
Title (To Be Specified)

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TITLE (to be specified)*

JACQUES DERRIDA

THE T-I-T-L-E-E-R

Were I to venture stopping here, to pronounce this, the t-i-t-l-e-e-r, had I audacity enough to be satisfied with it, or be convinced to leave you with what I have just uttered, no doubt you still could not tell how to take it.

In more than one way the titleer can be taken, meant or even understood.

For as long as there is attention drawn to what we calmly call a “context,” or for as long as a consistent discourse will not have encircled an event of language of this sort in its path, what I have just risked, or even suspended, in pronouncing *the titleer* would probably allow your reception or your understanding to remain open, and open to question. What happens to you (in hearing *the titleer*) certainly is neither for nought nor void, nor even totally indeterminate. You hear something quite well (the *titleer*), you begin to press toward several possible meanings of words, or of pieces of words, or of syntactical groupings which are sifted in shadow; you make them cross their paths or cross each other as if they were virtual sentences (*the title . . . here*, in three words, for example, or of a common noun placed and suspended like a title, if at least—another conceptual possibility is opened—you knew the Old French word (the *titrier* spelled t.i.t.r.i.e.r. [or the *titleer* spelled t.i.t.l.e.e.r.]).¹ But with your moment of discomfit, and in drifting about the waves or the semantic froth in the air, still you dominate these doubts. They leave you awash on the border of a shore where you want to arrive safe and sound or even arrive yourself. Awash because this suspension does not allow floating on the high sea, but in view of certain borders in whose harbor we wait—time suspended as our vessels are brought to a standing or a stopover—to depart or arrive. In any case the desire, if it chills the hearing of these words which form perhaps neither a sentence nor a discourse—*le titrier*, the titleer—this desire draws, or at least calls you to this bank where meaning can finally be stopped, fixed, anchored—with the most precise mooring of a legitimacy. You want to see the shore, you wish to discern the lines of the border.

And for that reason you would like to know what I mean when I pronounce *the titleer*.

Now I’m off to tell you all about it.

That—“I’m off to tell you all about it”—is what is called a promise, a commitment, a plighted word. Now were I not faithful to this plighted word, did I not keep it (what is always possible in the case, for example, where I

*A lecture delivered under this title for the first time on March 14, 1979, in Brussels (at Saint Louis College).



Hanna Hannah,
Story # 21, 1977,
mixed media on paper,
23" x 29".

might place my promise between quotation marks and bind myself to an endless commentary of statement, "I'm off to tell you all about it," the discursive event of the promise would remain suspended on the border of a certain border, half empty—but emptied of what? not of meaning but of something else which is neither reference nor even truth. It will assume a position, like a ruse of a dummy, inside a scene which, to be riddled with fiction, will be none the less effective. In announcing "Title (to be specified)" for this lecture, I have made a promise. But what kind of promise? Right off we might think that the locution, "Title (to be specified)," has come in a provisional fashion to take the place of the title. Like a blank check, it indicated the empty spot of a title to be filled in which, as such, there would be found the *true* title. Therefore I have promised to give a true title to my lecture this evening, and I promise to conform and adhere to it. But naturally this limit, this delay, this difference of title (the first time I came here, if I may be allowed to flatter myself with this reminder, was twelve years ago on the occasion to deliver a speech entitled *La Différance*) was possible only in the space of convention, thanks to the agreement or to the contract which was passed among you and foremost, among the appointed and legitimate authorities of the premise. According to very complex resources—too varied and rich here however to be placed on exhibit—of an implicit contract, these appointed authorities have trusted me, have accredited me with a faith in the plighted word. But what therefore had I promised? Nothing more than coming, and to come and speak, here, before you, but without specifying what, without committing myself to anything other than coming and coming to speak. All the same about anything on condition that at the given moment I furnish the true title to my speech (what was quoted until now being only a false, temporary title placing in check the title to come) and that somehow I have my remarks conform to this title—or this title to my remarks—so that between the entitled (another name for the title) and the remarks thus entitled, between the entitled entitling and the entitled entitled there is surely the most adequate agreement. But a prudent analysis of the politico-judicial context of this event would make all this business rather evident: if the legitimate authorities of these premises signed a blank check honoring me with an invitation to speak about anything under a title remaining still "to be specified," it is only in authorizing the titles they recognize in me that merits such confidence. A whole legitimizing process is implied in this contract, and it forms infinitely complex networks of sub-contracts, implicit evaluations, codes of admissibility, more or less virtual protocol, in brief, of the establishment of an ensemble of titles—this time not in the meaning of what entitles or names a work, a discourse, a corpus, but of what appoints, what legitimizes a function or gives status—a law (for example a right to speak in given conditions, etc.). But the two meanings of the word *title* in one law appeal to both, to a jurisdiction that I would rightfully like to interrogate.

In analyzing the protocol of this bizarre situation in which we find ourselves, at the border of a speech which has begun without having begun, which, still without a specific title, is going to speak about who knows what, in

my opinion it seems hardly contestable that in according me some kind of *carte blanche* they have rightfully or wrongfully judged—the difference matters little—, or they have had to judge that I have already pledged enough to merit the apparent confidence which they have conferred upon me without the cost of too much risk, and that therefore I had title enough to ask that they allow me not to specify the title in advance. These titles, I mean those that rightfully or wrongfully are recognized as mine, do not pass only because of copyright or collegial legitimacy, for the analogies that could be made of it would be a fine linkage for all kinds of juridical, jurido-political, philosophico-juridical problems, and the like. But they are of little interest to me this evening. All the same, this evening, like every evening, I feel somewhat obscurely that, if the titles in question—in this instance I mean mine—inspire a confidence propped up on all sorts of norms and guarantees, on a while social contract; nonetheless mixed in this is a vague disquiet, a suspicion, an apprehension before an always possible, indeed imminent catastrophe: in the audience there is someone who, sitting in the back, under very polished amenities and despite the display of evident civility, does not always respect the fundamental contracts. And what would happen if he were not to come tonight? And, in coming, if he were to speak? Or if in speaking, he spoke about anything? Or if in speaking of this or that or one thing or another, he were not to give a title to his speech, if he were to leave the title blank (“to be specified”) or if he were to invent a title bearing rapport neither with what he says nor with what we have the right to expect from him in these premises—that is to say, truly nowhere? And were this intolerable situation to last one or two hours without anyone daring to interrupt him?

So I warn you that this is about to happen.

I declare that I have the intention neither of replacing my “title (to be specified)” by any other nor of having it specified in any way. And we are going to remain on the border.

The title is here. (*Le titre y est.*)

By that I mean, now I’m off to tell you all about it, as I promised a moment ago.

Let’s say that I mean the following in the form of a thesis: a title always has the structure of a name, inducing effects of the proper name and under this title it remains in quite a unique fashion, foreign to language as discourse, in the very way it introduces an anormal referential function and a violence, an illegality which founds the law and the right of its procedure. All of a sudden we begin to see an unfurling of theses which I am not going to have to prove. In place of demonstration, in its stead, I shall put forward an account of sorts, a story, a *récit*. The premisses of a demonstration will perhaps be marked and therefore the passage of the story will be more economical.

Suppose that the *Tituler* is a title, the title of a book, of a painting or of a lecture. *Somewhere* it must be *legible*. *Legible*, implying right off a script, a trait, a mark. And there is no title without legibility of a trace. To defend this affirmation, I am not only referring to some primitive or etymological meaning in recalling that *titulus* will have signified from the very beginning an

inscription, a little trait or a little sign, in brief an elliptical, economical, visible, short but legible mark incising a surface, a support, a panel or a board. Without need for this philological guarantee of the word *title*, of the title “title,” I have to sustain that an analysis of the *functioning* of every title demonstrates that there cannot be a purely phonic title without possibility of its being recorded and without a code of legibility. Legibility, I specified, of the title having to be *somewhere*: by that I imply no theory of the title can be rid of a topology. No title without spacing, of course, and also without the rigorous determination of a topological code defining borderlines. A title takes place only on the border of a work: were it only to be a part, like one of its internal elements or one of its pieces, it would no longer play the role of having title-value. Were it complete outside, detached and separated from the body by a distance greater than that which the law, right and code ordain, there would be no more title. Such words—for example *the titleer*—would play the role of a title, for example, to my speech, but only if placed a bit ahead and on the border of my text, in accord with a whole topological code. But the same words, pronounced inside of my text and my discourse or even encountered elsewhere—in a dictionary or in another text—will no longer have title-value but only a rapport in some homonymic way with *titleer* as title. I feel that you are already protesting. I have just said that a title had to be legible; now for awhile, even here, nothing is either visible or legible, but only audible. and there remains however the overriding question of the title of my remarks. Justly: there will be a title only when the possibility of a reading will be set and when the false title you have read or heard as having being read, filed, recorded and programmed, at the spot where this false title will finally be replaced by a true, authentic and fitting title. Suppose that the *titleer* is this title: the word can claim to be that only when its legibility will have suspended its equivocation in the eye of the law—for it is of law that I have come to speak with you this evening—and where we will have had to decide if it might be spelled (the orthography of law and writing, of justice and of the law in relation to writing, I come to exchange with you this evening) the *title* (. . .) *here* (*le titre y est*), a phrase of two (four) words or the *titleer* (*le titrier*) in one word (or two). In the two cases of a complete sentence of a name, what assumes title-value will function like a name or even a proper name, and this will be the case even if the referential structure of this proper name is completely singular and paradoxical, as I will try to show in a while. Had I opted for the sentence—*the title (is) here (le titre y est)*—as title, this sentence would somehow become the name or proper name of a text I am supposed to sign; it would refer to this text across all sorts of other possible references and other semantic values it ostensibly shares with the same sentence—the title (is) here—which would be found elsewhere in another context. Naturally one of the complications here which happens to put the law to the test in playing and betting on it—for it is a game in which neither winner nor loser can ever be specified—is due to the fact that the word “title” is part of the title and that, in this phonetic writing across the audible element, the noun *titleer* happens at once to double, assemble together and send away the univocality of the

sentence. All the more since, now that the time has come for me to specify it—at least if only that were possible—the noun *titleer* would signify at least two things. In Old French a *titleer* (*titrier*) was a monk responsible for the archive of the titles of a monastery. He was an archivist, the archivist par excellence, for if every archivist must prevail over the order of titles—how can there be an archive without a title—what is to be said of a guardian of titles? But in a more recent and pejorative, devaluating meaning, what is of most interest to me, here, is that a *titleer* refers to a falsifier, a maker of bogus titles, a fabricator of counterfeit titles, as we would almost say of counterfeiters in thinking of what is called entitling or *titrage* of money in a rather narrow sense.

Having decided to proceed in a more reflective than definitive manner, by way of exemplum, story or samples of tales rather than by concepts, I thought first off that we might speak of the title of one of Baudelaire's prose-poems. Despite its brevity, it defies every kind of resumé. It seems to be about two friends (of whom one is the narrator) who, in leaving a tobacco shop, meet a beggar. The narrator's friend gives him a false coin and brags about it to his friend who, lost in the spirals of reflection, finally explains why he cannot forgive him. The tale that I leave for your discovery is entitled "La Fausse Monnaie" ("The Counterfeit"). For essential reasons which are bound to the referential structure of the title suspended the way it is, we cannot define, determine or specify the indivisible trait binding this title to what it is supposed to announce. On cursory reading it designates the false coin, in effect, at stake in the narrated account, not just of the real false coin or of the false coin in general, but even more generally, of this false coin as recited or narrated content which apparently forms the principal or major object of the narration. But the title can be implied otherwise: this tale which is the discourse of the narrator, its narration as well as the tale signed Baudelaire are fictions or simulacra—more or less figuratively we might say—of the false coin. In order to limit myself to this first fold—there would be many more and more complex at that, but for lack of time I shall stick to this one—the title "the Counterfeit" (*La Fausse Monnaie*) has at least two implications, the story of the counterfeit coin *and* the fictional structure of the narrative text. It is divided and suspended, but in each case it designates the false coin, something like a false title sent forth by a falsifier, by a *titleer* of sorts. But that is not all—and yet, however, with the apparent complexity of the text which I am describing in this fashion, you must realize that I am restricting myself to a very summary analysis of the borders of this prose poem. As soon as claiming to entitle the content of the story or even the referent of the content—the truly false coin, the title also entitles the textual fiction, its value at least for being equivocal. We cannot tell what it entitles; it is askew, cockeyed, and risks becoming the title itself, at least insofar as it is a title or an entitling border, of the false coin. It is a risk—but not for sure. And hardly for sure it remains undecided, imprecise, unspecified, always to be specified. Somewhat as if the title "The Counterfeit" uttered or let itself be uttered in the name of its personification: in refusing to let you know if I am the title of the story told (the story of the false coin) or of the narrative fiction (tale as a

false coin), I am entitling nothing precise; thus I am *The Counterfeit*; I am the title; I entitle only myself. I am no more than my own event, the performance of my title; yes, I am, myself, the title, *The Counterfeit*. But this personification, this self-presentation in the first person is properly a specification which he does not give.² For, in order that the currency can be false money, it is essential to the structure of its guise as counterfeit not to be presented as is, but as coin passing for real money. The false money announced or denounced for what it personifies at the same time has nothing to do with what it is. In order to entitle or function as a title, the title cannot be presented in a present discourse; it cannot say, "There you see what I am and what I mean." For that, essential are its emplacement, its *topos* being suspended on the border, and for its heterogeneity with respect to a discourse, its exchange-value to be structurally undecidable or, if you like, always *to be specified*. As a title, "The Counterfeit," a disturbing homonym of every other identical locution, must be read without showing or disclosing itself as "The False Coin." The titleer, whom we will ascertain to be the faithful archivist of a religious institution or a falsifier bent on circulating his contraband within it, is always at work. In the same way "Title (to be specified)" or "The Titleer" utters, without uttering: I am, I entitle myself by false title.

But I stated that I found this example unconvincing for this evening's performance. Concerned too about not putting on exhibit certain titles of mine which circulate more and more with a stamp resembling that of a false coin, I had still contemplated analyzing closely (*de près*) the title of this immense poem by Ponge called *Le Pré*. I would have recalled the forces and practical violences of a proper noun suspended above a text treating in every one of its conditions the *thing* called the field as well as the word *field*, the word *field* as noun, with its nominal reference, and even still the fragment of *field* as the present prefix in the word "présent" and in so many others, the word ready (*prêt*), as an adjective (the loan [*prêt*] as noun is not treated thematically although in my opinion it has an organizing role around which all of *Le Pré* (*The Field*) is indebted, and *La Fabrique du pré* retains a more visible trace of it), the word *près* as an adverbial or prepositional locution with all these signifying values, all these more or less thematic references identical not only in the unity of an account, a tale, a myth, a fable or a drama which we cannot describe here, but also in a brief, economical elliptical title: *Le Pré*. In terms of grammar, we can say that this title has a nominal form, but we can show that every title, even when it does not have the grammatical form of a noun (besides, which is extremely rare), produces a nominal effect, nominalizing—I would even say, an effect of the proper name. In the title of a title, *Le Pré* condenses the whole network of motifs and tangled titles (the thing, "pré," the word "pré"), the words as a noun [*pré* (field), *prêt* (loan)], as prefixes and pieces of words (*pré-*), as adjective (*prêt*), as adverb (*près*). Poem of language that it is, *La Fabrique du pré* praises all these referential trajectories, multiplying and crossing them, in abysmal chiasm or by inference under the border of a line which, in the text, separates the text from itself, from an internal and external border in separating the body from the signature Francis Ponge,

whose initials repeat those of Fennel (*Fenouil*) and Polish (*Prêle*) inside the poem, on the other side of the bar. But in speaking elliptically, if the law of the text, *Le Pré*, the title, “le pré” names, calls, designs, discloses and notes (*sagt, zeigt*), it is just like that even where everything in the writing of language thrusts, is nourished, present and presented like physics, then, in sepulture. *Le Pré* names, prenames, calls (*heisst*), watches over, summons all the *pré, prè,* or *prê* of the text, but before the whole text as *pré*. In doing this the title not only induces you to read all the fields, proximations or loans in sight displayed in the poem, all the accents which make it sing its song or the spellings which normalize it. It also gives you an order, it enjoins you—if at least you know how to read it; it makes the law, it bespeaks you without speaking, it gives you something to read: I am the field, I present myself like the field and, if you want to know what field means, what *pré* means, you must read me right off (*d’abord*), you must begin by reading me, you must read and understand me precisely. Thus here the title is ready (*prêt*) to fabricate the law since the enigmatic reserve in the ellipse where it is kept—near the border, neither in nor out of the poem, suspended in its proper name. But you remarked it: it only makes the law right from a violence before the law. In violating the normality of discourse, in throwing into disorder the habitual functioning of reference, in abusing contextual indetermination to accumulate equivocation, in placing about the name the abandonment of the sentence, in accumulating in the oracular power of the proper name the entire resource of mute sentences, it founds its own state, its own legitimacy, the imperium of law legitimized over violence—but a violence right away from the economy of the language of writing. It is this madness of the title that concerns me tonight, this stroke of force laying down the law in the course of a rape, and of an incessant violation, a rape perpetuated *across* the law.

Across the law? What does that mean? If I translate “across the law” by “rape of the law” we have yet to know whether rape *of* the law signifies the law violated or the law violating. The madness of the title is perhaps that no choice exists between these two possibilities. Because there is no choice does not signify that we are limited to one of these possibilities, but that the two are as necessary as incompatible, obligating according to the inflexible stricture of a double law and a *double bind*.

In foregoing both “La Fausse Monnaie” and *Le Pré*, I have chosen recourse to another exemplary title for this evening’s performance. It is about the title of a ‘tale’ (*récit*) by Maurice Blanchot. For this title of ‘tale’ forms one of the most problematic stakes of the text. If I have finally chosen this example it is because the ‘story,’ told according to one of the most unwarranted narrative structures, is a showdown with the law. The narrator—at least he who says I, who never happens to form a story and therefore to become a narrator any more than he who happens to say “I,” at the outer limit, to account for his identity or identify himself in the way that the lawmen ask of him—, the so-called narrator has accounts to settle with the law, at the request and provocation of the law at least according to two figures or two forms: one of a sort of feminine allegory that he calls the law and another of doctors who

could be called medical legists and who, in the name of society, summon him to tell a true story of the accident that befell him or of the aggression victimizing him. Because of this instance of the law I choose this example.

In effect, the very schematic and preliminary analysis I am venturing before you this evening sticks to the border of a work—which I only project—on law and literature that I would like to entitle “Du droit à la littérature.” At issue would be for example the history and structure of juridico-literary relations. Here I will define neither the premisses nor even the most general perspectives of such a problematic. I would not have the time to do so. I shall have to be happy with this: what I am sketching here in the title of the title will perhaps take place inside the more systematic analysis of a sequence or of a grand historical configuration of juridico-literary procedures: what institutes a new relation in Western Europe among, let us say, first off, literary production; then, positive law; and finally, the critical institutions of evaluation: of the traditional guard, of archivation, entitling and titled legitimization, of the institution of competencies, all of which the *Universitas* is the form and premise par excellence. The model of the universitas in which we work in the West—more or less well for some time now—has been set in place, with of course important but secondary variants in respect to a grand principal structure, at a moment when—and in relation with—the inscription in positive law of the fundamental decrees which order the propriety of works, copyright, reproduction, translation, etc. This event, of which neither the structure nor content can I describe here, has had an essential, internal and decisive relation with what others would call the inside most intrinsic to the production of literary and artistic forms in general. So the instance of the title (whether of the title of the work, the corpus, the legitimizing title in general, of the title authorizing authority, guaranteeing the evaluation evaluating criticism, etc.) situates the spot or one of the essential borderlines and therefore the line of rapport, the most apparent *Bezug* let us say, between writing and law, between so-called literary writing and law. About this general perspective in which I am involved elsewhere, here I will say nothing more. I simply wanted to open the discussion in order to justify it right away and to legitimize the choice of my example in order, then, to account for what I will speak to you under the title of *La Folie du jour* by Maurice Blanchot.

Following normal appearances, *La Folie du jour* is normalized by literary and editorial law, as the title of a work, of a book of small format published, as the date of its copyright by deposit of duty copy indicates, in 1973. On its cover, under the name of the author and above the name of the editorial enterprise conventions prescribe us to recognize the title *La Folie du jour* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana).

Title to be specified. It must be specified and made precise, but how? A title is always an economy awaiting *its* determination, its specificity, its *Bestimmtheit*, what it determines and what determines it. Determining and determined, determination always *returns* to it. It returns in the direction whence it is responsible and in the direction that has always promised return from elsewhere, and according to a very unique mode of return.

Of the immense reading that the unending book promotes, and whose structure defies every border and frame, I shall retain here only a few traits worthy of showing how and in what way, in playing on its law, *La Folie du jour* is a madness of the title. To use the expression “stake one’s law” (*jouer sa loi*) is the very equivocation of import. To stake the law is to twist or transgress the law, but it also can mean to repeat or mime one’s law. In both cases it is to summon the law as such. So it is that the law of the border is itself borderless: tantamount to saying that it never summons itself as such.

What therefore are the descriptions, and what are the laws of these descriptions which, in the case of *La Folie du jour*, emplace the title as the law while forbidding it to function normally, to be determined in precise specification, to be identified and to summon in being summoned? I restrict myself to the typical traits of this turnaround that goes out of control. Such maddening twists spin around this: *the sense of the title is a certain manner of not having any and its event is one of not taking place*. No more meaning and no more place, therefore.

1. No more meaning (*pas de sens*). I recognize in *La Folie du jour* its title-value, its title titled for reason of its place and of the juridical conventions which its *topos* obeys. No criterion of internal reading (either linguistic or semantic) allows me to discuss or contest the title of its title. Met *elsewhere*, the same words, “la folie du jour”—which moreover do not form, strictly speaking, a statement—will not have title-value, whether separated or detached from the book, the corpus or from the context born in mind or, on the contrary, that simply they are found written *inside*. This *in* the text bearing this title, “La Folie du jour,” the expression “la folie du jour” is to be read at least once. And evidently it (*elle*) does not have the function of a title: “But often I was dying without saying anything. In the course of time I was convinced that I saw the madness of day face-to-face; such was the truth: light became mad, clarity having lost all common sense . . .” Despite their absolute identity, these two occurrences of the expression “la folie du jour” have absolutely heterogenous functions. It is not because one of them is taken in a phrastic remark (“I was convinced that I saw the madness of day face-to-face”) that the title seems to have been drawn off a fragment. Were the whole sentence retained as a title as it can happen to be in certain cases, the entire sentence would have a sort of nominal role as title and value heterogenous to that of the “same” sentence inside the book. Here, then, topology poses the law. It cannot be said that the two locutions are simply homonyms. To a certain point they are synonyms although their mode, function and value are not reducible one to the other. In the title the locution allows a supplementary meaning to be granted to it, which reads thus: this is a title, I am the title. Then the signatory or, if you prefer, the locutor is not the same. In the book, “La Folie du jour” is signed—so to speak—by the narrator, or at least by whoever says “I” from the very first word onward and, besides, by the person who does not happen to become a narrator, to form an account and even, at the limit of stating *I*, to be identified under his “I.”³ While the responsibility of the title is incumbent upon the so-called narrator—required elsewhere by law

makers inside the “account”—the title, we must arrogate, rightfully, supposes that before the law—editor, copyright, etc.—the author, Maurice Blanchot, is responsible. But if the law obliges one to suppose the real and identifiable author, the title is nonetheless a fiction (Blanchot does not sign this title as he signs a check or a testimony before the examining magistrate). Presumably by a real author, the title still is part of a so-called literary fiction; but it does not play a role in the same fashion as what is found inside the same fiction, in for instance the other occurrence of “la folie du jour.” There is a fiction nominating and guaranteeing the unity of the fictional corpus in which it has no role. It must be found on the outer border of what it entitles.

Separated from the border, the two occurrences must nevertheless belong to the same whole, to what one calls the same context, here in the form of a corpus of a work: this book. And according to a certain rapport of ordered proximity. This relation is not citational. In the duplicity of this occurrence it is impossible to say which is the original and which repeats the other. This iteration without origin rises or folds into its abyss and as this non meaning (*ce pas de sens*) oversteps polysemy towards a borderless dissemination, toward the borderless border of the disseminal text. In order to see, let us try counting the possible meanings of the expression *la folie du jour*; let us try counting with them, encountering them, taking account of them, accounting for them.

1. If we pay heed to the idiomatic syntagm “du jour” which in French signifies “today,” “here and now” (as in the locution “the order of the day,” “the man of the hour” to mark the marking or remarkable thing of the present hour). *La Folie du jour* is what makes an event today, that of the hour, today and of no other, and even that of the day today as the place and date of the event, and in a way, its signature. And in the text thus entitled there is enough to support this meaning. At stake is the event or advent of madness, of going mad at such a moment. Where do we situate the event? Did it ever really take place? Whatever the enigma, the event is named several times, and even in a certain place, as the order of the day. We simply cannot tell whether it took place, what taking place means, or even if what had taken place was no more than a vision. You can read (on pp. 17–19 of the Fata Morgana edition) the passage beginning with *Dehors, j’eus une courte vision* which is closed by *Tout cela était réel, notez-le*. In the center the one who tries to say “I” explains, “This brief scene brought me to delirium. I no doubt was unable to account for it myself, yet I was sure of it, I had seized the moment when the day, having knocked up against a true event, was going to rush towards its end. Here it comes, I was saying to myself, the end is coming, something is happening, the end is beginning.”

2. A second meaning comes forth immediately to parasitize the preceding. The event of the day (madness) is not only what happens *this day*, even today, it is the order of the day itself (“I had seized the moment when the day, having knocked up against a true event, was going to rush towards its end. Here it comes, I was saying to myself” An event of the day, therefore, as present time and the possibility of the event of the present, of the moment. A presence of the present, happening from the possibility of something happen-

ing, to appear and to take place. An event of the eventuality and possibility of the account, day to day.

3. It passes, is passed and passes by the day as *day*, if you will, in the day as in *daylight*, the ether of evidence, the middle of visibility. It is justly the most evident meaning of a text which succeeds or fails to take into account the impossible endeavor to make an “account” of the tale, of a traumatic event which almost costs the *sight*—therefore the day—of the one who is supposed to say “I,” the person whom I do not call the narrator: for following this event when he risked his sight—or the day, he is found enshrouded; in a hospital or institution in which the official representatives of the society and figures of the law are exacting from him an account of the events, in their alleging that, given his title (as a writer) and therefore his competence, he must be able to furnish an ordered account of himself. He tells the story of his account without telling it; presently we shall return to it. The madness of day is also in French the madness of daylight from which he was almost deprived and which therefore strikes him more than ever (“I almost lost my sight, someone having smashed glass over my eyes”).

4. This fourth meaning is still divided, all of which is going to give to “day” a fourth, fifth, sixth, indeed a seventh meaning. We shall place before us a week of meanings. The day as “right” or as “vision” (vision as a visual perception or a half-hallucinating apparition) is what we see, surely. The day is what we see right off. But it is also light itself, designating both the visual faculty (as they say to designate the eye, the organ of sight) and the visibility or possibility of sight. Now the possibility of sight, as element of visibility and a milieu of the visible is not invisible on that day, and no more than the sun of Plato. In this sense of night, of blinding—what happens at daybreak makes the day take place. And in this text there is a history of the day, an *internal* history of interiorization, indeed of internment, of the revolution of the day which hastens towards its end soon as it appears. It is thus this turning, this career, this course, this story of creation and resurrection, that we can verify. There is a madness inherent to the day like its story, its becoming-night, its passage into its contrary. Light is mad because it is black; it loses its meaning and all “common sense.” And this madness will have been truth. He who almost “lost his sight” thus enters into the “frightful cruelty of the day;” he can “neither see nor be seen,” and he notes it directly: “The glass removed, they slipped a sheath under my eyelids and walls of gauze over their surface. I was not to speak, for speech shot through the pins of the dressing. ‘You were sleeping,’ the doctor told me later. I was sleeping! I had to hold up to the light of seven days: what a fiery glow! Yes, seven days together, the seven capital lights having become the liveliness of a sole instant demanded an account of me. Who would have imagined that? Sometimes I said to myself: ‘That is death; whatever happens, it’s worth the trouble, it’s impressive.’ But often I was dying speechless. After awhile I was convinced that I saw the madness of day face-to-face; such was the truth: light became mad, clarity had lost all common sense; it assailed me madly, without rhyme or reason. This discovery was a sharp blow all through my life.”

5. Another meaning, but now I no longer can count them, a summary being impossible. In the paragraph I have just read, you remarked that accounts were demanded. If it accepts polysemy, the law, the law of reason or the reason as law demands, requires that we even distinguish among our senses. Aristotle explains it quite well. Law demands that we at least be able to enumerate the identities of meanings and articulate them among each other in a calculable narration, in a description, in a tale (*Erzählen*) or an account (*Zählen*). But here the account proves to be impossible. Either singular or plural, it is the day that demands an account: "Yes, seven days together, the seven capital lights, having become the brilliance of a sole instant, demanded an account of me." Therefore the day is also the law—which demands an account, as representatives of the law are going to demand an account (*récit*) of the person who says *I*, to recount and account for what happened to him. On the other hand, the law does not only appear in guise of its representatives; it appears in person as a feminine figure in a duel of love and death with the one who somehow manages to say *I*. Thus an identification is remarked incessantly among day, the madness of day and the law, and the madness of law as well, who is also madness of law and reason. It is especially remarkable in a long sequence—I do not have time enough to read it (pp. 27–28 of the *Fata Morgana* Edition) which interprets the force of law, authority (it is also the authority of the author, his competence, his entitling legitimacy) as a possibility of seeing, surveilling, having under its eyes: synoptic Tables, panoramas, panopticons using the entire day. So in this sequence the word "day" becomes richer still and, if we may remark, it twists maddeningly once again in overstepping another supplementary meaning.

6. For essential reasons we cannot account for the economy of the idiom, of the economy of the economy, of the *idiom* of the *oikos*, of the law of *oikos*. Now in the French idiom, "jour" compounds with two locutions having to do with birth, if not with resurrection: "to see the day" ("voir de jour"), to be born, and "give the day" (*donner le jour*), to bear or engender. As it is a legitimate sense, if you look over the semantic register of birth with all the other meanings of "day," you can go on forever. So the authority of the representatives of the law that are posed here as medical legists are held to have everything under their eye, but it is he, the patient, who tries to say "I," and it is he, in saying "I," who gives them the day; put otherwise, it is he who engenders them: he gives birth to the law which surveils and persecutes him in exacting of the "instructed" person that he is (the word returns periodically to recall what his title and competence are) a true story. "I was lettered. But maybe I was not all the time! Capable? Where were these capacities that were made to speak like judges seated in their robes on a wooden stand and ready (*prêts*) to condemn me day and night?"

"I rather liked the doctors. I was not feeling sapped by their doubts. The problem was that their authority increased from hour to hour. (. . .) Looking upon my rooms, they were saying: everything there belongs to us (. . .) They challenged my story: Speak, and it was put to their ends. In haste I bared myself. To them I distributed my blood, my intimacy; I loaned (*prêtai*) them

the universe. I gave them the day (*leur donnais le jour*) (. . .) I reduced myself to them, I passed entirely beneath their eye and finally, having nothing present other than my perfect void, and having nothing more to show, they also stopped looking at me; very irritated, they rose in crying: Well, where are you? Where are you hiding? It is forbidden to hide, it is an offence, etc.”

Therefore it is he who gives the right of day to the persecuting law, and even later, the law herself will say, “Ah, I see the day, ah, God, etc.”

We are reading for the moment, I recall, only the title and, even, a sole word of the title, “day.” Were we to consider the diverse syntactical possibilities of the expression “madness of day” (*folie du jour*), polysemy would be driven mad over and over again. The text plays on the double genitive. The word “jour” happens to determine the madness that happens one day, or which happens in daylight (an objective genitive), but it too is a subjective genitive, the madness belonging to the day, to the maddening daylight losing “all common sense.” Thus there is freed a step over supplementary meaning belonging at once to the series, to the law of the series of others and crossing its border in a heterogenous space.

7. And “la folie du *jour*” can also be understood as the madness of “jour,” of the word in the sense of “jour,” the madness which has justly to do with this dispersion without source or unity, without common reason, with neither proportion, direction of meaning nor of the word “day”; nor of the *noun* “day”; nor law; nor a word out of law, nor an outlaw; this out-law makes the law. That is the folly: that logos is mad, that the discourse of reason is unable to assure itself of its meaning, of the single meaning of the day and, if not of univocality, at least of totalization of the remembering order, even of remembrance of the history of the polysemy of the day of a day. From then on the madness of the day is also the madness of the word, of the noun “day,” a madness of this titular element insofar as a simulacrum of unity, a simulacrum of the law, a simulacrum of the trial which at once has the appeal of authority, gives daylight to law while playing the law, maddening and twisting the judgment and the *critical decision*. We can no longer account for the economy of the linguistic, and even nominal instance which produces the effect of the title. Madness not only inhabits the meaning of “day,” but the word “day” as a nominative of the title, that is to say as a proper noun between quotation marks. There is madness: a proper name between quotation marks; and if the word “day” is not between quotation marks on the cover of the book, the text will have imposed the public reading of these quotation marks. The question remains: who makes the law a quotation without quotation marks?

A step over the border of meaning, I was saying, in the title, and as I was adding: in a certain way the title will not have taken place. For a title to take place, a border must at least separate it from what it entitles, and the line of this limit must be lawfully indivisible from a line. Now all the writing of the *Folie du jour* is made to stake this law. According to juridical conventions, what appears to be the first line of the tale (*récit*), its upper border if you will, is found to bear only the double (neither the original nor the quotation) of the “same” false incipit which, inside, if it can be said, of the “tale” (*récit*), responds

to the request of the medical logists. Here is the “beginning” of the book. You see the necessity for the display: “I am neither intelligent nor ignorant. I have known pleasure. That is too little to say: I live, and this life affords me the greatest joy. As for death? When I die (perhaps in a bit), I will be familiar with an immense pleasure.” Now on the next to last page of the book, we are born to read that this first line, this first page was only the story begun at the injunction or request of the representatives of the law, all leading you to defy any mark of the true beginning of the book which rolls itself into a part greater than the whole. Here are the three last paragraphs of the book, the last, at least in copyright, but still those preceding the first:

They had asked me: Tell us how things ‘really’ happened.—A story? I began: I am neither intelligent nor ignorant. I have known pleasure. That is too little to say. I recounted them a whole story to which they listened, if seemed, with interest, at least in the beginning. But for us the end was a common surprise. ‘After this beginning,’ they said, ‘you’ll get to the truth.’ How so! The story was all over.

This paragraph, which is only a part of the general account, envelops here the whole account as one of its folded parts, and its collapses the upper border, the incipit of the book, upon itself. There is a first invagination incorporating the border and internalizing the outer front of the first sentence, the one looking toward the title as an internal surface. The external surface has become the internal surface. But that is not all. The same invagination is going to internalize the other border, this time the lower border, that of the last word. I take up my reading where I had left it off.

How so! The story was all over.

I could realize that I was incapable of modelling a story with these events. I had lost the sense of history, and that happens in many maladies. But this explication only made them all the more exacting. Then I remarked for the first time that there were two of them, that this wrench in the traditional method, however, having been explained by the fact that one was an optical technician and the other a specialist of mental illness, perpetually gave to our discussion of the character of an overbearing interrogation surveilled and controlled by a strict rule. Certainly neither one nor the other was the chief of police. But given two of them, because of the fact they were three, and because the third was staunchly convinced, I am sure that a writer, a man who speaks and reasons with distinction, is always able to recount the facts he remembers.

An account? No, no account, never again.

This “last” sentence, this apparently final line figures right at the lower border of the body. Though it speaks of the resolution no longer to write accounts or tales, it remains a part of the internal surface, so to speak, of its border, of a story finished no more than a story which did not take place, whose request was made but which the ostensible narrator could not perform in a competent way, yet which he told at once in an incompetent and more than competent fashion, in a successful non-performance. Now in restricting ourselves to the structure of the last trait of the line, of the still divisible

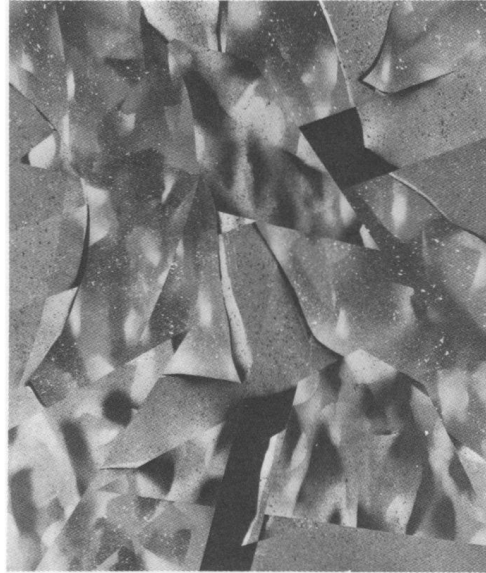


Hanna Hannah, *Story #17*,
1977, mixed media on
paper, 23" x 29".

border, the “An account?” which opened, two paragraphs above, what I then called the invagination of the upper border: “An account? I began: I am neither intelligent nor ignorant . . .” Folding over the lower border above within the lower invaginated border, the last sentence, what in copyright and in all critical competence is called the last sentence, produces another invagination crossing the first according to the figure of a chiasm. This doubly chiasmatic invagination of the borders does not allow us to discern in the reading the indivisible limit of a beginning from an end. It carries away the condition for every dictatorial emergence of a title, the title implying these critical effects of the border, the possibility of discerning indivisible borders. All the more since the titling locution, “La Folie du jour,” is the undiscerned double of its occurrence inside the corpus. There you see why in all rigor the title exercises its authority only in order not to take place, to remain interminably “to be specified.”⁴

Interminably undecided, reserved, in reserve in the ellipsis of a nominal formula that economizes the whole. The economy of the undecidable is not to the contrary incompatible with dissemination. Perhaps I have not underlined it enough (for want of time), but all that I have remarked of the title could have been assembled together under the title of economy and even of political economy. The title draws its title-value from its power to produce value and surplus through the economic operation, the operation of economy—or thrift and potentiation of surplus. And this is not tautological, it is rather a tautological ruse and the law of this *oikos*, of this *oikonomia*, and I believe as I have at least suggested, it is far from being simple and direct; it is not ruled by a sole orthogonal line. When surplus expands as far as the abyss, the law, economy and politics that the title of the title call forth have to be reconsidered.

I never demand of philology, and even less of what others call etymology, the guarantee of a concept. On the contrary, and Heidegger recalls it here and there, from what is given one can look both to history of the language and to the sciences which, in order to deal with it, must suppose it. There we must demand of the sciences and of languages the right of their title. Perhaps, and from what we have just glimpsed in the madness of day, we can accede better to such etymological hypotheses about the word, about the noun “title.” Through the Latin *titulus*, some refer to a radical contained in the Greek *tiô* (to esteem, evaluate, honor, valorize), whence *timè*, evaluation, value, price to pay, juridical estimation for example of a penalty or a debt. And with the properly *axiomatic* register of economo-politico-judicial evaluation, some take it back to the Sanscrit root *ti* where entire folds of meaning are assembled together in the idea of *re-assembling*, justly of reunion, colligation in the mind, on the inside: whence the meanings of to remark, to research, to recognize, to pursue, to venerate, to honor, etc. This motif about the assembling evaluation, the axio-economy which goes to its limit, to the *bewahren* of *Wahrheit*, to this variety of which Heidegger says, in a sense which is neither void, contradictory nor dialectical, that it is non-truth. *Die Wahrheit ist Un-wahrheit* (in *The Origin of the Work of Art*). As economy, in the violence of its ellipsis, the title is the truth without truth of what it *re-assembles*.



Steve Conley, *Captain Tivo*, 1978, acrylic on linen canvas, 80" × 60".

There is no title to resemble or reassemble, and what we have proven is that a reassembling never takes place.

One more step and I leave you. *La Folie du jour* has a history. I do not know if it can be accounted for. Before appearing in the form of what rightfully is called a book, *La Folie du jour* was published in a review, nearly (*près*) a quarter of a century before. But was this the same *Folie du jour*?

No semblance of transformation in the body of the text from one version to another, from the review to the book.

And however the title was otherwise, and because of the history of the title I have spoken of the two versions. At least. What was the first title? In all rigor it remains difficult to say. The so-called "first version" appeared in the review *Empédocle* in May, 1949. This review, which published only several numbers, bore on its title of contents, on its cover—and I would like to have drawn your attention to all these frame and all these juridico-political dimensions of *protokollon* (of the first page)—announcing its authors and titles, this: Maurice Blanchot, *A Story?* (*Un récit?*). On the table of contents, the title was therefore "A Story?" with this question mark that makes of the title a doublet of this double occurrence that we took up a while ago. The fold taken, I leave you now to complicate for yourselves the very chiasmatic invagination of the borders in the account of its history, in the story of its inscriptions and erasures keeping the memory of the inscriptions and former titles, the instance of the copyright happening to make an archive of the whole textual body in the national or world library. Were I to be authorized to abuse your patience further, I would turn against another page to show you that on the inside of the same review, so to speak, the table of contents is reproduced entirely, and this time, the title *A Story* no longer bears a question mark, no more than in the third occurrence of the same title, above the line of the so-called story accounted for before us. In effect there can be read: *A Story* by Maurice Blanchot.

Of all these subversions playing about the law, can we esteem that they mock the law, that they transgress or reveal its precarious historicity? Not at all, or all these sophistications would not be possible; they would have no force without the instance of the law they seem to defy; they would have no reason for it without drawing reason from it, without provoking it—to produce it in twisting it, this very reason whose madness they demonstrate rather than opposing to it, from the outside, another madness. Precisely this madness of the law, this *hubris* of the title, this denatured extravagance of the entitling authority is called forth here and is recounted under this mad title: *La Folie du jour*.

A lecture, you will ask, or a reading? Never again. In sum I have been invited, let us not say summoned, but honored by an invitation. In the title of a lecturer invited to present a discourse provided with a specific title. And to bind my discourse to my title, that is to say to fill in contract or promise the title in blank for which I have been accredited: *title (to be specified)*.* Is it the same, now? Will I have been specific? Under what title have I spoken to you? And in what title? It is a bit late for me to ask, but perhaps you will continue to ask why.

All the more since the title is here, you will give it to me, it was never lacking.

Translated by Tom Conley

NOTES

1. tr. note: from the quasi-medieval sense of t-i-t-r-i-e-r liberty is taken in respelling the sixteenth and seventeenth century variants of *titler*, *tytler* and *titeler* to fashion a homonymy with here and ear. The most obvious ring of “the title (—is—) here” emerges in *le titrier* from *le titre y est*. It remains only the first of the counterfeit sounds we should like to re-assemble in *titleer*, as the orthography, in remaining faithful to the duplicitous intent (let us say, of a *mauvais titrier*) of “One who claims or asserts a legal title.’ *Obs.*,” (*O.E.D.*) has perverse echo in the way an ear would see a sharp point in the history of *title*, equivalence, equivocation and the variants spinning off it (tickling, titration, etc.). In any case the twice repeated grapheme *tr* of *t i t r i e r* marks another obsessive shape in the French version of the text.

We must recall how “tr” of the essay on Valerio Adami (see Carol James on page 120 in this number) generates from the doubly invaginated chiasmus of the columns of *Glas*, the *ich* or χ of *Positions*, such that *t* does and does not translate *x*; in any event, too, the *tr*, $\pi\pi$, χ , etc., traduces the inception of the urgent mark displacing the myth of *truth* in the title. What had been a deathly inscription is turned into a mobile frame, for the *tr* and χ designate the twists of much of Derrida’s writing, whose contour allows us to see in *récit* a tale or account that will have force in the page to follow, a graphic mannequin of *tr* disengaging a half-trace (*tréci*, *tré-ci*, *tri-cé*, etc.) on the grounds of its truth (*vérité*) in American or other translations.

2. tr note: Throughout the French text the law is couched in the feminine gender. Inflections of an allegorical female, a *Justicia*, pervade so much that it is almost impossible to choose between a *she* and an *it* in the French version. The double bind of the French rendering therefore could have a cacophonous ring in the English if we rightfully put forward *she* in *its* place.

3. tr note: His “I” is *son “Je”*: as elsewhere, the text echoes an impossible pairing of identities, and all the more when different personal pronouns shift over each others’ surfaces. Here “his ‘I’” avers to be the space of a dream, a *son-je*; later, the knee of Justice will thrust through Blanchot and Derrida in the shape of a *je-nous*, a catastrophic violation of the law of the shifter.

4. tr note: Here *à préciser*, which we render as we do above, invaginates the field of *pré*, *près*, *prêt*, *présence*, etc., specified in allusion to *La Fabrique du pré*.