Living On

Translated by James Hulbert

But who's talking about living?
In other words on living?

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

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

BORDER LINES. 10 November 1977. Dedicate "Living On" to my friend Jacques Ehrmann. Recall that it was in response to his invitation, and to see him, that I first came to Yale. He had the good fortune to sign J. E. when he wrote his initials. This permitted him to inscribe my copy of his book "Textes" suivi de "La mort de la littérature," published anonymously, as follows: "To J. D. in friendly remembrance of this '10 November' on which J. E. called you." J. E. (the letters that
have every reason to suppose is a common context, although you have no absolute guarantee of it. If it is a sort of quotation, a sort of "mention," as the theoreticians of "speech acts" feel justified in saying, we must understand the entire performance "in other words on living?" as having quotation marks around it. But once quotation marks demand to appear, they don't know where to stop. Especially here, where they are not content merely to surround the performance "in other words on living?": they divide it, rework its body and its insides, until it is distended, diverted, out of joint, then reset member by member, word by word, realigned in the most diverse configurations (like a garment spread out on a clothesline with clothespins). For example, several pairs of quotation marks may enclose one or two words: "living on" ["survivre"], "on" living ["sur" vivre], "on" living, "on" living, "on" living, producing each time a different semantic and syntactic effect; I still have not exhausted the list, nor have I brought the hyphen into play. Translating (almost, in other words) the Latin de, the French de, or the English "of," "on" immediately comes to contaminate what it translates with meanings that it imports in turn, those other meanings that rework "living on" or "surviving" (super, hyper, over, über, and even "above" and "beyond"). It would be superficial to attribute this contamination to contingency, contiguity, or contagion. At least, chance makes sense here, and that's what interests me.

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

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

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

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

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

Will it be possible for us to ask whoever asked the initial question, "But who's talking about living?", what inflection governs his or her question? By definition, the statement [énoncer] "But
who’s talking about living?”, like every other statement, does not require the presence or assistance of any party, male or female. The statement survives them a priori, lives on after them. Hence no context is saturable any more. No one inflection enjoys any absolute privilege, no meaning can be fixed or decided upon. No border is guaranteed, inside or out. Try it. For example:

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

2. “But who’s talking about living?”: in other words, who can really speak about living? Who is in a position to? Who is already on the other side [bord], little enough alive, or alive enough, to dare to speak about living, not about one life, nor even about life, but about living, the immediate, present, even impersonal process of an act of living that nevertheless guarantees even the spoken word that it conveys and that it thus defies to speak on living: it is impossible to use living speech to speak of living—unless it is possible only with living speech, which would make the aporia even more paralyzing. Is this the point at which a triumphant procession unfinishes? “Then, what is Life?” I said.

The structure of this line, very close to the end (the end of the poem and Shelley’s end), the “I said” and the self-quotation are perhaps not so foreign to the canonical question of the supposed “unfinished” quality of a “Triumph.”

3. “But who’s talking about living?”: an implicit quotation of “living,” a “mention” of the word or the concept, which is not the same thing and doubles the possibilities. In other words: who is saying what about “living,” the word or the thing, the signifier or the concept, if we suppose that in this case these oppositions are pertinent in the least, and that “living,” precisely, does not go beyond their bounds?

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

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

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

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

processed,” in English?): a procession underneath the other one, and going past it in silence, as if it did not see it, as if it had nothing to do with it, a double band, a “double blind,” and a blindly jealous double . . . . what Hillis Miller would call a “double blind” (“double blind-alley” in “The Mirror’s Secret”). Double proceedings, double cortège, double triumph. The Triumph of Life, L’arrêt de mort (how will they have translated this title? Better to leave it in “French,” assuming that it belongs to a determinable language; but then in what language will this text appear?), each “triumph” (there are two triumphs) forming the double band or “double band” of double proceedings. This would be a good place for a translator’s note, for example, about everything that has been said elsewhere on the subject of the “double blind,” the double band, the double procession, and so forth (a quotation in extenso, among others, of Glas, which itself . . . and so forth): this, as a measure of the
living. But what does it say about it? A great deal, far too many things, but this much at least, in its writing-on-living: it is, itself, the poem, and it gives itself a name, The Triumph of Life. In a sense still to be determined, it lives-on. But—I must say it in the syntax of my language to defy the translators to decide, at each moment—iniaster whose name, or the name of what, does it live on? Does it live on in/after Shelley’s name? This deserves a translators’ note explaining both survire au nom de and what happens in French when triomphe de la vie [triumph of life] is transformed into triompher de la vie [to triumph over life]. This is not playing with language, as one might easily suspect. I maintain, not without delaying the proof a bit longer, that this is a question of what takes place in the poem and of what remains of it, beyond any opposition between finished and unfinished, whether we mean the end of the last poem or that of the man who drowned “off Lerici” on 8 July 1822, “writing The Triumph of Life” (as is said in one account of Shelley’s Life, with a chronological table in five divisions, “Dates,” “Events,” “Residence,” “Finance,” “Chief Works”).

“Who’s talking about living?” I am treating this sentence as a quotation; there can be no doubt about it now. And you may even have the feeling that all I’ve been doing is commenting on this opening sentence that came, with no quotation marks, from who knows where. But wasn’t this attack already a quotation? I was apparently the one who decided to write that, without asking for anyone’s authorization, not taking it out of any well-defined corpus, not indicating any copyright. But I immediately began to reconstitute all sorts of corpora or contexts from which I might impossible. How can one text, assuming its unity, give or present another to be read, without touching it, without saying anything about it, practically without referring to it? How can two “triumphs” read each other, each one and the other, without even knowing each other, at a distance? At a distance and without knowing each other, like the two “women” in L’arrêt de mort. The “mad hypothesis,” the manic hubris of a reading toward which the other procession (what happens je passe) be-

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

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

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

When a text quotes and requotes, with or without quotation marks, when it is written on the brink, you start, or indeed have
already started, to lose your footing. You lose sight of any line of demarcation between a text and what is outside it.

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

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

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

or

Glas), which I would like to have translated here. Beyond all this grand phantasmic organization and these real or fictitious events, I wish to pose the question of the bord, the edge, the border, and the bord de mer, the shore. (These "Border Lines," in French, are entitled "Journal de bord"—usually translated "shipboard journal," but here also "journal on bord." ) (The Triumph of Life was written in the sea, at its edge, between land and sea, but that doesn't matter.) The question of the border precedes, as it were, the determination of all the dividing lines that I have just mentioned: between a fantasy and a "reality," an event and a non-event, a fiction and a reality, one corpus and another, and so forth. Here, from week to week in this pocket-calendar or these minutes [procès-verbal], I shall perhaps endeavor to create an effect of superimposing, of superimprinting one text on the other. Now, each of the two "triumphs" writes (on [sur]) textural superimprinting. What about this
"text," of what I still call a "text," for strategic reasons, in part—a "text" that is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerring or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines)—all the limits, everything that was to be set up in opposition to writing (speech, life, the world, the real, history, and what not, every field of reference—to body or mind, conscious or unconscious, politics, economics, and so forth). Whatever the (demonstrated) necessity of such an overrun, such a *dé-bordement*, it still will have come as a shock, producing endless efforts to dam up, resist, rebuild the old partitions, to blame what could no longer be thought without confusion, to blame difference as wrongful confusion! All this has taken place in non-reading, with no work on what was thus being demonstrated, with no realization that it was never our wish to extend the reassuring notion of the text to a whole extra-textual realm and to transform the world into a library by doing away with all boundaries, all framework, all sharp edges (all *arêtes*: this is the word that I am speaking of tonight), but that we sought rather to work out the theoretical and practical system of these margins, these borders, once more, from the ground up. I shall not go into detail. Documentation of all this is readily available to anyone committed to breaking down the various structures of resistance, his own resistance as such or as primarily the ramparts that bolster a system (be it theoretical, cultural, institutional, political, or whatever). What are the borderlines of a text? How do they come about? I shall not approach the question frontally, in the most general way. I prefer, within the limits that we have here, a more indirect, narrower channel, one that is more concrete as well: at the edge of the narrative, of the text as a narrative. The word is *récit*, a story, a narrative, and not *narration*, narration. The reworking of a textual problematic has affected this aspect of the text as narrative (the narrative of an event, the event of narrative, the narrative as the structure of an event) by placing it in the foreground.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

both texts. *La folie du jour.* The course of the sun, day, year, anniversary, double revolution, the palindromic and the anagrammatic version or reversion of *écrit, récit, and série.* The series (*écrit, récit, série,* etc.). Note to the translators: How are you going to translate that, *récit* for example? Not as *nouvelle,* “novella,” nor as “short story.” Perhaps it will be better to leave the "French" word *récit.* It is already hard enough to understand, in Blanchot’s text, in French. An essential question for the
translator. The *sur,* “on,” “super-,” and so forth, that is my theme above, also designates the figure of a passage by translation, the *Übersetzung.* Version [*version,* also “translation into one’s own language”], transference, and translation. *Übersetzung.* The simultaneous transgression and reappropriation of a language [*langue,* its law, its economy? How will you translate *langue?* Let us suppose then that here, at the foot of the other text, I address a translatable message, in
[Je vois le jour], oh God," says a voice in La folie du jour, a "narrative" ["récit"] (?) by Maurice Blanchot. (This title, La folie du jour, appears only in what would be called, according to a certain convention, the "second version," in book form this time [Fata Morgana, 1973; In English, "The Madness of the Day," tr. Lydia Davis, TriQuarterly, No. 40 (Fall 1977), pp. 168-177, quoted throughout]. Of a "récit" first published in a literary magazine [Empêcheur, 2, 1949] under the title "Un récit?" Is it the same text, except for the title? Or are these two versions of the same écrit [piece of writing], the same "récit"? Usually, from one version to the next, the title remains the same. What is a version? What is a title? What borderline questions are posed here? I am here seeking merely to establish the necessity of this whole problematic of judicial framing and of the jurisdiction of frames. This problematic, I feel, has not been explored, at least not adequately, by the institution of literary studies in the university. And there are essential reasons for that; this is an institution built on that very system of framing. In the case of La folie du jour, the matter is even more complicated, as we shall see little by little, and this complication involves a certain "sur" ["on," "super-" etc.], or what we have called elsewhere, in La Dissémination, a certain "overcasting" [surjet]. For now, let us point out that the question mark [in "Un récit?"] appears as an integral part of the title only on the cover of the review Empêcheur, under the general heading "Sommaire" ["contents"]. Under the same heading, on the inside of the review, on a sort of flyleaf [page de garde] before the text itself, the question mark disappears. This disappearance...
fleeting, the *sémajour*, the “same” *jour*, the other, is both *ajouré* and *ajourné* [“perforated” and “adjourned, postponed”; derived from the two senses of *jour*]—in itself, so to speak, in the precarious instability of its title. The madness of the day, of this moment, is momentary. The abyss that carries it away is expressed (for example) when a voice says, “Oh, I see the daylight (*jour*), oh God.” It is not the narrator’s voice but a feminine one [i.e., referred to by the pronoun *elle*] that discreetly sets free (by means of a sort of game that tires the narrator, he says) all the powers of a language by making it apparently untranslatable: “Suddenly, she [elle] would cry out, ‘Oh, I see the daylight, oh God,’ etc. I would protest that this game was tiring me out enormously, but she was insatiable for my glory.” The game did not consist solely or surely (look at the paragraph) in wordplay. But language is involved from the first. The feminine voice that says “I see the daylight”—insatiable for the “glory” of the “I” of the story, for his triumph—this voice is spoken, is translated by language: “I am born” (*voir le jour also means “to be born” in French*), but also “I see” (things) and, what’s more, “I see” light, glory, the element of visibility, the visibility of that which is visible, the phenomenality of the phenomenon; thus I see vision, both eyesight and what it can see, the stage [séne] and the possibility of representation [séne], the scene of visibility, a *primal scene*, I might say, quoting the title of a very short text [i.e., “Une scène primitive”], a “broken window” by Blanchot, a text whose powerful enigma I do not wish to touch on here. Visibility should—not be visible. According to an old, omnipotent logic that has reigned since Plato, that which enables us to see should remain invisible: black, blinding. *La folie du jour* is a story of madness [*histoire de la folie*], of that madness that consists in seeing the light, vision or visibility, from an experience of blindness. If from “life” we appeal to “light,” from *vie* to *vision*, we can speak here of *sur-vie*, of living on in a life-after-life or a life-after-death, as *sur-vision*, “seeing on” in a vision-beyond-vision. To see sight or vision or visibility, to see beyond what is visible, is not merely “to have a vision” in the usual sense of the word, but to see-beyond-sight, to see-sight-beyond-sight. As in Ponge’s “Le soleil placé en abîme,” the story of glory engulfs or clouds over a sort of paternal figure, placing it in an abyss-structure, in vision-beyond-vision. The story obscures the sun (“the sun their father,” says *The Triumph of Life*) with a blinding light. (Thus perhaps the mother lives on, and on, as a ghost—phantom or revenant—an absolute figurant, a walk-on who walks on and on, in accordance with the “obsequent logic” to which I referred in *Glas*. I am my father who is dead and my mother who is alive, announces Nietzsche at the midpoint of his life, in *Ecce Homo*, after passing through blindness.) To see vision, to see on beyond sight: this abyss-like madness of an utterly primal scene, the scene of scenes, stages, representation, is simulated and dissimulated in the narrative in the reassuring form (for those who want to be reassured) of spectacles [*spectacles*] within bounds, determinate “visions” or “scenes” that serve in a way to allegorize the abyss and contain the madness. The word “vision” itself is ambiguous enough to make this economy possible.

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

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In the opposite sense to that of what takes place in the upper band: there, too, are economy and formalization, but by semantic accumulation and overloading, until the point when the logic of the undecidable *arrêt de mort* brings and opens polysemia (and its economy) in the direction of dissemination. Why have I chosen to stress the translation-effect here? 1. Effects of transcience, of superimposing, of textual superimprinting between the two “triumphs” or the two “arrêts” and within
says "I" in *La folie du jour*. This speaker has supposedly triumphed over blindness. I do not know whether it is possible to consider the "glories" of *The Triumph of Life* and those of *La folie du jour* as translating one another, and if so, which translating which, and in what ways. If we are not restricted to literal recurrences of the word "glory," then that translation can go every which way. Its detours become both endless and inevitable. Let us say that I interrupt them here. I stop [*Je m'arrête*]. Thus I shall not quote "Outdoors, I saw something briefly (*j'envis une courte vision*; also "I had a brief vision")* from *La folie du jour*, at the hinge of the text, to give it the resonance of an echo translating "And then a Vision on my brain was rolled," which is at once the linking point and the opening of the narrative in *The Triumph of Life*. After the "brief vision," before the traumatic accident in which "I nearly lost my sight, because someone crushed glass in my eyes," the accident that left him at first with his eyes bandaged (to be translated, I suppose, by "eyes banded" or by "banded eyes" as in lines 100 and 103 of *The Triumph of Life*), the beginning of the end is there for us to read. The beginning of the end describes in an abyss-structure (i.e., in an inserted miniature representing the whole) the structure of the "narrative," the "récit" (?) entitled *La folie du jour*. This "narrative" seems indeed to begin with a certain sentence that will subsequently be quoted towards the end as part of the narrative, unless the first sentence quotes in advance the one that comes at the end and that relates the first words of a narrative. I shall return to this structure, which deprivs the text of any beginning and of any decidable edge or border, of any heading or letterhead [*en-tête*]. (*En-tête* is the word with which Chouraqui translates the beginning of Genesis:

**ENTÊTE** [en-head] Elohim created heaven and earth.
The earth was in shambles,
darkness upon the face of the abyss,
the breath of Elohim moving upon the face of the waters.
Elohim says:

"There will be light."
And there is light.
Elohim sees the light: Oh, the good.
Elohim separates the light from the darkness.
Elohim cries to the light: "Day."
To the darkness, he cries: "Night."
And it is evening and it is morning:
day, unique.

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

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

*teaching*. The line that I seek to recognize within translatability, between two translations, one governed by the classical model of transportable univocality or of formalizable polysemy, and the other, which goes over into dissemination—this line also passes between the critical and the deconstructive. A politic-institutional problem of the University: it, like all teaching in its traditional form, and perhaps all teaching whatever, has as its ideal, with exhaustive translatability, the effacement
(There are writings entitled, for example, Entête [Genesis], the Gospels, Revelation [Apocalypse], and so forth. I would like to speak of them here, to attempt to read them, to move to them from, for example, The Triumph of Life, La folie du jour, L’arrêt de mort... and the story, the narrative, of “Living On” as difference, with an a, between archeology and eschatology, as difference in apocalypse. That will be a while in coming.)

What is judiciously called the question-of-narrative covers, with a certain modesty, a demand for narrative, a violent putting-to-the-question, an instrument of torture working to wring the narrative out of one as if it were a terrible secret, in ways that can go from the most archaic police methods to refinements for making (and even letting) one talk that are unsurpassed in neutrality and politeness, that are most respectfully medical, psychiatric, and even psychoanalytic. For reasons that should be obvious by now, I shall not say that Blanchot offers a representation, a mise en scène, of this demand for narrative, in La folie du jour: it would be better to say that it is there to be read, “to the point of delirium,” as it throws the reader off the track. For the same reasons, I do not know whether the text can be classified as being of the genre (Genette: the mode [mode; mood of a verb]) “récit,” a word that Blanchot has repeatedly insisted upon and contested, reclaimed and rejected, set down and (then) erased, and so forth. In addition to these general reasons there is a singular characteristic, involving precisely the (internal and external) boundaries or edges of language [la langue]. The deconstruction of a pedagogical institution and all that it implies. What this institution cannot bear, is for anyone to tamper with [toucher à; also “touch,” “change,” “concern himself with”] language, meaning both the national language and, paradoxically, an ideal of translatability that neutralizes this national language. Nationalism and universalism. What this institution cannot bear is a transformation that leaves intact neither of these two complementary poles.

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

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

It can bear more readily the most apparently revolutionary ideological sorts of “content,” if only that content does not touch the borders of language [la langue] and of all the juridico-political contracts that it guarantees. It is this intolerable something that concerns me here. It is related in an essential way to that which, as it is written above, brings out the limits of the concept of translation on which the university is built, particularly when it makes the teaching of language, even
Men want to escape death, strange animals that they are. And some of them cry out "Die, die" because they want to escape life. "What a life. I'll kill myself. I'll give in." That is pitiful and strange; it is a mistake.

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

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

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

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

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

By definition, there is no end to a discourse that would seek to describe the invaginated structure of La folie du jour. Invagination is the inward refolding of la gaine [sheath, girdle], the inverted reapplication of the outer edge to the inside of a form where the outside then opens a pocket. Such an invagination is possible from the first trace on. This is why there is no "first" trace. We have just seen, on the basis of this example refined to
the point of madness, how "the whole story [to which] they listened" is the one (the same but another at the same time) that, like La folie du jour, begins "I am neither learned nor ignorant. . . . " But this "whole story," which corresponds to the totality of the "book," is also only a part of the book, the narrative that is demanded, attempted, impossible, and so forth. Its end, which comes before the end, does not respond to the request of the authorities, the authorities who demand an author, an I capable of organizing a narrative sequence, of remembering and telling the truth: "exactly what happened," "recounting facts that he remembers," in other words saying "I" (I am the same as the one to whom these things happened, and so on, and thereby assuring the unity or identity of narratee or reader, and so on). Such is the demand for the story, for narrative, the demand that society, the law that governs literary and artistic works, medicine, the police, and so forth, claim to constitute. This demand for truth is itself recounted and swept along in the endless process of invagination. Because I cannot pursue this analysis here, I merely situate the place, the locus, in which double invagination comes about, the place where the invagination of the upper edge on its outer face (the supposed beginning of La folie du jour), which is folded back "inside" to form a pocket and an inner edge, comes to extend beyond (or encroach on) the invagination of the lower edge, on its inner face (the supposed end of La folie du jour), which is folded back "inside" to form a pocket and an outer edge. Indeed the "middle" sequence ("I had been asked, Tell us exactly what happened." A story? I began: I am neither learned nor ignorant. I have known joys. That is saying too little. I told them the whole

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

mentary interpretation by the translators (active, interested, inscribed in a politico-institutional field of drives, and so forth), if we are not to pass over all these stakes and interests (what happens in this respect in the universities of the Western world, in the United States, at Yale, from department to department? How is one to step in? What is the key here for decoding? What am I doing here? What are they making me do? How are the boundaries of all these fields, titles, corpora, and so forth,
self without including (or comprehending) itself, identifies itself with itself even as it remains utterly different from its homonym. Of course, at intervals ranging from two to forty paragraphs, this structure of **crisscross double invagination** (“I am neither learned nor [. . . .] A story? I began: I am neither learned nor [. . . .] The story was finished! [. . .] A story? No. No stories, never again.”) never ceases to refold or superpose or overemploy itself in the meantime, and the description of this would be interminable. I must content myself for the moment with underscoring the supplementary aspect of this structure: the chiasma of this double invagination is always possible, because of what I have called elsewhere the iterability of the mark. Now, if we have just seen a strikingly complex example of this in the case of a récit, a story, using the word “récit,” reciting and requoting both its possibility and its impossibility, double invagination can come about in any text, whether it is narrative in form or not, whether it is of the genre or mode “récit” or not, whether it speaks of it or not. Nevertheless—and this is the aspect that interested me in the beginning—double invagination, wherever it comes about, has in itself the structure of a narrative [récit] in deconstruction. Here the narrative is irreducible. Even before it “concerns” a text in narrative form, double invagination consticts the story of stories, the narrative of narrative, the narrative of deconstruction in deconstruction: the apparently outer edge of an enclosure [clôture], far from being simple, simply external and circular, in accordance with the philosophical representation of philosophy, makes no sign beyond itself, toward what is utterly other, without becoming double or dual, without making itself be “represented,” refolded, superposed, re-marked within the enclosure, at least in what the structure produces as an effect of interiority. But it is precisely this structure-effect that is being deconstructed here.

If “No. No stories, never again” belongs to *La folie du jour* as it is inscribed at its edge, at the edge of a text that recounts the demand for an impossible story, a text that was first called “Un récit,” and so on, the story effaces itself from the story by making itself more noticeable, by re-marking itself, with a “double exposure,” a superimprinting. And the history of the story or the story of history is the story of effacement as superimprinting of all the logic of the “double bind” or of double invagination that is reaffirmed in that story. It is not absolutely necessary that this superimprinting by effacement also stress the word récit, the name of the mode or genre, but it makes for a remarkable supplement . . . especially if the designation [*la “mention”*] “récit” is part of the title without being part of it, between the title and the rest. This is what happens with the first titles of *La folie du jour* and “in” the text that bears these titles, but it is also what happens between the two versions of *L’arrêt de mort*. The first one (1948) carries, beneath the title, if not as a subtitle, the designation “récit.” This disappears in the second version (1971), which also effaces the last two pages, an enigmatic epilogue that threatened to gather together, under the authority of a meta-story, the two “stories,” independent and indeed disparate, that precede it. Here we cannot go deeply into this event, this double effacement, which is a story in itself: the two versions form (without forming) a single corpus registered at the Bibliothèque Nationale in the name of Maurice Blanchot. I allude to this institution to indicate
how the unity of one version can be encroached upon by an essential unfinishedness that cannot be reduced to an incompleteness or an inadequacy. I register, I record this remark on the shore of what is called the unfinishedness of The Triumph of Life, at the moment when Shelley is drowned. I do so without claiming to understand what people mean in this case by “unfinished,” or to decide anything. I do so only to recall the immense procedures that should come before a statement about whether a work is finished or unfinished. Where are we to situate the event of Shelley’s drowning? And who will decide the answer to this question? Who will form a narrative of these borderline events [événements de bord]? At whose demand?

THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE

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

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

translation. Übersetzung and “translation” overcome, equivocally, in the course of an equivocal combat, the loss of an object. A text lives only if it lives on [sur-vit], and it lives on only if it is at once translatable and untranslatable (always “at once . . . and . . .”: hama, at the “same” time). Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language [langue]. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately. Thus triumphant trans-
of Shelley, a reading oriented by the problems of narrative [récit] as reaffirmation (yes, yes) of life, in which the yes, which says nothing, describes nothing but itself, the performance of its own event of affirmation, repeats itself, quotes, cites itself, says yes-to itself as (to an-) other in accordance with the ring, requotes and recites a commitment that would not take place outside this repetition of a performance without presence. This strange ring says yes to life only in the overdetermining ambiguity of the triumph de ["of," "over"] life, sur ["over," "on," etc.] life, the triumph marked in the "on" of "living on" [le sur d'un survivre].

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

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

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

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

judicial conventions of "literature." This schema is not its own telos, nor self-mirroring or mere mise en abyme; at least the "double bind" that structures these titles, as I seek to demonstrate it, keeps this reflecting representation from folding back upon itself or reproducing itself within itself in perfect self-corrrespondence [adéquate à elle-même], from dominating or including itself, tautologically, from translating itself into its own totality. Writing and triumph. Nietzsche: "Writing in order to
a concept, a term (x-less x): “-less” or “without” without privation or negativity or lack (“without” without *without*, *less-less* “-less”), the necessity of which I have attempted to analyze in “Le ‘sans’ de la coupure pure” and “Pas.” This “-less” syntax enters at least twice (and that’s no accident) into the (definitionless) definition of the narrative voice. We have already read “placeless place,” and now we come to “at a distanceless distance,” in a passage that makes the ghost return [fait revenir le revenant], “ghostly,” “phantom-like” *revenance* (the element of haunting that inundates, if you will, *The Triumph of Life*, its “ghosts,” “phantoms,” “ghostly shadows,” and the like):

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

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

The neutral and not neutrality, the neutral beyond dialectical contradiction and all opposition: such would be the possibility of a “narrative,” a “récit,” that would no longer be simply a form, a genre, or a literary mode, and that goes, that is borne, beyond the system of philosophical oppositions. The neutral cannot be governed by any of the terms involved in an opposition within *triumph*. Writing should always mark a triumph” ([Opinions et sentences mêlées, aphorism 152]; I quote from a French translation now in use but quite inadequate, precisely in its triumph. Nietzsche writes: “Schreiben und Siegen-wollen.—Schreiben sollte immer einen Sieg anzeigen . . . ”). See what he says then of the triumph (Überwindung) over oneself, i.e., he claims, without using force (*Gewalt*) on others. He opposes the triumph that he prescribes for literature, to that of “dyspeptics who write only at philosophical language and natural language. And yet it is not outside of language: it is, for example, narrative voice. Despite the negative form that it takes on in grammar (*ne-uter, neither*) and that betrays it, it surpasses negativity. It is linked rather to the double affirmation (yes, yes, come, come) that re-quotes [*récite*] itself and becomes involved in the *récit*.

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

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

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

the very moment when they are unable to digest something, or from the moment that the morsel [*morceau*] sticks in their teeth. . . . “The problem of the *mors* [literally “(bridle-)bit”] (how can *mors* be translated?), set forth in *Glas* and *Fors.* Obviously (and this is the case) to note [*marquer*] it, in this short telegraphic band addressed to the translators and that I am burying here underneath the other one, I can try for a certain intertranslatability (triumphant and arrested) of *The Triumph of*
It is almost certain that at certain moments we realize it: to keep speaking—this afterlife, life-after-life of the spoken word, speaking on—is a way of making ourselves aware that for a long time we have not been speaking any more.

Praise of the faraway near.

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

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

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

How then is the title of the book to be read? First, is it readable? Its open polysemy plays with the language to the point of stopping [arrêter] any translation of it. In his introduction to [the translation by Lydia Davis of] a fragment of L'arrêt de mort (Georgia Review, Summer 1976), Geoffrey Hartman asks rightly: "Is 'arrêt de mort,' then, 'death sentence' or 'suspension of death'?

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

Here, first of all, [in Lydia Davis' translation, now complete, published as Death Sentence (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill, 1978) and quoted throughout, with permission and with occasional modifications for the sake of continuity] is the moment in which death is signified, announced, like a condemnation that calls forth death and calls J. to death—assent, consent, that is also a sentence (J. is condamné in every sense of the word, given up and given over):

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

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

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

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

when the object seems to return. But in manic triumph, what the ego "has overcome and what it triumphs over" (was es überwunden hat und vorüber es triumphiert) is concealed from it. How is this dissimulation possible? Freud's dissatisfaction in this text, and in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, whose entire problematic should be introduced here. Speculations on the improbable death drive. Always one step more [un pas de plus], and no thesis [et pas de thèse]. Freud is still—bereft of an answer, unable to kiss it good-bye [faire son deuil de la réponse]. Here, in "Trauer und Melancholie," the most difficult phase seems to concern the difference between normal Überwindung and "triumph." Of course, the mania must have "overcome" (überwunden) the loss of the object or the mourning for this loss or the object itself. Hence the libidinal explosion of the manic, who, "famished," rushes to new cathexes, new objects. [During her "life after life" ["sur-vie"] or "resurrection," J., like the nar-
Condemned (by the disease, the doctor, the "narrator"), J. should have been dead already. She thus lives on, more alive than ever, though. The disease has not got the better of her, n'a pas eu raison d'elle, another expression that is hard to translate: avoir raison de is here to overcome, to triumph over. Over life, to be precise, which does not give in to that ratio and of which it is difficult to give a reasoned account.

In truth it is also J. who makes the decision that condemns her to death: J., who will have to, will have had to die, should have died (but will we ever know whether she died, whether death came for her?), makes the decision, takes it upon herself to decide and enjoins the narrator from deciding. She orders him to kill her, to "give her death." She decides her death [arrêt de mort], takes up the decree of death herself. This is the penultimate page of the first part (which also forms an independent whole) of an erstwhile récit strangely cut up into two wholes and suspended around this undecided arrêt de mort. The verb arrêter, made reflexive as s'arrêter, stopping (itself) s'arrêtant, twice marks a boundary that brings things to an end only to let them start or start over or start on again [repartir]. (The pulse "stopped s'arrêta", then began to beat again[...].) [...]. "What is extraordinary begins at the moment I stop [je m'arrête]."

Here, she demands death, which he gives her; she gives it to herself (i.e., takes her own life) with the hand of the narrator. As we read this, we should remember that J. was dead before, since she had returned to life at the narrator's bidding, in response to his call. Having died once, she had already lived on. This double death is a triumph of life and of death. Here is the passage:

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

I have no better way of describing it [Je n'ai aucun moyen d'en écrire davantage]. I could say that during those moments J. continued to look at me with the same affectionate and willing [consentant] look and that this look is still there, but unfortunately I'm not sure of that. As for the rest, I don't want to say anything. The difficulties with the doctor became a matter of indifference to me. I myself see nothing important in the fact that this young woman was dead, and returned to life at my bidding, but I see an astounding miracle in her fortitude, in her energy, which was great towards narcissism as the only effective factor. But he suddenly suspends, calls a halt, postpones, in a gesture for the sake of economy that concerns precisely economy. We must halt (halten), he says in conclusion, until we know the "economic nature" of physical pain and of the mental pain that is "analogous" to it. Earlier, as he often does, he uses the judicial expression Verdicti (verdict, sentence, arrêt) to designate the operation of Reality with respect to the lost object. Each time that
enough to make death powerless as long as she wanted. One thing must be understood: I have said nothing extraordinary or even surprising. What is extraordinary begins at the moment I stop. But I am no longer able to speak of it.

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

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

As defined (indefinitely) in the passage from Le pas au-delà, the arrêt de mort is not only the decision that determines [arrêtant] what cannot be decided: it also arrests death by suspending it, interrupting it, deferring it with a "start" [dureauté], the startling starting over, and starting on, of living on. But then what suspends or holds back death is the very thing that gives it all its power of undecidability—another false name, rather than a pseudonym, for difference. And this is the pulse of the "word" arrêt, the arrhythmic pulsation of its syntax in the expression arrêt de mort. Arrêter, in the sense of suspending, is suspending the arrêt, in the sense of decision. Arrêter, in the sense of deciding, arrests the arrêt, in the sense of suspension. They are ahead of or lag behind one another. One marks delay; the other, haste. There are not merely two senses or two syntaxes of arrêt but, beyond a playful variability, the antagony [antagonie; cf. agonie, "death throes," and antagonisme] from one arrêt to the other. The antagony lasts from one to the other, one relieving the other in an Aufhebung that never lets up, arrêt arresting arrêt, both senses, both ways. The arrêt arrests itself (s’arrête). The indecision of the arrêt intervenes not between two senses of the word arrêt but within each sense, so to speak. For the suspensive arrêt is already undecided because it suspends, and the decisive arrêt undecided because what it decides, death, la Chose, the neuter, is the undecidable itself, installed by decision in its undecidability. Like death, the arrêt remains (tests, s’arrête, arrêts itself) undecidable. Crisis: everything seems to begin in a period of crisis (1938, Munich, then "the end of 1940"), then with a "strange attack [craie]" when someone goes into "râles" ["breathing hoarsely"] (tr. Davis); also "death-rattle") after opening a closet where the "proof" of the story was, perhaps, to be found, and so forth. Crisis is the urgency [instance, also "instance," "lawsuit," "tribunal"]; of impossible decision, krinein, the "judgment" that it is impossible to reach, to arrêter, in the arrêt de mort. Since arrêt arrests arrêt, since the suspensive arrêt arrests the decisive arrêt and vice versa, the arrêt de mort arrests the arrêt de mort. Such is the arrhythmic pulsation of the title before it scatters like sand. The arrêt arrests itself, but in stopping (s’arrêtant) (as arrêt), it imparts movement, sets things in motion [donne le mouvement]. It makes

we recall the lost object and the libido once linked to it returns. Reality gives its verdict, i.e., "that the object no longer exists." Then, if the ego does not want to be condemned to the same fate and if it values the narcissistic satisfactions that remain for it, it decides to break off its "tie" (Bindung) to the destroyed object. 23–30 January 1978. In short, will it be possible to reduce the theme of double affirmation to the meaning of triumph, in the Freudian sense? The risk is that we may find the negativity of mourning, of economic resentment, and of melancholia as well, in the "yes, yes." Can it be avoided? But for Freud himself what he calls "triumph" is not clear, and all the re-reading that I attempted at Yale of the aesthetic nature of Beyond the PP could be brought to bear here. What I have said elsewhere ("Ja ou le faux-bond") about the deuil du deuil (i.e., "relinquishing mourning itself"), and of half-mourning. The arrêt de mort as verdict: it is obvious, and the translators
If we say that the unreadable gives, presents, permits, yields something to be read [l'illisible donne à lire], this is not a compromise formula. Unreadability is no less radical and irreducible for all that—absolute, yes, you read me.

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

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

During that scene, J. said to him, "If you don't kill me, then you're a murderer." Later I came across a similar phrase, attributed to Kafka. Her sister, who would have been incapable of inventing versational usage or of writing legitimatized by law—starting with legislating writing or the body of laws that sets the norm for legal language itself—the functioning of the title, the transformation of its relationship to the context and of its referentiality (I locate here the necessity of a very complex analysis: What does a title entitle, designate, delimit? Does it designate something other than what it entitles, i.e., the thing "entitled," the text or book? Or something other than itself?
something like that, reported it to me in that form and the doctor just about confirmed it. (He remembered her as saying, "If you don’t kill me, you’ll kill me.")

The doctor, like the narrator, can receive this sentence only as a demand for what is impossible: a contradictory double demand, a double petition to which the only possible response is to desist from granting it. This sentence [sentence] ("If you don’t kill me, then you’re a murderer") states, or rather produces, institutes, a law whose very structure puts you in a position of fatal transgression. And yet, by the same token, you obey it even in the transgression that it defines. Hence the infinite violence of what can strictly be called a “double bind,” “double obligation, double demand.” The disjunction allows of no respite, no hope for reconciliation; it is unceasing, sans arrêt. The narrator is subjected to the violence of this untractable law, like the demand for an impossible narrative. The same law, that of the arrêt de mort, relates this “double bind” and the double invagination described above. The narrator is here opposed to the doctor (as he is opposed to the doctors in La folie du jour), but he is also on the same side with respect to J.’s order. He “signifies,” relates, decides [arrêt], “gives” death, he is the “author” of death, but in all this he is only obeying a demand: a demand at once impossible to satisfy and satisfied the moment it is formulated, because it envisages its own transgression. This is how death is given, how one “gives” death to another or to oneself: oneself or another, it comes out the same. Murder is inevitable, and it is doubtless this uncompromising law of arrêt that the doctor’s memory seeks to attenuate by transforming the sentence “If you don’t kill me, then you’re a murderer” into “If you don’t kill me, you’ll kill me.” The arrêt de mort contains within itself this “double bind” that makes every death a crime, an event foreign to nature, related to law, cause, la Chose, and a law that can be posited only in its own transgression. In “On tue un enfant (frammentaire),” Blanchot writes: “There is death and murder—words that I defy anyone to distinguish seriously and that must nevertheless be separated—for this death and this murder, it is an impersonal, inactive, irresponsible ‘One’ [On] who must answer.” (This fragment, in Le Nouveau Commerce [1976], uses the vocabulary of the arrêt to designate the strange law that extends beyond the limits of [Hegelian] dialectic but still leaves a mark on it: “[.] The result, perhaps absurd, was that what shook dialectic, the unexperienceable experience of death, arrested it immediately: an arrêt of which the subsequent progression [process] retained a sort of memory, as of an aporia that must always be reckoned with.” This progression is here first the one that goes from Hegel’s “first philosophy” to speculative idealism.)

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

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

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

He is summoned—"Come"—by telephone. It was necessary to recount the exchange with the nurse before his arrival in order to suggest that the narrator and death are identical ("Soon you will see it"). Now, the telephone had hardly been hung up, the nurse will tell him later, when "her pulse [...] scattered like sand": a sign of death, a death sentence, in an instant as elusive as the last grain of sand in the time of hourglasses, death also as the result of the dissemination of the rhythm of life with no finishing stroke [coup d'arrêt], unbordered and unbounded arrhythm on a beach that is a continuation of the sea. The unexpected expression (her pulse "scattered like sand") will be repeated, quoted "in quotation marks" at the moment of the second death, on the last page, after the resurrection. This is the passage that I read earlier. J. appears dead, she died at the end of the telephone call, while the narrator was being told to "Come." She is dying, elle se meurt while the "Come" runs along the line and instantly reaches (comes to) the narrator. He is told to "Come," and she's dead. He arrives at the apartment, finds the door open, and J.'s death is announced to him with "vulgarity." This word recurs twice to describe the doctor, the one whose relationship to the identity of death is most secure and who is always more or less, as in La folie du jour, a medical expert, a representative of authority or social conventions, whose language he speaks ("It's a blessed release for the poor creatures"). (Vulgarity and foolishness are two values or non-values that, along with indiscretion, which is inseparable from them, are most reprehensible in Blanchot's view—or in the narrator's in any case. But since every value leads over into its opposite, this entails certain problems.) "I" arrives in the dead woman's room. The room is the privileged place of la Chose in all these stories, domestic but utterly foreign (unheimlich), left in the coldest anonymity, sealed off, usually a hotel room, in any case devoid of any other description, reduced to the most indispensable constants of Western habitation: a bed on the edge of which translates himself. The temptation, here, of an exhaustive reading, both of The Triumph and of everything else, beginning with all of Shelley's glor [death-knells], "On Death," "Death," "Autumn: A Dirge," the fragment "The Death Knell Is Ringing," again "A Dirge," Adonais, etc., etc. The same temptation with Blanchot: beginning with L'arrêt de mort, a starting point chosen by chance and of necessity, to recognize a "logic" that would enable us to read everything, in L'arrêt de mort and
one sits, at times an armchair that one tries to reach, a door, a
lock, and, in L’arrêt de mort, keys ("Yale" keys: "du genre Yale");
outside, corridors and stairways.

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

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

[... ] and it dawned on me [cette lumière me traversa] that at a cer-
tain moment in the night she must have felt defeated, too weak to
live until morning, when I would see her, and that she had asked
the doctor’s help in order to last a little longer, one minute longer,
the one minute which she had so often demanded silently and in
vain. This is what that poor fool mistook for anger, and doubtless
he had given in to her by coming, but he was already too late: at a
time when she could no longer do anything, he could do even less,
and his only help had been to cooperate with that sweet and
quaint death he spoke of with such sickening familiarity. My
grief began at that moment.

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

He has entered the room "full of strangers."

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

Was drained to its last sand in weal or woe,/ So that the trunk survived
both fruit & flower." "... And suddenly my brain became as sand.
... Then comes the play of animal tracks [traces], "erased" or "visi-
ibly stamp[ed]," and the "burst" of the "new Vision." Correspondence
[also "Change here . . . "] for Patmos. Vision. Apocalypse. Reveala-
tion. The translators will have to return again to the apocalyptic text of
Glas. They should explain the necessary immodesty of these self-
strength to hold out for such a short time longer. Naively, I
thought that interval had been a few minutes, and a few minutes
was nothing. But for her those few minutes had been more than a
lifetime, more than that eternity of life which they talk about, and
hers had been lost then. What Louise said to me when she telephoned—"She is dying"—was true, was the kind of truth you per-
ceive in a flash; she was dying, she was already dead; the wait had
not begun at that moment; at that moment it had come to an end;
or rather the last wait had gone on nearly the duration of the tele-
phone call: at the beginning she was alive and lucid, watching all
of Louise’s movements; then still alive, but already sightless and
without a sign of acceptance when Louise said, "She is dying"; and
the receiver had hardly been hung up when her pulse, the nurse
said, scattered like sand. [translation modified]

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

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

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

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

it against Nietzsche, perhaps: triumph over oneself is also pursuit of
power (Gemacht). Hence, and I come back to this, the apocalyptic text of
Glas. What I write here is related to reading, writing, teaching as
apocalypse, to apocalypse as a revelation, to apocalypse in its eschat-
ological and catastrophic sense, to the Apokalypsis Ioannou, the Revelation
of St. John the Divine. The translators will quote Glas, including this
passage that begins on page 220—"After developing the X-ray negative
have been lost, but my tenderness was so great that I didn’t even think about the strangeness of what was happening, which certainly seemed to me altogether natural because of that infinite movement which drew me towards her, and I took her in my arms, while her arms clasped me, and not only was she completely alive from that moment on, but perfectly natural, gay and almost completely recovered. [translation modified]

Between the call—the only time her name is spoken, this name that is not even disclosed—and a resurrection that is marked only by a breath, there was no time (“there wasn’t a second’s interval”). The first “breath,” the first “sigh” (we use le dernier soupir, “one’s last breath,” literally “the last sigh,” to mean death), the first “cry” of the woman who has just been born, did not follow a call, which was nothing but a first name, spoken out loud. Resurrection, birth, or triumph of life thus will not have been the effect of a cause, but rather an absolute event, a cause even, the cause, the causa, la Chose, the first name itself: since now no interval or interruption separates the call from the first breath, we do not even know any more who spoke that name for whom. She heard it before the other had finished speaking it. She is called as (is) the other, and it is like the name that is given for the first time, at birth. The time of this response that weds (responso) the call, accompanies it rather than follows it, performs it as a naming rather than succeeds it, even makes it possible by giving itself unconditionally—this time is contemporary with the end of L’arrêt de mort: “... and to that thought I say eternally, ‘Come,’ and eternally it is there.” The “and” (“and immediately,” “and eternally”) weds in a timeless time the one called and the caller, the imperative “come” and the coming of the one who comes. In this sense, we can no longer describe the call (demand, order, desire ...) and the response in the usual terms and according to the usual distinctions of an analysis of locutionary acts. The “come”-effect of the “first name” transcends all these categories (strictly speaking, it can thus be called “transcendental”: qui transcendit omne genus), and this event, at once ordinary and extraordinary, is also what L’arrêt de mort “counts.” But it recounts it while performing it in secret. The cryptic insistence of this secret is marked not only by the initial of a first name that is neither noun nor verb nor pronoun (the initial, at most, of the pronoun Je, J.): this insistence is constantly remarked, remarkable, noticeable, especially, as in the case of every crypt, in its relationship to the law, in an interdiction. Thus the narrator says repeatedly that he cannot say. He is forbidden to say. So—he says. And if the arrêt de mort is related to judicial decision, law, it is also an arrêt that arrests—with a sentence, a verdict—speech and the right to speak. (“As for the rest, I don’t want to say anything. [...] I have said nothing extraordinary or even surprising. What is extraordinary begins at the moment I stop [je m’arrête]. But I am no longer able to speak of it.”) The same interdiction encrypts the resurrection at the moment when he sees the terrible Chose, which we know he does not see as something, something other than an act of seeing, a look, eyes, when J.’s eyelids “opened to reveal something terrible which I will not talk about, the most terrible look [...].” Before, you remember, Louise had seen in the narrator’s face...
"that something was about to happen that she knew she did not have the right to see, nor anyone else in the world [. . .]." The 
arrêt de mort is thus the interdictory decision that arrests L'arrêt de 
mort (the "récit" with this title) on the verge of the event that it 
does not have the right to recount, but that also puts it into 
operation, puts it to work, makes it recount, decides, induces it 
to recount, starting from this interdictory suspension, makes it 
set out again toward the impossible narrative, to recount that 
(which) it will not recount. The text comments on the title (a 
parergon or cartouche between the work and what is outside it, as 
the locus du droit à la littérature), a title that is thus part of it 
without belonging to it; but the title also states the impossibility 
of the text or erstwhile récit that it will have entitled, the impos-
sibility of the intitulé [title, heading, that which is entitled]. 
L'arrêt de mort: of the intitulé. Or of the en-tête. The condition for 
its possibility and impossibility. An entire conjugation, in all the 
tenses, of law and duty [devoir] I must, I had to, I should not 
have, I must not, I shall have to refrain from, it will turn out 
that I should not have [in French, all expressible by conjugated 
forms of the verb devoir]), all the steps taken by the interdictory 
̄pas, in every tense [temps] and every mood [mode]. The double bind 
and the double invagination of this interdict make it possible for 
us to read [donnent à lire] the unreadability of this impossible 
event (the after-life of resurrection), of this "news." Thus:

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

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

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

Strange as it may seem, I don't think I gave one distinct 
thought, during that whole day, to the event which had allowed J. 
to talk to me and laugh with me again. It is simply that in those 
moments I loved her totally, and nothing else mattered. I only had 

self-control to go find the others and tell them J. had 

recovered. I don't know how they took the news [nouvelle] [. . .].

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

The first day, he greeted me with this statement: "I am fortunate 

enough to have faith, I am a believer. What about you?" On 
the wall of his office there was an excellent photograph of the Turin 
Sudario, a photograph in which he saw two images superimposed 
on one another: one of Christ and one of Veronica; and as a matter 
of fact I distinctly saw, behind the figure of Christ, the features of 

a woman's face—extremely beautiful, even magnificent in its

gilab, which means "to reveal" in Hebrew (to reveal in particular the 
genitals, the ear, and the eyes; in "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" I refer 
to Ezekiel [on this, see what Bloom says about the Chariot of Yahweh 
and The Triumph] and to a certain sequence: "Then did I eat [the scroll 

of the law]; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness." A similar 
passage in Revelation: "[. . .] I took the little book . . . and ate it up; 
and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and as soon as I had eaten it,
strangely proud expression. One last thing about this doctor: he was not without his good qualities; he was, it seems to me, a good deal more reliable in his diagnoses than most.

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

The question has the following resonance: What is a nouvelle

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

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

translation. The translators should read—and quote—all these texts in Hebrew and Greek. What happens when eidos is translated as "vision"? And the words erkkou and hapage by "come" and sometimes by "go"? The va and viens ("go" and "come"; cf. va-et-vient, "interrelationship") of Thomas l'obisar (in two versions). Direct the entire reading of L'arrêt de mort toward the end, when Jesus says: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last [prōtós kai ekkharios, ò archē
remember that she poked fun at her mother in the kindest manner, which was unusual. When I think of all that took place before it and after it, the memory of that gaiety should be enough to kill a man. But at the time, I simply saw that she was gay, and I was gay, too.

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

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

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

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

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

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

This frightening thing that has come about without ever presenting itself, this event that is ineffable at the very moment it is seen, seen without there being anything to see except a look or vision ("her eyelids [. . .] opened to reveal something terrible which I will not talk about, the most terrible look [. . .]"), this terrible thing, the terrorlessness of the thing (la chose) is not only ineffable, unnarratable: it is interdictory, it forbids telling and even seeing ("[. . .] I had seen and taken by surprise something strangely. He did not have a clear idea of what we call the seriousness of facts. The truth, the precision of what must be said, astonished him. [. . .] 'What do they mean by "event"?' I read the question in his movement of retreat. [. . .] She called him ‘the professor.’ [. . .] He spoke to no one. I don’t mean that he didn’t speak to me, but it was someone other than me who would listen to him. [. . .] Is he still coming? Is he going away already? [. . .] The joy of saying yes, of
I shouldn’t have seen”). But the interdiction is violated by itself (“I shouldn’t have . . . ”). It begins the arrêt of the récit, in other words paralyzes it but also sets it in motion with a single pas [step, “not”]. The interdiction transgresses itself and produces the pas that crosses it: the récit. The récit that tells “what happened” without having been present, and that tells it to the very “subject” to whom it happened and who is not supposed to know—this impossible récit is surpassed, overrun, débordé, by its own arrêt de mort. What must remain beyond its reach is precisely what revives it at every moment. The forbidden thing forbids. That which forbids (that which is forbidden) happens, comes about, without attaining, without happening in or to, the récit. And J. must not find out from the “I” what thus happens without happening to her, the “subject” of the whole thing, of la chose.

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

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

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

The pain near her heart did not go away, but the symptoms died down and she had triumphed once more. The treatment was discussed again: she wanted it very much, either in order to get it over with or because her energy could no longer be satisfied with a vague objective—living, living on [pour, survivre]—but needed a firm decision on which she could lean heavily. [translation modified]
This *survivre* delays at once life and death, on a line (the line of the least sure *sur*) that is thus one neither of clear-cut opposition nor of stable equivalence. "Living, living on" differs and defers, like "difference," beyond identity and difference. Its domain is indeed in a narrative formed out of traces, writing, distance, teleo-graphy. Tele-phone and tele-gram are only two modes of this teleography in which the trace, the grapheme in general, does not come to attach secondarily to the telic structure but rather marks it *a priori*. Difference—*arrêt de mort* or triumph of life—defers (differs like) the narrative of (from) writing. We notice this, as it "re-marks itself," (for example) in the immediate context of the passage that I just quoted on the "triumph" and "living, living on." The narrator has just recounted, written, what J. had written to him. ("During the beginning of my stay in Arcachon, J. wrote to me at fairly great length, and her handwriting was still firm and vigorous.") The narrator is always away (at a distance, *telé-*); he always returns from afar and finally remains at a distance. What does she write him? "She told me the doctor had just had her sign a paper in case an accident should occur. So the treatment, which consisted of a series of shots—one each day, given to her at home—was about to begin." The doctor, the one who has thus condemned her and in effect signed her death warrant by prescribing this treatment, the author of the *arrêt de mort*, asks her, the condemned woman, to release him from his responsibility as a doctor, with a signature subscribing to the *arrêt de mort*. The narrator has already signed her death warrant, subscribed to it, by telling J. that she is condemned to die, that the doctor has given her up. In the case of the paper,

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

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

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

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

Such would be the truth beyond truth of living on *La sur-vérité*

apocalyptic superimprinting of texts: there is no paradigmatic text. Only relationships of cryptic haunting from mark to mark. No palimpsest (definitive unfinishedness). No piece, no metonymy, no integral corpus. And thus no fetishism. Everything said here about double invagination can be brought to bear—a labor of translation—on what is worked out in *Glas*, for example, on the subject of fetishism, as the argument of the *gaine* ("sheath," "girdle"; cognate of "vagina") to be
ago, everything that remains of your life is a reprieve [est en sur-
nombre, is supernumerary]." He had just given me six more months
to live and that was seven years ago. But he had an important
reason for wishing me six feet underground. What he said was only
an expression of his desire, only suggested what he wanted to
happen. In J.'s case, though, I think he was telling the truth.
[translation modified]

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

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

Why truth beyond truth? At the moment when the narrator
has said, "I was frightened at the thought that she might discover
what had happened to her; it seemed to me that would be some-
thing absolutely terrifying for anyone to learn who was naturally
afraid of the night," he suspects himself of letting himself say
what must not be said (that is to say, as always, the only thing
to be said), the thing that would (absolutely) frighten, la chose
effrayante. This is the beginning of what I shall call, using a
figure justified elsewhere ("Pas"), the stairway [escalier] or es-
calade of truth, one truth about another, one truth on (top of
another, one above or below the other, each step more or less
[translation modified].) Similarly, everything said here about double
invagination can be brought to bear—a labor of translation—on what is
said in "La double séance" about the hymen (as syllaxis) and the pane of
glass [vitre]. A discussion, still to come, of the vitrifying structure of
writing and desire in L’arrêt de mort (\ldots I saw her again, through a
store window. When someone who has disappeared completely is sud-

translated "vagina"? On the game, see Glas, p. 257; see also, on
the subject of fetishism, "against" Hegel, Marx, and Freud, pp. 253 and
235. Freud: the fetish erects itself like a "monument," a "stigma inde-
lebile," a "sign of triumph"). L’arrêt de mort and fetishism. ("In her nightly
terror, she wasn’t superstitious at all; she faced a very great danger, one
that was nameless and formless, altogether indeterminate, and when she
was alone she faced it all alone, without recourse to any trick or fetish"
true than truth. This is not a matter of impersonal or objective truth, of veracity, of telling the truth that is equivalent to the thing in question. Nor of the relationship between truth and interdiction (the truth that must not be told), a transgressive truth or a transgression of truth, truth as law or above the law.

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

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

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

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

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

The truth that she only approaches may be what she already knew yet wanted, he believes, to hear from him, but perhaps also a secret located above what he could have told her but has forbidden himself to: la Chose effrayante, life-after-life that has come...
about or come on without coming to be here and now [sans arriver], the approach of what has come to pass, is past, without having taken place in the present, replacing both life and death without "taking" a "place," in the time that elapses or does not elapse when a first name mobilizes and paralyzes the entire narrative, forbids the very step that it sets in motion, fascinates all the writing of L'arrêt de mort. It can also be read as a fascinating treatment of truth. In the unarrestable dissemination of its titles, the arrêt de mort is the truth about truth, on truth, truthless truth on truth, the récit-less récit of truthless truth on truth.

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

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

Jacques Derrid.

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

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

Now, immediately after this blank space, at the bottom of one page and at the top of another, after the absolute interruption, the connectionless connection [rapport sans rapport], after J.'s second death, after the narrator has said, "What is extraordinary begins at the moment I stop. But I am no longer able to speak of it," on the next page, the facing page, the other shore, truth enters—thematical, and by name. As if the veil of an interdiction were finally going to be lifted—any minute now, once more.

"I will go on with this story, but I will take some precautions. I am not taking these precautions in order to cast a veil over the truth. The truth will be told, everything of importance that happened will be told. But nor everything has yet happened. [Mais tout ne s'est pas encore passé.]

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

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

All these texts, it should now be clear, involve law and transgression, and the order that is given, and the sort of order that can be obeyed only by transgressing it beforehand. Read yesterday, among some graffiti: "do not read me." I continually ask what must be done or not be done (for example in reading, writing, teaching, and so on) to find out what the place of that which takes place, is constructed upon (for example the university, the boundaries between departments, between one discourse
text presenting itself—presenting itself—by producing what it says. If there is performance here, it must be dissociated from the notion of presence that people always attach to the performative. What is here recited will have been that non-presentation of the event, its presenceless presence, as it takes place placelessly: the "less" or "without," and the pas, without pas, without the negativity of the pas.

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

There is a key in the récit: a "Yale" key. Like all keys, it locks and unlocks, opens and closes. This key has been stolen and concealed by N. (Nathalie). The terrifying scene that this episode will have occasioned seems to form a pendant-piece, in this second récit, to the scene of J.'s return to life in the first. But superimposing is something you can never be sure about, and above all we cannot strictly speaking call either of these a "scene": in neither does la Chose present itself, nor does anything else make itself visible—or if so, it forbids one to speak of it. This is, this will be, the moment in which "I" says "Come." This time "I" does not utter the "Come" in the conditional or virtual form or mood, or as a quotation, as in the three occurrences that I have cited, quoted, elsewhere ("Pas"), and "I" is addressing himself here not to the merely grammatically feminine, the feminine gender of "thought" or "speech," la pensée or la parole, or to a neuter (beyond sexual difference), but rather, it seems, in the present, indeed, to a woman. (True, this woman is no one: "I can say that by getting involved with Nathalie I was hardly getting involved with anyone: that is not meant to belittle her; on the contrary, it is the most serious thing I can say about a person.")

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

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

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

system of norms of this domain? I do not say it; I say what must not be said: for example, that a text can stand in a relationship of transference (primarily in the psychoanalytical sense) to another text! And, since Freud reminds us that the relationship of transference is a "love" relationship, stress the point: one text loves another (for example, The Triumph of Life loves, transfrentially, La folie du jour, which in turn [. . .]. It's enough to make a philologist laugh (or scream), and Freud
commit the speaker, are binding, in legal proceedings, in accordance with a contract that is all the more inflexible since the words belong to the language of the other. The paradox of the heteronomous dissymmetry that is due to the apparently formal element in the language before any consideration of context: the obligation is binding to whatever extent the words of the obligation are "fictitious," "fictive." There is commitment only in the language of the other, which I speak, of necessity, irresponsibly and fictively, in expropriation, but the language of the other is more contractual, contracts more, is closer to the conventional, fictive origin, to the extent that I invent it and thus adopt, appropriate it, mythically, in the present act of each spoken word. The language of the other lets the spoken word have the word, and commits us to keep our word. In this sense, there is "language of the other" whenever there is a speech-event. This is what I mean by "trace."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is possible that the idea of being married to me seemed like a very bad thing to her, a sort of sacrilege, or quite the opposite, a real happiness, or finally, a meaningless joke. Even now, I am almost incapable of choosing among these interpretations. Enough of this. As I said, I was deluding myself much more than I was her with these words, which spoke within me in the language of someone else [la langue d’une autre]. I said too much about it to her not to feel what I was saying; inwardly I committed myself to honoring these strange words; the more extreme they were, I mean alien [étrangers] to what might have been expected of me, the more true they seemed to me because they were novel, because they had no precedent; the more I wanted, since they could not be believed, to make them believable, even to myself, especially to myself, putting all my effort into going farther and farther and building, on what might have been a rather narrow foundation, a pyramid so dizzying that its ever growing height dumbfounded even me. Still, I can put this down in writing: it was true; there cannot be any illusions when such great excesses are involved. My mistake in this situation, the temptations of which I see most clearly, was much more the result of the distance I imagined I was maintaining from her by these completely imaginary [fictifs] ways of drawing close to her. Actually, all that, which began with words I did not know and led me to see her much more often, to call her again and again, to want to convince her, to force her to see something other than a language in my language [un autre chose qu’un langage dans mon langage], also urged me to look for her at an infinite distance, and contributed so naturally to her air of absence and strangeness that I thought it was sufficiently explained by this, and that as I was more and more attracted by it, I was less and less aware of its abnormal nature and its terrible source.
No doubt I went extremely far, the day we took shelter in the metro. It seems to me that I was driven by something wild, a truth so violent that I suddenly broke down all the frail supports of that language [langue] and began speaking French, using insane words that I had never dreamt of using before and that fell on her with all the power of their madness. Hardly had they touched her when I was physically aware that something was being shattered. Just as that moment, she was swept away from me, borne off by the crowd [foule], and as it hurled me far away, the unchained spirit of that crowd struck me, battered me, as if my crime had turned into a mob [foule] and was determined to separate us forever.

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

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

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

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now with a slight rattle. The nurse came and whispered to me that the night before that word had been the last she had pronounced: when she had seemed to be sunk in complete unconsciousness, she had abruptly awakened from her stupor to point to the oxygen balloon and murmur, ‘A perfect rose,’ and had immediately sunk [et aussitôt avait sombré] again. This story chilled me.” 6–13 March 1978. "et aussitôt": to translate this, like everything said above about the “et,” the translators will
contrary with the paternal law that kept me away from what was maternal? You will find that I have rung some changes on these questions elsewhere.

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

have to consult (or refer the reader to) the Greek “at the same time,” ἕμελλα, and en to ἐπεξής (“immediately”) as they are treated in “Ousia et grammē.” What is a reference, a reference to a thing, to a text, to one text, to the other? What is this word “reference”? And the reference of a certain “perfect rose”? The absolute crypt, unreadability itself. And yet the “references” call for an “infinite finite analysis,” an infinite-finite reada-translata-bility. Do not go on about the symbolism of the flower [lounge] can never be appropriated; it is mine only as the language of the other, and vice versa. The essential irresponsibility of the promise or the response: this is the crime of the hymen. The violence of a truth stronger than truth. The crime of the hymen takes place without taking place and repeats itself endlessly, by the throng [en foule], like sand, like the arrêt de mort: interminable proceedings.

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

(have done so elsewhere, at length, precisely about the rose). “Symbol” of life (the rosiness of cheeks, imitated by make-up in L’arrêt de mort), “symbol” of death (funeral flower) or of love, the rose is also the paradigm of that which never has to account for itself (“die Rose ist ohne warum,” “the rose has no why or wherefore”), the enigmatically arbitrary that signifies the non-significance of the arbitrary, of the thing with no why or wherefore, without origin and without end. (See “Le
in the “first” rite when he (the same one, another) returns, then calls her back to life, then “gives” her death: “[... ] reason returned to me, at least a fairly cool and lucid feeling which said to me: the time has come, now you have to do what has to be done.” His resolution is purely formal in nature. In any case, we are told nothing of its content: what you have to do is do what has to be done. Il faut “il faut”: he gives himself this pure order or prescription at the same time that he receives it. He will return home, but home is not home, for two reasons. First, he lives in hotels, has no place of his own. Second, because there are two places, two hotel rooms: one, in an almost empty hotel with no owner present (it’s wartime, and he’s been called up), a room in which “I had nothing [... ] but some books” and where “I almost never went,” and went “at night [only if] it was really necessary”; the other, in the hotel on the rue S., where “I had asked N. never to go.” She called him there one morning and “what I said,” his “réponse,” makes him hate the place. As he goes back there on this particular evening, he notes that “the strange thing” is that he does not think at all that she might be waiting there. He doesn’t feel like sleeping in either place, so he tries to get a room in “a rather shady hotel,” but since that hotel is full, he returns to the one on the rue d’O., the one where he “almost never [praque pas]” stays. His room there is like a crypt: with the elevator out of order, it is reached by way of a stairwell [escalier] with “a cold smell of earth and stone.” The cryptic topology of this dark room, this obscure chamber, has the resonance of a certain triumph of life. It is a for intérieur [usually “conscience,” “inner tribunal,” “heart of hearts”] without intimacy, an enclave larger than its inhabitant but which this inhabitant nevertheless carries within him; he haunts rather than inhabits it. The relationships of inclusion or inherence that link the part to the whole, cannot be fixed, defined, arrêté, in terms of boundaries. The part includes the whole, and life triumphs over life. “Everything about that room, plunged in the most profound-darkness, was familiar to me; I had penetrated it, I carried it in me, I gave it life, a life which is not life, but which is stronger than life and which no force in the world could ever overcome.” This camera obscura is a secret; no one goes there, and he keeps the key in his wallet. Hence the transgression that follows, the theft of a key and a letter, a crypt broken into, desecrated—and a representationless scene of la Chose: this scene is what I was coming to.

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

word of the first scene of the first act of a play (Genet’s Paravents, for example; see Glat), it retains, out of context, the reserve of all those poers (Rose!) of a name beyond names, the reserve that it still retains when it becomes the last word (par excellence) of the last act: of the dead woman and of death, of la Chose par excellence. Rose: rose; “rose”: I, a rose, rose. Its own subject and predicate, a tautology into which the other, however, has intruded, a flower of rhetoric without properties,
treated it, I think I cursed it, but when it did not respond, I did something which can only be explained by my lack of self-control: I struck it violently with my fist, and it opened immediately.

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

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

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

ing" should also be quoted—to Rilke, of whom Blanchot is a prodigious reader—to all his "rose"'s and all his "roses" (a formidable anthology, from which, because space is limited and for the sake of translation, I shall extract here only this line, from "Les roses," a poem written by Rilke in French: "Rose, toi, ô chose par excellence complete. . . ." Read and translate in full.), to Kierkegaard, of whom Blanchot is a prodigious reader ("The seal is yours, but I keep it. But you also know
great respect for that solitary night that I made almost no movement; only my hand went forward a little, but with great caution, so as not to frighten. I wanted most of all to go towards the armchair, I saw that armchair in my mind, it was there, I was touching it. In the end I got to my knees so that I would not be too large, and my hand slowly crossed through the dark, brushed against the wooden back of the chair, brushed against some cloth: there had never been a more patient hand, nor one more calm, nor more friendly; that is why it did not tremble when another hand, a cold hand, slowly formed beside it, and that hand, so still and so cold, allowed mine to rest on it without trembling. I did not move, I was still on my knees, all this was taking place at an infinite distance, my own hand on this cold body seemed so far away from me, I saw myself so widely separated from it, and pushed back by it into something desperate which was life, that all my hope seemed to me infinitely far away, in that cold world where my hand rested on this body and loved it and where this body, in its night of stone, welcomed, recognized and loved that hand.

Perhaps this lasted several minutes, perhaps an hour. I put my arms around her, I was completely motionless and she was completely motionless. But a moment came when I saw that she was still mortally cold, and I drew closer and said to her: "Come." I got up and took her by the hand, she got up too and I saw how tall she was. She walked with me, and all her movements had the same docility as mine. I made her lie down; I lay down next to her. I took her head between my hands and said to her, as gently as I could, "Look at me." Her head actually did rise between my hands and immediately I saw her again three or four steps from me, that dead and empty flame in her eyes. With all my strength, I stared at her, and she too seemed to stare at me, but infinitely far behind me. Then something awoke in me, I leaned over her and said, "Now don't be afraid, I'm going to blow on your face." But as I came near her she moved very quickly and drew away (or pushed me back). [translation modified]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

gorgeous,' she said to me. Then she brought the flower to her lips and kissed it with a mad passion as if she wished to hold on to everything that was slipping away from her. But it lasted only an instant: she threw down the rose the way children throw down their toys and became once more alien to everything that came near, breathing convulsively. 12 October. [..] Laure's dying was almost finished when she raised with a weary movement one of the roses that had just been
But when he sees them they die—when he sees them, and when they see him with that terrible look of theirs, see him as their death—with these looks, they die, are dead. Die, are dead, when he loves them—die, are dead, of this love. Moreover, he can love, desire, only behind a pane of glass, he says elsewhere. One imagines a glass coffin: this is one thematic of this récit—and of others—which I reserve here. But each woman is also the double, death mask, cast, ghost, body at once living and dead, of the other. Separated: joined. There are two of them, absolutely different, absolutely other, infinitely separated by the arrêt de mort between two heterogeneous récits. They are each bound to “me” (to the one who says “I” in each instance and who is not necessarily the same, who is perhaps not the same precisely because he, the same in name or first name, is linked, bound, in accordance with a double hymen and twice says “yes,” twice “Come”) in accordance with a double vow. By the same double token (coup), himself by the same token double, “I” becomes two, absolutely foreign to himself, divided, partitioned in his crypt: he belongs to two different récits, two different vows; he has another, a woman, dictate to him what he says and tell him what has to be done—another, a woman, who inspira. Everything is decided, we have seen, in the moment of an insufflation in which we no longer know who has the absolute initiative. Even the mouth of one of those women, “open to the noise of agony [agonie], did not seem to belong to her, it seemed to be the mouth of someone I didn’t know, someone irredeemably condemned, or even dead.” Interruption, this connectionless connection [rapport sans rapport] of the arrêt, passes not only between J. and N. but also, with the same interminable

spread before her, and she cried out almost in a voice absent and infinitely pained: “The rose!” (I believe those were her last words.) [. . .] At that same moment I was recalling what I had felt that very morning: “Take a flower and look at it until you and the flower are in harmony. . . .” That was a vision, an inner vision maintained by a silently felt necessity.” 20–27 March 1978. Resurrections. Easter week. The translators should refer to the end of my apocalypse (Glas), entirely concerned with the paschal conjunction. The Christ-like figure again, of the “who?,” of the X. of L’arrêt de mort, over whom “it’s about time we raised a cross,” says the doctor who condemns him. The translators will have to refer here to what is said about chiasmus, about χ (chi) and the ichthys in “+ R (par dessus le marché)” (in reference to Adam) and in Hillis Miller’s article “Ariadne’s Thread” (Critical Inquiry, volume 3, number 1). There is another X., in L’arrêt de mort, the creator of that
who is without being the same. For there is an other of the other, and it is not the same: this is what the order of the symbol seeks desperately to deny. The double bond to each woman signifies to each woman the arrêt de mort (death and life-after-life/life-after-death) so that the other's arrêt de mort will be possible (so that she will live on and cease to live). The arrêt de mort—what is designated by the title of the book and of the “totality” of a récit that is never gathered together to form one récit and that thus questions even the unity of its “title,” as well as the unity of the narrator—the arrêt de mort would thus follow this “double bond” whose terrifying figure, figure, face, traverses the récit that is forbidden, interdicted in the quasi-middle of it, over above beyond its double inner border.

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

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

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

Blanchot, who realizes, after the fact, that it was hard for her to bear that a “man” should have dared the “mad hypothesis” of the hymen between the two women; she used the most academic criteriology against me, demanded “proof,” and so on—reading “Morella,” the thought of that Miss Blind bent over the corrections of The Triumph, hesitations about the title—I had first thought of “Living On—in Translation” and “Translations”—my calculations about the English—how will they
that which is not accompanied—this "and"—writing returns, recurs, regularly when the narrative voice is (let's itself be) heard in Blanchot's text—in all the other texts signed by him. It is like a silent gliding, the elusiveness of a cause that does not accompany its effect, of a before and an after that are indistinct in the soft, light step [pas] of a movement. And, unceasingly, sans arrêt, arrêté, and arrêté nothing.

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

The two women, like the doctor, sign his death warrant, and he signs theirs, but always in a countersignature, because the render the il faut or perhaps the faut-il that is the imprint of prescription in "Living On"?—the Paris Seminar in 1974 or 1975 on "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers," what my friend Koitschi Toyosaki said to me yesterday, the article in La part du feu entitled "Traduit de" (it begins thus: "In For Whom the Bell Tolls, Robert Jordan, discovering the importance of the moment that he is in the process of living, repeats to himself in a variety of languages the word 'now.' Now, abora, maintenant, death that is "given" is always requested, demanded, by the one who receives it and immediately gives it to himself or herself, in order to sign it, with/from/in the hand of the other.

And thus we see . . . another hymen.

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

beute. But he is a bit disappointed [. . .].", the five pages in L'amitié entitled "Traduire" [last words: "... with this conviction that to translate is, ultimately, madness."], and so on), but I count the words and I give up. Economy. Political. . . . If there is something that arrests translation, this limit is not due to some essential indissociability of meaning and language, of signified and signifier, as they say. It is a matter of economy (economy, of course, remains to be thought) and retains
They telephone each other ("Come") across the infinite distance of a no-connection [d’un sans rapport]. The narrator is between them, saying "I," with an "I" identical and other, from one récit to the other. In him, before him, without him, they are the same, the same one, "two images superimposed on one another," a "photographic" superimposing; they are utterly different, completely other, and they unite and call to each other: "Come." Of course, nothing on the manifestly readable surface of the récits makes it possible to sustain such a mad hypothesis. How could the character from one story desire, marry, fascinate, etc., the character from another story? And if we wished to consider L’arrêt de mort a single récit, joined to itself by the supposed identity of the character who says "I," how could we fail to see that J. and N., in the story, have no connection, no relationship with each other, do not meet, just as the two series of events in which they are involved never intersect? Of course. No normal category of readability, then, could give credence to the mad hypothesis according to which the double invagination that attracts us in this récit could make it possible to read [donner à lire] the unreadable hymen between the two women: one without the other. I am speaking here neither of an intention nor of a construction on the part of the "author"—which does not mean that the interruption between author and narrator, or indeed between the two women, is simple: it is as ambiguous as the interruption of every arrêt de mort. As ambiguous, moreover, as the dis-tance of differtance (Ent-fernung): from one récit to the other, they—the two women, the two voiceless voices, tele-telephone one another: Come. And the relationship, the connection, between the two récits would be tele-graphic in nature. Furthermore, I am speaking here neither of an essential relationship with time, space, counting words, marks. The unity of the word is not to be fetishized or substantialized. For example, with more words or parts of words the translator will triumph more easily over arrêt in the expression arrêt de mort. Nor without something left over, of course, but more or less easily, strictly, closely, tightly. Beware of the "new mode of expression" of the "totally new of an intention nor of a construction on the part of the "narrator"—which does not mean that the interruption between narratorial voice and narrative voice, the two voices, the two women, one without the other, is simple: it remains as improbable as the interruption of every arrêt de mort. And yet something like X-ray analysis or "blood" [sang] analysis can make readable [donner à lire] that which is unreadable in this narrative body. (A moment ago I drew (on) the "blood" that circulates in one of the two stories, the "mysterious" blood, "so unstable that it was astonishing to analyze," the "madness of blood" in which the narrator seeks "hope of escaping the inevitable.") The readability of unreadability is as improbable as an arrêt de mort. No law of (normal) reading can guarantee it in its legitimacy. By normal reading I mean every reading that insures knowledge transmittable in its own language, in a language, in a school or academy, knowledge constructed and insured in institutional constructions, in accordance with laus made so as to resist (precisely because they are weaker) the ambiguous threats with which the arrêt de mort troubles so many conceptual oppositions, boundaries, borders. The arrêt de mort brings about the arrêt of the law. The double invagination of this narrative body in deconstruction overruns and exceeds not merely the oppositions of values that make the rules and form the law in all the schools of reading, ancient and modern, before and after Freud; it overruns a delimitation of the fantasy, a delimitation in the name of which some would here abandon, for example, the mad hypothesis to "my" fantasy-projection, to that of the one who says "I" here, the narrator, the narrators, or me, who am telling you all this here. This unreadability will have taken place, as unreadable, will have become language" and the like. Economy: stricture and not comparison, rupture. It is always an external constraint that arrests a text in general, i.e., anything, for example life death. What is arrested here: the authenticity (Eigenliehtigkeit) of a being-for-death. Think exteriority from the angle of this economy of the arrêt. Arrêt: the greatest "bound" energy, "banded," bandé, tightly gathered around its own limit, retained, inhibited
readable [se sera donné à lire] right here, as unreadable, from the very bottom of the crypt in which it remains. It will have taken place where it remains: that's the proof. From here on it's up to you to think what will have taken place, to work out both the conditions for its possibility and its consequences. As for me, I must break off here, interrupt all this, close the parenthesis, and let the movement continue without me, take off again, or stop, arrest itself, after I simply note this: in everything that happens, it's as if the narrator desired (in other words forbid)—from the moment he comes to say "I" onward—one thing: that the two women should love one another, should meet, should be united in accordance with the hymn. Not [pas] without him, and immediately without him. That they, these two other women, others of the other, should not merely resemble each other but should be the same: this is what he desires, what he would die of, what he desires like the death that he would "give" himself. This is absolute terror: the bottomless boundless abyss of that which is single, unique—the other death, laughable, the most simply insignificant death, the most fatal. And immediately la Chose is its double. It remains [rester] its double. But now we shall be able to make out the arrestance of this rest.

At about ten o'clock Nathalie said to me:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It was probably necessary," I murmured.
She snatched at these words.
"It was necessary, wasn't it?"

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

procession of doubles, ghosts, transits, folies du jour, manic jubilations and triumphs, I have produced here an underground or shady translation of The Triumph, and for example of "The crowd gave way, & I arose aghast/ Or seemed to rise, so mighty was the trance,/ And saw like clouds upon the thunder blast/ The million with fierce song and manic dance/ Raging around; such seemed the jubilee. . . ." I have amassed
an invisible responsibility to which she lent only her voice, and
that now a supreme power, sure of itself, and happy—not because
of my consent, of course, which was quite useless to it, but because
of its victory over life and also because of my loyal understanding,
my unlimited abandon—took possession of this young person and
gave her an acuity and a masterfulness that dictated my thoughts
to me as well as my few words.

"Now," she said in a rather hoarse voice, "isn't it true that
you've known about it all along?"
"Yes," I said, "I knew about it."
"And do you know when it happened?"
"I think I have some idea."

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

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

"Well, what?" I said, getting up too.
"Yes," she cried, "yes, yes!"
"That this took place a week ago?"
She took the words from my lips with frightening eagerness.
"And then?" she cried.
"And that today you went to X.'s to get . . . that thing?"
"And then?"
"And now that thing is over there, you have uncovered it, you
have looked at it, and you have looked into the face of something
that will be alive for all eternity, for your eternity and for mine!
Yes, I know it. I've known it all along."

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

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

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

Purloined Ribbon," in Glyph 1. Quote in full.) Transference. How
can one sign in translation, in another language? Living on—in/after
whose name, in/after the name of what? How will they translate that?
Of course, I have not kept my promise. This telegraphic band produces
an untranslatable supplement, whether I wish it or not. Never tell what
great, it is incapable of being ruined by anything, and condemns us, perhaps, to immeasurable unhappiness, but if that is so, I take this unhappiness on myself and I am immeasurably glad of it and to that thought I say eternally, "Come," and eternally it is there.

GEORGE P. ROBERTS

Words, Wish, Worth: Wordsworth

I

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

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

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

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