastior, Jean Lescure, and poet/mathematician Jacques Loubaud. Examples:

Raymond Queneau : *Exercices de Style* (1947): It is the recounting ninety-nine times of the same inconsequential episode, in which a man witnesses a minor altercation on a bus trip; each account is unique in terms of tone and style; *Cent Mille Millions de Poemes* (1961), is a collection of sonnets inspired by children's picture books in which each page is cut into horizontal strips that can be turned independently, allowing different pictures (usually of people: heads, torsos, waists, legs, etc.) to be combined in many ways. Queneau applies this technique to poetry: the book contains 10 sonnets, each on a page. Each page is split into 14 strips, one for each line. The author estimates in the introductory explanation that it would take approximately 200 million years to read all possible combinations.

Georges Perec was the master of this playful style. His crime novel, *La disparition* (1969), translated into English by Gilbert Adair as *A Void* (1969), is a 300-page narration from which the letter 'e' is banished. It is an example of a lipogram. The English translation, *A Void*, is also a lipogram. The novel is remarkable not only for the absence of 'e' but also because of the mystery in which the absence of that letter is a central theme. In his next novel, *Les Revenentes* (1972) the missing letter, 'e' stages a come back and a counter attack. For here, this is the only vowel used in the entire book. Six years later came the culminating work of his brief career, *La Vie mode d'emploi* (1978). Almost like a homage to Joyce's *Ulysses* its action unfolds on a single June day, to which he further adds two more constraints: everything happens towards eight in the evening, and in a single apartment building. , *La Vie mode d'emploi* is a huge compendium of stories, games, gags, and puzzles.

Jacques Roubaud: the poem, *Trente et un cube* (1973) is a collection of 31 poems, each with 31 lines, with 31 syllables, themselves distributed on the basis of a Japanese poetic form, the 'tanka' (5+7+5+7+7)

The Oulipo writers did not, of course, discover the idea that formal constraints stimulate rather than obstruct creative writing but they took it to far greater lengths than before. Their arbitrary phonetic, syntactic and alphabetical restrictions made enormous demands on the writer's ingenuity and had two main effects: first, to re-affirm the capacity of language to create texts from within its own operations and thereby shape our perceptions

of reality; secondly, to free the writer from the obligation to create politically or philosophically committed literature, which for the Oulipo for the Oulipo group was a far more alienating constraint.

An extract from the first manifesto which calls itself ‘the plea for modern constraints’:

Toute oeuvre litteraire se construit a partir d’ une inspiration . . . qui est tenue a s’ accommoder tant bien que mal d’ une serie de contraintes et de procedures qui rentrent les unes dans les autres comme des poupées russes. Contraintes de vocabulaire et de la grammaire, contraintes des regles du roman (division en chapitres etc.) ou de la tragedie classique (regle de trios unites) contraintes de la versification generale, contraintes de forme fixes (comme dans le cas du randeau ou du sonnet), etc. [. . .]

L’ humanite doit-elle se reposer et se contenter, sur des pensers nouveaux de faire des vers antiques? Nous ne le croyons pas. Ce que certains ecrivains ont introduit dans leur maniere avec talent (voire avec genie) mais les uns occasionnellement)forgeages des mots nouveaux), d’ autres avec insistance mais, dans une seule direction (lettrisme), l’ Ouvroir de Litterature Potentielle (OuLiPo) entend le faire systematiquement et scientifiquement, et au besoin en recourant aux bons offices des machines a traiter l’ information.

--Francois Le Lionnais

“Premier manifeste de l’ Oulipo” in *Oulipo, la litterature potentielle*, Gallimard, 1973

French Nobel Prize Winners

French authors have won more Literature Nobel Prizes than those of any other nation. The following French or French language authors have won it in the year given:

- 1901 – Sully Prudhomme (The first Nobel Prize in literature)
- 1904 – Frederic Mistral (wrote in Occitan)
- 1911 – Maurice Maeterlinck (Belgian)
- 1915 – Romain Rolland
- 1921 – Anatole France
- 1927 – Henri Bergson
- 1937 – Roger Martin du Gard
- 1947 – Andre Gide
- 1952 – Francois Mauriac
- 1957 – Albert Camus
- 1960 – Saint-John Perse
- 1964 – Jean-Paul Sartre (declined the prize)
- 1969 – Samuel Beckett (Irish, wrote in English and French)
- 1985 – Claude Simon
- 2000 – Gao Xingjian* (writes in Chinese)
- 2008 – J.M.G. Le Clezio

***Gao Xingjian** born (in Ganzhou, Jiangxi in China) on January 4, 1940, is a Chinese emigre novelist (French citizen since 1997), playwright, and critic who in 2000 was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature “for an oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity.” He was also renowned as a stage director and as an artist. In 1997, Gao was granted French citizenship. He is a noted translator (particularly of Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco), screenwriter, stage director, and a celebrated painter.

Gao's drama is considered to be fundamentally absurdist in nature and avant-garde in his native China. His prose works tend to be less celebrated in China but are highly regarded elsewhere in Europe and the West. He once burnt a suitcase packed with manuscripts during the Cultural Revolution to avoid persecution. Gao was awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et Des Lettres by the French government in 1992.

Major Literary Prizes awarded annually in France

Prix Goncourt - created 1903, given to the author of "the best and most imaginative prose work of the year".

Prix Femina - created 1904, decided each year by an exclusively female jury, although the authors of the winning works do not have to be women.

Grand Prix de Roman de L' Academie francaise - created in 1918.

Prix Renaudot - created in 1926.

Prix Tour-Apollo Award - 1972-1990, given to the best science fiction novel published in French during the preceding year.

Prix de Deux Magots - created in 1933.

Grand Prix de Litterature Policiere - created in 1948, for crime and detective fiction.

Prix Litteraie Valery Larbaud - created in 1957.

Prix Medici - created in 1958, awarded to an author whose "fame does not yet match his talent."

Prix Goncourt des Lyceens - created in 1987.

Prix Decembre - created in 1989.

Prix de Prix created in 2011

Important Socio-political, and Literary Dates 1950-2000

Year	History	French Literature	World Literature
1950	Korean War	Ionesco: La Cantatrice chauve	Bradbury: The Martian Chronicles
1951		Yourcenar: Les Mémoires d'Hadrien/Beckett: Malloy	Salinger: Catcher in the Rye
1952		Beckett: En attendant Godot/Proust: Jean Santeuil (unfinished novel published posthumously)/Mauriac wins Nobel Prize in Literature	
1953			Hemingway: The Old Man and the Sea
1954	Indochina (Vietnam) wins independence from France	Sagan: Bonjour Tristesse	Tolkien: Lord of the Rings
1955	Soviet Union Gets hydrogen bomb	Robbe-Grillet: Le Voyeur	
1956		Senghor: Ethiopiques/Beauvoir: Les Mandarins/Camus: La Chute	
1957	European Common Market founded with six members/Sputnik, the first satellite, launched by Soviet Union	Camus wins Nobel Prize in Literature/Robbe-Grillet: La Jalousie/Simon: Le vent	Pasternak: Dr Zhivago / Agee: A Death in the Family/Kerouac: On the Road

1958	French Fifth Republic created; De Gaulle Elected President		Achebe: Things Fall Apart
1959		Genet: Le Nègres/Queneau:Zazie dans le Métro	
1960	Most of France's African Colonies attain independence	Lonesco:Rhinocéros/Simon: La Route des Flandres	Lee: To kill a Mockingbird / Bolt : A Man for All Seasons
1961			Heller: Catch 22
1962	Algerian independence		Kesey: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
1963	President Kennedy assassinated	Boule: La Planète des singes	
1964		Sartre wins Nobel Prize in Literature, declines it	
1965		Laye: L'Enfant noir/Pinget: Quelqu'un	
1966			Goldman: The Lion in Winter/ Achebe: A Man of the People
1967		Tournier: Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique/ Gatti: V comme Vietnam	Marquez: One Hundred Years of Solitude
1968	Student revolt rocks French government	Yourcenar: L'Oeuvre au noir	

1969	De Gaulle resigns; Pompidou elected President/U.S. lands first men on moon	Beckett wins Nobel Prize in Literature	Vonnegut: Slaughterhouse-Five
1970		Tournier: Le Roi des Aulnes	
1971			Thompson: Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas
1972			
1973	European Common Market expands to nine nations/France becomes a nuclear power		Solzhenitsyn: The Gulag Archipelago
1974	Giscard d'Estaing elected President of France		
1975	Vietnam reunification		
1976			Haley: Roots
1977		Feyder: Emballage perdu	

1978		Tournier: Le Coq de bruyère	
1979			
1980	Francois Mitterrand elected President of France		Toole: A Confederacy of Dunces
1981		Yourcenar the first woman elected to French Academy	
1982			
1983			Snyder: Axe Handles
1984		Tardieu: La Comédie du langage	
1985		Djebar: L'Amour, la fantasia/Claude Simon wins Nobel Prize in Literature	
1986			
1987		Rinaldi: Les Roses de Pline	Morrison: Beloved
1988			Rushdie: The Satanic Verses

1989		Hèbert:Poèmes nouveaux	
1990		Rouaud: Les Champs d'honneur	
1991			Updike: Rabbit at Rest
1992	European Union replaces franc and other currencies with the Euro	Nothomb: Hydiène de l'assassin	McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses
1993			
1994	Jacques Chirac elected President of France		
1995			
1996			
1997			
1998			
1999		Echenoz:Je m'en vais	
		Nothomb:Stupeur et Tremblement	
2000	Corruption scandals shake French government		Allende: Daughter of Fortune

A Note on acknowledgments & Permissions

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September 10th, 2014