THE IMMOBILE VOYAGE:
TEXTUAL MOVEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH-
LANGUAGE POETRY

BY
ADELE E. PARKER
B.A., UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, 1990
M.A., SUNY BINGHAMTON, 1997
M.A., BROWN UNIVERSITY, 2003

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH STUDIES AT BROWN
UNIVERSITY

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND
MAY 2008

This dissertation by Adele Eleanor Parker is accepted in its present form
by the Department of French Studies as satisfying the
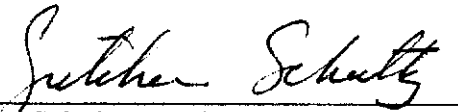dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date 4/23/08

Sanda Golopentia, Advisor

Recommended to the Graduate Council

Date 4/23/08

Gretchen Schultz, Reader

Date 5/02/08

Glenn Fetzer, Reader

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date _____

Sheila Bonde, Dean of the Graduate School

VITA

Adele Parker was born on August 22, 1965, in Jacksonville, Florida. After spending three semesters at Bryn Mawr College, she received her B.A. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1990 with a double major in Women's Studies and French. Subsequently she attended the State University of New York at Binghamton for her M.A. in Comparative Literature and a Certificate in Translation, and was awarded Most Promising Translator. While at Brown she taught French language and was the first Helena Rubinstein intern at *difference*s: *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. She has published in *Postmodern Culture* and *The Journal of Caribbean Studies* as well as in *The War Body on Screen* (Continuum, 2008). From 2006-07 Adele was Visiting Lecturer at Colby College and held the same position the following year at the College of the Holy Cross, where she is now Visiting Assistant Professor. Her dissertation "The Immobile Voyage: Textual Movements in Contemporary French-Language Poetry" focuses on postmodern poetry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Tracing a Path to the World

"No straight arrows fly from crisis to solution by means of the language of

poetry."[1] A straight arrow is indeed the least likely metaphor for the work of poetic

language, by any definition an indirect, allusive, elusive discourse. The term "immobile

voyage" in my title is more than a simple metaphor for the sedentary reader or writer

being carried away by imagination. "Immobile" refers to the increasingly prevalent

notion that no final destination is reached by, in, or with a poem. It is the journey, the

poem as activity, that matters, and not a completed cohesive message that must be

delivered. Never arriving, or else always beginning again, are common tropes. There has

been a "shift […] from the poem as point of origin to recognition of the poem as being in

process in its reading" (Easthope vii). Thus reading is part of the act of poetry, which is a

sustained movement toward wholeness, toward presence.

The immobile voyage may be described as a journey of discovery or a quest for

the writer, which the reader follows, albeit making her own detours and divagations.

Syntactic function positions words in continual movement toward the real, which

prevents stagnation of a finite system of signs. So the writer, like the reader, moves

toward the other, toward the external world, within the borders of a world of her own

making, within view of her own horizon. The import lies in the interaction between the

---

[1]   Michael Bishop, *The Language of Poetry*, p. 4.

poet's consciousness and the world and the impact of that relation on the relation between reader and world. The principal way this occurs is through textual movement at play in the rhythms and structures of a text, manifest syntactically, semantically, and thematically.

Movement is traditionally central to poetry in the sense that rhythm and rhyme--both dependent on repetition--have always been cornerstones of lyric.[2] Movement is central to human perception insofar as we tend to think in spatial and orientational metaphors, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have pointed out; our conceptual and cognitive processes are generally metaphorical in nature.[3] With conceptual frameworks such as 'happy is up' and 'sad is down,' metaphors and other spatially and kinetically oriented figures convey affective content that is experienced at a subconscious level. Textual movement acts in a similar way, making itself felt and thus communicating crucial information about the message of the text, about the writer and the writer's horizon. My dissertation follows the movements expressed in four poets: Jacqueline Risset and Anne Teyssiéras, both from continental France, Edouard Glissant of Martinique, and Gaston Miron, from Quebec. All four poets see poetry as intimately tied to questions of being and knowing. My choice of these four allows me to study a sampling of textual movements generated by poets of differing identities in different contexts, while at the same time finding similarities among operations of poetic language. Jacqueline Risset's circularity in writing about writing, while conveying what is at work

---

[2]   I was reminded of this important connection by Glenn Fetzer's paper "Contrepoints rythmiques et sonores chez Jean-Michel Espitallier et Lorand Gaspar" (MLA Convention, Philadelphia, Dec. 2006).

[3]   The Greek etymology of the word 'metaphor' is of course to transfer, to carry across; metaphors themselves transfer meaning from one term to another. The sense of movement is highlighted in Paul Ricoeur's description: "On the one hand, [...] the metaphorical utterance reproduces the form of a movement in a portion of the trajectory of meaning that goes beyond the familiar referential field where the meaning is already constituted. On the other hand, it brings an unknown referential field towards language, and within the ambit of this field the semantic aim functions and unfolds" (*Rule* 299).

in *écriture*, generates a movement of return that opens up a space within which to meditate on choices and what is at stake in making them. Anne Teyssiéras writes that "Le génie est de savoir tout sacrifier au mouvement" (*Clavicules*), indicating a commitment to the primacy of movement, to giving oneself over to a vital force—pulsation. For Edouard Glissant, "L'accumulation est la technique la plus appropriée de dévoilement d'une réalité qui elle-même s'éparpille" (*Discours* 17), the reality that is the diffuse history of the Caribbean. Gaston Miron's expansive 'march to love' traces a radius from the singular to the collective in a bid for wholeness. This study undertakes to examine, within a hermeneutical and phenomenological framework, how these movements offer experiential constructs for affective and cognitive reactions to and engagement with poetic language and with the writer's own history.

These are not the best-known poets of French expression, not poets that one is likely to casually encounter in an anthology. Nor are they the easiest, and it is precisely their difficulty that I find most compelling. The difficulty here may vary in kind and degree, but it has common a basis in resistance to easy answers and easy questions fostered by a life lived outside of a literary or linguistic mainstream. If Mallarmé's difficulty was occasioned by a search for symbols that would convey impressions of a most personal nature, these four poets, while their modes of expression present their thought processes in a way that could only be called personal, are also inspired by a more global and objective project. The poetic act is meant to "à partir du langage, [...] instaurer avec autrui une relation qui englobe le monde" (Doumet 17). The four poetic idiolects studied here present a problematic relation to language and to reality that is universal.

It is a commonplace that postwar poetry no longer speaks for the subject, but for

language itself. Poetry is not as clearly codified as it was in previous eras, when lines of standardized lengths, regular rhyme schemes, and accepted lyric themes defined it. Poetry and poets are no longer seen as speaking for a nation or even a particular public, in the way of Victor Hugo or Jacques Prévert. Old forms, genres and themes have virtually disappeared; poetry no longer concerns 'les grands sentiments.' "Much poetic writing in France in the post-1945 period is set in an elemental landscape and expressed through an impersonal poetic voice. It is therefore often seen as primarily spatial and cut off from human concerns" (Wagstaff).

With this ostensible "effacement absolu du poète" (Jaccottet qtd. in Hackett 22) and widening variety of approach and form, how do we read poetry today? Human biographical and geopolitical concerns are still largely evident in the way we receive and critique poetry, dividing poets according to their nationality or language of expression, gender or race. Bringing together some of the larger inquiries surrounding poetry with the issues around identity and national belonging, I arrive at the question of how specific historical experience is transmitted and accepted through poetic language, how the overdetermined subject extends its consciousness. I would argue, with Heidegger and with poet Yves Bonnefoy, among others, that the ultimate focus of poetry is not language itself, but rather what lies beyond: poetic language seeks precisely to indicate the path to what cannot be communicated in language. Bonnefoy describes

> poetry's own will, which is the force in the words that moves them toward more
> than words, which is to say, poetry's potential for love, the appeal it throws out to
> the reader to go further than the poet toward unity. (802)

Likewise, Heidegger in *On the Way to Language*, having noted "the two kinds of saying, poetry and thinking" (96) writes

> In keeping with the most ancient usage of the word we understand saying in terms of showing, pointing out, signaling. [...]
> *The essential being of language is Saying as Showing*. Its showing character is not based on signs of any kind; rather, all signs arise from a showing within whose realm and for whose purposes they can be signs. (123)

In expressing these preconditions, Heidegger also wishes to say that language's purpose is not communication; it is the place where we already reside. It is at moments of misunderstanding or inability to find the right word (59) that language touches us, reveals itself to us. Here is a correlation between poetry's attention to language and poetic difficulty.

Some critics, such as Serge Gavronsky, Jean-Jacques Thomas and Steven Winspur, have pinpointed more specific defining common characteristics among contemporary poets: fragmentation; the refusal of poetry as communication; an ongoing struggle with the referent. The first two of these suggest that poetry is more concerned with itself and with the materiality of language than with traditional goals of communication. And yet, with language always come issues of communication; for poetry not in the same way as with prose or speech, but we know nevertheless that something is being transmitted. The further poetic language moves from established lyric forms, the more we must think the relation of poetry to community, the self-referential world the poet creates and with what ease or difficulty one may enter into it. The age-old dichotomy concerning art—art for art's sake versus art *engagé*—takes on new meanings as significations attributed to art and to commitment change. We must always re-ask the questions of the poet's relation to his or her work and to readers and of the work itself to society. What does it mean to be a French, Martinican or Québécois poet, or a woman poet? How essential, and how essentialist, are these identitary concepts? To what extent

do they color the work? I will incorporate these elements in my study, but also wish to

talk about what poetic language does, how it behaves, rather than regard it as a static

form to be contemplated, one that does not change after its initial creation. In the words

of Adorno: "In order to be contemplated aesthetically, [the poem asks] to be thought

through, and a thought once set into motion by a poem cannot be cut off at the poem's

behest" (213). We are then in the territory of praxis and its consequences: how the poet

acts through words and what effects these acts have. This seems a more fruitful path for

our present purposes, given that we are discussing not only the nature of poetry but

readers' relations to it, which are by definition in flux. We can take a useful definition of

praxis from Cornelius Castoriadis: "praxis is a perpetually transformed relation to the

object. Praxis begins with the explicit acknowledgment of the open character of the

object and exists only to the extent that it acknowledges this" (89). This is suited to the

nature of the text, which demonstrates its own patterns of behavior rather than remaining

a fixed and unchanging entity.

Textual movements depend on human interpretation, on a sense of what Paul

Ricoeur chose to call narrative in opposition to the structuralist and post-structuralist

attention to text. Writing takes place in a world of humans, created and read by humans.

> D'un côté, la phénoménologie a mis l'accent sur l'étroite corrélation de la
> conscience et du monde, au point de définir le sujet comme "être au monde"; de
> l'autre, la géographie moderne elle-même a montré que le paysage ne saurait se
> réduire à une réalité physique ni à une représentation objective, puisque,
> indissociable d'un point de vue et des images qu'il génère, il est irréductiblement
> subjectif, humain et culturel. (Collot, "Se retrouver paysage" 106)

Bonnefoy has noted "The text is not poetry's true place; it is only the path it followed a

moment earlier, its past" (798). In other words, we are not simply examining a collection

of interrelated words and meanings but following a trace that moves through the world, trusting that the journey will be worth our while. To look at the larger movements at play in poetry is to allay the concern that "an essential dimension could cease to be felt when one defines it simply as text" (Bonnefoy 796).

To examine the subjective aspect of writing and reading is rather to focus on experience and on thinking. Phenomenology is "the description of lived human existence, which is located at the between point of world and consciousness" (Alcoff 48). It is a branch of philosophy more concerned with understanding the world and human action through narration than through theorizing and is the study or description of human consciousness and awareness; phenomenology becomes hermeneutic when we say that all forms of awareness are interpretive. That is, we do not simply interpret literature or other texts, but anything and everything we perceive or take in in the world around us. We are interpreting everything in part because we come to everything with our own presuppositions; the very fact of interpreting indicates that there is already some preliminary understanding that we have, some ideas about whatever entity we confront. Hermeneutics concerns the structure of the way in which human being understands its own existence, how it self-interprets and interprets its own activities (Embree 304-07).

These concepts can be brought to bear in many ways on the study of literature; interpretive consciousness can be seen in the speaking subject of the text or in the reader, who, along with the writer and the text, each have their own horizon. The horizon stretches out around us as far as we can see; it bounds our world and opens it, and we are in a particular spatial and temporal location in relation to it. It is the limit of what can be observed and yet recedes when we approach it and so contains inexhaustible possibilities;

every experience has something that is there and something that is only potential, and all of these experiences and potentialities together constitute a world. The real world also has its own horizon, and it is this one that has probably been the most neglected (Collot, "Se retrouver paysage" 105). Among hermeneutic concepts, the horizon can be used to "éclairer les structures du langage poétique à partir de celles de l'expérience vécue" (Collot 8). As a deictic principle of both structure and opening, a construction that is also constantly in movement and in relation, it organizes "le rapport au monde, la constitution du sujet, et la pratique du langage" and may illuminate "non seulement la réception de l'œuvre, mais aussi sa production, et ses rapports avec la réalité intérieure et extérieure" (7). This organizing principle gives us one way to look at writer, reader, text and world in the new reality that happens around them. Of course there is inevitably always something that lies beyond the horizon, and this sense of loss and of the unreachable permeates much of this poetry, as it does modern poetry in general.

The poetry studied in this dissertation is not often explicitly about personal identity, but our detour through these poetic worlds can only further our understanding of not only ourselves but of the writer and his or her community.[4] For Heidegger, being's relation to itself is established and maintained through its relations to others, and vice versa: there can be no notion of subjectivity without a corresponding one of intersubjectivity. Heidegger's term is Dasein, or There-Being, Being-there, which does not describe a self-enclosed sphere but is rather a process of engagement with things and beings in the world, things that emerge in a way that is part of the very way we encounter or engage them to begin with. We approach with a certain disposition, are attuned in a

---

[4] Ricoeur held that the only way to self-knowledge was via a detour through objects of cultural production, human consciousness being unable to grasp itself directly.

certain way, with a particular intentionality, and are pre-interpreting what we meet with, what we experience; we each have our own particular understanding of our relations to others.

A typical hermeneutic reading consists in analyzing the formal structures of a work, its relation to tradition, the author's appropriations of those traditions, and the reader's self-assessment and re-assessment of the text upon having completed the rest of the analysis. This juxtaposition of tradition with innovation affords Ricoeur's "advocation of a third way between apologism for the past and affirmation of progress" (Kearney).[5] Meanings are brought into the present and reactivated without being detached from their original circumstances of production. Movement always indicates temporality, and part of what textual movements convey is a connection among past, present, and future. Ricoeur argues such for myth, and I would argue that poetry assumes a similar place in culture in that it communicates through symbols and points beyond the self and everyday reality toward what is known at a profound level and yet can only be tentatively perceived. Indeed, poetic language has held a place of great importance for many thinkers: for Julia Kristeva, poetic language stands as the fullest expression of language's potential. Heidegger saw the poem as the privileged site where we come closest to the possibility of an encounter with language. He saw the poet as at least as important as the philosopher in engaging ultimate questions of being in that poetry uncovers the world and responds to what it finds in a nuanced and sensitive fashion. The poet names beings, not to encase them in rhetoric but to allow them to shine forth.

Analytical tools must be adapted to each poet; as Gadamer has written,

---

[5] Ricoeur's tripartite definition of tradition (traditions, traditionality, Tradition) discussed in *Time and Narrative* volume III already included a complex dialectic between "sedimentation" and "innovation" (trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago: U Chicago P, 1988) 228ff.

"hermeneutics is a protection against the abuse of method, not against methodicalness in general" (*Hans-Georg* 70). Let the text be the guide to its context, its horizon, its moment in time and place. The reader enacts two hermeneutic movements: an act of imagination followed by an act of structuration. First she interprets; so that this is not simply projection, the second movement "fai[t] entrer en relation les données textuelles afin qu'elles s'éclairent mutuellement, qu'elles s''entre-interprètent'" (Collot 254). The reader brings her own values, expectations and presuppositions to the text, then adapts her understanding to coincide with the givens of the text, in a circular (I would say spiral or cyclic) process that leads to a progressively more comprehensive reading. The text mediates the reader's symbolic world wherein she shares a reality with the author. Every reading, every interpretation carries the possibility of a relation to an other. The experience of others is brought to us through signification but it exists beforehand: it is the excess of the poet's experience, and not of the sign, that imposes figurative language.

There is much to be taken into account and a hermeneutic approach brings together all the elements of the poetic experience: the poet's consciousness and subconscious, as well as the non-conscious, in Kristeva's terms—the area of thought covered by the dominant ideology of the community, its myths and suppositions. Add to that the text itself and its peculiarities; its place in the genealogy of influences that makes up literary history; the meeting between the poet and the surrounding society; and the poetic language wherein the poet's idiolect and the dominant sociolect are woven together with unanticipated textual effects on the reader, who stands at her own horizon and brings her own associations and biases to reading. Writing and reading are solitary activities, yet writer and reader carry on a dialogue through the window where the text

opens onto the world.

Paul Ricoeur said in an interview: "The theory of hermeneutics, in my opinion, would consist of developing the parallel theory of genesis of text and of reading, and to show the flow of one to the other" (Nakjavani 1087). In other words, we are able to account for the writer and her creation as well as the process of decoding that follows. The author's experience remains private but aspects of its meaning can be disseminated to the reading public through written discourse. The reading of a text saves meaning from foreignness; that is, meaning is activated and kept alive by the reader's understanding. The creation of a text and its reception consist of a meeting between two individuals, the convergence between poet and reader, who fashion the text between them.[6] The poet generates a trajectory through poetry and the reader enacts the movement by bringing her own understanding and associations to it.

The shape a poet gives a work, or the shape the work takes, is not only an indication of that poet's place in the genealogy of poetic practice and influence but a measure of intentionality, or directedness toward something, the rapport between the mind of the poet as manifest in the textual world he has created and the lifeworld. Intentionality is central in distinguishing between what Ricoeur would call the explanatory (ideological) aspects of a work and the exploratory (utopian) aspects, affording an escape from the abuses of dogma toward an affirmative future.

In resituating a text within its context, it is important to distinguish between the center and the periphery of a literary field. Non-continental French literatures have

---

[6] I quote Gourgoris to clarify that I am not simply talking about reader reception theory because "the issue here is not to establish retrospectively the text's historical boundaries (I consider these to be inherent in the very moment of writing), but to understand how the text's internal existence (its singularity) comprises the various moments and contexts of its performance, in which reading is, of course, fundamental" (11).

largely been marginalized as being not "French" enough, although this state of affairs was

strongly challenged in 2007 with the "littérature-monde" manifesto published in *Le*

Monde, which declared an end to the concept of "francophonie," with France at its center,

given that "francophone" is not a language. The work of Glissant and Miron was well

received in France, but it also struggles with the seeming necessity of always thinking in

relation to the continent.

Thus it is also important to take into account the fact that Risset and Teyssiéras are

women, not only for the ways in which the gender of an author can affect the writing and

the life of the writer as well as the experience of the reader, but in that contemporary

women poets have still not, or have only recently begun to, take their place alongside

their male counterparts in being recognized as artists in their own right. Risset and

Teyssiéras write within a traditionally masculine genre, even the most modern elements

of which have been established and shaped by male writers. Despite early examples such

as Louise Labé in the sixteenth century, or Marceline Desbordes-Valmore in the

nineteenth, there have not been any well-known and respected women poets of that

stature for decades now. The chapters in this dissertation dealing with women poets thus

take part in a recuperation of writers who have not received their due recognition, for no

other apparent reason than that the literary field is historically male-centered, especially

where poetry is concerned.[7] "More than any other literary genre in the field of French

---

7   Anthologies published in the last 40 years are limited to: Jeanine Moulin, *La poésie féminine* (Paris: Seghers, 1966); Carl Hermey, *Contemporary French Women Poets: A Bilingual Critical Anthology* (Van Nuys, CA: Perivale, 1977); Liliane Giraudon and Henri Deluy, *Poésies en France depuis 1960: 29 femmes* (Paris: Stock, 1994); Martin Sorrell and Marie-Claire Bancquart, *Elles : A Bilingual Anthology of Modern French Poetry by Women* (UK: U of Exeter P, 1995); Michael Bishop, *Contemporary French Women Poets* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995) and *Women Poets in France 1965-1995: A Bilingual Anthology* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Wake Forest UP, 1997) (in the introduction to which Bishop wrote "Women simply have been, and still are, very significantly excluded from the modern poetic canon" (xiv).). There are a small handful of texts covering francophone women poets, such as Renée Linkhorn

women's writing, women's poetry has been inadequately represented in French poetic anthologies and has consequently not received enough attention in the critical discourse on poetry" (Saleh 204). The twentieth century produced more French and francophone women poets than any other and this dissertation goes some way toward rectifying the lack of critical attention paid them in looking closely at the work of Teyssiéras and Risset.

In Risset we find a dialectic between exterior and interior, located around the body as a point of return. The body is in turn in dialogue with an abstract reality: the long poem *Jeu* is full of anonymous and sometimes inanimate bodies and of personal pronouns whose reference is unclear. This ghostly human presence makes becoming manifest, a coming-into-being where potential is all. Hers is a poetry of beginnings (love as pure beginning), of instants: "that initial instant when voice throws itself into the void. [. ..] The weight of language in its entirety to be pushed aside in order to begin" (qtd. in Gavronsky, *Six* 103).

In *Jeu* there is movement from the outer to the inner, from within the body, the forest, the house, outward to the clearings, the open spaces, and then back again. In the interpenetration of these two worlds there is constant effacement and renewal, destruction of *langue* and restructuration by *parole*. Body and landscape are in fact often confused, as are movements made by the body or on the body; confusion between the event and the telling of it, the journey and the story one spins from it. We are forced into a global perspective, trying to take in everything at once. And still as soon as we look the thing

---

and Judy Cochran, *Belgian Women Poets: An Anthology* (New York: P Lang, 2000) and a few on individual poets, such as Jean-Marie Gleize, *Le théâtre du poème: vers Anne-Marie Albiach* (Paris: Belin, 1995).

changes, as soon as we arrive the place moves. This constant instability weighs on the

reader, who has a sense of always trying to catch up, to read more and see more in order

to reach a moment of clarity, a space of unattainable repose. The movement of return is

what provides the comfort of repetition—structure—and thus a sense of narrative. More

than that, it affords us the luxury of reconsidering our interpretations.

Words are free to interact with each other in numerous ways, creating a

polysemous and ambiguous text. The early pages are dense and prose-like, while later the

words grow sparser, as if this representation of an interior landscape is too fragile to

sustain. We have only this series of instants to illuminate the spectacle of subjective

experience. The reader before this text is forced to make an extended series of

interpretive choices to the point of becoming aware that the process of choosing is part of

the 'message' of the poem. Making choices is how we construct our own experience and

identity, how we enter into relation with the world and make it our own.

Teyssiéras chooses to live in illusion, to see illusion as reality. The death of her

mother when the poet was 10 and her own subsequent illness and stay in a sanatorium

have colored her work, wherein an absent, inaccessible, female other often appears. This

presence of an absence, illusion as reality, demonstrates her fascination with life and

death and with paradoxes and contradictions considered in themselves, not as something

to be resolved. The movement of pulsation stands in for an unwillingness to be caught on

one side or another.

Glenn Fetzer sees in the work of Teyssiéras "avant tout un dilemme

épistémologique, celui du rapport aléatoire du sujet qui perçoit à ce qui l'entoure. … Que

savons-nous? Comment le savons-nous? D'où vient le savoir? Comment le savoir inscrit-

il sa présence au monde?” (218). Her seeming search for calm and relief from suffering appears to interviewer John C. Stout to be an avoidance or absence of identity, to which she replies: “Un homme…peut être neutre et homme à la fois. Quand on est une femme, écrivain, poète, on peut être amenée à se réfugier dans le neutre si on veut faire passer des idées, des pensées, des choses philosophiques” (134). She questions why poetry by women is called “feminine poetry” while that by men is simply called “poetry,” and to draw attention to the relative servitude of women in relation to men in society, a neuter “il-elle” or “celui-celle” appears in her poetry, both genders present without hierarchy. Similarly, she sees neither Being nor Becoming to be dominant, although in much of western thought woman is associated with immanence and man with transcendence.

Regarding *Les Clavicules de Minho*, Teyssiéras noted that “Après ce livre, des amis poètes m’ont tourné le dos. Il y a des choses ‘qu’il ne faut pas dire.’…” Her efforts to expose the inner workings, the underpinnings, of the poetic process, in this text, while seeming to draw back a veil from her work at the same time add another layer to the investigative process. What she most often finds true of writing poetry is similar to the experience one has in reading Risset:

> Par le phénomène de l’onde toujours élargie
> autour de son centre, le poème se trouve parfois
> fort éloigné du point d’impact — il en procède
> cependant, à l’insu même du poète. (38)

The poetic text takes on a life of its own and all that that entails: its own relation to the world and to others. It speaks its own language and forms its own bonds, is alive with a pulse of its own. Unlike Glissant, Teyssiéras sees language escaping her, sees an inherent split not only within herself but between herself and what she tries to create, between vitality and its trace.

En émergeant des eaux du moi le je encore ruis
-selant ramène ces lambeaux innommables dont va
se nourrir le poème.

Ce qui nourrit affame: le poème est un réflexe
coupé de son centre vital. (50)

Glissant's work has more in common with Risset's in its attention to our relation to the world and to world-making. Part of the goal of his poetry is to restore the island of Martinique and the greater Antillean community to its own sense of history. He seeks a singular and a community identity through putting into language his surroundings, the specificity of his lived experience. This requires a sense of the original rupture as well as of the many layers that went into making Martinique. His long poem *Les Indes* takes the form of an epic, the first step in the invention of any nation, calling on an ancient tradition in the service of a modern postcolonial community. His reasons for this choice speak to a felt need for the weight of history in anchoring a national identity.

Glissant has in fact designated the epic as the form that the literature of the new world community, the *totalité-monde*, or *tout-monde*, will take. Later work such as *Pays rêvé, pays réel* imagines a relation between the dream of Africa and the reality of the Caribbean—which is still but a dream itself, in that its most important aspect remains in the imaginary, in the sense of identity and community that can only reside, finally, in individual belief and in shared experience. And what experience is shared most clearly but that of the land on which people live and the human bodies in which they live, as well as the rhythms and intonations of their everyday spoken language. Opacity and diversity, or community, are always in dialectic. The notion of opacity insists on singularity: no subject can be fully known or understood in its specific uniqueness.

Glissant claims Antillean identity and writes in detail the implications of this

identity and the means of confronting its study, claiming through his writing the power to make language conform to his thought. His concept of Antillanité reminds us that the particular land to which Africans were brought further contextualizes their story/history, their development and their identity. He brings to the forefront a geopoetics wherein art is born at the site of contact between the subject and its surroundings, an origin that organically fosters a complex, layered, and winding process of creation.

The question of difficulty in Glissant's texts always arises, and not only in relation to his status of speaker for his historically impoverished community. Part of the answer lies paradoxically in his stance as a model of singularity, speaking his own poetic idiolect, and part of the answer lies in the movement of accumulation that informs his work. Colonization in the Caribbean followed a unique course, according to Glissant, one that was more spiral or circular than straight or direct. In turn, he sees his work as a "spiral retelling" that consists in accumulating words, languages, identities, concepts, patterns, throughout the body of his work. Accumulation is the gathering of diverse elements into a composite, a list of relevant points made more forceful by their collection in one place, in the reworking of ideas and figures through different texts. In his definition of "poétrie" as a multi-genre, cross-fertilized, endlessly changeable, infinite text; in his creolization of French, which permeates the language he chooses to write in with the original violence from which creole sprung as well as its rhythms and intonations; in his expectation that the overdetermined, opaque speaking subject will be heard. In dense recitations of Antillean flora and fauna, these unfamiliar words become *points de repère* in the vast universe of Glissant's creation, and the very act of reading them is an experience of otherness in itself, before we begin to understand their meanings. "Trees. . .become, for

Glissant, a centre of confusing, contradictory forces. . .a way of organizing time and space, of establishing an unceasing vision of interrelating forces" (Dash 42). In this case, it is the natural world of objects, living objects, that serves as an organizing principle for questions of being, identity, and history, for one's place in history. Accumulation, like glossing, attempts to ensure that every reader will have associations or identify with some part thereof. When the elements of one's reality are so dispersed, the best way to present them and to try to make sense of them is to gather them together.

Like Glissant, Gaston Miron has militated for independence for his region, though this stance and his sense of national identity tend to be more explicit in his poetry. He takes on the position of the social collective and then extends this to the universal, always seeking expansion of the circle of belonging. Often he seems to want to abnegate his own subject position in order to give his country a name and a face in the world, but he also sees the "marche à l'amour" as part of the poet's struggle. Love is movement toward the other but at the same time toward one's own identity--identity in relation--and it is a source of sustenance when facing not only the solitude of dispossession and cultural alienation, but also the necessary solitude of the artist.

Miron's texts act against "l'aliénation délirante" of the linguistically and geographically divided subject and inscribe this alienation at the same time, fusing his country's sociolect with his own poetic aesthetic. As co-founder of *L'Hexagone*, a publishing group devoted to French-Canadian poetry, Miron was instrumental in building a literary institution that would promote Québécois literature. Glissant found much to admire and with which to identify in Miron, as he wrote in his preface to the last edition of *L'Homme rapaillé*, published in France by Gallimard in 1996:

> cette langue française qui jadis vous fut si orgueilleuse et dominatrice, la voici là pantelante pathétique et souffrante sous la main du poète, vous eussiez dit d'une langue créole qui cherche le jour nous rameuterons ensemble nos langues menacées…la langue française nous la partagerons aussi, et les créoles et toutes les langues dessouchées, Gaston Miron vous l'a promis, vous comprenez pourquoi lui Miron, sa langue est vouée à l'intime autant qu'aux espaces. (14)

Here we see the development of *parole* from *langue*—-in Glissant as well as Miron. It is important to note one crucial difference between their situations: in Québec, more so at the time that Miron was writing, some 30 to 50 years ago, the French language was dominated by English, and the French-speaking subject was looked upon with some scorn. Glissant of course approaches language from the other side, as he was once looked down on for not being a native speaker of French rather than for being one. In fact, for Miron, the French language would not have been "orgueilleuse et dominatrice;" Glissant is certainly addressing an audience who, he assumes, shares that view of French. And while Glissant refers to creole as one among many "langues dessouchées," we must remember that French, in Miron's eyes, would have better fit that description. Poetic language itself could be seen as a "langue dessouchée," given that it is marginalized, spoken in poetic idiolects, understood by only a minimal group of devotees. Miron's direction was out, beyond, toward a utopian future that would reject the confining dogmas he had had to live under.

Thus this study will examine the concept and operations of textual movement through reading return in Risset, accumulation in Glissant, pulsation in Teyssiéras, and expansion in Miron as case studies. It attests in some measure to the many permutations a poetic journey can take.

CHAPTER 1
Jacqueline Risset: Toward a Phenomenology of Return

Pourquoi, si l'on écrit, faut-il écrire sur le fait d'écrire ?
Parce qu'écrire est un jeu. Si l'on voit quel jeu – *le* jeu, il faut écrire, et il faut écrire sur le fait d'écrire.[1]

To begin, a page of one of Risset's books shows in microcosm some of the concerns embodied in her work, as well as, to some degree, all of the poetry in this dissertation. I will primarily discuss her long poem *Jeu*, but here I read a slightly later work called *La traduction commence*, which consists of a series of shorter poems, although it is not necessarily less difficult of access than *Jeu*. The last piece in the book, also entitled "La traduction commence," is in four parts with the titles I CH 61; M.S. 1544; M.P. 1908; and o mei dolci animali. The first three refer respectively to I Ching hexagram 61 (translations of the Chinese name for this hexagram include "Central Return"); to the publication date of *Délie* by poet Maurice Scève, about whom Risset published a critical work in 1971 and with whom she shares an interest in the subject of love; and to Proust's Carnet de 1908, pointing to the fragment and to the importance of memory. The fourth section is divided in two by a horizontal line in the middle, with numbered columns 1 and 2 above and 3 and 4 below. Column 1 contains short lines of no more than four words in Italian and Latin. The second column translates these brief lines into French and the lines are followed by names in parentheses that we presume to be references: Petrarch, Lucretius, Joyce, and Leopardi. These phrases may well have been

---

[1]   "Questions," 253.

written by these authors, but they are so short as to make citing them almost unnecessary. Intertextual reference appears to be inevitable and yet ultimately arbitrary, as influential texts are absorbed and reworked by future authors until nothing but traces are left of the original.[2] Yet a few words can be all it takes to open floodgates of associations for any of us, to launch us on other paths. Column 3 mixes the same lines in French, Latin and Italian, while column 4 consists only of four arrows pointing toward the right hand side of the page, otherwise blank, suggesting the reader is meant to continue this translation that has begun. What language(s) that translation might be in, or what intertextual references might be brought in is up to the reader, who is now the writer. This generosity vis-à-vis textual creation underscores and augments the productive role that both writer and reader play: here both read and write and the conditions of production for and roles of or relation between writer and reader are modified. The writer reads historic texts and is directed by certain words to her own writing, and the reader is invited to take the next logical step and begin writing out of the words of the writer Risset, not in analysis of the writing already present but to add to the production of a new kind of a text. In the words of Hàn, "il faut de nouveaux récits."

In reading this short piece, I wish to highlight several elements that will be useful in reading longer works by Risset and that will come into play with the other poets in this study. 1) The notion of return, the movement I associate with Risset, appears in the reworking of older texts, in the central role of rereading, and in the choices the reader makes in interpreting the poem. In fact, 2) the reader must make choices in order to interpret the work. 3) There is a double movement of resistance to and invitation to

---

[2]   This calls to mind the statement made by poet Françoise Hàn in an interview that a poem is made up of all the poems written in all the languages since the beginning of the world.

interpretation. The meaning of the text is not immediately comprehensible, but the text presents a space wherein the reader can contribute to the meaning. Thus 4) production by the reader is part of her participation in creating the text. 5) Past, present and future are contiguous, and history is shown as happening through human creative production, not as a series of random events.

Before Jacqueline Risset published *Jeu* in 1973, she wrote an essay on the concept of "jeu" and the act of writing about writing that illuminates her poem. She summarizes the idea of *écriture* when she says "écrire sur le fait d'écrire est aussitôt osciller entre la réduction systématique et la sacralisation indue – entre le mode d'emploi d'une activité délimitée et la description métaphorique d'une pratique ineffable" ("Questions" 252). Writing about writing is not only an oscillation between two poles; it is also an inherently reflexive act, a snake swallowing its own tail in the manner of the eternal return as described by Nietzsche. In this way it resembles thinking, which leaves nothing outside itself—"Il n'y a pas d'objets de la pensée, pas d'instruments. L'assiette aussi se mange" (255). Thinking and writing leave no remains; they swallow everything. Since the writing one is writing about is one's own act of writing, we have the element of lived experience, lived while writing and in writing. Writing as experience is writing as a phenomenology of consciousness, an act of thinking that, in becoming writing, opens to other consciousnesses. Thus even within the impossible ouroborean circle, we have possibilities of connection.

In this essay, Risset focuses on the fact that we are beings-in-the-world and so writing is something that happens in the world, something that passes from one point to

another within the world, with the world. This does not mean that writing is easily

reducible; it still exists as an impossibility. Or rather, "écrire a lieu entre deux

impossibilités : celle de la pensée, celle du texte même" (253). Once again, we are

oscillating between two poles without being able to reach either one of them: thinking

and writing, or more specifically, the way station of writing that is the text. We must look

at why this is so, why these are impossibilities. Writing can only be an echo of thinking,

repetition of an approximation of thought, or even "un echo *à l'envers,*" where writing is

impossible to think outside of itself. As for the text, any text is provisional and must

always be reactivated; writing is fragmentary and a fixed text is not possible.

> Heidegger wrote that
>
> the true experience with language can only be a thinking experience, all the more so because the lofty poetry of all great poetic work always vibrates within a realm of thinking. But if what matters first of all is a thinking experience with language, then why this stress on a poetic experience? Because thinking in turn goes its ways in the neighborhood of poetry. (*OWL* 69)

Here we can see an emphasis on the bond between thinking and language, poetic

language in particular: the poetic experience is an experience with both thinking and

language. Heidegger uses the term poetic language to refer to any kind of heightened, or

intensified, discourse, but his examples are largely drawn from poetry, suggesting that

poetry is in fact the best source for or best example of this kind of discourse. For

Heidegger, poetry is the site where we come closest to undergoing an experience with

language. We cannot talk about language because then it is an object and is no longer

language; we can talk about the possibility of having an experience with language, and to

experience something is to attain it along the way. We are beings in space and time, so we

have experiences along a way. Language is a showing, a making apparent; language

allows things to emerge. Things are made accessible to the receiver of language in the sense that "only the word makes a thing appear as the thing it is, and thus lets it be present. The word avows itself to the poet as that which holds and sustains a thing in its being" (*OWL* 65-66).

Poetry is mythified as a genre but at the same time devalues text as an inert record after the fact: "rien ne s'y passe, tout s'est passé avant" ("Questions" 254).

> L'écriture a lieu quand l'ensemble (du je) devient jeu. Quand y a-t-il jeu ? Jamais complètement, puisque tout texte est un reste. Il n'y a pas de reste dans le jeu, le fonctionnement est intégral. Donc, tout texte est en retard sur le jeu effectif – mais ce retard n'est pas chronologique. Puisque ce qui est en jeu, ce ne sont pas les objets, c'est la pensée même.
> Le jeu, pris dans le texte, est fonctionnement, et, en même temps, *mise en jeu*. ("Questions" 255)

In other words, "whatever is supposed to precede and inform writing, whatever is supposed to escape play or be primary or be present in its own right always turns out to operate just like writing" (Neel 118). There is an integration of self and of what is held back of the self, of process and of the launching of the process. Thinking itself is what is in play, and to think something is to bring it into play. We can think of thinking along two paths: as an idle but constant form of experience, as one goes about life in thought; and as a philosophical project, a conscious taking up of an object of consideration. In a similar vein *Jeu* is individual expression in that it is a phenomenology of a consciousness, an act of thinking, and it opens up to other subjectivities in the relation of reader to writer. It contests accepted notions of reality as a whole, notions that we might otherwise share, while allowing more subterranean kinds of connections, consciously acting to reorient perspective. If I say the poem is "consciously" doing something, I must posit the poem as a kind of thinking entity that develops, discovers and reveals knowledge.

This chapter focuses on Risset's *Jeu* because it marks a particular moment in French poetics and intellectual thought, commonly referred to as the "linguistic turn," wherein reality is seen as a primarily discursive construct. *Jeu* can be read in light of the tenets of the journal *Tel Quel*, notably the theory of *écriture*, to illuminate the processes of writing and thinking that take place therein. The poem's place on the continuum between engagement and aesthetics can be considered in light of the question of desire raised by Risset's citation of Pierre Jean Jouve on modern poetry: "L'objet n'est rien, le désir est tout" ("Chant"). How do we conceptualize desire in a work where the subject is so elusive? How might we characterize the relation between self and other there?

One thread that will prove important is the myth of eternal return as seen by Nietzsche, which holds that everything we do will be repeated in an endless cycle forever. This is not meant in a metaphysical sense but is a progression toward becoming *Übermensch* or "overman," toward total independence. Nietzsche claimed that if with every decision you face, you consider whether your choice is something you would like to repeat for the rest of eternity, it will affect your choices for the better, placing an existentialist emphasis on choice and responsibility. Return is evident in *Jeu* in the repetitions, the glosses, the revolving and recycling moments and movements, and the endless choices of interpretation: how do we collocate the scattered phrases, what images and meanings can we take from this text? Eternal return holds up a model of singularity, of an apex of being that one can strive for. The text models such an example in the purely idiolectal mode of its expression: a singular subject has made many lexical and discursive choices across time and space to arrive at this particular collection of words. The presentation of the text, the figures, the structure, all point down a path that is

metaphorically circling (or rather spiraling) back on itself, though not in a closed-off or narcissistic sense. Understanding is not the most important thing, without a respect for difference; in this sense community is not just based on gender or national identity and not even solely on poetic readership, but on relational discursive practices. Risset offers a text for others to read and respond to, to make interpretive decisions about on their own path to affirmation of their singularity, and to ultimately write themselves. Each moment of decision in the eternal return corresponds to the 'instants' of which Risset writes: discrete points in the flow of time.

Before proceeding to a more in-depth analysis of *Jeu*, it is important to situate Risset socially and historically to give a flavor of the intellectual and cultural currents of the time that would have colored her writing. She was born in 1936 and so is part of a generation of writers who were children during WWII, of school age in the 1940s and 50s when literature was largely in thrall to political ideology,[3] and who came of age in the 1960s during a time of great social and political upheaval that included the Algerian war. Other poets of her generation born in France include Jacques Roubaud, Marie-Claire Bancquart, Marcelin Pleynet, Claude Pélieu, Anne-Marie Albiach, and Denis Roche, among others. Pleynet was on the editorial board of the innovative literary journal *Tel Quel* with Risset and shares stylistic features with her as well as an interest in the thematics of love. Roubaud was closely involved with the OuLiPo and so was clearly committed to new and radical ways of approaching poetic language.[4] He has also served

---

[3] The upheavals of the 1930s led to doubts about the seriousness and usefulness of "the writer." Existentialism arose out of the fear and isolation engendered by war and the threat of war: action was called for when people could no longer believe in the usual forms of authority and were forced to rely on their own powers. Ideas of engagement and resistance at the time came largely from Sartre and from Aragon's commitment to communism.

[4] OuLiPo, short for Ouvroir de littérature potentielle, is a group of writers who work under a variety of constraints in the interests of breaking open all the possibilities of literature. Among numerous devices

on the editorial boards of *Action Poétique* (1950) and *Po&sie* (1977), two of the most important journals of modern poetry in the 20th century. Pélieu was a translator of American Beat writers and constructed his own cut-up texts in the style of William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin.

Denis Roche wrote the essay/poem text "La poésie est inadmissible, d'ailleurs elle n'existe pas," in which he laments "cet *exotisme poétique* qui consiste à projeter dans un ailleurs agréable mytho-idéaliste toute parole à destinée poétique" and claims "*C'est à partir du symbolisme, en gros, que la poésie est devenue la concrétisation écrite de l'idéalisme bourgeois*" (212). Even surrealism, influential for *Tel Quel*, only amplified the exoticism of metaphor, from Roche's point of view. This idealized poetic production became the definition of poetry and the poem the sole unit of poetry; within such a system the only kind of revolutionary changes possible are grammatical. Philosophy only brings a metaphysical idealism to poetry, according to Roche, causing poetry to become "cette merveilleuse marchandise à réconfort" (212), an easily digestible consumer product. Thus

> *elle n'existe plus* que sous la forme de ces beaux dirigeables, de ces belles « saucisses » grimées qui servait aux observateurs de la guerre, de ces baudruches inutiles.
>
> Toute écriture qui ne dénonce pas ce « poétique » est vaine. Toute poésie qui se veut « poétique » *contre* une écriture à portée idéologique précise est vaine ; et de même toute personne « poète » qui prétend exalter ce « poétique ».
>
> La logique de l'écriture moderne exige que l'on contribue massivement à l'agonie de cette idéologie symbolarde et périmée. L'écriture ne peut symboliser que ce qu'elle est dans son fonctionnement, dans sa « société », dans le cadre de son utilisation. Elle doit coller à cela. C'est la condition première de toute chance neuve. (212-13)

---

used have been palindromes, anagrams, blending of proverbs, exclusion of certain letters, and prescribed poetic forms. The group was founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and mathematical historian François le Lionnais and is still active today. Membership has included such luminaries as Italo Calvino, Georges Pérec, Jacques Roubaud, Marcel Duchamp, Harry Mathews, Marcel Bénabou and contemporary poet Michelle Grangaud.

Despite the wish of *Tel Quel* and its members to return to an earlier golden age of

literature, that return took the form of a beginning; it was a return to language itself,

writing itself, and thus was acted out as a dedication to continuous renewal. Lines of

battle were drawn between those who contributed to the hardening of poetry's arteries by

forcing writing into bloated, outdated forms and those who sought out writing in its own

habitat, to follow it where its practice led. The former are not willing participants in this

battle, "observateurs" that they are, but the latter find the death of their kind necessary for

real writing to take place.

> Pleynet explains further:

> Telle qu'elle est entendue aujourd'hui encore, la poésie est inadmissible, cette poésie inadmissible n'a rien à faire avec la fonction du texte poétique ; comme poésie, cette poésie inadmissible n'existe pas… Et, d'autre part, pas de statut d'existence pour la poésie. (Pleynet 106 n.18)

Roche named one series of his poems *La poésie est une question de collimateur*, "posant

que la poésie n'est pas la lunette qui oriente, mais cette partie de la lunette qui *assure*

l'orientation de la vue dans une direction précise" (Pleynet 106). This highlights the idea

that is played out in *Jeu* that writing cannot directly say something but can only point to

it, directing the reader's focus. One central generalization we can make about this

generation of writers is that they refuse any notion of coherence in the relations between

language, being and the world. *Jeu* enacts and comments on this state of affairs as well as

its reconfiguration of those relations.

Risset, a polygraph writer like Sollers, has written not only poetry but prose and

criticism, including book-length studies of Pleynet[5] and Maurice Scève[6] and essays on

---

[5]   *Marcelin Pleynet* (Paris: coll. "Poètes d'aujourd'hui," Seghers, 1988).
[6]   *L'Anagramme du désir : Essai sur la "Délie" de Maurice Scève* (1971. Paris: Fourbis, 1995).

Joyce,[7] Fellini,[8] and Gramsci,[9] as well as over 20 articles in *Le Monde* since 1992, most often on literary topics (Proust, Dante, Duras, Italian literature). She has translated Dante and Machiavelli into French and, fittingly, Francis Ponge into Italian, he for whom the poem was "une route qui ne mène hors des choses ni à l'esprit."[10] In such a case it can be interesting to ask what role poetry plays within the body of Risset's work and whether it conveys something that the author's other texts cannot. Certainly the act of translating has had an effect on her poetry, as she pointed out in a 1995 interview:

> J'avais une poésie très telquellienne elliptique d'avant-garde où le sujet n'apparaît qu'entre les mailles allusives. Mes derniers poèmes ont été infléchis de façon inattendue par ma traduction. Ils sont plus autobiographiques. (qtd. in Ceccatty)

Her reason for not translating her own work is telling: "Quand on écrit le signifiant et le signifié sont inextricables. Quand on traduit on casse le lien: c'est une trop grande violence" (Ceccatty). This notion of inextricability of signified and signifier is indeed important in her work and *Jeu* is constructed of these "mailles allusives."

Jeu is 158 pages long. Sections of it were first published in *Tel Quel* in 1965, '67, and '69 before being released in book form by Editions du Seuil in 1971. Risset encountered the review *Tel Quel* in the mid 1960s and felt an "affinité profonde," which explains why she sent them her work before ever having met the members or served on the editorial board ("Avant-gardes"). The poem satisfies the tenets of *Tel Quel* regarding transgeneric texts: it is a poetic text with prose qualities, it is divided into 5 sections like a classical dramatic work, and it has other dramatic qualities: many passages are like set

---

7   "Joyce traduit par Joyce," *Tel Quel* 1973 (55): 47-58; "Joyce et la poésie italienne contemporaine," *La Revue des Lettres Modernes* 1994 : 1173-1182.

8   "Préface." *Carissimo Simenon, Mon cher Fellini,* Claude Gauteur, ed., (Editions Cahiers du Cinéma, 1999); *Fellini, le cheik blanc: L'annonce faite à Federico* (A. Biro, 1990).

9   "Lecture de Gramsci," *Tel Quel* 1970 (42): 46-73.

10   Francis Ponge, "Les mûres," *Le parti pris des choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987): 37.

pieces or scenes, including didascalic elements detailing poses and gestures. The five sections of *Jeu* are titled, in order, "Géographie (*Parcours*);" "Récit;" "Après-Récit;" "Jeu;" and "Méthode."

Part of *Tel Quel*'s project was a return to poetry, not only as poems, but in all its manifestations: Tel Quelians were interested in the poetic aspects of prose, in crossing the limitations of genre.[11] This blurring of genre distinctions is part of an important concept developing in French thought at that time—the concept of *écriture*. *Écriture* was conceived as an opening onto a space where the theory and practice of writing come together, where writing and thought, creation and meditation meet, and where there is no longer a strict separation between the creative and critical functions of writing. *Tel Quel* wanted to shine a light on the conditions of literary creation through an analysis of this writing process, and to delineate a theoretical position stemming from the act of writing itself.

Tel Quel was founded in 1960 by Philippe Sollers, who was 24 at the time—the same age as Risset. The journal went through ideological changes over the years but at its beginning, Sollers and his cofounders (who had all dropped out of professional schools) shared a dissatisfaction with what was happening in the literary domain—literary production seen only as ornament or else as demanding ideological expression—and felt a need to reclaim literature as literature, or rather, as text, in a way that coincided with structuralism. They felt that it should not be subordinate to political ideologies nor to aestheticizing ideologies, and this false dichotomy was to be broken by close attention to language, poetic language in particular, and to the act of writing. Both the *nouveau roman*

---

[11]   Much of the history of the journal recounted here is taken from Marx-Scouras (1996).

and surrealism were crucial influences but *Tel Quel* went beyond them by articulating

écriture with philosophy and seeing philosophy as the repressed of literature. Intellectuals

of the era—such as Foucault and Derrida, both of whom published in *Tel Quel*, and

Deleuze—began articulating philosophy with the practice of writing; passing through

literature allowed these thinkers to bypass or overturn some of the dictates of Western

rationality. Literary innovation and cultural revolution were seen as a way to uncover

truths that could not be disclosed any other way.

Sollers in particular felt that the political Left was conservative in its artistic

tastes, and this was exemplified for him in the person of Sartre, who had no use for self-

referential, hermetic writing and who privileged journalism as a way for writers to free

themselves from language (Marx-Scouras 14-15). Sollers might have asked

> If postwar engagement was unsuccessful in reconciling literature and the
> revolution, was it perhaps because it failed to see that cultural revolutions disinter
> otherwise profoundly inaccessible truths and do so through the vehicle of style?
> (Marx-Scouras 19)

We could add that it is one of the functions of poetry to transmit what cannot be conveyed

any other way, and point to Ricoeur's discussion of encounters with cultural production

as a way to self-knowledge, individually and collectively. The view of literature as

literature had come to be seen as reactionary rather than as a force for change, and those

involved with *Tel Quel* took it upon themselves to reclaim that position as a radical one.

> The critique of engagement by the *Tel Quel* generation was central to a mission
> whose purported aim was the rehabilitation of the literary modernity of the late
> nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As they had boldly stated from the
> outset—in none other than Aragon's *Les Lettres Françaises*—they wanted to take
> literature seriously the way Hölderlin, Flaubert, Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce, and
> Valéry had done. They were going to be *écrivains*, not *écrivants*. In seeking to
> relaunch a literary movement that had been under attack by Fascism, Nazism, and
> Stalinism, and that had been occulted in the postwar years by socialist realism and
> Sartrean engagement, the founding TelQuelians were put in a position where they

> had to account for the repression of certain literary and artistic manifestations—to which they had inherently been drawn—by political ideologies. (Marx-Scouras 17)

In other words, *Tel Quel* supported literature in a radical, essential form, as writing, and protested its eclipse by politics and the subsequent dismissal of questions of language and form. This is not to suggest that they were solely interested in formalism.[12] In their attempt to return to modernity, they became important players in the realm of postmodernity.

Sollers can be regarded as a counterpoint, as someone writing in the same circumstances as Risset and in the same vein. While he wrote prose, it was in a poetic style. He was also concerned with "develop[ing] a writing of the act of writing: analogical writing" that does not seek either transparency or opacity and into which he brought biographical or social elements (Lechte 225-26). Sollers wanted to write what cannot be written—the inexpressible, often considered a poetic domain. Norms of writing are social norms; journalism embodies these norms, while the true writer is always avant-garde (227): examples of avant-garde writers crucial to *Tel Quel* were Joyce, Mallarmé and Ponge.

Another close colleague who can serve as comparison is Marcelin Pleynet, not least because Risset edited a book of his work and wrote the introductory essay but also because he dedicated his essay "La poésie doit avoir pour but…" to her. In this essay, he speaks of wishing to remove poetry from the purely decorative realm, in which textual activity is masked, just as the novel had successfully been rescued from naturalism. He

---

[12] While Fredric Jameson associated *Tel Quel* with structuralism, others have situated the group closer to poststructuralism (Andreas Huyssen, Steven Connor, Linda Hutcheon). Despite a concern with formalism, *Tel Quel* members integrated social and, increasingly, political, elements into their work (Brandt 260 n.30).

also questions the notion of genre whereby the reading of a text is fixed in one position, one direction. In speaking of reading contemporary poetry in particular, he writes:

> Les difficultés de lecture que peut poser un texte contemporain n'ont pas d'autres fonctions que de mettre l'accent sur la lecture toujours à faire, sur la non-lecture de qui achoppe à ces difficultés, ou de qui les réduit, n'en pose pas tous les aspects (lisant par exemple le titre comme titre, ne pensant pas ce qu'une telle convention peut recouvrir), et s'inscrit ainsi dans une convention qui, non pensée, l'aliène. (105)

This places a large measure of accountability on the shoulders of the reader, and even suggests that the definition of experimental or avant-garde work depends on how (successfully) it is read. A reader may be alienated from the very conventions she is used to reading by, by the fact that she has not considered them in the light of a particular text or act of reading. In *Jeu*, the encounter of the act of reading with the practice of writing moves the work along to unexplored places, toward the new.

Since Risset was a part of certain intellectual literary trends of the 1960s, and her concerns with language and experience mirror those of others, we might compare her to certain writers of the nouveau roman such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, who characterized the new novel by the lack of a central character and the use of a banal 'he' as the subject of verbs, and by the apparent lack of structure to the narrative: the story tells itself, form follows writing. We can discern similarities to Risset's project but with the difference that a banal 'she' appears in her texts, or 'they' feminine, 'elles' au pluriel. To make a brief comparison with a woman writer of the nouveau roman, Risset differs from Nathalie Sarraute in that Sarraute spoke of things swarming under the surface of language, like the stuffing coming out of the armchair in *Enfance*, while for Risset language is what is underneath language; depth is simply another myth of transcendence.

One woman poet of Risset's generation with whom she has a great deal in

common is Anne-Marie Albiach, whose second book of poetry, *État*, was issued at the

same time as *Jeu*.[13] Both books display an interest in the performativity of language; their

nontraditional use of typography, punctuation, and white space demonstrate a shared

desire to depart from poetic commonplaces as well as from any conventional attempt at

representation. Both reveal a human presence, evidenced by personal pronouns, bodies,

regards, that remains nevertheless indefinite, evasive.

Other poets interested in similar types of formal transgression include Danielle

Collobert, who "experienced a sense of extreme alienation from the constraints and

boundaries of genre" (Stout, "Writing" 300). Collobert, Albiach and Risset have in

common an ongoing attempt to "force language out of its rigid boundaries so that it might

express the inexpressible" (301). Collobert's book *Meurtre* recalls the aggression evoked

in Risset's work, expressing violence done to language through repeated images of dead

bodies—corresponding to bodies found in *Jeu*, where it is often unclear whether they are

alive or not. Depersonalization, defamiliarization, a pushing at the boundaries of genre

and a "dismantl[ing of] discourse, syntax, 'subjectivity' in language" (300) are shared

characteristics. Another similarity is highlighted when Stout asks "What sorts of

relationships link each line to the lines that precede and follow it?" (307), a question we

are forced to ask when reading *Jeu*. Could the hermetic, stuttering kind of writing many

contemporary French women poets adopt speak in part to their experience of feeling

silenced in a male-dominated literary world, triply so as women, poets, and linguistic

experimenters?

Despite this experimentation, Risset draws on and has been linked to the

trobairitz, women troubadours, notably by Gavronsky in *Six Women Poets* when he says

---

[13]   Anne-Marie Albiach, *État* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1971).

that "Risset is the truest descendant of those first women poets who were at the inception of the writing of poetry in France" (xlii). He suggests that her 'love poetry,' or her poetic work in which love is a theme, draws more on the tradition of the *trobairitz* than on that of 19th-century Romantic women poets, her most recent predecessors. Her poetry seems to advocate "a recuperation of the affective in avant-garde poetics" (xliii) precisely by drawing on the work of the *trobairitz*, "a tradition representing a dual insistence on emotions and textuality" (xliv). John C. Stout includes her in his article on contemporary women poets continuing a Renaissance tradition through a "masculine blazon," confirming her as an author firmly entrenched in the French poetic tradition and continuing it—albeit in an experimental fashion.[14] Modern as she is, she laments the distance between the French language today and its roots, compared to Italian: "même les troubadours sont trop loins" (Ceccatty). Her project enacts "three ways of poeticizing language […] emblematic of French poetry today": "the poetic transformations of historical references, the co-optation of readers' intertextual competence, and the playful exploitation of language's formal rules" (Thomas 10–11).

Risset's insistence on breaking tradition can be seen not only in her poetry but in her involvement with two avant-garde literary movements of the 1960s: not only *Tel Quel*, but Gruppo 63 (1963-69) as well. Gruppo 63 was a literary group, founded by Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, Renato Barilli, Nanni Balestrini (whose novel *Tristan* Risset translated into French (Seuil, 1972)), and others,[15] that sprang up in reaction to the spirit

---

14   While I cannot go into all of Risset's work in detail, other links to medieval lyric can be found in *L'Amour de loin*, the theme of which is the poetics of courtly love and the title of which comes from Jaufre Rudel's 13th-century song "La Chanson de l'amour de loin," and in *La traduction commence*, in which the last section uses the denomination schema used to document medieval manuscripts.

15   These include Antonio Porta; Alfredo Giulani; poets Edoardo Sanguineti and Elio Pagliarani; Luciano Anceschi, who published on aesthetics and phenomenology; Giorgio Manganelli, who was prolific in a variety of genres, including journalism (Italo Calvino once remarked that in Manganelli, "Italian

of conformity found in Italy at the time. Those involved went on to produce an enormous body of work among them that influenced the whole of Italian literature. Like *Tel Quel*, Gruppo 63 called for a revival of literary language as separate from consumerist values. The group held debates and readings and from 1966-69 published a monthly political journal called *Quindici*. Influences included Marxism, structuralism, phenomenology, and the sociology of mass communications, and its members produced experimental narrative, plays and poetry.

Speaking at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris in 2002 during a "semaine italienne," in a presentation entitled "Les avant-gardes littéraires en Italie et en France dans les années 1960," Risset said that now perhaps it would be possible to see these important avant-garde literary movements of the 1960s—*Tel Quel* and Gruppo 63—as they were ("tel quel"), since at the time there was such agitation around them. She called this time a "période extraordinaire d'effervescence intellectuelle" and noted some of the differences between the two groups, which she encountered within months of each other in 1965. The handful of editors of *Tel Quel* met in a small office in the building of their publisher Editions du Seuil and discussed with rigor and intensity the texts that came in— from Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, and the like. Gruppo 63, at their second reunion in 1965, consisted of about 50 people gathered in a large dusty hotel talking without ever defining the object of discussion. The two groups were certainly related—*Tel Quel* published Eco and Sanguineti, for example—but there were important differences. *Tel Quel* reproached Gruppo 63 for being Jungian and not Freudian, while Gruppo 63 reproached *Tel Quel* for being overly literary and not political enough; there existed "une crispation polémique

literature has a writer who resembles no one else […], an inventor who is irresistible and inexhaustible in his games with language and ideas." [https://www.mcphersonco.com/cs.php?f[0]=shh&pdID=143]). Barilli has published works on aesthetics, rhetoric, and contemporary art.

entre les deux" that Risset attributed in part to their differing cultural, linguistic and

national histories. She noted that they may seem rigid to those of us reading today, but

had influence in the 1960s and opened up new horizons, and as she describes Gruppo 63

clear similarities with *Tel Quel* can be discerned (although Gruppo 63 was modeled more

on the German Group 47, which met among the ruins of postwar Germany for literary

purposes). Gruppo 63 wanted to break with Italian poetry of the time, much like *Tel Quel*,

and to "faire dépérir le langage de la poésie moderne" ("Avant-gardes").

In 1971, the same year *Jeu* was published, Risset published a scholarly

monograph on the Renaissance poet Maurice Scève entitled *L'Anagramme du désir:*

Essai sur la Délie de Maurice Scève.[16] It is easy to see why she would feel an affinity for

Scève,

> pour qui poésie et pensée sont indissolublement liées dans la forme d'un
> questionnement perpétuel, et dans le tissu du texte; de telle sorte que cette écriture
> se trouve par là très curieusement proche de l'écriture contemporaine.
> (*Anagramme* 31)

Thinking and poetry are linked in the case of Scève, and there is the "sens empêtré et

retardé, dont la violence apparaît d'autant plus grande qu'il semble avoir du mal à

émerger des liens grammaticaux" (13). At many moments in this scholarly work we see

the concerns that are acted out in *Jeu*; Risset herself makes the connection to *Tel Quel*,

passing by Mallarmé and Lautréamont on the way. Specifically, she traces the emergence

of "une perspective différente, non individuelle et non esthétique, qui met […] au premier

plan la notion de travail dans la langue" (30). This perspective was "ouverte par

Lautréamont et Mallarmé [et] a été reprise et réaffirmée par les avant-gardes du XXe

---

[16]   *Anagramme* was first published in Rome and reprinted in France in 1995 as, according to Risset in the
"Note bibliographique," the book "avait suscité en France, me semble-t-il, un certain intérêt." The
French edition contains three essays on Scève that had been published in Italy but not elsewhere.

siècle, et, par le groupe *Tel Quel*" (173, n.3). Risset could even be speaking of *Tel Quel* when, referring to an "école lyonnaise," she points out that "lorsqu'un groupe se constitue, c'est en général précisément contre l'école qu'il se rassemble, contre une culture hégémonique devenue autoritaire et étouffante" (32). Thus she underlines the desire to depart from the rules and regulations governing traditionally accepted forms and genres, a desire that has marked much of the poetic field since the 1960s.

The last section of *Jeu* is entitled "Méthode," a topic that would come at the beginning of more traditional texts, outlining the approach to what is about to be discussed. By placing it at the end Risset suggests that there is no map for the acts of thinking and writing, of representing; rather, one attempts afterward to describe what has taken place. It is only in this passage that we begin to see the notion of stopping, furthering the idea that this is not simply more of the ongoing attempt to represent but is a taking stock of what has gone before: "la destruction complète (120); "le tracé se referme" (124); "le bloc, l'arrêt" (130) "quelquechose est saisi" (151). Yet the writing is not very different in "Méthode" from that of the other four sections: everything in the text belongs to the concern with praxis, with an intersection between practice and theory. That intersection is not stable, however, and so it is a matter of pointing to it through writing, of using the string of words to follow the moving point of encounter, the "certain point – mobile – à retrouver, à retraverser, où écrire et écrire sur écrire se touchent, se rejoignent." This is why the same ground must be gone over and over again, steps retraced, why there is so much talk of beginnings—not of endings, since the exact 'point,' if there is such a thing, always moves and must continually be pursued.

A method is a mode of inquiry, based on a theory, and thus implies a particular

way of thinking about something. This thinking, while meeting with writing at points,

reactivating it and bringing it out of itself, is also the thing that locates it, permits it to

identify itself.

> Le jeu en jeu dans l'écriture ne peut pas se fixer un espace ; il faut entrer et sortir, recommencer la sortie : c'est la théorie qui brise la sphère enfermante, provisoirement – la sphère attire le jeu : suspendu, ensemble d'échanges partout établis, il se fige s'il ne se pense pas à mesure dans son ensemble ; la théorie la traverse, c'est la théorie qui le réactive, qui le fait donc, entre la mort et la naissance, là où il est. ("Questions," 256)

We can dwell on what theory, or method, might bring to light about *Jeu*, but then

we must also ask what *Jeu* says about theory; after all, we are dealing with a point of

encounter and cannot only look from one viewpoint. *Jeu* tries in part to answer the

question that it explicitly poses "'comment passer de l'autre côté?'" (72). Repetitions of

phrases such as "l'un à côté de l'autre," "et le centre à côté," "l'absence de centre"

suggest entities together in a vague, decentralized space. The center is no longer the

essential, organizing principle, and this spatial metaphor is shorthand for a mode of

thinking that has questioned not only hierarchical relations but symmetrical ones as well.

In this period, there has been no predominant belief in a center, no unity, no truth; no

beginning, no end. In a word, there is no transcendent signifier to be found, and it is in

fact this lack of foundation that puts play into play. Previously,

> The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure—one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure—but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure. By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself. (Derrida 278)

Structure has always been reduced to having a center, usually thought of as a fixed origin

or as presence itself, the point of which is to limit play. The center allows for some degree

of play but then closes it off. The center, being the unique part of the structure, the nucleus, is what is unstructural about the structure and so is inside and outside of it at the same time—"not a fixed locus but a function" (Derrida 280). The center as the motor of all movement, the pivot, is alluded to continually in *Jeu* but in paradoxical ways that suggest the impossibility of its existence, or at least of its stability. If a structure without a center represents the unthinkable, we must note that that is an inherent part of the poetic project: poetry proposes an entry into thinking that is always shadowed by what can only potentially be thought, what can only be indicated.

If there is no central point, only a mobile point of encounter, there still appear to be two sides, two poles. These can be practice and theory, experience and representation, self and other, writing and reading. Which side is Risset on, are we on, and where are we trying to go? Arguably in multiple directions. From experience to representation, certainly, but then what experience do we have of representation? How do we live what is presented to us in poetry, in what ways do we re-present it to ourselves? Similar questions can be posed in relation to *écriture*: there is always a theory of practice, but how does the practice of theory play out? How is writing transformed by our thinking about it? How is our thinking about writing integrated into the writing?

With all of this coming and going, recrossing and retracing our steps, another factor in the frame of poetic reference is revealed: not only is reference to the real uncertain, but internal reference within the poem is unclear as well. Reference is questionable when it is not possible to determine what pronouns refer to or which subject adjectives are accorded to, a common occurrence in *Jeu*.

"Méthode" begins with an epigraph from Lao-Tzu, the Buddhist philosopher:

"Animer le jeu droit au centre et hors-jeu." The *jeu* in this case takes place everywhere, in the center and outside of itself, "hors-jeu." It is everything, and the method is to maintain its momentum. "Le jeu était donc déjà commencé (avant qu'on se voie, avant qu'on entende ou qu'on voie le nom?)" (131). The game is what goes on at every moment without one being aware: the game is life.

<div style="text-align:center">*****</div>

Risset's poetry can be seen as following in a long line of antilyric assaults on conventional French verse, and so it arrives with political import, even if it is not explicitly *engagé*. In its difficulty, it resists commodification, is not made for mass consumption, and would be called elitist by some for that reason. It does not conform to any kind of 'bourgeois' lyricism, but rather challenges fixed notions of how meaning is generated, and what meanings are worth generating or worth attempting to comprehend. An American poet by the name of Leslie Scalapino,[17] whose writing has much in common with Risset's, has spoken of freedom not as a patriotic notion but as the apprehension of the reality of the instant and of her attempts to create a "free nation in the terrain of the writing." Writing opens a space where community does not depend on shared identity in the usual sense, where a kind of "entre-deux" can exist—between movements, schools, sets of rules:

> Freedom, if we define it absolutely as freedom from being involved in a game, merely is the dialectical moment when one game is being discarded, and the rules of the new game, which will necessarily replace it, are not yet experienced as rules, but as the waning of the former rules. (Beaujour 67)

Where does the question of aesthetics fit in? What do we do with poetry that is

---

[17]   Scalapino's imprint O Books has published Danielle Collobert in translation (*ItThen*. Trans. Norma Cole. Oakland, CA.: O Books, 1989)

not typically lyric, that does not fit accepted standards of beauty and expected rewards of

pleasure? Part of what it does is in fact lead us to question standards of beauty and

aesthetic pleasure as much as it leads us to question anything else: not just notions of

identity, poetic language, truth and knowledge and the like, but of the very purpose of

poetry. In today's intellectual climate, where the academy is operated like a business and

society is increasingly technological, the demands on literature to justify itself and on

literary value to systematize its criteria are felt with greater insistence. We are looking at

a poem written over 30 years ago in a different time and place, where literature was being

revalued for itself. Today, few people would have the patience to read *Jeu*, and few

people would find it either pleasurable, useful, or morally uplifting, criteria that constitute

the demands of many readers for value earned from engaging with art. Yet it can still

work for us precisely in its resistance to this new (but similar) set of rules, in its demand

for openness to ambiguity and uncertainty.

     In the title of *Jeu* we already have a refusal of any absolute meaning, an example

of *différance* in a play of words that can be seen but not heard, so that writing is

valorized.[18] *Jeu* can be read as "je" or "I," leading us to read the piece as an account of

subjective experience or as "play," bringing to mind the infinite play of meaning, a

process of signification that indicates a meaning that it will not actually reach. We often

talk about poetry, or the world of the poem or poetic reference, in similarly dual terms: as

---

[18] C. S. Peirce demonstrated the process of deferral of meaning in his theory of the interpretant. Derrida's term conflates "to differ" and "to defer" and is something that happens in writing (or reading), that is seen but not heard. That the spelling of *différance* can be seen but not heard as distinct from *différence* uncovers the myth that writing is subordinate to speech. Meaning within a system of reference is based in part on differences between signs. Derrida extends this idea of Saussure's to say that, if meaning comes from the relations within a network, then there is no true, original meaning, nor is there an end to meaning: signs can relate to other signs in an infinite progression. Thus meaning is continually deferred, as is presence itself: a sign never "is," never means, but in relation to something else. Language is in endless play.

referring to the empirical world but also to an interior world, a consciousness. Both of these notions contained in the word "jeu" come together in reading the poem.

Je(u)/I

The project of *Tel Quel* cast doubt on the lyrical 'I' and it must be noted that the personal pronoun "je" does not appear anywhere in *Jeu*. This depersonalization or disavowal of subjectivity gives the appearance of language running loose on its own with no author, or at least no defined speaking subject, at the reins. However, this is not possible, and we know that a thinking subject directs this language to a certain extent, even if only glimpsed, in Risset's words, through the work's "mailles allusives." We then have to ask about the relation between being and subjectivity.

One interesting aspect of the word "I" / "Je" is its indexicality: when the poet writes it she is referring to herself but when I read it *I* say "I." We come to a kind of boundary there, a limit between the I-writer and I-reader, across or through which understanding takes place—but how and to what extent? The poet relates her experience and through my reading and my writing it becomes my experience; that is to say, I have an experience of the experience she projects, I have an experience mediated by the textual expression of her experience.

Risset's poetic writing is a kind of thinking, a thinking made visible only by writing, which necessarily distances the writer from her own thinking and her own experience, resists or obscures some of it, and also distances the reader. Writing is the impossible but necessary instrument of communication of experience but "experience always exceeds discourse" (Fisher). Words are slippery and meaning is continually

deferred, but language is not solely to blame for the misunderstandings and ellipses that plague communication. The fragmentation of the writing signals the fragmented nature of thinking as well as the inevitable loss that occurs when translating experience into words and thinking into writing. Experience and language thus become necessarily conflated: the writing confounds the lived moment and the recounted one, the event and the telling of it.

Poetry, for Heidegger, is thinking without philosophy. But what his philosophy says about thinking is that thinking is at the basis of philosophy, which is putting what we implicitly know or think and experience into words (hence phenomenology: *phainomenon* + logos). He says that to think is not so much to ask questions, but to listen to what questions assume, though this in itself is fundamentally a questioning. But as we are seeking the nature of being (the goal of philosophy for Heidegger), the questioning is of the presuppositions of our questions, so that we might focus ourselves on what lies before us and meet things as they are, or as close to that as we are able.

He writes about thinking, "we come to know what thinking means when we ourselves try to think" (*What* 1). Thus we cannot define what thinking is for someone else, we can only think our own thinking and think about what it means for us. It is an experiential process of clarification. We try to hold simultaneously the thinking of this thinking subject in the poem, the thinking I, and then our own thinking as we encounter the other, our own interpretations that may or may not coincide with meanings generated by the text.

Risset links 'I' and 'play' when she writes "L'écriture a lieu quand l'ensemble (du je) devient jeu" ("Questions" 255). And further explains *jeu* and links it to thinking when

she writes that "ce qui est en jeu, ce ne sont pas les objets, c'est la pensée même" (255). For writing to take place *je* becomes *jeu*: subjectivity is dispersed in an attempt to balance creation and analysis, experience and thought. Since anything the subject encounters has already been thought of or thought about in some way, it is that thinking that is in movement, going out to meet the object and returning upon itself in a directed but unconfined mode of exploration.

Jeu/Play

The term "play" suggests a certain freedom of movement and ambiguity or absence of goal, as well as ludic, 'playful' activity.[19] The practice of articulating *jeu*, as "game" or "play," with literature, was prevalent at the time Risset was writing her piece by that name.[20] In his article "The Game of Poetics," Michel Beaujour posits that "poetry is a *game*, or like a game" and furthermore that "[g]ame or play are not to be taken as opposed to the serious pursuits of life" (58). "The poet plays against two opponents, which are, ultimately, the two faces of the same coin: language and the subconscious" (60). "[H]e must play *with*, and also *against*, the rules of his language (English, French, etc), in order to subordinate them to the rules of poetry" (60-61).Which "rules of poetry" Beaujour refers to is problematic, but *Jeu* does play with, and against, the rules of ordinary language rather than follow or establish any regulatory poetic system involving

---

[19] **4 a** (1)**:** an act, way, or manner of proceeding […] (2) **:** brisk, fitful, or light movement <the gem presented a dazzling *play* of colors> (3) **:** free or unimpeded motion (as of a part of a machine); *also* **:** the length or measure of such motion (4) **:** scope or opportunity for action. (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/play)

[20] Play has been an important philosophical concept since Plato. To focus on France in the 1960s, there was, for example, Derrida's essay "La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines" in his book *L'écriture et la différence* that came out as part of Seuil's "Tel Quel" collection in 1967. Roger Caillois's book *Les jeux et les hommes* was republished in 1967 (1958). *Yale French Studies* issued a special issue in 1969 called "Game, Play, Literature." Also in 1969, Jacques Henriot published *Le jeu* as part of PUF's collection "Initiation philosophique." Emile Benveniste had published "Le jeu comme structure" just after WWII, in 1947 (*Deucalion* 2: 161-67).

standardization of line length, meter, rhyme, or figurative language.

The play in *Jeu* is the attempt to represent, a playing at representation. Just as we are always on the way to language (to quote Heidegger's title), so are we always on the way to a one-to-one representation of lived experience: experience as not only sensory but affective, cognitive, and interpretive perceptions as well, that cannot be wholly contained in language. Gadamer writes,

> Only because play is always presentation is human play able to make representation itself the task of a game. ... All presentation is potentially a representation for someone. That this possibility is intended is the characteristic feature of art as play. (108)

Play is always presentation, hence representation itself becomes a kind of game or play, and all presentation or re-presentation is presented <u>to</u> someone.

This leads us too to "play" as in theatrical production, a presentation of a work that is constructed, staged, but is also actually happening. Because it is a performance, it is a representation <u>and</u> an experience that performers and spectators have. There is a structure to theater, a common frame within which performers relate; in some instances, performers also interact with the audience, in an attempt to rupture the divide between creator (an entity that would include author, director, actor, and so on) and interpreter. Theater was the literary form probably most affected by the spirit of the times and the events of May 1968: theater companies were becoming less hierarchical, more collective enterprises, and theater was becoming a tool for increasing political awareness, fed by the popular and Surrealist slogan "tout le monde est artiste!" (Coward 376). Perhaps most importantly, a theatrical production is a living text, a form of communication between creator and interlocutor that is mediated by experience in real time.

Signification is also at play, in play. For Ricoeur, syntactic function positions

words in continual movement toward the real, which prevents stagnation of a finite

system of signs. So the writer, like the reader, moves toward the other, toward the

external world, within the borders of a world of her own making, within view of her own

horizon. Reader's and writer's paths may converge or at least move in the same direction,

within view of their respective horizons. In this way the reader follows the path of

writing, thinks along the same passage to representation, witnesses the process of

thought: there is no mythification of the act of production. This is an important tenet of

Tel Quel, that there be no mythification and no deification of the creator.

Time and Space

In reading this poem other horizons are brought to our attention, laid bare for us.

There is a wealth of deictics in *Jeu*, that is, the many relational markers of time and

space: before, after, behind, next to, in back, to the left, "la seule évidence étant la

juxtaposition des mouvements-" (11): "il suffit de ne pas oublier de regarder à la fois

devant et sur le côté" (22); "—aussitôt loin derrière debout devant la fenêtre il regarde

dehors doucement" (23); "*l'un à côté de l'autre / A côté : le centre*" (54). The gaze is

important in the first two of these citations, reminding us to always look from every

angle. We are equally reminded that the act of looking can change what we see, that our

conceptions of things do not always dovetail with the identities of things—" (pays rond,

entouré par la mer – sans qu'apparaisse du tout la notion d'île)" (30)—no matter what we

may wish or believe—"On serait tenté d'y voir un cercle mais ce n'en est pas un" (29)—

and that the act of naming things does not fully separate them from us—"de l'intérieur

(mais il n'y a plus d'intérieur) – de la forêt (mais on est la forêt en même temps)" (25).[21]

Through this delineation of situations in space, there is an ongoing attempt to relocate what gets lost in writing: (the illusion of) presence. The structure of the work, the bones of the process, are shown to us. But in a work of art the horizons are indeterminate: it is a world that is unfamiliar, an other world, a new space opened by the text. There is a great deal of concrete detail in *Jeu*, but the overall impression is one of abstraction.

I stated that the poem is an attempt to represent a passage: a passage to representation. As soon as we talk about moving along a path to something we are inevitably talking about not just space but time. Risset's consciousness of time is a notable element of this work. The flow of the work is made up of many present moments, fixed and flowing; her vision of time is a series of instants, of moments of consciousness.[22] The flow of consciousness allows for a unity of identity in one's conscious life, but it also allows for a multiplicity of experience: we can feel, perceive, remember all at the same time or in succession, and Risset presents this kind of time-consciousness—which is, for Heidegger, inauthentic temporality because it is organized around the now, when *Dasein* is oriented toward ends, goals, toward the future. But if this is a following along on a path to representation, then it is, finally, pointed toward a future, since without ends we could not talk about beginnings, which are a theme here and a theme of Risset's work.

In speaking of what she sees as traits common to her work she spoke of "the weight of language in its entirety to be pushed aside in order to begin" (*Six* 103). Several

---

[21]   Michel Serres, in *Éclaircissements*, suggests a way out of the metaphysical obsession with essences and processes (represented by substantives and verbs) by focusing on prepositions as signs of relation and interaction.

[22]   Risset published a volume of poetry in 2000 entitled *Les Instants*.

passages in *Jeu* end with *recommencer*, *on recommence*—which amounts to a repetition.[23] This could be the resumption of activity after a failure, implying the need to summon one's strength to begin again. It can also be a continuation, signaling the impossibility of really beginning absolutely, of a pure beginning. It is as if she is trying to clear a space for herself within language, since language is always about itself, always speaking of itself, always contaminating (and contaminated by) what it is engaged with. While allowing language to do what it does, while working it and allowing it to work or play, it is as if she somehow wants to sneak up on language, surprise it when it is alone by itself, perhaps startle it into doing something new or into opening a space for a purer form of her experience. She is necessarily freeing up language at the same time. Risset shows or enacts her very process, and it is in this struggle with language that the poem comes into its being.

Sections and Epigraphs

An in-depth reading of the poem must include analysis of each section, including its title and epigraph, paratexts that are integral to the text's generation of meanings. The titles of each of the 5 sections, or intertitles, are not available to the larger public, but only to someone already involved in the text to some degree, or who is at least perusing the contents. (Genette 296) These divisions signal to the reader that this is not a wholly unified text. A book of poetry could contain many poems, each with its own title; in this case we have one poem, but one that has been divided into parts. We are encouraged to view these parts as distinct stations of the text, supported by the fact that three of them

---

[23] Of course any system of meaning relies on repetition; signs must be used in the same way repeatedly in order to serve a notional function and be accepted as units of meaning. *Jeu* and similar works turn repetition on its head by directing it toward increased **loss** of meaning.

were published separately before being published as parts of *Jeu*. The intertitles are neither entirely thematic nor rhematic, to cite Genette's classifications; they do not provide clear clues as to what the section contains, nor do they simply mark a division. They help to construct a structure within which elements in relation and at play can be witnessed. The role of the unstable center in this play adds to the dissipation of any feasible concept of unity.

In using any key at hand to understand the *parcours* of this difficult text, we can examine the epigraphs that appear at the head of each section, taken from Spinoza, Montaigne, Wittgenstein, and Lao-Tzu. Just by listing them we see the breadth of time and space covered by these interventions: Italian, French, German, Chinese; 17th century, 16th century, the modern age, the pre-Christian era. According to Genette, epigraphs can function as a commentary on the title or as a commentary on the text; the author of the epigraph can serve as a commentary on the text; or the epigraph can serve as a dedication to that author (*Seuils* 159-61). The "effet-épigraphe" for Genette relies on the very presence or absence of an epigraph and the epigraph as used by young writers of the 1960s was a "signal…de culture, un mot de passe d'intellectualité," that indicated who a writer perceived as her peers (163). The writers mentioned form an illustrious group: what, in particular, might Risset have found compelling about them?

Spinoza valorized cognition—thinking, generating ideas—over sensory information as the way to understand objects in the external world and he refuted any idea of causal interaction between mind and body by positing the two as different expressions of an individual person. Wittgenstein's theories of "language-games" could have been of interest to Risset; his relation to phenomenology is of some interest to us.

He can be read in conjunction with Risset's essay "Questions sur les règles du jeu" in that he believed that language could not be separated from thought. Montaigne is relevant in part because of his reliance on human experience and history to strengthen his arguments. His epigraph is taken from one of his most famous essays, from book 2, chapter XII, "Apologie de Raimond Sebond," in which he discusses the insufficiency of human reason for understanding the world. Montaigne even described a sort of hermeneutic circle when he wrote in this essay: "To judge the appearances that we receive of objects, we would need a judicatory instrument; to verify this instrument, we need a demonstration; to verify the demonstration, an instrument: there we are in a circle." What kind of proof is needed to validate our perceptions of the world? How can we know what is real and what is merely appearance? Do we assume that appearances are not real? Must we even draw a distinction between essence and appearance? How do we know our experience of the world coincides with that of others? Again this goes back to Ricoeur, who said that we cannot know our own mind directly, but only in its interactions—usually with signs, with cultural myths and texts. Lao-Tzu was a founder of Taoism who warned of the dangers of desiring things and urged contemplation of the natural world. He advocated "'nonstriving' or 'non-[purposeful] action,' by which one returns to a primitive state closer to the Tao, a stage of creative possibility symbolized by the child."[24] The Tao, or the Way, is something that is incomprehensible and inexpressible in language.

The first section of *Jeu*, "Géographie (Parcours)," is indeed a trip through the terrain to be covered, a brief one—an overview that, by its title, spatializes the world of the poem. Then follows "Récit," a narrative of sorts, but one that does not deliver what

---

[24] "Lao Tzu." *The Columbia Encyclopedia,* 6th ed. New York: Columbia UP, 2001–04. www.bartleby.com/65/. 27 May 2005.

might be expected from a narrative; it is more a revelation of the structure of the primary experience that becomes narrative, patterns of repetition and renewal more than development of plot or character. "Après-Récit" is not so different, though perhaps by the title it signals that there is something after narrative, life that exceeds narrative, or that the text itself continues after the story is told. Holding both readings at once refers back to the complex interweaving of experience and language and their continual attempts to contain each other. The section "Jeu" has the same name as the entire book, a kind of repetition that recalls a Russian nesting doll. As I stated earlier, "Méthode," the last section is a momentary stopping point and serves as a sort of comment on what has gone before.

The epigraph that begins the first, shortest section, "Géographie (Parcours)," comes from Spinoza and reads "Ce n'est pas sans raison toutefois que j'ai écrit ces mots : si seulement je pouvais réfléchir sérieusement." We cannot tell from this quote, without knowing what surrounds it (and no reference is given), if "ces mots" referred to are the ones in the second clause or some other ones. In any case, the first clause serves as a defensive move that counteracts possible accusations of nonsense or of exaggeration, considering Spinoza's reputation as a thinker. The second clause is taken up again in the body of Risset's text (suggesting that it could be what 'ces mots' refers to): "pour 'réfléchir sérieusement', passer par le corps des fictions – fictions réduites à des unités minimales." The question of narrative thus reappears, broken down into small units, and this is somehow a way of thinking seriously—by passing through narrative and seeing it in small, discrete parts, perhaps the moments of experience that have gone into making it. Each object must be considered in itself as well as in its relation to the (fictional) whole.

As we pass through 'le corps des fictions,' "le trajet consiste à échapper à l'origine." Beginning, center, foundation not only escape, but we must try to escape as well. The *parcours* we will effect is a journey away from the transcendental signified, into a space where both play and thinking come into play. "L'événement devient forme, redevient événement." A bit further on we read

> *Tous les points sont sensibles – les fragments liés (par efface-*
> *ment, remplacement, développement) (développement cassé, recassé)*
> *-- pas de discours admis – une méthode ?* (7)

We know that we will see many disparate parts brought together in a series of repetitions and replacements and that these elements will be at play and not explicitly theorized, this play being perhaps a kind of method or theorizing in itself.

"Récit" cannot be thought through without some consideration of the title. For Ricoeur, narrative is fundamental to human experience in that it shapes our perception of time and ultimately allows us to better understand ourselves. Narrative is a mediating passage between the before of a text—l'avant-récit ("prefiguration")—and after—l'après-récit ("refiguration"): the passage is a "configuration." The *après-récit*, taking place as it does after the fact, takes into account the reader's interpretation. In this way, *Jeu* accounts for the reader as well as writer and text, establishing a place for an understanding of the reader's role in producing the narrative or the meaning of the text. By Ricoeur's standards this is not actually a narrative at all, even by his first requirement, which is that a narrative should have a beginning, middle, and end; not to mention that narrative can be summarized. However we can draw on the notion of an *avant-récit* to illuminate the entire piece, as a text that is still potential and has not taken full narrative shape, but rather is a threshold to something larger. We can also draw on Pleynet's statement "La

poésie doit avoir pour but le récit depuis toujours différé de son activité (de sa vérité) pratique. […] tout texte est un prétexte, n'est jamais qu'un pré-texte" (113-14). Since the *récit* being told is of the very practice of the writing, it is never completed; "Le récit dit que celui qui récite s'installe dans la mort" (Pleynet 119). This statement underscores the difference between recounting something that happened and parroting something one has learned by heart, which freezes the event and bears it out of time—'kills' it.

This section begins with the Montaigne epigraph: "le trajet d'une rivière fait crime." In "Apologie de Raimond Sebond," the epigraph's source, Montaigne, while arguing for the moral superiority of animals over humans, laments the arbitrary nature of justice and truth, which change according to the laws of a country. Risset's section ends on a description of a sort of planet rotating: "l'ensemble tourne palpite s'efface / repasse s'efface." Movement between light and dark, visibility and non-visibility, is another pivot or center, indeed of the writing itself—images around which others orbit. Images of the river crossing (*comment passer de l'autre côté?*) and the turning planet signal the secret figure of the *récit*, the natural change—the movement and variability that are inevitable in nature, or external reality—that pulses through it, and the variety in human perception of those aspects of nature. The river runs, constantly renewing itself, and it also serves as a boundary in the minds of people living on either side of it, people who change their laws and customs arbitrarily depending solely on which side they live on—another side of change. The planet rotates, moving ceaselessly, but its appearance does not change—it only looks to an observer like change as the sphere moves through darkness and light, recalling to mind the vision of "le globe oculaire tournant et remuant dans son orbite" "Géographie (Parcours)" of the viewer herself.

"Récit" is the densest and most difficult section of the poem. It is presented like prose, although lacking in punctuation. While we can point out certain moments or themes, there remains something that always eludes our grasp. This is generally true of poetic production, which for some is defined by its failure to be seized in paraphrase, but is highlighted in this case by the apparent attempt to tell some sort of a story, a *récit*. We encounter much that is familiar and yet we cannot *talk about* what we have read except in the most general way; we can only experience it. A long parenthetical comment on the work itself (the work being self-referential by design) illustrates some of the issues at hand:

> (On nous a peut-être déjà raconté cette histoire – les articulations nous en sont familières – le centre n'est pas encore très clair, mais ceux qui la racontaient disaient qu'eux-mêmes s'y embrouillaient, que dans ce cas précis ils n'étaient pas sûrs qu'il y eût vraiment un centre, mais plutôt plusieurs centres, des fragments de récit se recoupant entre eux à l'endroit justement des articulations ce qui pourrait nous faire penser qu'il ne s'agit pas exactement de la même histoire mais d'une autre légèrement différente qui aurait en commun avec la première les articulations dont nous parlions – le reste variant (puisque les voyageurs qui se présentaient le soir à l'entrée de la maison parlaient à peu près la même langue étaient habillés de façon identique – à cause de la pénombre on distinguait mal leurs traits personne n'a jamais envisagé semble-t-il qu'il puisse s'agir après tout de la même personne à différents moments de ses voyages – il faudrait vérifier, calcul aléatoire étant donné le petit nombre d'éléments jusqu'à présent en notre possession
> -- puisqu'on ne connaît pas les buts de ces voyages – les fragments seuls, la même façon de disparaître et de se lier au reste (à la nuit au texte) la charpente invisible mais la même, un conteur ou plusieurs, la question reste entière mais on commence à la voir apparaître du moins se formuler un peu on peut attendre après tout laisser qu'elle se raconte) (18)

The story is familiar to us, we may have heard it before, and we are looking for the center, the core of it. Or because the center "n'est pas encore très clair," perhaps we are seeking its vague silhouette, some clue to its importance. Whatever we can figure out is bound to be somewhat random, as we have only a small number of elements of the story

in our possession. Among the 'characters' in this particular passage are those who have told us or are telling us the story, and according to them there is no center or else there are several, one for each part of the story. The other characters are the travelers—or perhaps one single traveler at different moments in his travels—and the trip is the story itself. Is the traveler the writer, the reader, both? Perhaps different poets or thinkers, or different faces of the 'eternal poet' who is found in every culture. Is there a destination? We don't know what the objectives of this voyage, or these voyages, are, we can only let the story unfold, "laisser qu'elle se raconte." The notion of the story that might be the same as or slightly different from another one, and of the individual who might be several or might be one person at different stages, these recall again the hermeneutic process of incremental changes stemming from encounters with others or with other texts. The story changes with the telling, or with the teller; the traveler changes with each new leg of the voyage.

One of the parentheses remains open; we have no way of knowing if it is the first or the second. There are several non-hierarchized narrative threads. One purpose of this is to show that a digression, an aside, is ever only a continuation of the text, cannot be separated neatly and cleanly from the rest of the text. Perhaps the entire text is digression. Dashes create the most separation to be seen here. This is also because the teller of the story is part of the story: "ceux qui la racontaient disaient qu'eux-mêmes s'y embrouillaient"; whether they encountered a center of the story or the core of the event as it happened to them is unclear and irrelevant. The author/traveler or reader can only partially and temporarily grasp the story that is life itself, the flow of life and time.

"Après-récit" begins with the Wittgenstein epigraph "Nous leur apprenons alors

l'expression: 'J'ai rêvé', qui introduit le récit."[25] Why talk of introducing the *récit* at the

start of the *après-récit*? Perhaps the preceding was a dream of which we only now

become aware. And perhaps this in turn refers to *Tel Quel*'s transfer of psychological

limit-experiences (such as dreams) into the philosophical realm where experience takes

place within the space of language (Marx-Scouras 79). It is clear that we also need to

bring in Wittgenstein's notion of private language, which is

> not a language which is unshared as a matter of fact, but one which is unsharable
> and unteachable in principle, because its words refer to what can only be known
> to the speaker, namely his immediate private experiences. (*Wittgenstein* 309)

Rules of use determine the meaning of words, which can mean nothing unless there is

some agreement as to how they are to be used. There follows an argument regarding

private definitions, which by definition are not subject to collective rules and are thus

meaningless to others (313). Risset steps out of the private language argument by not

naming experiences but simply relating them, or describing them, which, again according

to Wittgenstein, is all we can do.

> If a private ostensive definition cannot provide a standard of correctness, its
> putative sample, the inner object, drops out of the picture as an 'idle wheel'… [it]
> is not that the private object is unknowable, but that it is semantically irrelevant.
> (313)

In *Jeu* the private object or objects are shown to us although still not quite known, or not

understood. Private experience has no place as a basis for language, but there must be a

place made in language for its expression.

This section, this refiguration, concerns isolation and separation, fear of symmetry

and repetition, new ways of seeing individual elements that refigure existence while

---

[25]   This quote comes from a passage in *Philosophical Investigations* wherein Wittgenstein discusses
teaching children that this is the phrase they should use to introduce the fantastic narratives they recount
upon waking (II.vii). Dreams fall into the category of unshareable private experience.

renewing ties to where one already is—to forget what one already knew, one's prior

associations, in order to see it again with new eyes ("pour la première fois perceptibles

sans leurs familles" (35)). It can be possible to see things in their own thingness, while

they appear differently in relation to other things, in experience or in writing ("voir étant

désormais : situer par rapport/à l'ensemble : pas d'isolés" 55). The distance from

experience that opens in/by writing:

> il s'agit d'écrire
>
> tout s'éloigne (39)

A distance not just of space but time that is paradoxical—the present is always over and

yet what is always there, always where the movement is taking place.

> et désormais le maintenant exclu on est passé au-delà de
> l'autre côté de quoi
> tout a commencé par se réduire au présent seul honnête
> seul vu
> et puis tout éloigné tout élargi devenu vague, un autre
> vague puisque c'est le lieu toujours prêt de la circulation   (44)

The form of the poem enacts its words: all is revision, recapitulation, glossing of what

has gone before. This can look like reworking the same ground but in fact things are

always changed, we are always on new ground:

> traverser passer emporter des morceaux qui se déchirent
> repasser traverser
> (sans que traverser retraverse) mais repasser   (46)

We think again of "tourne palpite s'efface / repasse s'efface" and see the same structure

of eternal return. A male personage ("il") is traversing this landscape, observing, but as if

watching a screen or caught in a dream, with no control over events: "quand il ne peut

pas vérifier il attend"; "c'est brusquement un autre site naturel" (52-3). All of this—

circulation, time and space revisited, being swept up—brings to mind, in the same vein,

the hermeneutic circle, of which there is a working description in this section of *Jeu*:

> dans ces mouvements on se retrouve toujours au même
> point « les deux phases sont identiques » mais ce n'est pas
> exactement le même à cause des rencontres (59)

Here we see why revisiting the same sites is not just that: we are changed by our encounters with others, with experience, so that even being in the same place seeing the same things is not the same. We are always progressing but not in a simple circle that wears out the same path; more like a spiral that traces similar patterns but through different space, angling in new directions. Whether they are one's own or in conjunction with others, "les interprétations s'accumulent, utilisant les interstices" (58), multiple readings of experience abound, taking up whatever space is available, between the lines. There is often talk in these pages—as elsewhere in the poem—of a pivot, "le point où se précipitent et réduisent à un point les rencontres" (42); in this case it is "les rencontres" that are the subject, that come together and form the center, momentarily.

The section entitled "Jeu," taking the title of the entire poem for itself, treats, even more than the other parts, of the multiplicity of viewpoints and choices at each moment, at every point of our continuing writing voyage through time and space. Objects can be described but even the use of a common word can be called into question, due to the proliferation of interpretations.

Amidst this multiplicity there are still moments of isolation:

> Retrait immobilité silence
> « simplement, naturellement et sans efforts
> sans qu'il y ait de rapport entre eux »   (93)

"Entre eux" could refer to relations between semantic or syntactic units (retrait, immobilité, silence) or to two or more people and their mutual understanding. In any

case, the "geste connu" of "tissage," "les fils repris," always begins again after stillness.

The physical landscape moves and breathes again, regathers itself into a whole, as a

whole – "l'ensemble accueilli dans un autre ensemble" (102). Individual words can affect

this scenario – "le mot qui retombe en pluie sur ce bloc calme" has become magnified, is

able to surround and envelop the "bloc calme." Or, alternately, the word dissolves—into

raindrops—in the face of it. Pulling phrases from the whole poem cannot break down or

capture the whole, but can indicate certain moments that it passes through, "la voix

couverte par la rumeur d'ensemble" (104).

With regards to Risset's use of poetic language to represent thinking or to

coincide with the thinking of her lifetime, or to represent the thinking of her time, writing

is "an integral part of the process of knowledge" (Marx-Scouras 66) and so is wrapped up

with thinking. Something is not known, fixed in knowledge, and then written about;

rather the writing is part of the thinking and part of the knowing as confirmation and

transformation. Does something have to be known to be expressed, or be put into

language to be known? The point of poetry is that gap—poetry points out that there is an

unknown, it opens a space for rumination on what cannot be said, as we see in both

Heidegger and Nancy.

> Si nous comprenons, si nous accédons d'une manière ou d'une autre à une orée de
> sens, c'est poétiquement. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'aucune sorte de poésie
> constitue un moyen ou un milieu d'accès. Cela veut dire – et c'est presque le
> contraire – que seul cet accès définit la poésie, et qu'elle n'a lieu que lorsqu'il a
> lieu. (Nancy 9)

Heidegger says that in poetic discourse the communication of one's own

possibilities can become an end in itself and that this can amount to what he terms a

"disclosing of existence." This poem projects a world where writing, representation,

constructing and understanding meaning are taking place, and has the creative power to redescribe the world we live in and the ways in which we go about understanding ourselves.

There is more to say about the gap mentioned above:

Apparaît ainsi, par la pratique poétique même, l'idée de quelque chose – ce n'est pas une chose – qui ne peut être désigné. Or ce contre quoi vient ainsi buter le langage n'est rien d'autre que le langage lui-même, puisque la relation de représentation du je au monde est ouverte par lui. (Champeau 27)

In this space of the inexpressible, of potential meaning, language re-encounters itself, enclosing us in our relations to ourselves and to the world.

Risset said in an interview:

And as of that instant, the possibility arises, liberating these fragments of sentences from their natural contexts, so to speak, that they might re-form themselves into a passage, that they might link themselves to other cells which are foreign to them. This linkage between different cells might be considered a sort of contamination, as if there existed different people, different beings in language who all of a sudden found each other and communicated. (Gavronsky, *Toward* 143)

"Contamination" is an interesting term. I spoke earlier of language contaminating and/or being contaminated by the objects with which it engages. This notion is found in Risset's words, where "different cells" of language suddenly become "different people, different beings in language." We have gone from language in its communication with an external reality to communication within language, among different parts of language, as a sort of contamination. How does this work? We already know that language cannot have any 'pure' relationship with thought or with objects; now we see that units of language exist in a similar relation.

Pleynet cites the filmmaker Eisenstein's definition of montage, a statement that could just as easily be said of *Jeu*:

> La juxtaposition de deux fragments de film ressemble plus à leur produit qu'à leur somme. Elle ressemble aux produits et non à la somme en ce que le résultat de la juxtaposition diffère toujours qualitativement de chacune des composantes mises à part. (108)

This is simply another way of looking at the polyvalence of new combinations words enter into in Risset's text, the lyrical narrative episodes that develop and inter-engage. The lack of normal syntax or punctuation allows words and phrases to connect more directly with those in other parts of a page or elsewhere in the text; in fact, the reader tends to concentrate on these connections and repetitions as a way into the activity of the text, as children jumping rope have to learn the rhythm to enter into the game.

When Pleynet says of Denis Roche that it is

> à travers l'activité didactique du jeu formel de la convention poétique et de sa transgression, sur le moteur de l'activité de production lecture / écriture que le travail de Denis Roche tend, en fait, à mettre l'accent. (109)

we can say something similar of Risset. *Jeu* is 'about' the activities of experiencing, writing and reading and the kinds of meanings they produce together.

Later Work

Later works of Risset are not always simpler than *Jeu*, though they are sometimes more lyric. Her other texts treat similar issues of language and becoming through the lens of time. There are moments of suspension in time in Risset's poem "Sept passages," a series of 7 poems, or prose texts as Risset calls them, in *Sept passages de la vie d'une femme*. In "Colline de l'annonciade," the sixth of these 7 texts, a car descends in a spiral while the astonishment of the here and now "dissout toutes les formes fermées" but then "corps bouclé assis dans son nom sur les coussins de la voiture peu à peu l'étonnement quitte le paysage le bras sur la portière se remplit de ses propres nerfs une légère brûlure

vient sur la peau du métal chauffé un doute flotte encore bientôt réabsorbé mais dans la ville de temps en temps il resurgit" (14). From existential doubt and a sense of time collapsing the body at the end of this passage has returned to itself, and returned to the safety of the link between language and world, safe because recognizable; no longer stripped of its name.

This book is made up of what Risset calls "'passage' experiences, that is, passages 'out of…,' exits—the experience of the instant." The first poem in the series of poems "Sept passages" is called "Screen-Memory." The function of a screen-memory is to cover over a more significant memory with an apparently insignificant event, a sort of translation of a deeper memory that covers and makes accessible.[26] It is a screen for the other memory in that it covers and lets filter through, and so could stand in for a heideggerian moment of revealing/concealing. It is also a screen in the sense of an image, screening an image that activates a memory. Risset says "It [screen-memory] can also be the symbol for poetry. Screen memory is a memory that begins to act up, to turn around, to decipher from the point of a particular image" (Gavronsky, *Toward* 140). She thus posits memory and poetry as active agents of knowing and interpreting and as having particular effects on time. Memory shapes time in unexpected ways and with a screen memory we are given a version of the past without knowing, any more than the speaker does, what is important about it or what we are really meant to understand. In interpreting the memory and/or the poem, there is a clue: the past participle *assise* at the start of the piece "assise dans la masse du jardin" becomes *assis* "assis par terre dans le sable avec le jardin qui presse tout autour" at the end of it. It would be simple to see this as a remark

---

[26]   Peter Consenstein explores the relation of Freud's concept of "screen memories" to literary memory in *Literary Memory* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002) 12ff.

about some change of gender that has taken place over the course of this brief memory, this non-event; a change with the passage of time that has to do with some kind of gendered time or gendered experience and memory. Risset, in her way of making evasive and problematic statements about gender and writing, says that the disappearance of the 'she' doesn't mean that it has become masculine; it signals the disappearance of the feminine marker as a supplement to the verb, a general displacement of identity through experience. "Through the disappearance of that mute –*e*, I express a gripping experience. The end of the poem is exactly the same as the beginning except for a slight variation that has come to signal itself in its anonymity" (Gavronsky, *Toward* 141). A distance from oneself is inevitable and necessary.

Another poem sequence in *Sept passages de la vie d'une femme* is entitled "9 Poèmes de Mnemosyne," referring to the Greek goddess of memory. In part I the speaker complains of being made to cross the threshold of writing. In III we have "dehors/dedans / le temps se déconcerte" "Oui – née de rien / de rien / voix de pur / futur" (52-3). This sense of stepping outside of time is itself a gap that is productive of poetry. The following sections treat a series of voyages, real and imaginary, passages that mirror those made through language, which are made up of cells that are isolated but interact in mysterious ways. "[F]or me, what appears in an involuntary manner is the first cell. The others are consciously worked in a way that allows me to discover the first. In fact there's a proliferation of cells that are brought up and then dismissed; then still others are brought up. At the heart of all that, I hope the poem appears by itself" (Gavronsky, *Toward* 143). The centrality of memory in producing new work and the willingness to give language free rein continue to be hallmarks of Risset's oeuvre.

CHAPTER 2
The Pulse of Absence in Anne Teyssiéras

"L'insaisissable en soi le poème est d'abord présent dans notre corps."[1]

"[…L]'illusion m'est une réalité : j'insiste là-dessus" (Teyssiéras qtd. in Stout 135). This is a curious, provocative statement that brings to mind the ten-year old girl whose world was shattered by the death of her mother, as well as the adult who confronts some of the tougher philosophical questions and attempts to navigate and bring together a variety of opposing positions in exploring the troubled relation between writing and the real. Positing illusion as reality turns conventional knowledge upside down and leaves us endlessly questioning, as Teyssiéras is herself: how can we truly know what is real and what is illusion? And where is the poem in this schema—illusory representation of the real, lived experience, a separate truth?

Teyssieras's poetry has been described as epistemological, as seeking to know and to know what we are able to know and how. "Le poète semble en quête d'une forme vide, d'une absence qui l'éclaire depuis un lieu non situé, d'une présence vivifiante et mortelle, et qu'il n'ose approcher" (Brindeau 226). This quote refers to her early work (prior to 1973) and still holds true today: her poetry records a quest for a source of light that is too bright to actually approach but that promises to clarify all. As I stated in the Introduction, the notion of poetry as that which permanently reaches for the unattainable, which seeks

---

[1]   *Les clavicules de Minho*, 40.

to articulate the inexpressible, has become a commonplace in modern poetic theory. What matters is how these attempts, these longings, play out in the work. In Teyssieras we have a particular kind of amorphousness that seeks to shape itself ("en quête d'une forme vide") in relation to other beings and elements of existence, often through structures of myth, scientific paradigms, and a "bizarrely dynamic stasis" that pervades her poetics (Bishop 1995 Review of *Instants*). As with Risset, we see a process of existential becoming in progress, an ongoing attempt to shape oneself and one's experience through actions and words while tracing this progress through words at the same time. In this "existence compliquée de points d'intérrogation" (7), each question mark "fait un grumeau dans la pâte / grumeau que le poème avale" (84). As Glenn Fetzer states, a fundamental characteristic of Teyssiéras's work is that she tries to "comprendre et intégrer les rapports multiples et instables des trois composantes de l'oeuvre: poésie, poème, poète" (220).

Context

Teyssiéras, born in 1935 (one year before Risset) in Nantes, has lived in Paris since 1956, the date of her first publication. She has published 15 books of poetry and one narrative (*Le passage de l'arbre mort*). We know very little of her personal trajectory, apart from what she told John Stout in an interview in 2000. Apart from the one narrative text, she has not published anything but poetry, unlike the other poets in this dissertation: her dedication to poetry is inscribed in *Les clavicules de Minho*, her *ars poetica* that will be a primary focus of this chapter.

At the risk of taking an overly biographical approach, there are elements of her

private life that resonate with what we read in her poetry. In John Stout's interview with

Teyssiéras in 2000, he poses the all-important question of why she chose poetry over

prose, what poetry allows her to do that prose does not. In part, she replies that "Cela me

semblait le chemin le plus court pour atteindre quelque chose, une espèce de vérité qui ne

m'apparaissait pas" (131). She began to write poems at the age of 12, after a period of

illness that followed a difficult time in her life: after her family was forced to leave

Rouen during the war, her mother fell ill and died of tuberculosis when Teyssiéras was 10

years old. "Cela a été un terrible choc. Ma mère me paraissait l'être le plus nécessaire au

monde" (131). The apocalyptic quality of this loss can be seen in the title of a cadence in

CM "Le dernier vivant," and, as we shall see, it is a thread that runs through the work,

appearing as a fascination with death, in reconfigurations of natural and mythical

processes, and in the recurring movement of the pulse, a point of "dynamic stasis" that

reenacts the poet's being frozen in time at the moment of truth and progressing in time as

a living being.

Teyssiéras herself had to spend time in a sanatorium, along with her brother. She

kept writing throughout her years at lycée, where her 'profound distress' went unnoticed

and where she took a baccalauréat in philosophy. At the university in Rouen she

continued to write a poem a day until her father suggested that she try to have them

published. She eventually moved to Paris where she found people who helped launch her

career. While she claims the early poetry she wrote, up to age 20, was wholly informed

by her wide reading among the Romantics, Symbolists, Classics, etc., and need not be

returned to, we can see that the early death of her mother, studies in philosophy and wide

reading in poetry mark her work to this day.

Teyssiéras feels affinities with Michaux and Artaud, as well as Blanchot, Bataille, and Bernard Noel, whom she considers "des compagnons de route" (135). She shares Artaud's experience of "cette souffrance, cette impuissance devant l'écrit" and is drawn to a vision of death in Emily Dickinson and Andrée Chedid (Stout). She evokes the influence of Andrée Chedid thus: "J'aime beaucoup son souci de la personne humaine. C'est le poète de la fraternité. Elle lutte contre toutes les formes d'oppression, guerres, violence, racisme" (136). In *Clavicules* Teyssiéras employs many epigraphs from a wide variety of writers, including Dickinson, Chedid, Saint-John Perse, Heraclitus of Ephesus, Artaud, Rimbaud and Jean-Pierre Spilmont (a contemporary author, also published by Rougerie). In this way she is also a "poète de la fraternité," making connections among fellow writers across time and place (as does Risset). And not least, she cites her own work in other works, reworks her own writings. At the end of *Chemin sous la mer* (*CSM*) is the statement "Les passages entre guillemets sont tirés d'ouvrages antérieurs ou de textes en préparation" (75). The poet carries on a dialogue with herself, speaking to herself across time, through different stages of her work.

Teyssiéras says about *Clavicules*: "Après ce livre, des amis poètes m'ont tourné le dos. Il y a des choses 'qu'il ne faut pas dire'…" (136), suggesting that writing poetry is a mysterious, if not mystical, endeavor, the secrets of which should not be revealed to the public at large. Teyssiéras clearly does not subscribe to this viewpoint, but rather feels that that which is mysterious, such as the act of creation, should be opened to shared examination. The reader's participation is crucial; dialogue is the way to further understanding. When Stout notes that everything in that book is a paradox and nothing is simple, that questions always lead to other questions, she responds "J'aime travailler sur

les contradictions. Pas pour les résoudre, mais pour qu'elles se réalisent en tant que contradictions mêmes. Non pas pour retrouver une unité, qui serait peut-être appauvrissante" (137). As for *Chemin sous la mer*, Rougerie, Teyssiéras's regular publisher, declined it at first, saying that it was overly philosophical; eventually they did publish it.

Ars poetica

As a statement of poetics, *Clavicules* presents a dual presence throughout, so that we read with a double subject in mind: the metaphorical speaking subject of the poem, as well as Teyssiéras herself espousing her ideas about poetic creation, rhythm, gender and poetry, and the relations among myth, science and literature. She talks to herself, enacting the fact that there is always an other, even when one is alone, and that one of the fundamental responsibilities of human beings is to confront and engage the other. As with Risset's *Jeu*, the writing concerns writing, albeit in a more concrete way. The book is one hundred and one pages, divided into 7 chapters alternating with 7 "cadences" that are intertwined but separate. The term "cadence" indicates the importance of rhythmic sound and motion, of inflection and harmony. On the first page, before chapter 1 begins, there is a short passage of 2 paragraphs that approaches the question of poetry and knowledge. It is through her "existence compliquée de points d'interrogation" that the writer claims to have learned that poetry is "un savoir demeuré au seuil de lui-même" (7). This echoes Heidegger's contention that to know is to be able to learn, and to learn is to be able to ask questions (*Introduction*). Through this knowledge, poetry goes to meet all people as well as each person. We find the "contradiction inévitable" here, "ce dilemme" that colors her

work: that ignorance is a way of approaching everyone "alors que la connaissance, elle, débouche sur une dispersion qui l'affaiblit" (7). This dilemma cannot be remedied, but what poetry does is to offer its particular kind of knowledge that is "à l'instant même décimé et reconnu par qui l'approche" (7). Thus a reader can perceive knowledge only at the moment it is destroyed. This paradoxical simultaneity is a key to Teyssiéras's work and to the idea of the "voyage immobile." While it may seem that one remains in stasis when reading, there is an ongoing struggle between what one knows and what one perceives in the text, between presence and absence, experience and writing/reading, movement and stasis. These are not either/or propositions, but processes of negotiation, compromise and compensation that the poet and the reader live.

Pulse

The pulse is the space of travel between these opposing and/or complementary entities, between the real and the represented, the foreign and the appropriated. This movement in Teyssiéras does not drift between one pole and the other, but vibrates between them in such a way that the instability and unpredictability of their very relation is brought to the fore. What is messengered between them, borne by poetry, is what is all-important and inexpressible: the non-verbal, the imminent, the unrealized.

Words always come from the human body. When the poem springs from the body, its rhythm is shaped by the pulse, the rhythm of life. The pulse can be felt and even measured but cannot be grasped or held—like life itself, like what lives in poetry. The pulse consists of two complementary elements—beat and silence—felt at specific points on the body. It is an integral part of the physical body, the very sign of life, but in most cases cannot be controlled. It does not represent life but **is** life, and its absence is death.

Life does not happen without it. Similar to Teyssiéras's description of the poem as a rock thrown into a pond and the ripples that move outward, independently of the rock or the one who threw it, the pulse is a fixed point that makes possible all movement. It is the rhythmic beat of poetry: systole (rhythmic contraction) and diastole (rhythmic dilatation) (*CM*). This close conjunction of 2 elements is expressed throughout the work at several levels: in the interplay of fonts and sections, in imagery, in the address to the reader and expressed relations between different aspects of the writer. Presence and absence; flawed reality and perfect illusion; nature and art; mind and body; unconscious and cognition; perception and reason; contraction and expansion; revealing and concealing; finitude and limitless potential; movement and stasis; these pairs all find their way into the work. "Action. Réaction. La danse appelle la contredanse" (74). Rhythm is inevitable as Teyssiéras sees it, cannot help but occur because it is based on the systole and diastole of the human heart, a beat echoed by the *Fort – Da* game as observed by Freud, playing out the presence and absence of the mother. Between pulse beats there is a split second of nothingness, of limbo, until the next beat comes. "Il y a une pulsation entre parole et silence" (16). Akin to the "moving center" of the subject as described by Jaspers (Olson) the pulse corresponds to split reference (Ricoeur) and the tension maintained in the metaphoric copula. It anchors the "boundary character" of poetic discourse.

The pulse is related to life and death but also to the poem itself as a thinking, knowing, acting entity–yet one that is always "complice de la mort" (49). The rhythmic pulse keeps time and links human being across time. The scope of the real, natural world is present in figures of light and dark, rocks and sea, barren places, sky, stars, and planets, the pulse maintaining a common rhythm through it all. In tandem with the empirical

world, the world of myth is drawn upon as a complementary form of knowledge, an alternate way of describing and explaining existence.

"Cadence 3 – Anatomy Lesson 1" describes the movements of the heart: a heartbeat sounds like "toujours-toujours"—"pas un instant de répit"—and beats the cycle that binds all living beings and at the same time is particular to one being: "…ton sang millénaire, ce bien commun où tes limites s'illuminent," a ceaseless source wherein "la naissance et la mort n'en sont que les relais." Birth and death are way stations in the continual flow of blood across generations, as the continual source of writing passes through the way stations of texts, to borrow an image from Edmond Jabes. Teyssiéras explicitly connects life and poetry: "les mots dont tu manques le plus obéissent aussi à cette pulsation liquide." Rhythm is sovereign; it chooses the one through whom it wishes to work, for better or worse, and nothing can be done against it. "Il devient un sixième sens et enfouit dans le cœur de l'élu(e) toute l'histoire du monde" (55). The poet becomes a repository for all stories.

> The pulse stands in for a vision of the world as it could be if shaped by poets:
>
> Si les poètes avaient pu construire le monde, on y verrait que le *contre* n'est pas le châtiment du *pour* mais son affirmation heureuse dans le dynamisme et l'identité des contraires. En s'identifiant l'un à l'autre, pour et contre, haut et bas… auraient donné sa *substance* à la spiritualité, et de l'esprit à la matière. (74)

The double beat comprising the pulse makes itself felt in the basic dualities of the work. The forms duality takes are in the typography—the use of italics and roman font—and in the use of dialogue; in the contradictions and paradoxes and oppositions in figures throughout the work; and, at a thematic level, in the issues the poet grapples with, such as the paradoxical simultaneity of presence and absence, the acceptance of death in the cycle of life, the relative values of science and mysticism, gender injustices, and the role nature

plays in human creativity—as a source for mutual understanding; as a counterpoint to the human power to create, and the resulting hubris; as a reminder that other presences are not simply objects to our subjects. Rethinking modern notions of subjectivity is indeed part of Teyssiéras's project: she calls into question relations between self and other and considers the role of poetry and of the poet in the possibility for change. The different voices in the text are underscored by the division into sections and the alternating use of fonts.

Subject(s)

There is a duality of subject in the work, as mentioned above: the speaker addresses herself as "tu" so there are effectively two parts to the poet. Teyssieras's voice has, as Fetzer points out, two registers—a personal voice and the unexpected voice that is "l'écho de l'origine" (218). There is also the pair of poet and reader that meet over and through the text. Even the term 'je' is indeterminate, inclusive—"Je suis perdu(e). Je suis sauvé(e)" (*CM* 93)—and there are distinctions made between *je* and *moi*: "Moi-je : simulacre d'alliance" (*CM* 52). It is the gaze of the spectator, the reception by the reader, that allows the Je to "émerge et gagne sur moi" (52). Yet the confusion between *je* and *moi* is salutary: "C'est la pénombre où prend vie le poème" (52). It remains true that « la tâche du poète (tâche d'ailleurs impossible) est celle d'arriver à la décovuerete » (Fetzer 218). Writing is not simply a process of fixing passing thought on the page but is a journey in itself.

The first section of *Clavicules*, "Passager de la Terre," is a sort of dialogue between an italicized and a regular-font voice that sets the poet in an ancient, stony landscape, accompanied by a language. It is not immediately evident who the two

speakers are: poet and reader, poet and language, or more probably the poet speaking to herself, as thought and interpretation constitute a dialogue or dialectic. "*Qui es-tu écrivant cela ?*" (10). The passages in regular font speak in generalities about the poet in the third person, while the italic passages address another directly as "tu." This dialectic continues throughout the work and may consist of different pairs, but at least in the final example we see it is the poet speaking to herself, to another part of herself that is differently gendered and so apposite to her 'real' identity: "Frère, je t'ai dit tu sans te connaître, car tu es moi" (101). This refers back, too, to poets themselves as "frères ennemis" (56), recalling Baudelaire at the same time.[2] She continues: "Il est vrai que je voulais ne plus pouvoir distinguer ce qui est de *toi* et de *moi*, mais je souhaitais, aussi, entretenir et même accuser cette distinction dont se nourrit la vanité de l'écrivain(e)" (101). She embodies the masculine and the feminine, self and other and thus becomes distinctive, whether by adopting a masculine stance or simply by being larger than life. While wishing to see herself as one whole, complete and knowable, she faces a hidden, silent part of herself – the dark side of the moon, the silent contraction of the pulse, the unknowable, opaque other. This particular duality maintains the process of the poem as process and not product, as thinking rather than thought, while disturbing the hierarchy of man as transcendent, woman immanent.

Fragments d'une captive contains repeated addresses to "tu," and *Le chemin sous la mer* contains dialogue made explicit by dashes. Interspersed italic and roman text create a dialogic effect throughout *Clavicules*, which also includes many question marks and several times words spelled out all in capital letters. Quotation marks are used solely

---

2   In "L'homme et la mer" Baudelaire refers to man and the sea as "lutteurs éternels," "frères implacables."

to cite other authors, incorporating all of writing in the text. Italics, like quotation marks, can highlight or emphasize something, call attention to it, and set it apart. Sometimes irony is implied, though more often this is achieved with quotes—a sense of calling into question what is being said. Italics can also downplay something, set it apart in a way that diminishes it. Within and across sections, these two kinds of passages speak to each other: "*Qui es-tu toi qui n'es pas toi?/Je suis l'autre et je suis l'Unique*" (84). Poetry and philosophy, myth and science can be seen as entering into dialogue throughout the text. "Le dialogue définit alors la relation entre poésie et pensée" (Vaysse 45).

Stout points out that negative terms in *Clavicules* such as "nul," "aucun," "rien," and "jamais" are often followed by "mais," returning to a sense of unexpected hope. Teyssiéras gives the example of "le jour se lève" and "la nuit tombe" to show that the two depend on each other to exist. As a child, "j'essayais de comprendre pourquoi les choses étaient comme ça, dans une espèce de succession, tellement répétitive et contradictoire. C'est aussi ce qui m'a donné l'envie d'écrire, probablement" (Stout 141). Not only is the impulse to understand at the root of the poet's creating, but, more specifically, attempts to gain an understanding of the constant, familiar interplay and interdependence of opposites.

In "Cadence 1 (Premier désastre)" the questions posed concern the disappearance or dispersion of this "tu," or rather the emptiness inside the poet, who is "au seuil de ce qui était toi, mais tu n'entreras pas." This emptiness, disappearance or death of the poet does not clearly distinguish her from the living, however. "Mais tout est bien dans ce désert ou le bruit de la vie et l'appel de la mort se mêlent" (14). The regular-font passage emphasizes present time and place—"Ici, là, maintenant" (15)—but diverges from

simultaneity and union and accentuates instead separation: "Il est impossible de vivre simultanément en deux lieux séparés" (15). Yet words, texts, unite people across distances and determine environments, "décident d'un climat" (16).

The repeated phrase "Personne apparemment ne sut ce qui s'était passé" in "Cadence 2 (Second désastre)" suggests doubt and in particular doubt on the part of the witness, or about whether there is a witness. Uncertainty permeates every attempt to make distinctions. "[C]et éclair d'un instant où la faute et le châtiment ne se distinguent plus l'un de l'autre." Error as its own punishment evokes not just metaphysical doctrine but the perfectionism of a poet frustrated with the impossibility of speaking truth. "Tu n'as jamais compris ce qui s'était passé. / Qui donc sauva les mots de la géhenne?" The repeated line followed by the image of a phoenix in flames gives hope that one can return from grief and speak about it.

Poet / Reader, Poet / Poem

The poem separates from the poet early on; like the ripples coming out from a rock thrown into a pond, it strays far from the point of impact and continues unknown to the poet (40), "un réflexe coupé de son centre vital" (50). "Ainsi progressent vers nul rivage les ondes fugitives de la totalité" (49). Not only is the poet on a *pèlerinage* but the poem itself moves on and changes unbeknownst to the poet, a voyager in its own right, but cut off from its vital center in its search for wholeness through the reader. The poet orients herself not in relation to her poem but among the tumult of voices of which her own is an echo, repeating from memory the tragicomedy of which the original text is forever lost (41-51?). "Le poème est l'écho de ce qui ne fait pas de bruit" (49). The poem recalls and repeats the unknown and continues toward the unknown.

The poet does not privilege the poem, as Fetzer points out, citing the line "La page blanche est un mouchoir pour le nez du poète" (*CM* 25). Writing on the page is only the physical trace of an illusory re-presentation of the real; it could never capture the real, or even the idea of the real:

> Ni le dehors ni le dedans ne sont présents dans l'image qui les rend identiques. Un leurre scintille en toute représentation.
>
> […]
>
> Dès que tu tentes de la saisir l'idée sursaute et prend le vent.
> L'écriture est dans la ligne de fuite d'une idée, elle n'est en fait que l'ombre projetée de cette fuite.
> Le poète lâche la proie pour l'ombre. (25-6)

It is not possible to capture things in all their specificity, nothing can truly be presented and the representation itself is faulty; writing is only the shadow of the trajectory of an idea, as removed as the shadows on the wall of Plato's cave. The poet cedes the real, or is tricked into ceding the real, in the name of that shadow; "tu n'y vois que le reflet d'une réalité absente" (30). Yet, the poet dreams of fusing with this illusion—"Disparaitre dans le poème est le rêve qui obsède le poète" (*CM* 29)—which would be, in a way, to be brought back to herself. "L'œuvre est le non-lieu du poète en même temps que son séjour" (*CM* 10).

Poetry attempts to reach out, as Teyssiéras writes in *Clavicules*, "la poésie va à l'encontre du commun tout comme à la rencontre de chacun" (7). Yet there is also a disjunction between poet and reader, less surprising than the two sides of the poet, given that they are two different people. Their relation is no less contradictory; in fact, it is based on contradictions and misunderstanding, on which the poem subsists. "Le poète et son lecteur: ils ne s'identifient l'un à l'autre dans la parole qu'en se tournant le dos. // Le

plus haut moment de l'un est quand s'accomplit le détour de l'autre" (52). Through the

detour, the *I*, or the poet, and the other further each other's self-understanding. The poet is

able to transcend himself through the reader, he depends on the reader: "Le poète prend

appui dans le regard de l'autre pour surgir hors de lui-même" (54). The reader is also

deepening self-knowledge. As with any pair, the one helps define the other. As Heidegger

stated, *Dasein ist Mitsein*, or, to be in the world means to be with others; there is no

subjectivity without a preceding intersubjectivity, and even someone who is alone

expresses a different way of being with others. There are authentic and non-authentic

ways of being with others, but death is the only form of individuation. (Friedman 68-69).

The poet addresses the reader directly in at least a few places: at one point she

writes "Un loup n'erre pas dans le poème pour te dévorer, lecteur" (62), as though poetry

might be considered something to fear—a comment on the power of words. "Le livre ne

t'a pas violé. Mais ton viol du livre contribuera peut-être à la survie de son auteur" (63).

The act of reading is a violent one, but necessary; not only because the understanding of,

or attempt to understand, the other is indispensable, but due to the poet's desire for her

name to live on. "Le poète prend appui dans le regard de l'autre pour surgir hors de lui-

même. C'est à toi que incombe la tâche de classer toutes les peaux mortes de sa mue"

(*CM* 54). The poem as "émergence de l'être hors de son champ vital" is fragile and

depends on a certain reception, on being welcomed, to survive. "Par cet abus de

confiance le poète ne saurait être quitte envers son lecteur" (96).

Presence / Absence

In terms of themes and figures in the work, presence and absence can be seen as

the overarching duality in a number of ways; the tension between the two is deemed

unbearable. This duality subsumes pairs such as life and death; the concealing and revealing that Heidegger saw occurring with language; illusion and reality. It is often expressed in Teyssiéras as oxygen and suffocation, or water and desert. Illusion is defined as what is not externally present or perceived as visible and reality consists of what is present and perceivable, available for evidence. The same can be said of myth and science: the opposition between what is imagined or believed in spite of invisibility or lack of proof versus what is empirically known, albeit always subject to new evidence. Included in myth are not only the many references Teyssiéras makes to gods like Mars and mythical figures such as Eurydice, Nessus et al., and figures like the Golem, but also the arcana Teyssiéras integrates into her work, most notably the Tarot. The planets straddle the systems of astronomy and astrology—part of the balance she wishes to attain between science and metaphysics.

Teyssiéras's interest in being is a philosophical concern that touches on the physical—presence as human presence. Yet all of space enters the poem; lack and nothingness speak through the poem, an absence that contains everything. Absence and presence are presented as blending together to the point of reciprocally vomiting each other (36). Their unbearable confusion provokes consciousness to pour itself into the emptiness it finds outside of itself: hemolysis. Hemolysis is when red blood cells break open and spill hemoglobin into surrounding tissues and fluids. This blood metaphor appears in conjunction with the mixing of interior and exterior and evokes emotional pathology as well. The analogy is to nervous depression, a state where the pressure of unbearable distress provokes outbursts of consciousness. Flowing from one terrain into another cannot happen too quickly. In *Fragments d'une captive* there is a key that opens

the world, but the door is a small one that only lets in one word at a time. In *Clavicules*, poetry itself is a key that does not open any door.

Also found in the poem: "L'amour irréalisable trouve dans le poème son espace vital" (48); the surrounding world is just a space it moves through. Thus even though unrealized, nonexistent, absent, illusory, this love does exist as it lives in the poem. The poem doesn't exhaust loss, it maintains it, assumes it. The poem is a site for what is unrealized, unspoken, imminent or departed. In the poem these intangible elements of life find space in which to exist, even as absent, as fleeting or non-existent.

For Heidegger, human being is defined as that which understands the finitude of all being, its own and that of other entities: this is the ground for Teyssiéras's own search for the meaning of being. The play of presence and absence begins with the inevitable hiddenness of the fact of disclosure: human being recognizes its own mortality, and this understanding of its own end, its ultimate possibility, is what opens the world for significance. Since human being is aware of itself as being-towards-death, or as becoming dead/absent, it is aware of itself, or present to itself, as being absent. "Ce qui est ne sait pas être" (*CM* 92). Human being is thus aware that presence is never complete, always containing its own absence. However, the truth of this absence, this finitude, is often forgotten or neglected in general human unconsciousness. Living in this ongoing possibility of becoming brings with it the capacity for seeing things as present: this is known as being-in-the-world and involves a hermeneutical understanding of things and their being, thus giving significance to things.

Poetry holds the moment of meeting, of fullness in the encounter of opposites; poetry is the moment of full attention, the moment of real present and presence—but only

for an instant. We cannot disappear into the poem, as Teyssiéras claims is the dream of the poet (29); we must always immediately fall out of it again. It is the site of our closest encounter with language, and with what lies beyond language, but this can only be revealed to us by instants.[3]

> La vie n'est-elle qu'une agonie dont il faudrait ramener les lointaines extrémités en un seul point? Entreprise folle, écartelés que nous sommes entre ce qui fut et ce qui sera, toujours hors de ce qui est.
> Le poème connaît cet instant ultime du point-remède, mais toujours hors du poème nous retombons. Il faut recommencer. Il faut continuer. La vie est longue et les moyens d'en pâtir sont multiples. (29)

The poet is completely solitary and tries to ameliorate this condition through futile attempts to merge the past and present, while the poem is a sort of utopian site, a 'remedy' where an eternal present is held in place, a moment of full attention. Even the poet, however, is always already destined to lose that spot, that moment. The solitary poet may have contact with others but it is imperative that communication is through parole and not langue: "Tout contact se résout dans l'approximation. / La communication entre les êtres ne peut faire aucun progrès, tant que l'élan personnel, qui voudrait la nourrir, reste pris dans les convenances" (30).

In spite of the poem being a "remède," a "mystère" that "résout à sa manière l'incompatibilité des éléments," we can only see there "le reflet d'une réalité absente." "Elle" – reality – looks for itself through what the poet has seen but only finds the poet; reality is the gap of the threshold that the poet cannot cross or be crossed by, so there is the continual question of how to grasp this absence. Words stall time so that instants, without escaping the temporal flow, can be briefly immobilized outside of time. The poem is not a place you can inhabit, but "un creux correspondant à un plein de réalité

---

[3]   Risset's *Les Instants* addresses similar concerns.

[…] Il est le comble d'une absence et la cendre d'une présence. // En lui se lie (se lit) sans

s'accomplir la double aspiration d'un androgyne" (31). The poem tries to be (at least) two

things at once and cannot achieve this but is made in the process, in the tension between

reality and illusion, tradition and innovation, *je* and *moi*, masculine and feminine, the

invisible or concealed and the visible or revealed.

The title of part II, "La face cachée de la lune," unites the mythical and planetary

strands of this work as well as the notion of invisibility, of what exists but remains

unseen. The first line, "La poésie dénude" also invokes a state of being stripped bare, as

the moon is bare.

> Cet aspect dépouillant de la poésie nous laisse voir son côté actif, sa pulsion par
> laquelle l'enfoui est déterré, le voile est enlevé, et le caché mis en lumière.
> "Dénuder", par ailleurs, suggère rendre vulnérable ou même défectueux en
> quelque sorte. En remontant au concept heideggerien de la poésie comme
> Dichtung plutôt que Poésie, c'est-à-dire l'acte primordial de l'individu plutôt que
> celui de versifier, la poésie s'éloigne de manière inéluctable du réel et, selon
> Teyssiéras, s'engage dans un jeu de miroirs, dans une économie d'illusions.
> (Fetzer 220).

Poetry bares objects in the Heideggerian sense, by stripping them of their names, at the

risk of loss of identity or worse.

> La nudité troublante de l'objet "poétique" n'est que l'absence du nom qui le
> désigne (l'habille). Dans l'absence du Nom les mots s'engouffrent, cernant l'objet
> de lueurs irréelles. […] Au moment de favoriser le don de sa chair indicible elle
> [l'absence-clé] meurt sur l'éperon de la réalité. Un poème vient de naître: c'est
> l'histoire d'une faillite. (*CM* 19)

Poetry is born of this absence, breach, failure; of the moment where things are revealed

and concealed simultaneously. The reader must be both close and distant; "Il faut que la

porte soit ouverte ET fermée à qui le lit" (20). At the same time, all of this is an illusion,

to which the poem is home; the truth can only be approached from a distance, never

actually reached or revealed. "L'espace poétique s'ouvrant à l'infini dans un jeu de

miroirs, le poète ne survit que par une égale déperdition de sa réalité" (24). The poet is

only a poet in her acceptance of this loss of reality or truth. She understands that she has

to travel far for self-knowledge, and that that knowledge will be fragmented and

ephemeral.

Names of things are only temporary veils; rather what poetic language does is

gesture toward things in a way that unmasks them for an instant. In that brief moment—a

moment repeated throughout the work of Teyssiéras—we can know something of real

being, before the curtain is drawn again.

> Le poème montre, il ne nomme pas.
> Ce qu'il dévoile connait un instant de stupeur.
> C'est par la fente de ce saisissement que passe
> un peu de l'essence des choses. (*CM* 71)

For Teyssiéras, Fetzer suggests, the name "poetry" acts as a link between language and

world that is continually being weakened by other forces (220).

> En s'identifiant à l'objet auquel il aspire sans cesse le poème change le manque en
> plénitude et pose le détour comme étant le plus court chemin d'un point à un
> autre.
> Le poème du détour, comme le détour du poème, s'égare dans l'infini de la
> répétition. (*CM* 35)

These lines could be spoken by Ricoeur, who posited the 'detour' as the only way to self-

understanding; that is, one never has unmediated access to one's own consciousness, but

must come to see oneself more clearly through interpretation of texts and cultural

symbols. Although for Teyssiéras it is not so much a matter of concentrated

interpretation, at least for the poet, as it is about intuition: "Seule l'intuition te guide à

travers *la forêt des symboles*…" (35). It is the words that take over, language that speaks

the poet. "*On en arrive à ce renversement: ce sont les mots qui t'utilisent, non le

contraire*" (94). It feels to the poet that she is guided by something 'outside' of herself.

Likewise, "Seul le silence voit. / L'œil du poète est la tache aveugle du silence" (36). Silence is paired with the invisible. If only silence sees, but the poet's eye is the blind spot of silence, the poet is once again elided from the process of discovery that she has set in motion. A comparable relation between poet and other is described earlier: "Plus sa solitude grandit plus s'affirme sa sensation d'être un trou d'air dans la respiration des autres" (29). The poet bears what is missing elsewhere and is therefore unable to bear those bits of reality that others take for granted. The poet is the only part of seeing that does not see (the concern with witnessing found elsewhere in *CM*) and the poet breathes where other people's breathing is not. Silence is precisely what the poet listens to—"*Le silence doit demeurer l'objet privilégié de ton écoute*" (72)—and silence sees what the poet is there to report.

The effect of writing on the poet is also crucial: "Tandis qu'il écrit la peur quitte le poète." She describes the process of the poet, bringing to mind Risset's language cells:

> Il isole une cellule conductible hors de la chaîne fatidique.
> Il la maîtrise, la fait briller, puis l'épingle sur une page.
>
> Là, il prend un recul et longtemps la regarde : isolée et quoique brillante, elle paraît plus lointaine du fait de son isolement – et un peu vaine. N'importe ! C'est la flamme d'une nuit blanche. Elle ne révèle rien, ou si peu, de ce qui l'a suscitée. Mais elle est *belle* !
>
> *C'est ainsi que les mots t'entraînent loin de la réalité, vers un rêve de toi qui, sitôt formulé, te rejette.* (72-3)

The breach is where the poem is born. This recurring image of the poem as being a piece torn from a whole, a piece that then strays so far that it loses all connection with its origins, here is paired with an image of the poet as also drifting away from her normal surroundings, being lured away from reality by a dream fostered by language: a dream of being creator, perhaps, rather than simply conveyor of a message. The dream would not

exist without language; words allow the formulation of such fantastic dreams, but they are dreams that appear to lead nowhere. Again, one is always dropped back into reality, from the dream, from the poem; rejected, abandoned, alone.

This potential loss of self, or of safe haven, was preceded by another primordial loss. Stout remarks that the thematic and formal development in Teyssiéras's books constitutes "une mythologie personnelle […où…] l'événement capital qui détermine le développement thématique des poèmes, c'est la perte d'un être cher, d'une femme, d'une mère, et le deuil qui s'ensuit" (132-33). The pulse as the primary movement in her work absorbs the ongoing beat of life/death, life/death, reinforced by images of the physical body that draw on her interest in science, as well as the importance of a feminine presence. Drawing on this idea of the absent, inaccessible one with whom one tries to reestablish contact, Teyssiéras qualifies her work as "une quête [qui] me laisse l'espoir d'aboutir à quelque chose de positif, qui serait la présence d'une absence" (133). The trauma of her mother's death is repeated and sublimated in her work.

Death and the mother are not only relevant to the child but are specifically germane to the poet: "La mère est aux yeux de l'enfant (et du poète) celle qu'il ne peut atteindre vraiment qu'à condition de mourir à lui-même" (32-3). The mother as a figure of origin and of totality does not allow for true selfhood; just as the infant must separate from the mother, first through birth and then in the development of subjectivity, so the poem must separate from the poet, and the poet from tradition and influence in order to become a creator in her own right. For the poem this is a blind, unconscious process. "Le poème ne saurait vouloir quoi que ce soit hors l'instant de son écriture" (37). For the poet, it is a concentrated struggle toward something, toward becoming. But there is also,

as we saw with the figures of silence and breathing, a need to accept the impossibility, the gap, that the poem represents: to reach finality, totality, would be to reach death. Teyssiéras is among the poets who can "accept to some degree the imperfect, but at least potential capacity of language to repulse fear, to keep the poet from the haunting reality of death and nothingness" (Bishop, *Language* 5).

It is also through the poem that the poet can cheat death, but this depends on the reader; the poet's survival is bound up with meeting the other. The poet only survives through the loss of her own reality—that is, only survives as a poet, as poetry involves a necessary suspension of quotidian materiality. There is tension between everyday reality and what it rejects, which winds up in the poem, when "[…] l'existence quotidienne nous pousse à rétablir en elle ce dont elle nous prive inlassablement […]" (41). What cannot be expressed in the usual ways finds its way into poetry; and poetry becomes necessary to complete one's experience of life. The poem is also rendered complete by the understanding of the reader, or more precisely, the reader's own experiences and memories reactivate the poem's meanings and restore it to present time. "The sense of a text can only begin to have meaning for us after the verification that consists—quite instinctively—in giving new life to its words with our memories or present experiments" (Bonnefoy 806).

"Le poème est le foyer d'une illusion. // Son eau capte les reflets d'arbres absents sur la berge" (*CM* 22). The imagination that writer and reader bring to bear are as important as the poem on the page and the hierarchy of truth and illusion must be turned on its head, like trees reflected in water. Truth, reality, are not what matter; and who is to say one's own experience of the world is not reality, whether it coincides with others'

views or not? "*La question ne se pose plus pour toi de la* vérité *des mirages, mais bien plutôt de la manière de les atteindre, à distance, de sorte qu'ils ne se dissipent pas*" (22). What is important is to hold that experience, to not let it be diffused by words or anything else; the obstacle to this is what is illusory. Language can be used to decorate and cover experience or it can be a conduit between one person's experience and another's understanding.

For Ricoeur "[m]etaphors are just the linguistic surface of symbols, and they owe their power to relate the semantic surface to the presemantic surface in the depths of human experience to the two-dimensional structure of the symbol" and they are thus the linguistic surface of myths as well. Both old/literal and newer meanings are carried by metaphor and myth, resulting in polysemy and "semantic thickness." Metaphor is a logical contradiction in which things are both the same and different, and yet sameness and difference remain opposed and in tension (at least in "live" or "novel" metaphors) (Medina 126). Ricoeur's "tensive theory of metaphorical truth" in *Rule of Metaphor* suggests that metaphors are referential in their "rediscription of reality." "Hence, metaphors are in some sense transparent to the nature of reality in a way that other forms of language are not" (Olson 101). Metaphors are not just connotative or subjective; they do provide a kind of reference, a "second-level denotation" that suspends the literal (first-level) reference. This "split reference" transcends the "subject-object structure of experience" (Olson 102-03) and thus has as part of its ontological function the power to change our perception of the world and our experience of interaction. We can see that the poetic function of language is not Jakobson's mere focus on the message for itself but that poetry (metaphor, myth) effects change in the reader/listener/addressee.

Science / Myth

The myth of Orpheus figures in Teyssiéras's work, with the lost woman Eurydice, as do the figures of Narcissus, Nessus, Andromeda, Uranus, Mercury, and others, figures that blend myth with the science of astronomy. Love leads Orpheus to the underworld to seek his recently deceased fiancée Eurydice. He convinces Hades to let him take Eurydice away with him on the condition that he not turn around to look at her until they are aboveground; he forgets and looks back, and she is taken away from him again. Orpheus is not allowed to return and lingers at the banks of the Styx, between life and death, for 7 days, until women whose advances he rejects tear him limb from limb. The Muses bury the pieces and his ghost is reunited with Eurydice. Orpheus was also representative of song and music, as he played the lyre. The term orphic refers in part to the juxtapositions of divine and evil, life and afterlife, and has also come to mean "mysterious: having an import not apparent to the senses or obvious to the intelligence; beyond ordinary understanding,"[4] akin to the very mystery of language, which is "that language says, says something, says something about being" (Ricoeur, "Problem" 79). Orphism has also referred to a style of abstract cubist painting in early-twentieth-century France that communicated through form and color. Orpheus descending to the underground and then returning to the surface world corresponds to the move from the whole to the part (Ricoeur's "descending analytic") and from the part to the whole ("ascending dialectic") constituting hermeneutic interpretation. He looks back because he must know, he cannot be sustained by the illusion that Eurydice is behind him.

Teyssiéras agrees with Stout when he claims her work is orphic, not only because she often describes the speaking subject as "un voyageur ou un pèlerin" (133). She

---

[4] (http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=orphic)

disagrees with his suggestion that her *pèlerinage* is a spiritual one, a quest for

transcendence, as she has already realized that she is working from an illusion that is an

élan, not transcendence. Writing poetry has gone from being necessary to being

inevitable. "[J]'ai compris que mon parcours s'inscrivait sur un cercle. Je vis à l'intérieur

du cercle dont le centre est la poésie et la circonférence mes étapes" (134).

However, she began to realize that although she had a fundamental need to go in

search of the lost mother, analogous to Orpheus's search for Eurydice, the lost female

figure who cannot be retrieved but only rejoined in death, she was living an illusion that

would never lead to anything miraculous. "C'est là que j'ai commencé à penser que

l'illusion était une forme de réalité" (133). To complement this stance, she began to read

in the sciences, such as quantum physics, and in the 1980s and 1990s she began to call

esoteric systems into her work, in particular the Tarot and Kabbala.[5] She attributes this to

her identity as Marrano: Portuguese Jews who denied (or were denied by force) their

original religion to convert to the religion of their adopted country.

> Il y a dans ma poésie un balancement entre ce que m'apporte la science et ce que
> m'apporte l'ésotérisme kabbalistique, dont on ne peut attendre que des rêves.
> Avec la science, c'est différent. Il y a des choses tellement réelles dans la science.
> C'est fascinant. Les deux connaissances, pour moi, se font contrepoids. Mon
> parcours est au milieu. (136)

References to hard science include descriptions of the brain and heart, and comparisons

between poetry and destruction of the atom, as well as many references to physical

processes of nature, whether within the body or in the external world.

Like Eurydice, the figure of Andromeda is a doomed woman, doomed by her

mother's actions, in fact, although she is saved by a man who loves her. Andromeda was

---

[5]   The Kabbala is the secret oral Law of the Jewish tradition, passed on orally and corresponding to the
    written Law of the Torah.

left chained to a rock for a sea-monster to devour, until Perseus killed the monster and

rescued Andromeda in exchange for her hand. Section IV of CM "Les Enchaînements

d'Andromède" meditates on the fatal relation between poet and poem.

> Qu'est-ce que le hasard du poème dans le destin du poète ?
> La paille dans la poutre.
>
> Qu'est-ce que le poète pour le poème ?
> Un mort-vivant. (45)

Thus the poem has no serious role in the life of the poet—paille dans la poutre—the

aleatory quality of the poem is nothing compared to the dark destiny of the poet, or is

even a flaw therein. The poet is irrelevant to the poem, no longer living in any way that

counts.

The chapters and cadences that structure *CM* have names that evoke myth,

planets, and catastrophe, and thus an incomprehensibly large and long-lived world

outside of ourselves and beyond our control, and one where imagination and natural

phenomena play equal parts. In *Chemin* Teyssiéras plays on the associations between

Hebrew letters and Tarot arcana by associating the poet with the hanged man and the

poem with the lightning in the tower. She tells Stout that the hanged man is the poet

because the poet is not recognized, doesn't really have a place in society and is even in a

deliberately hostile world and is obliged to see it upside down. Hence she often speaks of

'the other side' of things. "Il voit le monde à l'envers, comme le poète essaie de voir

l'envers de choses pour se diriger dans sa propre vie et essayer de trouver un équilibre

entre l'envers, l'endroit, le plus, le moins, le pire, le meilleur. C'est la dialectique de toute

existence" (139). She also makes the common association of the madman with the poet:

"Le poète est forcément fou" (139). Teyssiéras points out that there is a negative and

positive side to all arcane, and like the card that "nous dit l'irréversible et la fatalité de certaines épreuves" (139), it is the fate of the poem to be cast like lightning on the negative, which it should illuminate/reveal and at the same time destroy. The poem is there to act upon the world: "le poème est là pour agir sur le monde, pour essayer de le rendre meilleur en frappant de destruction ce qui mérite d'être anéanti et en éclairant ce qui doit être révélé" (139). The double action of the poem, like lightning, destroys and illuminates in equal measure. That is the ultimate irony: the tarot announces a light to light the darkness, a knowledge according to which one could see the world illuminated; but the real persists in hiding itself since tarot knowledge seems to only designate illusion. Cartomancy perspective is also present in *CSM*, the 10 parts of which each correspond to a particular tarot symbol.

Teyssiéras and Stout discuss the figure of the Golem, title of her most recent collection of poetry (2000). The Golem is brought to life by a combination of Hebrew letters; its purpose is to protect the Jewish people, but it must be given orders to act. "Il est à la fois extrêmement bénéfique et assez dangereux" (qtd. in Stout 139). It is not a human being, not endowed with the power of speech, not really magic, but a legend that people choose to believe in for the comfort it brings them. "C'est une créature qui n'a pas d'existence propre. Elle *est* dans celui qui le pense" (140). Clearly this serves as an analogy for the role of illusion in Teyssiéras's work and the role of reading and interpretation vis-à-vis poetry. The Golem stands in for poetic creation and embodies the reality of illusion. Teyssiéras and Stout discuss the figure of the golem in the eponymous book and how it is an allegory for poetic creation in that EMETH (truth, life) is written on the figure's forehead to animate it and the E is removed (METH = death) to return it to

dust. E is also the aleph, the first letter. With this figure, Teyssiéras wished to create "un double opposé," a more naïve and childlike figure to complete the more interior aspect of the poet; the golem makes it possible to say and do things the poet would not ordinarily. By beginning and ending the book the same way, with the line "Un golem a pris ma place," Teyssiéras intended to indicate that there was no point in writing the book, or that it is as if it hadn't been written; since it has been written, the ending repeating the beginning shows that it is not in fact over or finished; there is a new beginning. This is the circle she claims to live in, with poetry at the center.

The natural, empirical world is a counterpart to these mythical and mystical systems—the landscapes through which we walk, literally as well as figuratively, are described in *Clavicules* and the other works. *Chemin* at one point lists the elements, and elsewhere refers to the big bang. The inside of the body is part of the natural world as well—the heart, pituitary, hypothalamus, blood—the ungraspable is not only metaphysical but is within us and all around us in the form of visible, measurable entities, that are yet not entirely within the realm of our comprehension. For Stout, these references to nature and the natural world "serve as a counterweight to abstract and enigmatic esoteric systems" and "imply a vast network that is outside of human consciousness and that provokes ontological considerations" (136). Teyssiéras adds "Je veux rester concrète dans le souci d'une recherche un peu philosophique. Cela commence avec *Les clavicules de Minho*, continue avec *Le chemin sous la mer*" (136). The title *Les clavicules de Minho* conflates the body with the natural world and hints at borders and crossings. The Minho is a river that runs through both Spain and Portugal. To speak of its clavicles could refer to the two ends of the river, on either side of the frontier, or it could

refer to a fork where the river separates from itself. We also imagine the human

collarbone, traversing the body and appearing to hold up the skeleton. This bifurcation is

part of poetic language, the split reference.

Masculine / Feminine

Feminine identity tends to imply an understanding of marginalization, liminality,

of being positioned at the threshold or on the boundary. This inherently postmodern

aspect of feminist theories means that attempts to revalorize the feminine will not result

in simply privileging the feminine. Teyssiéras maintains a certain tension between

masculine and feminine in her work, as she does with other dualities, in part through her

ambiguous use of pronouns; she also speaks more explicitly of what is called "poésie

féminine."

She speaks of her desire for an absence of identity as a refuge, a place of non-

suffering; thus, paradoxically, she has to seek the neutral, as a way of talking about

philosophical ideas and thoughts as a woman.

> Je suis même revoltée de voir que, dans les deux moitiés de l'humanité
> (masculine-féminine), la moitié féminine est maintenue dans une relative
> servitude. C'est un accord tacite. Et cela dure depuis des siècles. On ne s'en rend
> plus compte, à la limite. J'essaie d'attirer l'attention là-dessus, depuis mon
> enfance… Aujourd'hui on parle de parité. Mais sur dix peintres, par exemple, il y
> aura une ou deux femmes reconnues, et on dira: 'C'est assez pour l'égalité des
> sexes!' Cela entretient le malentendu. En réalité, les femmes sont sous-
> representées. Si je raisonne ainsi, je peux sembler très féministe. Pourtant,
> quelques amies m'ont reproché d'avoir une attitude machiste parce que je ne tiens
> pas compte des problèmes féminins. C'est un peu vrai. Je les saisis globalement,
> de l'extérieur. J'ai des choses à dire qui ne sont pas de cet ordre-là. (134)

Neither 'il' nor 'elle' is privileged in the work; often the *voyageur* is androgynous, "celui-

celle" (*CSM*) Later in the interview Teyssiéras and Stout discuss the ways in which she

links poetry and femininity; she notes that there is no 'poésie masculine' because that is

just "'poésie' tout court" (137), while "poésie féminine" is still a common expression; we are still stuck in the same old traps. "Mais on peut dire aussi que la poésie est la part féminine de l'homme. Pourquoi pas?" (137). While Stout sees women poets as gaining more recognition in France and abroad, Teyssiéras says: "En France, je n'ai pas l'impression que les choses vont changer dans l'immédiat. Des femmes écrivent, écrivaient, continueront d'écrire. Mais dans les universités françaises, on n'enseigne pas vraiment la poésie contemporaine. On parlera d'Apollinaire, de René Char, d'André Frénaud… Mais on ne parlera pas d'Angèle Vannier, ou de Marianne van Hirtum, ou de Marguerite Clerbout. La critique fait le tri, et les poètes n'intéressent guère les universités" (138). She goes on to mention Canada, Germany and Belgium as countries whose scholars have written on contemporary women poets. Clearly there is no dearth of poetry written by women; it is the lack of reception that hides that output: few reviews, books not taught in universities, and so no one to listen to the feminine voice. "*Ce que ton poème veut dire, le monde le vomit, sans chercher à s'y reconnaître...*" (*CM* 72).

In section III of *Clavicules*, "Vertiges de Mars," Teyssiéras indicates that speaking of feminine poetry is more nonsensical than it would be to speak of masculine poetry; it would be more legitimate to isolate the egotism of the latter than to wish for the inadequacy of the former. The masculine element is so overly complete that it becomes essentially feminine in its duality. "La femme se suffit. L'homme se manque" (69). Poetry should be feminine, because then the subject/object master/slave relation would be destroyed in it and the poet could freely identify with the feminine. As it is, it is "masculine poetry" that goes without saying.

Being / Becoming

Writing is absence in the sense that the writer is absent to the reader and the thing written about is absent, not to mention that there is an excess of experience that does not find its way into language, yet the present experience of reading occurs with this absence; one simultaneously with the other. The landscape of the work is filled with identifiable entities from the real world and yet we are constantly reminded that they are not actually there in the poem, that they have been replaced by words.

> *La vase qui gicle entre tes orteils*
> *Et quelquefois une inquiétude :*
>   *est-ce un insecte vivant*
>   *une brindille*
>   *un coquillage tranchant*
>   *un clou rouillé ?*
> *Non, ce n'est qu'un mot oublié.* (97)

In tandem with this contradiction, the skill in poetry for Teyssiéras is to bring together opposites, to introduce "une succession harmonieuse de pensées et de mouvements ennemis" (91). It is the movement and rhythm of the sequence of thoughts that is most important; the poet is often driven to "sacrifier au rythme un peu de sens" (91). "Le langage est une solution de visibilité: tu apparais là où tu cesses d'être vu, comme d'invisibilité: tu disparais en culminant dans la présence de l'autre" (92). The poet is lost from sight to the reader, who assumes the responsibility of the poem, of finding harmony and movement within. Words do not fully represent exterior things, but they seem to want to stand as things on their own. "Sur la page les mots vacillent […]. Ils voulaient l'accommodation la plus physique. Ils n'ont trouvé que l'accommodement d'une sensibilité" (97). Often all words can do is to be adapted to the poet's needs, who, however, finds words escaping from her control. To this responds a passage in italics

beginning "*Entre les lignes la mort signe le recul de ta voix de son encre blanche*." (97).

> *Couché sur cette page tu cherches à t'incruster dans sa blancheur. Mais tu la noircis instantanément. Tu voudrais gommer les reliefs de ton identité et tu te répands dans ton encre*. (101).

In the poet's attempt to inlay the work with herself, to lose herself in the poem, we also see the "dynamic stasis" and "*voyage immobile*" we know to be linchpins of the work, as the pulse that moves but does not progress. This is another fundamental dichotomy in the work, between thought and action. "Ecrire rend fou car des actes voudraient accompagner les mots, des gestes vivre les formes… Tel est le lot du poète : entretenir l'illusion d'une adéquation entre le geste et la parole" (80). Action is transferred from the human body to language, thought fixed on the page, occasioning nausea in the poet who seeks equilibrium, adequate representation, but is left with poetry as "l'incomparable seuil: entrée prometteuse, salle d'attente, limite au-delà de laquelle les conditions changent; mais en même temps, barrière infranchissable" (Fetzer 222).

> *Plus tu progresses dans ton œuvre plus le désir d'y accomplir quoi que ce soit s'y décourage. L'acte envisagé au départ est devenu cette pensée en acte, l'écriture, dont les moyens justifieraient la fin s'ils ne te séparaient de toute action possible. […]*
>
> *Tu es pareil à ce bateau dont l'ancre a lâché le fond et qui se met à tourner sur lui-même…*
>
> L'élan gagne sur la retombée de l'élan, le naufrage sur le voyage. (94)

Not only does movement slow but the desire to move, to act, is subsumed by writing. Thought supersedes action, although the poet hopes for the act of writing to be just that, action that occasions change, that sets off on a voyage with writer and reader, and does not end in shipwreck.

Teyssiéras's particular conception of time and space, as Stout points out, brings

past and future into coexistence. She speaks of relativity: special, general, and existential, the latter which could help us to understand and master time, according to her conception of it. Time exists through us; we make it exist. Past and future can be interchangeable at the level of the instant. We overtake the instant on one side or the other but since it is a precise and mobile point the two 'sides' can interfere with each other, past and future can change places in relation to each other. This existential relativity is also the problem of Être and Devenir: Être is unchangeable and Devenir is moving but each is in the other. The two go together, with neither taking priority. "Cela me paraît très encourageant de savoir qu'on peut devenir dans ce qu'on est. En devenant, on transforme ce qu'on est, complètement. Il y a là un espoir, malgré tout ce que je dis de désespérant quelquefois. Il y a un espoir. Il est situé dans l'existence" (qtd. in Stout 141). As much as Teyssiéras walks backward looking into the past, she does move forward; writing always involves forward movement. The poem may be experienced as suspended in time, yet writer and reader pass through time while engaged with the text, and the poem itself is "un déplacement non un aboutissement."

Stout remarks on the theme of freedom in Teyssiéras's work, which for her means progressing from an individual search for freedom to a call to readers: "Je voudrais amener mon lecteur à une forme d'humanisme, au souci de l'autre qui nous fait prendre conscience de tout ce qui se passe dans le monde actuellement: ces guerres, ces emprisonnements, ces exécutions, ces massacres…" (133). The pulse is very present here, in the sense that Teyssiéras uses poetry not only to confirm her own particular way of living, but to lead others to increased consciousness of life, not just their own but the lives of others, in particular those who suffer cruelty and injustice at the hands of their

own human species. Through a moment of recognition of humanity in each other—the pulse, the life that flows in each of us, the one thing we can all be said to share—a bond may be forged.

Teyssiéras had refused to be interviewed before Stout made the request: "Rien ne menace autant la sincérité que les mots" (141). She claims she used to say she wrote to reconcile herself with the world but that she had confounded the pleasure of the act of writing with the written product that disappears like a drop of water in the ocean. The process is what counts, and part of that process is to define itself, its actions and purpose.

> Poème : nuage en trompe-l'œil plissé sur l'horizon.
> Maquillage de la mort.
> Bulle de savon égarée de l'autre côté du miroir.
> Blancheur traçante et retombée d'écume, unies au cri désaccordé d'un paon.
> Balisage du noir.
> Regard de JE dans l'œil de l'AUTRE.
> Revanche contre un mal que le poète perd de vue.
> Ver luisant que la nuit capture.
> Survivance masquée d'un doute.
> Hémorragie. (CM 40)

"A la fin ce qui demeure est ce qui est écrit, mais ce qui est écrit sera toujours moins vrai que *nous*" (20). This is the human paradox, encapsulated in the silent pulse that drives everything. The trace left when it ceases to beat is only that, a trace. Finally, the human pulse stands in for the *insaisisissable*, the beat of reality revealed/concealed: "toujours toujours." We are left with the physical, with life, as compensation for the irretrievability of the real. Human beings, in concert with other human beings, create poetry while they can.

CHAPTER 3
Edouard Glissant's Poetics of Accumulation

"Dans le panorama actuel du monde, une grande question est celle-ci : comment être soi sans se fermer à l'autre, et comment s'ouvrir à l'autre sans se perdre soi-même."[1]

"J'écris par vagues."[2]

Edouard Glissant has noted a modern belief in

la caducité de la poésie. Celle-ci ne répondrait plus aux conditions de la vie contemporaine. Il y aurait en elle quelque chose de suranné par rapport aux violences et aux précipitations de la modernité. [...] La question est toujours la même, dans le même contexte : la poésie, à quoi ça sert ? [...] *De quelle information le poème peut-il être chargé ?* (*PR* 95, my emphasis)

He links the possibility of an increased role for the poet to the advent of the information age, a chance to rediscover the links between the poetic and the scientific (or Reason). A major and obvious difference, however, is that computers run on a binary system, where the "accident" that propels the poetic text could potentially destroy stored information. Yet, Glissant compares the "banalisation de la vitesse" associated with the computer to Rimbaud, whose "prétention […] à la fulguration révélatrice" opened the way for "les patiences maillées de Mallarmé, synthétisées de Joyce, dérivées de Pound" (*PR* 97). The computer could be seen as open to totality, but it is an encoded totality that avoids the multiplicity of languages in the world today. Glissant claims that if formerly the question was whether work was oral or written, now the computer screen allows for "la

---

[1]   *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, p. 23.
[2]   Qtd. in Couffon, 60.

transcription sur la page (qui est notre écran) d'une économie de l'oralité" (*PR* 98).

In a similar vein of transformation, Glissant's work consists in a "spiral retelling" where the same concepts and themes reappear in his poetry, plays, novels, and essays, but not in the same form each time, as the word "spiral" indicates. There are constant modifications and retellings over time in different forms, and it can be argued that his poetry is the purest expression of his thought.[3] Some of the themes he takes up again and again are "the right to difference," opacity, *le Divers*, rhizomatic networks, among many others—all concepts that break from any universalizing or totalizing ideology. This "spiraling" can be seen in a formal sense as well as thematic: "il a ce sens éminemment musical de la variation, du redoublement et du dédoublement, de la reprise créatrice" (Baudot IX). Glissant himself notes, in introducing the three dramatic texts that make up *Le monde incréé*, "J'ai parcouru quelques-unes de ces traces dans des poèmes et des récits antérieurs – il faut sans cesse reprendre" (7). This reworking goes in tandem with the "circularité fondamentale" that is the Caribbean: "une sorte de rayonnement, de spiralité, qui est déjà loin de la 'projection en flèche' qui marque toute colonisation" (*IPD* 14). His process mimes what he sees as a uniquely Caribbean historical process that takes a particular shape and moves along an indirect path.

In his insistence on location, Glissant's work differs from Risset's in that, while both write from a relational perspective, Glissant is firmly rooted in a particular location:

---

3 His translators, among others, make this claim. Betsy Wing writes in the introduction to her translation of *Sel noir*: "over the years Glissant has consistently turned to poetry as the ultimate striving for knowledge of the totality of the world. For him the poem is the form most suited to this *totalité-monde*, which can never have one meaning or one conclusion but is the precarious synthesis (as is the modern poem) of more and more distinct realities. Beyond this, for Glissant, 'Language,' as Foucault has said, 'is no longer linked to the knowing of things, but to human freedom'; Glissant sees in poetry—the language that brings what is potential into reality—a means of locating the multiple possibilities for a new and productive relation with the world." (1-2). Jeff Humphries states simply that "arguably the most important, at least the *purest* parts of his work are the volumes of poetry" (xxxiii).

the Antilles. While Risset's work can seem to exist outside of any particular space or time, Glissant's poetry is laden with specific concrete references to the islands and their history: from flora and fauna, mythology, tradition, he constructs a geopolitical poetics of *antillanité*. In this attachment to *paysage*, he finds kinship with Faulkner, who he nevertheless saw as overly isolated in his small patch of the American South. Glissant wants to place into relation, correlation, elements of the islands with each other and with other sites.

Glissant's notion of landscape is not mere romanticism or *pittoresque*, but is an integral part of the poet's perception of the world around him. Land is grasped by consciousness early on, before one has words or concepts for it, and the land holds the collective memory. Glissant's invented word for the unique land of the Americas is *irrué*: "il y a là de l'irruption et de la ruade, de l'éruption aussi, peut-être beaucoup de réel et beaucoup d'irréel" (*IPD* 11). The *paysage* of the Caribbean is not decor, but "un personnage du *drame* de la Relation. Ce n'est plus l'enveloppe passive du tout-puissant Récit, mais la dimension changeante et perdurable de tout changement et de tout échange" (*IPD* 25). The landscape is instead "an active component of self-analysis" (Hitchcock 34) and an important element in the work of "diasporic intellectuals" for whom "spatial thought remains endemic to what the writer is or must become" (35). There may be an element of isolation from one's own 'non-intellectual' society, expressed in Glissant's verse: "La terre seule comprend" (*Pays rêvé, pays reel* 59). When Hitchcock says "The land is a repository of memory" (37) and "True independence […] begins with a psychic rootedness in the land" (38), he is talking about the collective experience of a particular people in a particular place, and of the place difference plays in this

particularity, in this individual and collective independence. One cannot be without being somewhere, and from somewhere. The root in this "psychic rootedness" is usually perceived as the Deleuzian rhizome, a web of tangled roots that spread horizontally, laterally, and with which Glissant is so often associated. However, because of his insistence on situatedness, rootedness also necessarily includes the vertical *racine*. Only a defined being can enter in relation with others.

The question of rootedness ties in with the eruption of history in the Caribbean, also *irrué*: Glissant has said that tradition in the Americans did not have time to ripen slowly. It was more a matter of eruption into modernity, a brutal birth that forever marked the cultural space of the Caribbean, separating it from the long European tradition that wishes to swallow all other culture(s). Poetry *engagé*, for example, is of short duration; Glissant refers to Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* as a "moment: the flamboyant return of a consciousness" (*IP* 143). Glissant wishes to make of this eruption something that lasts, and that is inherently Caribbean, something that doesn't merely separate or oppose. For him the Caribbean is already relational and inclusive.

Glissant distinguishes cultures at three levels of development in the Americas: indigenous Meso-America; Euro-America, made up of people and customs from Europe; and Neo-America, a creolized culture. Neo-America draws on the other two but influences them at the same time. Creolization is a process taking place around the world, according to Glissant: "*le monde se créolise*" (*IPD* 15). The tendency today is to call this process "globalization," but that is largely a marketing term; in Glissant's recent work *Tout-monde*, he relates it specifically to the spread of the internet. Two important elements of creolization are equality and unpredictability: all cultural elements are equal,

in non-hierarchical relations, and these relations produce unexpected results. Examples he

gives are zydeco music and black Indians in Louisiana; a poetic analogy would be the

shock of dissimilar poetic elements brought together to produce rhetorical figures such as

metaphor. Glissant himself explains the term in various texts: "Quand je dis

'créolisation', ce n'est pas du tout par référence à la langue créole, c'est par référence au

phénomène qui a structuré les langues créoles, ce qui n'est pas la même chose" (*IPD* 29).

That is, it takes a plurality not only of languages but of the accompanying cultures and

modes or systems of thought that accompany them, and the melding of these systems to a

certain degree, to produce the phenomenon of creolization. In Glissant's early collection

of poetry *Un champ d'îles*, he wrote "De la douleur a-t-on fait un mot / Un mot nouveau

qui multiplie." From this citation we can make a few observations about the shared

language engendered by shared experience: Antillean literary production stems from

pain, grief, loss; that pain has engendered a new word, or a new mode of speech

production; the new language proliferates and reproduces itself, possibly as literary style.

Part of this phenomenon, and integral to Glissant's thought, is "la pensée de la

trace," which is not part of "la pensée du système" that regiments Europe. It is rather

> un non-système de pensée qui ne sera ni dominateur, ni systématique, ni
> imposant, mais qui sera peut-être un non-système de pensée intuitif, fragile,
> ambigu, qui conviendra le mieux à l'extraordinaire complexité et à
> l'extraordinaire dimension de multiplicité du monde dans lequel nous vivons.
> (*IPD* 25)

Within the group of multiple cultures and systems, none holds power of place over the

others, none dominates through political, linguistic or other means.

As for the role of the writer vis-à-vis the nation, Peter Hallward states that the

writer is, for Glissant, "the *only* properly conscious member of the nation-to-be," and that

"the writer's eventual aim is of course to establish that collective 'we' in which his or her individual voice is justified, confirmed, *and dissolved*" ("Edouard" 450). Why dissolved? The writer comes into being as part of (in part because of) the community, is formed by it and plays a role in imagining its shape, a shape that includes him, of which he is a part. Glissant himself has said of the role of the writer of literature:

> Pour moi, à échéance, il me semble que mon livre [the novel *La Lézarde*] aidera davantage les miens qu'un ouvrage de revendications pures. Dans l'expression littéraire des peuples, amorcer un style propre, me semble une chose de la plus haute importance. C'est, si vous voulez, la première manifestation de la dignité. La 'littérature des îles' m'épouvante. J'ai réagi. D'autres prendront le relai[s] et me dépasseront en talent. Je n'ai que le mérite de montrer un certain chemin qui me paraît libérateur.[4]

Speaking these words in 1958, early in his career, Glissant saw himself as pointing out a direction, an early path his nation might follow. Literary style is as important an indicator of belonging, of community as different from another community, as any other cultural marker; and it is purer, more personal, than any manifesto of rights that would probably sound like a hundred others proclaimed around the world. Development of a national literature is also a sign of "culture" in the most refined sense, a step away from the kind of folklorization and *doudouisme* Glissant has lamented. Almost half a century later he has graduated to a more global view, but we can still trace the line of his thinking about writing and community through those years.

In this chapter, I will look most closely at one of Glissant's earliest works of poetry as well as one of his most recent: *Un champ d'îles* (1952) and *Les grands chaos* (1993). Through these, I will look at the notions he has of writing and communication as they are presented in the form and content of his, and how the accumulation of details of

---

[4] Baudot, 32 #69: Entrevue, dans JOLY, Pierre. "Edouard Glissant / écrivain martiniquais : 'Je veux montrer un chemin qui me paraît libérateur.'", *Paris-Normandie* (Rouen, France), 31 Oct. 1958.

his experience inspire an appreciation of the complexity of Antillean creole identities and of the increasing creolization of the "totalité-monde." I will also examine the notion of the self in relation to community through figures of accumulation, such as water. These figures echo development of creolized communities and they mirror processes of gaining knowledge of self and other and of the process of moving through life and gaining experience, adding layers or other mixtures to one's identity. Glissant's poetics of relation states that those in relation must be situated, rooted, and his roots are in the Antilles, located in relation to influences from and notions of Europe as well as Africa. Glissant does not rely as much as some modern thinkers on European thought; one European he shares ideas in common with is Gilles Deleuze. Reading Deleuze and Glissant together can help to pinpoint some of the specificities of Glissant's thought and the implications of that for his definitions of the Caribbean and of an increasingly creolized world.

To situate further Glissant's thought as it relates to his geographical origins, his notion of *antillanité*, we visit briefly the notions of *negritude* and *créolité*, to see how his thinking coincides with and differs from these schools of thought.

The Context of Martinique

Martinique's status as a colony that never gained independence, that became instead a department of France, complicates attempts by that island's artists to articulate what is theirs and theirs alone, what constitutes their singular identity--assuming there is such a thing and that it is desirable. That is, is this a singular identity already made up of relations; is it singular only in its particular blend of identities? And if this identity is still nevertheless defined as singular, will this stance be at the expense of openness to other

identities, whatever admixture they may consist of? Technically—politically and legally—French, Martinicans are treated as other, and see themselves as separate. One possibility stemming from resistance to gallicization is the development of a negative identity, that is, one that operates primarily through a rejection of certain values, in this case of those from the continent. In this light, poetic figures of landscape, ocean, flora and fauna can contribute to a positive identity in that they ground the writer and reader (or listener) in a specific experiential space or they can tend toward a naturalization of an imposed identity, an expression of internalized notions of simplicity, naïveté, 'earthiness.' Inhabitants who were originally positioned by the colonial slave trade must calculate their relation to a plurality of languages and identities. To embrace the particularities of this island is a matter of survival and at the same time an act already associated with violence and with forced passivity.

As a space where normative rules of discourse need not apply, poetic language is able to hold these complexities and the kinds of unfixed references normally present in a developing literature. This obtains too in that poetry is an activity, a creation. Glissant and other Martinican writers have incorporated diverse and complex factors of geography, language, race and history in the process of outlining a position from which to speak that draws on lived experience. Glissant has worked from the site where the Antillean imaginary and his own inner terrain meet in order to speak the word/wound that results, employing tropes that enact the collisions of these elements. These writers' use of the French language and literary history, their use of the Creole language and its oral tradition—or their sublimation of it--, and their questioning of the very concept of 'mother tongue' speak to the centrality of a literary aesthetic in establishing a Caribbean

presence, a state of "Caribbeanness," and an Antillean voice, a Martinican text. Glissant has been instrumental in this quest. Other writers from the island—including Gilbert Gratiant, Aimé Césaire, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, Monchoachi—have done their part to shape and elucidate an identity over the last century, within or in reaction to movements of *negritude*, *antillanité* and *créolité*.

In the simplest terms, Negritude founded an identity on African descent and the black race, Antillanité on a particular geographical region, and Créolité on the encounter of these elements with the other national/diasporic identities that have made up Martinique's population, such as Chinese, Indian, and Lebanese. Antillanité constitutes a vision that no longer looks to France nor to Africa as 'native country:' it is a turning toward the specificities of Caribbean and West Indian history. Chamoiseau and Confiant, with Bernabé, have declared "Créolité" as a non-reductive totality, an "open specificity" (89). Part of the Caribbean project has been to reconfigure the triumphal notion of progress that represses rupture and diversity.

Gratiant was a poet of French and Creole who lived from 1895 to 1985. Early on he was accused of being a mere folklorist, of conceding to and enacting the views of blacks and creoles held by whites, but later he became known as a guardian of a disappearing culture and as a precursor of the *créolistes*. Following Alfred Parépou's *Atipa*,[5] the first *roman créole*, Gratiant attempted to legitimize creole as not only a written language but also a literary language, at odds with its image as an uneducated patois. He compared this step with the development of French and with Joachim du Bellay's call to poets in *La Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse* (1549) to write

---

[5]   *Atipa* was composed of approximately 80% dialogue, highlighting the importance of the spoken word from the beginning of the creole literary tradition.

in "vulgar" French in order to nourish and fortify the language with their superior linguistic gifts. Gratiant put into written form *contes créoles* from the oral tradition of storytelling that was the major cultural production of Martinican slaves and their descendants. These same tales would later be an influence on Glissant, who as a child spent time on various plantations where his father worked as a *géreur*.

Gratiant wanted to see creole become an international language, thus not only an instrument of expression but also a weapon of liberation. The preface to the 1996 collection of his work *Fables créoles et autres récits* makes the following distinction between Gratiant and Césaire: "Césaire forges his weapons by forcing French to conform to the torrential fugue of his images; Gratiant borrows his from the linguistic vitality of the Martinican people." Césaire is associated with militant force juxtaposed with the *emprunt* or exchange that Gratiant makes. Glissant, however, sees Gratiant as an unfortunate example of *doudouisme* and considers him to have used creole as a showcase.

What ultimately links Gratiant to later writers more than to Césaire is his insistence on the source of Martinican civilization as a mixture of races and cultures. This is a foundation of Glissant's work as well, although he expresses it differently. In the first issue of *L'Etudiant noir* (1934), wherein Césaire and Léopold Senghor articulated early reflections on negritude, Gratiant published an article entitled "Mulattos…For Better or Worse" in which he developed an analysis of métissage as a founding element of Martinican society and Creole culture. He wrote: "je suis nègre; mais ce cri n'est pas exclusif et j'ai autant de plénitude dans ma joie à me sentir mulâtre martiniquais ou tout bonnement français Vendômois." He declares solidarity with martyrs of race hatred and imperialism but then says that "cela n'implique pas qu'afin de retrouver *ma* naïveté

originale, *ma* véritable identité, je m'efforcerai de réinventer sous prétexte de libération

artistique, raciale ou sociale, les façons volontairement imprévues et de penser et de

m'exprimer." Gratiant celebrates the multiple *appartenances* that make up his identity

and at the same time he expresses a particular solidarity with those who experience

oppression based on their black skin. This seems to foreground both negritude and

créolité; his aesthetic, though, is relatively traditional. Glissant does not necessarily see

his own artistic innovation as 'volontairement imprévue' but rather as stemming from an

organic ground of both his culture and his own singularity.

Césaire on the other hand emphasized the impact of colonization and thus drew a

sharper line between black and white. His use of the word *nègre* for Negritude referred

specifically to Africa, whereas Antillean blacks used the term *noir* and considered the

term *nègre* more pejorative. René Maran's novel *Batouala*, the 'true black novel,' of

1921, was considered scandalous in that it gave voice to a black man, but Maran did not

write about any revolution of the colonized; Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*

was important in this regard. Césaire was dealing in the 1930s with an increasingly

aggressive Eurocentrism that compelled a stance of negative identity, while many cultural

conditions encouraged an embrace of African culture, a choice that provoked some

anxiety. Césaire and others saw African descendants as attempting to progress toward

modernity while being held back by the colonizer.

In attempting to exorcise alienation and internalization of white values, one could

say (it has been said) that Césaire locks himself into this racist system, that he accepts the

imposed identity. It is a stage of defiance through which any minority or oppressed group

passes: 'yes, I am indeed that which you scorn.' Negritude remains an influence but this

element of binary opposition is rejected by Glissant as relying overmuch on

Europeanness to explain itself; he also feels that Césaire's influence on his own work has

been overstated. Taking an attributed identity and claiming it as a subjective one can

create a strong position. As Fanon wrote, "It is the white man who creates the Negro. But

it is the Negro who creates Negritude" (47). Critics of the movement of negritude focused

on its valorization of negative identity, of a defensive attitude in relation to the white

colonizer. Wole Soyinka notably said "Un tigre ne proclame pas sa tigritude; il saute sur

sa proie." Negritude is isolating, for Glissant; it locks a group into a self-contained space

without relation to others. It is a position defined by dispossession, by lack of power or

self-ownership, a defensive position: "Partout où des Nègres sont opprimés, il y a

négritude. Chaque fois qu'ils prennent un coutelas ou un fusil, la négritude cesse (pour

eux)" (*IP* 142). There is also the absurdity of grouping together people from Senegal, the

US, the Caribbean, and so on, just because of the color of their skin:

> J'ai appelé 'antillanité' une manière de dire: échappons à cette idée qu'il n'y aurait
> pas de différence entre un Noir des Etats-Unis, un Noir de la Martinique, un Noir
> du Brésil et un Noir du Sénégal. Il y a des différences, comme entre un Breton et
> un Alsacien! Les différences culturelles existent et il ne faut pas les nier. J'ai
> employé ce mot 'd'antillanité' pour dire aux écrivains de mon pays: Revenons au
> pays réel que sont les Antilles et essayons de nous brancher sur ce qui est
> réellement l'imaginaire de chacun. Cela a été une étape importante, mais je me
> suis aperçu en travaillant dans les romans, les poèmes, les essais, que l'important,
> c'était la créolisation. (qtd. in Couffon 57)

Surrealism, already an anti-colonialist movement, fostered a language useful for

depicting the disorientation and alienation of slavery; Césaire used it as a disruption of

linguistic norms to describe unspeakable experiences with no point of reference and to

attempt disalienation of the means of expression. Radical strategies are needed to meet

great violence. Césaire largely defined himself through race. He affirmed "I am of no

nationality foreseen by the /chancelleries;" if he has no nationality, he claims a nationality based on race.

Glissant remembers his own early founding of an artistic group called Franc Jeu, who were interested in politics but refused to join any party, and he is grateful for it in that "petit à petit je puis échapper à l'idéologie de la Négritude césairienne" (interview with Wilbert J. Roget qtd. in Baudot 3). However, his poetic language was certainly influenced by surrealism, as well as symbolism, and this can be seen from his very first published poem "Déroute des souvenirs," in lines such as "l'hallucination de ta robe d'algues," "ton sourire de building neuf," or "les montres à cadran de nuages ronflent dans la mollasse des souvenirs." These unexpected pairings of words and images recreate the sense of rupture and unfamiliarity that Glissant sees as inherent in the Caribbean experience.

Glissant feels that despite individual singularity, lived experiences can always be expressed. He does not need to deliberately render language inexplicable to match his context, rather he adapts language to better express what can be expressed. *Antillanité* reminds us that the particular land to which Africans were brought further contextualizes their story/history, their development and their identity. Glissant brings to the forefront a poetics of geography wherein art is born at the site of contact between the subject and its surroundings. You can no longer look elsewhere in order to see yourself. You are no longer African but Antillean.

Without access to the homogeneity of Europe, without a return to a mythic Africa, roots will be put down there where one is. For Glissant it is through the non-anthropomorphic landscape that the trace of history can be read. Figures of the earth

abound in his work, earth as bearer of collective memory before people living there may even become conscious enough to begin to express that memory. Only through poetry, through art, can this trace be read and the Caribbean restored, transferred from its melancholic space outside of time and language into duration, into history.

Thus Glissant situates the roots of poetic identity squarely in the land, the earth, where the poet was born. Earth is central to his work—as metaphor of native land, motherland, of the source of language, etc.—and also as a very real presence that shapes us—the color of the soil we walk on, the species of birds we see. Images of birds and trees in Glissant suggest liberty, but also link the earth and sky and are related to both. In J. Michael Dash's interpretation of some of Glissant's recurring images of the natural world, "Birds function as images of transcendence, as material representations of thought, luminous images of movement. [...] [I]mages of trees function as representations of vegetable forces akin to the animal flight of birds…Unlike the Cesairean image of the tree that represents an explosive plunging shaft, the tree here seems to fade into air and light" (42). And then: "The tree's growth is like that of the poem feeding on the surrounding space" (43). This does not only indicate the centrality to the poet of the sensual world of perception but evokes a trope of unconscious vegetable growth that mirrors the poetic vision of endless potential. From *Un champ d'îles*: "Et vous, la savez-vous, cette blessure par où le mot suinte du tronc, forçant l'écorce? / Mot de blancheur, nul paysage, nul ramier" (25). Sap is the word as life's blood that alters that from which it stems, forcing the bark. It is an organic process, a painful genesis.

The image of a tree is one repeated throughout his work in a thematic play of accumulation; the very act of repeating images and ideas highlights their presence. The

image of the tree in *Un champ d'îles* "can be seen as a rehearsal for the later novels [...,] as a way of [...] establishing an unceasing vision of interrelating forces. Glissant in *L'Intention poétique* clarifies the image of the tree in terms that return almost verbatim in the novel *Mahagony*" (Dash 42).

Celia Britton has aptly stated that it is not a matter of understanding the words in the poems but of understanding through the words, gaining larger comprehension through reading. If "a poem understood is a poem done with," as Glissant has said, then we read the poem, with and through the poem as part of the all-important process. We live with the poem in the present rather than consigning it to the forgotten past, yet its rootedness in the past is an important part of what it conveys. Glissant, unlike Miron (as we will see in chapter 4), does not rerevise the same poems but reintroduces the same ideas over time in different works, in this way creating and maintaining the temporal continuity he feels lacking in his history.

Créolité, according to Glissant, comprises not only Creole words but a detour from the linearity and order of classical French, an incorporation of the rhythms and intonations specific to his culture and history. It stems from the very process by which creole languages and cultures are formed: two or more heterogeneous elements coming together to spark a new element, unprecedented and unpredictable. The "simplification of grammatical structure" of creole belies the "violence of the forces at work" that contributed to its rapid development (van Name 123). Glissant's poetry is far from simple, and so it is more the impact of the violence and the experience of being misunderstood that are at work here. The complexity of Glissant's own world, the features of his own experience that would be invisible in French, can only be rendered

through a personalized language, an idiolect that incorporates manifold facets of both French and Martinican creole. His concept of opacity, irreducible singularity, applies to individuals as well as cultures, individuals and cultures that are always in relation. From opacity naturally comes diversity as opacity precludes homogenization. There exists an ideal balance between separateness and collectivity.

One's identity is always overdetermined, never simply a matter of race or any other single element, but the totality of the lived, all that one is or will be, all that one says or writes, one's entire history. It is a flame that burns without interruption, a life of integrity that comprises all the paradoxes of being, in this case, Antillean. The totality of this lived experience differs in its complexity from the 'cry' that is like an explosion, all-consuming but soon over. In Glissant's poetic world, the *cri* is only one stage in reclaiming identity; after that, one must begin to articulate, to transform *cri* into *parole*.

Créolistes such as Confiant and Chamoiseau employ a poeticized, creolized language in their literature. Their manifesto *L'Eloge de la créolité*, written with Jean Bernabé, follows "the river of alluvial Creoleness" as it irrigates the roots of identity, aided by the 'compost' of orality. Thus créolité is constantly moving, not created by humans but open to human intervention and, in fact, vital to human existence. This river is the route to one's 'repressed authenticity;' to stay dry is 'aesthetic suicide.' They speak of the French language as a conquest: they have introduced creole words into it and thus have forced it to hear them and to bear witness to their experience. This is meant to refute the ongoing concern with a weakening or superseding of creole by French, though it could also be seen as a reply to colonialist violence. As du Bellay wished for words from other languages to be 'grafted' onto French to enrich it and cause the substrata to grow

more substantial, so speakers of French creole seek reinforcement of their own language,

and thus experiences and identities, through a similar kind of commingling.

Glissant does not have a simple relation to the creole language or its uses; it is

sometimes assumed that he places it always in a positive light but, as Hallward writes,

> According to Glissant, the traditional forms of popular resistance in Martinique--
> the secret, initiatic role of Creole, shared participation in folk tales, religious
> syncretism, and so on--divert but do not engage the issue of dispossession. Such
> diversionary tactics remain dependent, predicated on the continued presence of
> the oppressor. ("Edouard" 452)

What does national identity consist of when folktales, religion, local language are taken

away? This is an open question in the case of Martinique, and that is why Glissant says

that his readers 'are in the future.' His people will have to progress to a state of self-

possession in order to come to an authentic understanding of their situation. Creole

cannot contribute to the establishment of the nation as such; it does not serve on its own

to produce or create anything (*DA* 401). The problem in the case of the francophone

Antilles is that the maternal language of creole and the officially imposed French

language "entretiennent chez l'Antillais un même insoupconné tourment" resulting from

what Glissant calls a "poétique forcée," when "une nécessité d'expression confronte un

impossible à exprimer" (402).

I have discussed some of the identitarian movements that link the Caribbean

region to the African continent and to other nations. I turn now to some of the more

important influences on Glissant coming from continental France.

European Influences

Glissant has called Saint-John Perse "le plus essentiel poète" (*IP* 108), though he

may have come to modify his thinking on this later on. Perse was an in-between figure in that he was French aristocracy but grew up, for the first 12 years of his life, on the island of Guadeloupe. In 1940, when the Vichy government revoked his French citizenship, he traveled to the US and settled there for over 15 years before returning to France, thus spending his life between Europe and the Americas. He had "greffés en lui le fourmillement, le bienheureux fertile (l'opulent, le grouillement) de ce qui à nouveau naît" (*IP* 108). Hence he had early life experiences in a setting similar to Glissant's but seen from the other end of the class spectrum. He grappled with the problems of self and other but from a different perspective, had a different dream. Uprooted, errant, and yet on the side of the colonizer, not colonized. Poet as voyager, poem as asylum.

Paul Claudel rigorously sought out what surrounded any possible poetic foundation. He attacked science as the bearer of all knowledge of the world, not only in the name of poetry but of faith, and sought a source or generative principle that would explain the self-fulfilledness of the world, a logic apart from that of scientific determinism that would always involve relation. "La métaphore est l'art autochtone de tout ce qui naît," he wrote (qtd. *IP* 99). Glissant continues: "Claudel forcera pour élire la poésie comme le *faire* par excellence, par quoi l'homme crée 'sa position lui-même dans l'ensemble.' Ainsi la poésie, domaine de la métaphore, sera installée au cœur de la connaissance. La logique de ce qui naît, c'est en fin de compte un Art poétique" (*IP* 99). In line with Glissant's notion of poetry as what is new, unexpected, this situates poetry as an origin. "L'unité du Tout a pour conséquence la caducité des dualismes" (99). When humans see themselves as center, they take the center with them and relate everything back to themselves. Claudel expresses through Christianity "cette correspondance entre

toutes choses qui toujours hante les poètes" (*IP* 102).

Glissant took the term 'le Divers' from Victor Ségalen to express the perils of complete assimilation and cultural appropriation. He wrote of Ségalen: "il n'entend pas en grande solennité doter son époque d'une sensibilité nouvelle, mais il va presque en secret se pénétrer d'une manière totalement autre (intégrée à la tradition d'un peuple de traditions – en Chine) de sentir et de connaître" (*IP* 89). In this way, in comparison to Perse, Chateaubriand, Leiris, Ségalen marked "le point du déracinement sans ruses, du reniement systématique" (*IP* 89) and so found his own specificity of place. Ségalen "a voulu réaliser totalement l'Autre dans le Même" (*IP* 90) and such an "apprentissage de soi" could only be accomplished through poetic means, through accidents. Ségalen ventured into the *étrange*, risking exoticism, toward *Connaissance*, to find the limits of his own position. Glissant quotes Ségalen: "C'est par la Différence, et dans le Divers, que s'exalte l'existence" (*IP* 92). Glissant could have said the same, and could be referring to his own work when he says of Segalen: "Son lyrisme serait crispé s'il n'était à tout coup nourri des saveurs du réel" (*IP* 93). Ségalen was "*en avant* du monde" (96): "après avoir en lucidité vécu l'appel du Divers, il restait à Ségalen à re-vérifier *son propre terreau*" (*IP* 95), just as Glissant would trace relations between his own *terre inquiète* and the rest of the world. All three of these poets for Glissant express something of the relation of the specific to the universal, "de l'un à l'univers."

Glissant, as mentioned, as a postcolonialist thinker relies less heavily on continental thinkers than others.[6] Yet he has borrowed many concepts from Deleuze or from Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari (Glissant was close friends with Guattari), among

---

6   "Glissant's work owes considerably less to European (colonizing) theorists (Karl Marx, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan) than does that of Homi Bhabha Gayatri Spivak, or Edward Said" (Humphries xii).

them the rhizome, nomadism, chaos, and the detour, which he has adapted to his own work. It behooves us, then, to read Glissant in tandem with a European thinker, with Deleuze in particular, to see what he has taken or left behind, in what ways his thinking differs from that on the continent. According to Christa Stevens, postcolonial literary criticism in general has borrowed heavily from Deleuze because his thinking allows for a bypassing of the frozen binary of colonizer/colonized, of identities at either the center or periphery. She states that "[c]et essor postcolonial de la référence deleuzienne doit beaucoup aux travaux d'Édouard Glissant" (223). Glissant has used deleuzian concepts in the service of his earlier project of establishing an Antillean identity as well as his later one of demonstrating the universality, or globalization, of that kind of creolized identity. One main difference in the way Glissant has adapted, for example, the rhizome, is his insistence on its rootedness; it is not the singular root that plunges downward in one direction, but it is *enraciné* in one area nevertheless. Relation is not made up of a lot of nebulous entities but of defined, singular, opaque beings. The Antilles are a paradigm of this idea: their populations were created through, founded on, a mixing of cultures, and they thus represent the mixing or *brassage* of cultures that is going on at an increasing rate around the world; they are this world in microcosm. The universal is best witnessed through the specific detail. Islands as they figure in Glissant's work are always in rhizomatic relation, open to each other in a network, yet always themselves.

Deleuze's conception of the island, in contrast to Glissant's historicized, grounded model, is an "idée-idéal de l'île comme lieu où l'homme se sépare du monde pour recréer le monde" (Stevens 226). In his analysis of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Giraudoux's *Suzanne et le Pacifique*, Deleuze posits the island as a place of origin, but of secondary

origin, such as that of Noah after the flood. This coincides in part with Glissant's

insistence on the Caribbean islands as a homeland, as opposed to seeing Africa or Europe

in that light, as has been customary. However, another important difference between the

two thinkers is highlighted here in that Deleuze privileges the insular quality of

experience on the desert island, going by that of Robinson in Tournier's novel *Vendredi*,

whereas this way of thinking based on Western literary texts is overly abstract and

apolitical for Glissant (228), who believes in always beginning from geographical and

historical reality. In fact this view of the island as a passive "île vierge qui s'offre comme

champ clos d'expérimentation au voyageur" (229) is a typical colonialist view, one that

Glissant demonstrates in his epic *Les Indes*.[7] Stevens points out the irony of this view

when juxtaposed with the reality of many Africans brought to the islands and enslaved,

islands where the original inhabitants had been killed off, followed by the dubious period

of fights for independence and then departmentalization, further alienating Martinicans

who are seen as not 'really' French. "Le Martiniquais, affirme Glissant, ne maîtrise pas

son espace-temps, à cause de cette histoire doublement subie et raturée et à cause d'un

espace non-possédé" (Stevens 229). This is coupled with natural forces of destruction and

the physical isolation that can impede true relations with other lands. Further exile has

been experienced since massive migration to the continent began in the 1960s—before

that it was only those who were able to go for higher education—and later dispersion into

the rest of the world. "Ainsi Glissant décrit le paradoxe que le Martiniquais, tout en

vivant sur une terre très fertile, ne sait pas tirer profit d'elle, ni physiquement ni

---

[7] The island in *Les Indes* is a sort of faultline in that Glissant portrays it as a traditionally passive woman violated by intruders and we must ask ourselves how conscious he is of this portrayal; that is, is he deliberately presenting a problematic image of the island as it was historically treated by colonizers, or does he share in that view to some extent. How aware is he of what he is representing in terms of gender?

mentalement. Dépossédé, il ne peut pas l'ensemencer, aliéné, il ne sait pas s'y enraciner"

(230). While Martinique is not technically a "desert" island, it is an island that has been

"deserted" politically and culturally. Stevens points out that when Deleuze calls for "une

redistribution générale des continents, de l'état des mers, des lignes de navigation," "c'est

justement l'enjeu du projet politique et poétique d'Edouard Glissant" (231). Glissant

proposes "la configuration archipélique comme l'essence de l'île antillaise" (Stevens

231) so that these islands are seen in relation and not as isolated and solitary; they in fact

have a multitude of relations among each other as well as with the shores of the

continents they are near. This is where the title of his first book of poetry comes from: *Un

champ d'îles*.

The ocean surrounding the island is every bit as relevant as the island itself, and is

in constant relation with it. Glissant speaks of the ocean as being the new country of the

slaves brought by ship from Africa: "l'océan de la traite fut notre nouveau pays" (*DA* 95).

He also cites two anglophone Caribbean poets in epigraph in his *Poétique de la relation*:

"the unity is submarine" (Kamau Brathwaite) and "Sea is History" (Derek Walcott).

Figures of water play a role in Glissant's poetry as relation to self and to community, as

accumulating force related to his 'spiral retelling.' For Deleuze, writing is never

representation but invention. Glissant writes not merely to show his perspective of the

world, or what he sees as his people's perspective, but to create and project that world, to

bring it fully into being. His poetry and essays draw on this idea of freedom, freedom to

imagine another path, a multiplicitous, divergent path.

Bodies of water are always in relation to the coastlines, banks and islands they

touch or even surround. The unstable boundary between earth and water lends itself to

the figure of hypallage, which is associated with accumulation and "qui attribue à un objet l'acte ou l'idée convenant à l'objet voisin. [...] l'hypallage littéraire repose sur un phénomène psychologique. Lorsque, de deux corps voisins, l'un se met seul en mouvement, les deux corps semblent en mouvement l'un par rapport à l'autre. Par suite d'une illusion d'optique ou d'une défaillance du sens critique, si le mobile paraît immobile, l'immobile paraît mobile" (Morier 534). An example of interrelations in nature to the point of melding together—the "hallucinatory experience of imagination" to which Humphries refers, "in which the differences among poem, reader, and referent dissolve into one immediate present experience" (xxxiii) is a passage like the following from "Les grands chaos":

> D'alors jusqu'à dorénavant
> La feuille en la boue ruisselle
> La racine d'eau fait liane
> À l'arbre dont l'île est le fruit (124)

The leaf and root are confounded with water and the island itself has been born as a living thing. The sounds of *feuille* and *ruisselle* confirm the confusion between them, while *eau* is enmeshed between *racine* and *liane*, which correspond by virtue of sound as well as sense. Nature's web of elements mirrors a history of cultural and linguistic intermingling: "Mots d'île mots de continent/Broussaillaient ce même chemin (*GC* 124). While the difficulty of the poetry means that we can only experience it in present tense— there is no narrative we can construct—we are also continually reminded of a distant past, and are vividly situated in other places.

Intersubjectivity: Opacity and Community

Glissant has privileged an essential community identity based on land or territory

that differs from the more common type of ethnocentric nationalism. His is a creolized region and identity, based on multiple races and ethnicities and national *appartenances* that, above all, is not exclusive. The "conversion de l'être" of which he speaks consists in the difficult process of abandoning the idea that "l'identité d'un être n'est valable et reconnaissable que si elle est exclusive de l'identité de tous les autres êtres possibles" (*IPD* 15). This opacity can be seen in individual and national terms.

Continental French thought in recent years has disavowed the notion of any possible community in the face of increasingly specialized identities.[8] This has been problematic for a France known for 'the French exception.' In the face of increasing diversity of the population, due to immigrants from the former colonies, community cannot be seen to rely on resemblances but instead must be more broadly disseminated, more discursive and relational. What Glissant adds to this is the understanding that to relate, entities or groups must first be solidly grounded; they must relate **from** somewhere. Relation does not take place in a vacuum, but within and from specific geopolitical (geopoetic) spaces.

A particularly valuable concept of Glissant for coming to terms with postcolonial relations and relations of humans to each other is "opacity," as contrasted with 'transparency':

> L'artiste ne peut se satisfaire du langage de la transparence, car il n'est pas possible de parler de manière transparente de ce qui est inextricable. Les plus grands écrivains de ce siècle, que ce soit Joyce ou Faulkner, sont des écrivains de l'inextricable. Et cet inextricable met en valeur, met en lumière, permet de faire comprendre l'inextricable du monde. (Glissant qtd. in Couffon 60-61)

One facet of opacity is thus its particularity to artistic expression, to the poetic task of

---

[8]   See Hiddleston, who cites Blanchot, Nancy, Derrida, Lyotard, and Badiou as having weighed in on the issue.

pointing to what is on the threshold of knowing and saying. The concept admits that transparency reveals too much to the colonizer, but also is part of an attempt to find a language adequate to a "collective consciousness trying to be, to find expression" (Dash qtd. in Hitchcock 39). While much has been made of the usefulness of this term for relations among cultures, I would say that it also has much to add to interpersonal relations and to the interpretation of Glissant's poetry at a personal and collective level. The word *com-prendre* stems from "to take with" or to appropriate. To understand is thus in a sense to do a violence, to assimilate the other to one's self, to colonialize. Glissant asks, why not accept others, with or without understanding them? This seems like a radical move when the goal of improving cross cultural understanding is so often presented as the standard to strive for among educational, religious, and business organizations and institutions. Part of what opaque writing such as that in Glissant's poetry does is to orient the reader to acceptance of the other, of an experience or subjectivity that is all but incomprehensible.

How does Glissant move from the specificity of the Martinican experience to the idea of the *tout-monde* or the notion that "le monde se créolise"? Most of the greatest and most 'universal' literary texts are grounded in a specific time and place; this foundation is what allows them to give free rein to the shared details of humanity. Glissant's valorization of difference and specificity becomes a vision of the entire world interacting rhizomatically, creating in effect a singular entity. This problem can be seen in two parts: how does Glissant's consciousness get translated or transferred into the collective we of his nation, and what is the precise relation of Martinique to the rest of the world, to the totality? He sees his region as a prophetic model of creolization, a process that more and

more affects every region.

The question of to and for whom Glissant is speaking has arisen, primarily in his case because of the disjunction between the complexity of his language and the supposed illiteracy of most of his people. A question that has been pondered in regard to Glissant is the connection between his often hermetic literary production and his compatriots, probably poor and perhaps unpoliticized; can there be a bridge between the two? His work is not meant to directly inspire his nation to action; it may make outsiders aware of his nation and its problems and of their connections to it and, more importantly, it develops a voice for the nation and thus develops the nation. The situation on the island has not necessarily remained the same in any case, as he pointed out in a 1998 interview:

> Les békés ne travaillaient pas, ils s'en fichaient ! Ils faisaient des études pour la forme. Ils ne réussissaient même pas le bac, parce que leur usine ou les terres paternelles les attendaient. J'ai fait mes études avec quelques enfants de békés et ils étaient tous nuls. Ils avaient leur destin tout tracé : prendre la succession de leur père. Maintenant, ils le regrettent. Ils disent : 'Comment expliquez-vous cela ? Tous les Noirs de la Martinique sont connus, renommés, compétents, etc.' Et nous, pas ! (qtd. in Couffon 26-27).

Glissant has noted many times that his Martinican readers exist in the future (Hitchcock 41). By this he indicates a certain frustration with the current Martinican mindset that displaces and internalizes colonial domination.

Poetry and Nation

"O poème qui naît de vous, qui naissez à ce labeur du monde entier" (*CI* 15).

Glissant has designated the epic as the form that the literature of the new world community, the *totalité-monde*, will take (*IPD*).[9] The epic was generally a form used by

---

[9]   Gilbert Gratiant wrote his own epic, entitled "Hier et demain ou l'épopée antillaise" wherein he imagines an alternate history and gropes toward a clarification of Martinique's relation to France. He

atavistic cultures, for which composite cultures feel nostalgia.[10] For Glissant, the new

epic will incorporate a change in form as well as content, in keeping with his project of

defying genre conventions.[11] "Le genre littéraire [...] ne correspond plus à l'actuel travail

littéraire qui est diffracté, cassé." (qtd. in Couffon 60). "Les poèmes sont porteurs de

récits et les essais porteurs de poèmes ou d'inventions romanesques. Nous, les Antillais,

et en général les écrivains des pays du sud, nous sommes les ethnologues de nous-mêmes.

L'écrivain de ces pays qui ne serait que romancier ou essayiste ou homme de théâtre me

paraîtrait frappé d'une étrange infirmité" (60). Glissant's epic is *Les Indes*, in which he

does not take advantage of mnemonic patterns of rhyme and rhythm in the way that

traditional oral cultures have preserved foundational epics.

In an oral tradition, the limits of the physical body determined in part the structure

and form of the work. What are the limits of writing and rewriting in the 'spiral retelling'

that constitutes Glissant's work? They turn out to be limits determined by the body as

well:

> La conséquence en sera qu'à chaque édition d'un tel texte, s'il s'en trouve, la
> tentation viendra (par ressouvenir de ces techniques relayées) d'en modifier –
> d'en parfaire ? – la lettre, encore et toujours. Le relaté varie ainsi (en même temps
> que bouge la matière de la Relation) vers une perfectibilité d'expression qui
> n'aborde pas à l'absolu. Jusqu'à quel extrême ? Quelle limite ? Sans doute à ce
> point où la voix faiblit et la main s'arrête. (*PR*)

There is nothing transcendent about the act of creation, the accumulation of experiences

---

discards the common figure of rice grains mixed with coffee, easily separated, and writes instead: "Our
country is like a man / Who hears beating in his chest / Two hearts together instead of one alone." For
Gratiant there is an affective exchange, even union, as well as a cultural one. He remains in the mindset
of two separate entities, however—the typical postcolonial bind of the *entre-deux*.

[10] Atavistic cultures are defined as those that underwent the process of creolization long ago; composite
cultures are still undergoing it.

[11] In a note at the end of Glissant's work *Le monde incréé*, with the descriptive subtitle of "poétrie," he
explicates: "*Poétrie: poème et conte et palabre ensemble, où s'encontrent les paysages, où les histoires
se raccordent, s'entresouchent les langages. Vous la prolongez ou vous la changez sans fin. Vous la
datez à votre manière. Les poétries, quels qu'en soient la circonstance et l'auteur, se répondent.*"

and words over the course of human generations and lives; it is dependent on human agency. It is this act of accumulation, of continuously building on what went before, that determines structure, form, content. Nothing is to be excluded: the material gathered, crafted, polished and presented to the reader will be as complete and as variegated as the writer can achieve. The more elements that are brought into play, the more likely they are to be recognized and embraced by someone. This lack of streamlined linearity is notable in the structure of his great work of essays *Discours antillais*, where he writes:

> L'intention en ce travail fut *d'accumuler à tous les niveaux*. L'accumulation est la technique la plus appropriée de dévoilement d'une réalité qui elle-même s'éparpille. Son déroulé s'apparente au ressassement de quelques obsessions qui *enracinent*, liées à des évidences qui *voyagent*. Le trajet intellectuel en est voué à un itinéraire géographique, par quoi la 'pensée' du Discours explore son espace et s'y tresse. (17)

The poetry develops from a regional focus in *Un champ d'îles* (1952) and *La terre inquiète* (1954) and widens into a more global approach by the time of *Les grands chaos* (1993), amassing cultural perspectives. In *Un champ d'îles* Glissant traces the relation between the physical islands and the poet's image of them, saying of the poet's gaze as it travels over the various elements of the island, "O ce regard qui de l'un à l'autre hésite et s'amasse!" (10). Even the gaze accumulates views, amasses the sensory experiences that go into forming a collective and singular subjectivity.

The structure of *Un champ d'îles* is simple: of 3 parts, the first is 6 sections of prose poetry. The second is 46 four-line stanzas, with occasional rhymes and lines of approximately 8 syllables, followed by a single line. This is bookmarked by the third, which is composed of 4 more sections in prose. Absence and presence are in play and presence is directly addressed, along with other elements: "Vous, présence, émoi de pierre, ouvrage du soleil quand il est lézarde sur la roche. [...] Votre absence, de même

pluie, ouvre la lumière" (14).

The speaker addresses an absent feminine "vous" throughout, here with a line recalling Mallarmé: "Absente qui êtes présence! Que la parole à l'entrée du poème hésite encore" (15).[12] Addressing a third person besides the reader situates the poem "in an uncertain zone of dispersed, decentered subjectivity" (Humphries xxv) and also weaves relation to the other into the writing. It, or she, stands in for everything that is not the poet, is not the islands, is absent from them; this might include the African continent, or any vision of what is lost or missing.

The notion of threshold evoked by "la parole à l'entrée du poème hésite" recurs in *Un champ d'îles*, bringing to mind the unstable point of encounter between water and land that is multiplied in the archipelago. The shifting sands of these thresholds mirror the threshold that is the poem, as evinced by Nancy and also by Anne Teyssiéras, as I will demonstrate in that chapter. Repeated collocations of "argile" and "bouge" or "remue" echo the idea of the sand or clay that appears to be moving due to the ocean, river, lake whose currents run by it--"cette argile au chaud du coeur, qui bouge"; "cette argile qui à nouveau bouge" (10); "Cette argile à nouveau remue!" (11)--in an instance of hypallage.

The threshold does not only beckon to the writer or reader of the poem, but is also an opening between human and nature and between the poem and the world.

> Que tout ce lieu soit muet comme un poème sans vergers, où que cet arbre hésite au bord de vous, cherchant l'oiseau de son regard sur vous brodé, la nef des arbres hauts sur la hauteur, et l'ogive tressée d'ombre pour vos ployures, -- toute splendeur est-elle pas muette? Comme un poème hésite au bord de l'eau, tâte du pied guette le gué mire le ciel dans ses brouillards sans gué, sans gué! comme un poème de mâtures crie sa voile et ses huniers, -- ainsi demeure-t-il à la frontière de vous, maraudeur d'un autre pays, une pierre à son front comme un signe

---

[12] "Je dis: une fleur! et hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement lève, idée même et suave, l'absente de tout bouquet." Mallarmé, *Crise de vers*.

d'ancienneté. (*CI* 11)

Poem, natural world, human, all are confounded and yet not interchangeable, not able to penetrate or become the other. The poem has no orchard, the tree is anthropomorphized but cannot cross the border of the human, any more than the poem can enter the water. If splendor, whether poetic or natural, is mute, it falls to the human to express it through the poem, as the poem can express the manmade (voile et huniers). Yet the poem and the human remain separate and even foreign to one another. The poem is in movement—"de mâtures"--and can seem violent, marauding, but can also embroider its gaze upon you. As the human looks to the poem for beauty (or booty), so the poem returns the gaze. The question of where this place, the *lieu* mentioned, is arises again in the first section of part 3: "O tout ce lieu est mort, plus que l'aurore dans les chambres, loin du vent. Jamais plus n'ira le vent par la parole, acheminant des rêveries" (24). This refers to the islands, certainly, but also to the space of the poem, the world within, and created by, the poem.

La terre inquiète (1954), which followed *Un champ d'îles*, tracks the relation between earth and sea, between the island and the waves that continually erode it, shape it, by turns covering or revealing it, enacting the timelessness of the natural world. "The ephemeral point at which this dialectic of land and sea occurs defines the locus of poetic consciousness" (Humphries xxviii) There is still a feminine presence in the second person, as well as a "je" who speaks; poetic subjectivity does not express itself in a homogenous manner.

Les grands chaos (1993) is, according to Humphries,

> perhaps Glissant's most ambitious and most difficult work of poetry. In it, all of the themes and preoccupations that shape his previous work—poems, novels, and essays—find their densest and arguably their purest expression. It cannot be "read" in the conventional sense; rather, it must be allowed to pour over the reader

like the waters of a great river […] (xxxii)

It is not necessary to completely understand a poem's semantic meanings to appreciate it; one has to understand it in part, but if one has enjoyed a poem or appreciated the sounds or images then one has 'grasped' it on some level. Here we are asked to immerse ourselves completely in the experience of the poetry, to bathe in it and to live with the ambiguity that mirrors the uncertainty in the lives and history of Caribbeans and the proliferation and abundance that is the islands' nature.

Dialogues among the 'great chaoses' involve the bayous, the Seine, the Nile, the Lezarde in Martinique, and thus brings together the Americas with continental France and the continent of Africa. These waters are neither limpid nor pure, they are great forces of nature driven through channels they have forged, sometimes overflowing and overtaking other paths. "Saisissement des avenues" (119). When waters withdraw, they leave behind not only "gravats de terre" but "mottes de mot," having served as conduits of culture.

The lexical field of water takes on as many variations as the flora and fauna, from "feu marin" and "ressac tumultueux" in *Un champ d'îles* to "la mer sagace" and "l'eau des mots" in *Les Grands Chaos*. Yet "Le langage de l'eau n'est perçu qu'en écho" (149), indicating that it cannot be grasped directly, anymore than water itself can. The myth Glissant traces says that once water and earth were mingled, recalling the book of Genesis in the Bible: "Approche d'un temps primordial, terre et eaux mêlées, où le rythme de la voix est élémentaire: Ici, battu de huit cadences" (119). All the elements flow together, as Humphries suggests, and this is underlined typographically by the lack of periods in the first cadence, except for a final one. The use of "nous" privileges community, and it often appears he is addressing the water, birds and geographical

elements directly on behalf of the community: "vos glouglous" (123); "tu ne poses plume en corolles" (124); and even "Failles, qui surgissez," the final line of the piece (191).

The cadences of "Les grands chaos" are, in order, "Bayou," which serves as an introduction; "Les grands chaos," which includes "Désode," "Dialogue des grands chaos," and "Et autre dialogue hué"; "L'oeil dérobé"; "Boisées"; and "L'eau du volcan." The notion of threshold evoked by "la parole à l'entrée du poème hésite" recurs in *Un champ d'îles*, bringing to mind the unstable point of encounter between water and land that is multiplied in the archipelago. The shifting sands of these thresholds mirror the threshold that is the poem, as evinced by Nancy and also by Anne Teyssiéras, as I will demonstrate in that chapter. Repeated collocations of "argile" and "bouge" or "remue" echo the idea of the sand or clay that appears to be moving due to the ocean, river, lake whose currents run by it--"cette argile au chaud du coeur, qui bouge"; "cette argile qui à nouveau bouge" (10); "Cette argile à nouveau remue!" (11)--in an instance of hypallage.

The threshold does not only beckon to the writer or reader of the poem, but is also an opening between human and nature and between the poem and the world.

> Que tout ce lieu soit muet comme un poème sans vergers, où que cet arbre hésite au bord de vous, cherchant l'oiseau de son regard sur vous brodé, la nef des arbres hauts sur la hauteur, et l'ogive tressée d'ombre pour vos ployures, -- toute splendeur est-elle pas muette? Comme un poème hésite au bord de l'eau, tâte du pied guette le gué mire le ciel dans ses brouillards sans gué, sans gué! comme un poème de mâtures crie sa voile et ses huniers, -- ainsi demeure-t-il à la frontière de vous, maraudeur d'un autre pays, une pierre à son front comme un signe d'ancienneté. (*CI* 11)

Poem, natural world, human, all are confounded and yet not interchangeable, not able to penetrate or become the other. The poem has no orchard, the tree is anthropomorphized but cannot cross the border of the human, any more than the poem can enter the water. If splendor, whether poetic or natural, is mute, it falls to the human to

express it through the poem, as the poem can express the manmade (voile et huniers). Yet the poem and the human remain separate and even foreign to one another. The poem is in movement—"de mâtures"--and can seem violent, marauding, but can also embroider its gaze upon you. As the human looks to the poem for beauty (or booty), so the poem returns the gaze. The question of where this place, the *lieu* mentioned, is arises again in the first section of part 3: "O tout ce lieu est mort, plus que l'aurore dans les chambres, loin du vent. Jamais plus n'ira le vent par la parole, acheminant des rêveries" (24). This refers to the islands, certainly, but also to the space of the poem, the world within, and created by, the poem.

Poetic enjambment is one common way of throwing a reader off rhythm and of enforcing closer attention to the lines, and it is rife in Glissant's work, across stanzas as well as across lines. One example in *Un champ d'îles* is the stanza "L'après-midi s'est voilé/De lianes d'emphase et de fureur/Glacée, de volcans amenés/Par la main à côté des sables" (16).

Forms of repetition as accumulation such as epizeuxis--"Comme une épée épée" ("Désode")--, adnominatio--"Comme une houe qui n'a houé" ("Et autre dialogue hué")-- and anaphora--"Le temps qui demeure est d'attente / Le temps qui vole est un cyclone" (*Un champ d'îles* 16) amplify sounds and presences. Dramatic repetition in first lines of stanzas happens in *Un champ d'îles*: "Abandonnés les tournoiements"; "Abandonné le puits de souffrance"; "Abandonnée tarie la mesure" (17-18). The word repeated denotes desertion, being forsaken, however abandoning the elements mentioned is for the good. "Oiseaux zouézo gibier partis/Où sont allés les tire-d'ailes/flambants, messagers, tourterelles" from *Les grands chaos* (124) is a classic case of accumulation in which the

general term "oiseaux" is used and then repeated in creole--"zouézo"--and then more

specific examples are given. It is noted that these animals have left and then the question

is posed of where they have gone. The reduction of the two terms for birds to one in the

English translation ("Birds game all gone/Where did they go") flattens this complexity of

connotations for the reader who does not read French.

In 2007, Glissant founded the Institut du Tout-Monde in Paris for the purpose of

furthering knowledge of creolization. The website states that the institute proposes to

> faire avancer la connaissance des phénomènes et processus de créolisation, et de
> contribuer à diffuser l'extraordinaire diversité des imaginaires des peuples, que
> ces imaginaires expriment à travers la multiplicité des langues, la pluralité des
> expressions artistiques et l'inattendu des modes de vie.

Taking stock of all of these diverse imaginaries, multiple languages, and plurality of

expression will create a "vaste réseau culturel à la fois francilien, interrégional, en très

étroite connexion avec les régions de l'Outre-Mer, et international." (http://tout-

monde.com/). This is one more step toward promoting acceptance of all peoples while

keeping the past of the islands in sight.

CHAPTER 4
Gaston Miron: The Journey Out

Toujours, un voyage, une marche dessinent le double mouvement de la perte et
des retrouvailles. Au terme du voyage, l'altérité semble vaincue pour de bon.[1]

With Gaston Miron's death in 1996, the 6th edition of *L'homme rapaillé*, his sole

published book of poems, will remain the definitive one.[2] As much as he reread and

rewrote his own work and added prefaces and postfaces to editions, we can now only

look back over these emendations to trace the path he took through the long process of

articulating a global Québécois identity. French poets saw him as "la légitime expression

de tout un peuple" and yet, "[p]ar son implication dans la lutte, le poète, loin d'être le

simple écho du groupe, se place au centre même de la praxis révolutionnaire. Cependant,

il ne se laisse pas absorber complètement dans la militance" (Brochu 68). He has been

called "a cultural activist […] exceptionally rooted in Quebec literary tradition"

(Desroches 4). His activism and literary gifts come together in his poetry.

Despite the patchwork quality of *L'homme rapaillé* in its evolution, its stages of

expansion have been attempts to include diverse aspects of humanity in general and

---

[1]   Nepveu, *Les mots* 121.
[2]   While *Deux Sangs* was published in 1954 (co-authored with Olivier Marchand) and *Courtepointes* in
      1975, both were ultimately folded into subsequent editions of HR. The last edition, published in France
      in 1998, did not contain any of the prose texts found in the other editions; it is only definitive because
      Miron can no longer make changes to it.

Québécois identity specifically. It has been described as "un recueil qui a son unité et sa cohérence," of which the prose texts "constituent une prise de position sur la situation québécoise que l'on peut qualifier de globalement cohérente" (Pleau 134). André Brochu stated: "Le lyrisme mironien est une stupéfiante intégration de tout" (2005 8), and this 'intégration de tout' is what Miron strove for; in his wish to speak for himself and for his compatriots he nurtured a comprehensive perspective on his country, its history and its place in the world.

For Pleau, the incessant reworking Miron subjected his poetry to signals "un refus obstiné de l'achèvement" (147), while Nepveu perceives HR as "un acte de résistance à la monumentalisation" (2003 11). In this sense it is always "une poésie en devenir, vouée à l'*intranquillité* et en cela emblématique de la littérature québécoise" (Gauvin 4). Chamberland sees "un souci jamais apaisé d'éprouver le dire poétique" (35), and Gasquy-Resch qualifies Miron as "[t]rop exigeant pour se contenter de l'à peu près, trop passionné pour se taire" (17). Seen in this light, Miron was driven tirelessly toward his own definition of poetic perfection: rewriting was intended to bring the work closer to authenticity and to wholeness. With this 'definitive work in progress,' as with other paradoxes associated with Miron—politics and poetics, art and engagement, self and collective, orality and writing, populism and formalism—he expanded the space where these oppositions could enter into more complex relations with each other than previously seen in French-Canadian literature.

"Débarassons-nous des cercles" wrote Miron, as circles will not lead anywhere new. He wished to push himself and his country, with which he identified, forward, to move away from inward-directed processes and outward into the wider world. I name the

movement in his work expansion, as he expands his own identity to include Quebec and that identity to include the world; as the sounds (alliterations, anaphoras) in his work echo and sing and repeated patterns serve to bring all of it together in a harmonious whole; as the relation to the other is constantly emphasized in an attempt to find common ground, symbiosis; open landscapes populate the poems in a unification of inside and outside, and sentences consistently overflow the borders of a poem. If Miron wished to be rid of circles, we can nonetheless see his movement as instead expanding the circle, a movement that stretches boundaries to incorporate all the contradictions of the poet and his people.

With the synthesis of "tout" that Miron sought—"Le tout : tel est bien l'objet visé" ; "Miron […] verra toujours le savoir et l'écriture comme un tout à conquérir"; "La poésie du militant […] est nourrie de toutes les vérités" ; "il dit tout"; "Miron […] s'emploie à dire la grande faiblesse à partir de laquelle tout est à construire" (Brochu 2003 8-10)—it is interesting that his favorite line of poetry was one penned by Guillaume de Poitiers, the first troubadour: "Farai un vers de dret nien" or "Je composerai un poème de tout à fait rien;" all comes from nothing.

From French Canada to Québec

It would seem that the sense of cultural and personal wholeness Miron pursued might be easier than in some other francophone post/colonial settings, but French Canada has its own peculiarities. Given the lack of schooling and resultant illiteracy in French Canada of the 19th century, following the British conquest, solitary poets of the time did

not find a wide readership. Emile Nelligan (b.1879) showed great early promise but was institutionalized for mental illness. Why did Miron make such an impact when other important poets had published before him?

> Perhaps because better and earlier than anyone else, Miron articulated a drastic shift in Quebec identity and expressed it in a powerful epic tone engaging culture and literature in light of the growing decolonization movements of the 1950s and 1960s. This epic voice did not celebrate the past glory of a powerful nation, as many poets before him had tried to do. On the contrary, it was in the humiliation of having to struggle to master his own language that Miron found his most powerful argument. His poems refocus the collective space into a new sense of nationhood and channel it into a project of political independence for Quebec. (3)

Desroches goes on to point out that many of those who came after Miron claimed him as a *confrèr*e, including feminist poets who empathized with his attempts to "reach concrete, daily life, in a repossessed language that would be universal […] linking the concept of universal to identity" (France Théoret qtd. in Desroches 5), and so he brought different cultural groups together. Miron's work can be seen as participating in the epic mode in the vein of Glissant, that is, not a traditional epic designed to establish a coherent national narrative but one that posits a new, post/colonial nation against its former oppressor (Desroches 7). In this, his poetry, and in his public life as promoter of Quebec culture, Miron tried to expand the meaning of that identity and to incorporate it into the world at large. He worked in the context of a "collective space" but had to "struggle to master his own language," quite literally in the case of French, and also in the sense of finding his own idiom that would best present the specificity and the universality of the Québécois experience.

While "poète engagé" smacks of folklore within the context of Quebec cultural politics, Miron's politics and self-expression work together in his poetry; his engagement

stems more from the pain he felt as a colonized subject than from a particular ideology. And his main problem was not with Anglophone Canada but with the upper classes and their system of dominance, to which the English language was "fondement ou accessoire" ("Bilingue de naissance"). Given the circumstances of 1960s Quebec (similar to the circumstances in many other places), it was not remarkable if a poet writing at the time saw him or herself as being "au service de la révolution." Miron's status today goes beyond his militancy or his "poésie du pays," despite his concerns about his own alienation and resulting possible lack of authenticity in the language he used, his poetry has maintained a reputation in its own right, apart from his activism.

"[I]ndépendamment de ses intentions politiques, il s'exprimait aussi avec une voix personnelle dont l'authenticité n'est pas discutable" (Pleau 90). In his poetry he writes himself and his country, willing both into being while simultaneously confirming the fact of their existence. He should be read, as with the other poets in this dissertation, as an individual writing from a particular place and time. "[R]especter l'esprit de Miron, ce sera d'abord le lire à partir de sa situation" (Pleau 103).

Montreal was a center for literary reviews from around 1941, and poetry began to take on increased importance, not just in the literary sphere but culturally and politically: Mailhot cites Jacques Blais--"Le poète de 1934 n'avait guère droit de cité, celui de 1944 passe pour l'interprète de la collectivité"--and later notes that "notre poésie commence, vers 1950, à se donner une continuité et une durée" (18; 20). While surrealism has been given partial credit for these changes, poets' increasing use of everyday spoken language was a stronger poetic force, and this followed a period that had been open to a range of experimentation that included a return to ballads and other traditional forms (Mailhot 20-

21). "A force de renaitre, la poésie québécoise a fini par naitre" (18). However, publishers

still did not find poetry to be a financially worthwhile investment and it had "peu

d'existence institutionnelle" (21). It was at this point that Miron and some friends

founded les Editions de l'Hexagone which provided a stable home for poetry, not only

through publishing and distributing books and the review *Liberté,* but in serving as a

meeting place for poets to perform and exhibit their work.[3]

In establishing these literary outlets, Miron and his friends wished to serve the

community at large, known as "les Canadiens français" early on but then increasingly by

separatists as "Québécois" in the 1960s during the Quiet Revolution to avoid reference to

the colonizing entities of France and Canada (Randall 77).[4] In accordance with

Lautréamont's statement that "La poésie doit être faite par tous, non par un" (qtd. in

Dieng 311), cultural and literary output were seen as collective and inclusive enterprises,

central to Miron's thinking on the social role of poetry. This general sentiment was

probably the closest the editors of *Liberté* ever came to expressing a mission or ideology

for the journal.

> C'est dans la qualité de ses poètes 'mineurs' que la génération de l'Hexagone
> manifeste le plus clairement son importance. Même s'ils ont rarement publié plus
> de deux ou trois recueils, ces poètes incarnent l'essentiel du projet poétique et
> idéologique de leur époque. [...] la poésie québécoise acquiert une profondeur,
> elle cesse de reposer sur quelques isolées, si riches soient-elles. (Mailhot 24-25)

Canada was entering a period of prosperity along with the rest of the West, and poets

responded by stripping down to "la parole nue"; the discourse was more about ethics and

rigor than revolution. Referring to the early 1960s, Mailhot writes

---

3   The original co-founders of L'Hexagone with Miron were Olivier Marchand, Gilles Carle, Louis
     Portugais, Jean-Claude Rinfret, and Mathilde Ganzini, for a total of six, hence the name: a figure with
     six equal sides. The name also plays on the term used to refer to the country of France.
4   "Other separatists insist during the same period on the term 'Canadien français', in order to underline
     their continuing colonization" (Randall 81 n. 1).

il s'agit toujours, dans la poésie québécoise moderne, de la 'fondation du territoire'. Formule ambigue s'il en est, car ce territoire, c'est aussi bien l'espace réel du Québec (libre) que le 'territoire de la poésie'. La naissance souhaitée d'un nouveau pays coincide avec la naissance du langage, avec la création du cosmos et de l'homme. Le nationalisme passe, dans la poésie, par le mythe, voire la religion. (24-25)

"La poésie est pour plusieurs l'hymne d'une nouvelle foi, 'la foi des racines'" in this "période ou la parole poétique se veut souveraine et fondatrice" (25). Miron was a representative *par excellence* of this transitional period from traditional Catholic values to secular and humanist concern with establishing a sovereign national identity. In 1963, "la poésie du pays connait son apogée": it was at this time that Miron published early selections of "La vie agonique" in *Liberté* (25). In the 50s poets (especially those affiliated with *Liberté*) were reformist and concerned with poetry for poetry's sake; that is, "on concluait que la poésie n'avait pas à s'engager, et c'était dans son accomplissement propre qu'elle prenait, *de facto*, une dimension sociale" (26); poetic discourse was "la parole absolue." More and more in the 1960s, with such publications as the leftist review *Parti Pris*, the concept of poetry or literature as subjective experience was dismissed as conservative. Many poets turned to writing novels, a genre that allowed for more detailed attention to social issues. Complex, experimental writings such as those of Nicole Brossard signaled a change in ideas about lyricism, and l'Hexagone lost some of its influence around this time. However, as it also began to publish new editions of classic works from 1945-1965, which often served as springboards for the newer generation, l'Hexagone was able in some measure to reposition itself.

With urbanization, secularization, growth of the counter-culture, rock music taking the place of traditional *chanson*, and similar cultural upheavals taking place throughout the West, poetry tended to be "expérimentale, aggressive ou ironique," to be

fragmented and improvisational in the mode of jazz music. "La poésie se veut moins naïve et immédiate. [...] il ne saurait plus être question de 'petites fleurs et de petits oiseaux'. [...] La poésie s'urbanise, découvre le sexe et la drogue" (28-29). Added to the changes Québec was experiencing that it shared with many other places, its cultural position between the 'beat' writings of New York and California and the influences of structuralism in France lent a particular flavor to literary output.

> L'écriture de l'avant-garde se cherche entre Sollers et Ginsberg, Denis Roche et Ferlinghetti. L'intervalle est large, la synthèse est difficile, voire impossible. Une chose est sure: la collaboration des poètes à ce que [Jacques] Godbout a appelé le 'texte national' est bel et bien terminée. (29)

The movement from the beginning to the end of the 1960s was from certainty and faith to chaos.

It was immediately upon the heels of this period, in 1970, that Miron published the first edition of *L'Homme rapaillé*. If his earlier work was seen as the apogee of 'poésie du pays', ultimately the body of his work in its expansive movement embraced not just nationalism and not just subjective lyric but both, and their relation. In discussing Franco-Ontarian poetry, a concept that would only appear in 1970 with the rise of independentism in Quebec, Lucie Hotte cites Margaret Michèle Cook's division of this poetry into two camps: "la poésie de l'être et la poésie du pays," or a lyric tradition versus a poetry marked by, and marking, a collective self, using the quotidian discourse of that collective and treating its social and political issues as themes. Hotte sees a third type that seeks a balance and relation between individuality and community belonging. She sees the 'poète du pays' as experiencing a lack of identity due to a lack of authentic language and place, and thus as lost, while the lyric poet understands that he is simply alone, without a community, but exists as an individual nonetheless. Both poets she cites as

examples, Patrice Desbiens and Eric Charlebois, meditate on language and linguistic belonging as they pertain to poetry and the role of the poet, but in Desbiens "le travail sur la langue vise à dénoncer une situation sociale et politique" while for Charlebois "il s'agit plutot de signifier un certain désespoir." This neat division cannot be maintained throughout the work, and we can see shades of the other camp in each poet; we can see something of Miron in both poets as well: when Desbiens writes of "Cet autobus qui me met hors de moi-même en m'amenant/plus près de moi-même" or states "Je ne peux pas partir et/je ne peux pas revenir" (171, 173), we are reminded of certain lines of Miron such as "il y a longtemps que je m'étais pas revu" or "je ne suis pas revenu pour revenir" ("Liminaire"), in which we find similar feelings of ambivalence and variable connectedness in relation to where one is. One difference is that "chez Desbiens, il s'agit moins de trouver un sens d'appartenance ailleurs, un lieu où l'on serait chez soi, où l'on pourrait être soi, que de laisser derrière soi une appartenance aliénante" (173), while Miron writes "je n'ai jamais voyagé vers d'autre pays que toi, mon pays," emphasizing his desire to move toward something and not simply away from something else, to reunite himself with his country, to find himself there in both senses of the term. Thus although he may share Desbiens' feeling of being trapped in inauthenticity, he feels that authentic existence and belonging are to be sought and found together.

Charlebois' poetry contains many references to streets and places in Ontario, but his voyage on specific roads does not read as a quest for his country, nor do his references to a dead friend appear to relate to any sense of cultural death; rather we can read his travels in terms of the common trope of journey as life, set within a specific geography but also very personal—and thus universal.

> Cette poésie nous présente donc le cheminement d'un homme qui cherche sa place dans le monde, tant franco-ontarien qu'universel et qui découvre qu'on ne peut vivre que pour soi. [...] Plus que le destin de la communauté, ce qui est mis en scène ici c'est le destin d'un individu, qui ne nie pas son lien avec la communauté franco-ontarienne, mais qui ne perçoit pas sa destinée comme représentative de celle de sa communauté. (176-77)

Miron in many ways did see himself as representing his community, but this does not negate the very real presence of his personal self in the work. One example similar to that of Charlebois is Miron's poem "Rue Saint-Christophe," of which André Gervais juxtaposes five different versions. The third line, which in the first version reads "Peu à peu on m'a perdu toute trace de moi-même" becomes in subsequent versions "Peu à peu j'ai perdu toute trace de moi-même." The second version has no title, while the third and fourth have the title "La fatigue de vivre;" the final version of the poem as it has been published since has the title "Rue Saint-Christophe" and maintains the revised third line. This change can be seen as a shift from blame to acceptance of responsibility, or, if we wish to take a post/colonial perspective, as anger toward the colonizer internalized and directed against oneself. The more salient point is that the impersonal general pronoun becomes a first-person singular pronoun, transforming an act performed on the subject by anonymous others to a very personal sensation of loss and of responsibility for that loss. The change in title would appear to go from geographical, hence regional, to personal and back again; when we learn that Miron was living on the rue Saint-Christophe in Montréal while drafting the poem, we understand that, again, the division is not so clearcut. As with Charlebois, the reference to a specific street stems from personal lived experience, as much as or more than from any geopolitical position.

We know that Miron considered himself militant, that his commitment to his politics even interfered with his writing and his personal relationships (Pleau 101 n.6).

We are familiar with his prose writings on the specificities of Quebecois identity and language and his more dogmatic poems like the oft-cited 'Damned Canuck." Pleau insists that we can examine the political in Miron's poetry without reducing it to that; in the same vein, I believe we can examine the question of love in his poetry without reducing it to that and, going one step further, explore the relation between engagement and the personal that infuses his poems since "son ambition était d'embrasser toutes les dimensions de l'existence dans sa poésie" (102-03). Pleau specifies that we know Miron was personally engaged and we know he wrote essays on the politics of language in Quebec, and that he made allusions to politics in his poems; the question is to determine "dans quelle mesure ces allusions diverses touchent à l'essentiel du projet poétique de Miron" (97). We can look at this relation through the lens of genre—prose versus poetry—and modifications to *L'homme rapaillé*, as well as language, figures, and themes in the work.

Authentic Speech: Québécanthrope or Compagnon des Amériques?

The primary route to the genuine québécois identity Miron sought was to be language.

> Sa quête éperdue de la langue qu'il cherchait à préserver, qu'il défendait publiquement, était son constant souci, car dans sa chute, sa perte, elle entrainerait la disparition de l'expression d'une culture et d'un peuple, y compris celle des poètes. (Kattan 115)

Precision in language was paramount, as expressed in his long piece "Notes sur le poème et le non-poème," where the repeated term *Ceci* refers to linguistic alienation. Miron explained further: *Ceci*, "C'est devenir étranger à soi-même dans sa propre langue. C'est-

à-dire ne plus reconnaître que notre langue est envahie par un autre esprit et une autre tournure" (qtd. in Dominguez 1019). The poem is anywhere where one's own language exists and is tied closely to identity, whereas the non-poem, "c'est […] la domination de l'altérité linguistique sur moi" (qtd. in Dominguez 1020). A major aspect of this concern with authenticity is the fear that he is not speaking authentically, that he is using a "*français approximatif et aliéné*" (qtd. in Dominguez 1019). He speaks of "cabotin," "mime," "jeux," and "parade" in relation to himself, as if he is always watching and judging himself from the exterior; he is doubled and is not his true self, is dispossessed.

Miron was trying to move away from alienation and dispossession, toward self-possession and belonging.[5] This was part of a broader general movement outward to include self and country, individuality and belonging, politics and poetry. The poet Octave Crémazie wrote in a letter in 1867 "Ce qui manque au Canada, c'est d'avoir une langue à lui" (qtd. in Randall 83, Gasquy-Resch 25). Alienation was both historical and linguistic, and the latter on two fronts: English was the language of privilege and easily contaminated Canadian French, which, partly due to this 'pollution,' did not meet the standard of continental French.

In his quest for identity, Miron's concern with questions of authenticity and dishonesty or fakery pertain to the goal of being true to oneself and the difficulties inherent in that attempt when one is forced to speak from a dispossessed position in a language from which one is alienated. Attempts to speak one's truth are often frustrated by the feeling of having to wear a mask, or having to speak a language that cannot quite express one's experiences or perceptions:

---

[5] Nepveu examines this preoccupation through Ricoeur's entry on "alienation" in the Encyclopedia Universalis.

> -Tapi au fond de moi tel le fin renard
>
> alors je me résorbe en jeux, je mime et parade
>
> ma vérité, le mal d'amour, et douleurs et joies ("L'homme agonique")

Even such weighty concerns as truth, love, and pain can only be mimed, played as a game, or paraded about like show animals. Indeed this appears to be the poet's role: "j'écris, j'écris, à faire un fou de moi / à me faire le fou du roi de chacun." As necessary as the writing is, it is at the same time impossible to do it correctly; in hoping to speak for all, the poet ends up simply making a mockery of himself on others' behalf. This, then, must be his way of forming connections to others as long as he cannot express himself in any pure, direct fashion. And it is more specifically a way of serving people as a jester, of personally entertaining everyone. Certain subtitles indicate that even his link to poets who preceded him is dubious: "Cantique des horizons (sur un ton faussement valéryen)" and "Corolle ô fleur (sur un ton faussement mallarméen)."[6] At the same time, these attitudes were part of a more general Quebec aesthetic: "La poésie québécoise s'est libérée non seulement en brisant les vieilles formes de la métrique traditionnelle mais aussi en apprenant à rire et à sourire, par la fantaisie, le clin d'oeil, la cocasserie" (Mailhot 19).

Attainment of authenticity is impeded specifically by the status of the French language, which must be recuperated for Quebec. Alienation is linked to the fact and experience of being dispossessed of one's native tongue. Use of the neutral demonstrative pronoun "CECI" in "Notes sur le poème et non-poème" designates something close to the speaker (in comparison to "cela") and yet refuses it the honor of being named, of being

---

[6] Like most writers Miron was not always aware of certain influences creeping in, as when critics pointed out the similarity of his line "Le gris, l'agacé, le brun, le farouche" in "Les siècles de l'hiver" to Mallarmé's "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui" (Plourde).

accorded its own separate identity. At the same time, its significance shows in the fact that it is written in all capital letters, so the word jumps off the page and is the first thing a reader sees. Yet "Je sais qu'en CECI ma poésie est occultée."

"CECI" further refers to, in Miron's words, "[ce] qui sépare le dedans et le dehors en en faisant des univers hostiles l'un à l'autre. Des univers opaques l'un à l'autre (121)" (Dominguez 1021). Authenticity and true poetry are predicated on connecting or uniting opposing elements, here inside and outside, or entire separate universe. Literally, Québécois language and literature had to come to terms with French language and literature on the other side of the Atlantic. Miron took seriously the task of building a national literature. Politically, he was a separatist, believing Quebec should secede from Canada, while also wishing to see Quebec take its rightful place in the group of world nations. His expressed need to return to his country gives the impression that the country is not what it was, or is something it had never been, or that it did not exist at all, since he had to travel to it even though he was not anywhere else: "je n'ai jamais voyagé vers d'autre pays que toi, mon pays." He nursed a "lifelong hostility to all forms of bilingualism" (McGimpsey 42) in which he saw inherent inequality. This travel and return is also a return to authentic selfhood, hence the complementary movements of reduction and expansion, of withdrawal and movement outward.

One problem with the fusing of individual and collective is the question of who then is speaking in the work. This can be seen as a problem of reception; did the public persona cover over the poet? As a public political speaker,

> il faisait siennes les règles d'un discours commun. […] Mais qui parle en lui? Tout ce réseau de représentations, de stratégies argumentatives, de mouvances affectives n'est-il pas à la fin attribuable à un anonyme, qui se dérobe sous un

entre-nous familier? Comment alors ne pas soupçonner que, lorsque nous croyons entendre la poésie de *cet homme-là*, c'est celui de l'anonyme que nous 'recevons' et reproduisons? Et que nous mettons à notre insu dans la bouche du poète tout un tissu d'idéologèmes colportés par tout un chacun dans l'irresponsabilité de la *non-signature*. Certes, ces mots de tous ont aussi passé ses lèvres puisque le militant débattait ferme dans le milieu de l'*interlocution* publique. (Chamberland 32)

Entre-nous personalizes the entre-deux and universalizes it at the same time: not everyone feels torn between two cultures but everyone relates to other people and everyone feels torn in the context of interpersonal relationships. What is this "entre-nous," and is it related to the "entre-deux" so often mentioned in discussions of francophone literature? We are all continually moving between independence and affective connection, just as some of us move between cultures and languages, equally at home in either, both homes equally necessary. What was Miron doing differently? What happens when the language of the populace issues from a poet's lips? How do we discern between our own thoughts as voiced by him and our thoughts and beliefs attributed to him, by which we risk reducing him to a political, nationalist figure? Chamberland proposes this approach:

> laisser le poème s'entendre en sa diction comme énonciation d'un sujet singulier, par posture réfractaire aux présupposés d'un discours commun. Toutefois l'écart singularisant, grâce auquel un poète assume la responsabilité de son dire, s'inscrit moins sur le plan de 'contenus' ou de 'signifiés' que dans toutes marques d'une *voix signifiante* qui, en son rythme et sa syntaxe, éprouve la teneur, la charge et la portée de chaque mot aussi bien que du rapport des mots entre eux et ce, de telle sorte que pas un n'échappe à la rigoureuse exigence d'un dire vrai: un poète n'est tel que de payer sans compter de sa personne et de son corps. Telle est la poétique du poème, que nulle politique ne subordonne, quoi qu'il en soit, par ailleurs, de sa légitimité ou de sa nécessité. (32-33)

This passage becomes a definition of poetry in general in its defense of one poet's singularity: poetry is singular in every way, not just in its rhyme or rhythm or choice of words, and cannot be subordinated to politics; the politics of a poem is poetic(s). Brochu overstates the case when he says that everything in Miron's work was subordinated to

politics except for love.

Influences

Various critics (Nepveu; Brouillette) have pointed out that Miron was better known as a personality and as an activist than as a poet and that it is time to reexamine his poetry on its own merits. His influence as an individual and as a 'man of action' was enormous—he cast a wide net—but the influence of his poetry has not been thoroughly analyzed.

> Par ses écrits et par sa présence, inoubliable à quiconque l'a rencontré, Gaston Miron a su tisser des liens, qui n'ont cessé de s'élargir, entre des écrivains et des intellectuels de par le monde. C'est pourquoi il est apparu important de présenter aujourd'hui un nouvel aperçu du rayonnement de son œuvre. (Brouillette 209)

We can look further back to see who influenced Miron, to better get an idea of his place in literary tradition. Gasquy-Resch enumerates the first poets he read, who were all Canadian: Crémazie (romanticist and patriot), Pamphile le May (who straddled the Romantics and Parnassians and "qui ouvrit la voie à une poésie du terroir" (26)), Nérée Beauchemin, and Englebert Gallèze. The latter bears the mark of a true Mironian precursor, a "poète intimiste à mi-chemin entre la poésie du terroir et la poésie mystique, qui a su ouvrir ses poèmes au parler populaire et au rythme des vieilles chansons folkloriques" (27). In a kind of vicious circle, because he felt lacking in knowledge of his own history, or felt that it had been taken from him, Miron tended to forget his early readings in French Canadian literature and so to then feel even more deply that he had no history. Writers of Miron's own generation tended to find him overly patriotic in his epic orality, while those who came later thought him not formalist or intellectual enough. His

inclusion in French anthologies seemed to have more to do with increased interest in

"francophone' poetry and a view of Quebec as somewhat exotic. (Filteau 8-9).

While Miron has much in common with Glissant, a major difference is that while

Glissant insists on the *Divers*, or the ultimate unknowableness of each individual and

each community, Miron believes in the possibility of not only national but even universal

solidarity and homogeneity. "Glissant's philosophy of language is not based on

elucidating understanding, but rather on developing strategies to foster density, opacity,

and resistance" (De Schutter 11), whereas Miron believed in the possibility and the

necessity of true human contact, mutual comprehension and support. In this way Miron

tends more toward universalizing expansion and inclusion rather than random piecemeal

accumulation of elements of historical identity that vary from one individual to another.

They share an early strong sense of loyalty to origins and struggle with linguistic identity,

and both were well versed in their respective local authors before discovering continental

literature (Desroches 4). Interestingly, for Glissant French was the dominant language—

over creole—while for Miron, English dominated French; this contributed to certain

differences in vision, and Glissant later in life expressed some disagreement with Miron's

stance. Miron's *rapaillage* is not the same as Glissant's accumulation, or rather the

accumulated figure of the *homme rapaillé* is what exists but is not to be accepted and

certainly not a goal or at least an expectation, as it is for Glissant. Miron strives for a

utopic wholeness and unity; the piecemeal quality of *l'identité rapaillée* is something to

be left behind, to be integrated; it is not the normative overdetermined subjectivity found

in Glissant and other post/colonial theorists. Evidently other post/colonial poets were also

relevant besides Glissant. Miron reported his visceral reaction on first reading Aimé

Césaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au pays natal*, saying that that text obviated the need for his own.

In his essay "Ma bibliothèque idéale" Miron cited as influences Du Bellay, Eluard, and Frénaud, among others, and Rutebeuf as "le premier grand poète lyrique personnel de notre langue." He admired what he saw as Rutebeuf's engagement, which Jean Marcel attributes to a misunderstanding, but even more he admired the troubadour's voice, "unique et émouvante". Miron's poems, and not only his love poems, are said to echo those of the troubadours. The two poets did share to a degree poverty and misery, opposition to tradition, lyric or otherwise, and attention to the collective. Rutebeuf would joke about how he was destined to "travailler comme un boeuf" because of his name; he has this in common with Miron, who wrote "j'avance en poésie comme un cheval de trait" ("Paris"). Marcel finds this to be the real point in common: "Les deux poètes se rejoignent, en vérité, par là où l'on s'y attendrait le moins : l'effort poétique, la poésie comme misère" (30). The near impossibility of writing plagued Miron; creative insecurity, the feeling that he was never good enough, drove him to revise ceaselessly.

Miron was also greatly influenced by his friend André Frénaud, and claimed to have written three-fourths of his own poetry after reading Frénaud. "Frénaud, comme Miron, fait travailler le langage populaire dans ses poèmes. Les deux oeuvres appartiennent ! Une poésie de l'ontologie et de l'identité" (Royer 82). They shared a vision as man in combat with man to raise himself to the best he could be. In his review of Roger Little's book on Frénaud, Michael Sheringham writes "Little argues persuasively (against Roger Munier) that the conflict of positive and negative forces, hope and despair, self-disdain and self-acceptance, does involve a dialectic in which,

even if only at a snail's pace, progress is made" (769). Miron's self-berating and expressions of hope, his grief and tender expressions of love, withdrawal and expansiveness operate in a similar manner. "Indeed, this duality is a characteristic trait of Miron's verse which is both tender and brutal, romantic and realist, regional and universal" (Dominguez 1017). Little writes, comparing Frénaud to Beckett, "C'est cette persistance dans le tissage des mots qui aboutit à une trame positive. L'accomplissement de chaque poème nie magnifiquement les forces négatives qu'il étale" (qtd. in Sheringham 770). The existence of Miron's work in itself acts as resistance to cultural oppression and linguistic hegemony. His persistence in bringing each poem closer to authenticity served as a corrective guiding force.

L'homme rapaillé, or l'homme rapiécé

Montbertrand sums up well the image of l'homme rapaillé when he writes

Cet homme est figurativement fait de restes de paille, et l'on peut le comparer à un épouvantail dont la paille sort par les manches et le pantalon. Cet être rapaillé, ramassis, est sans doute un peu canaille et repoussant (car en marge de la norme anglo-saxonne). En somme, c'est un homme fragmentaire ni totalement désintégré, ni suffisamment unifié ; il n'est ni éclaté, ni pétrifié. Son état reflète celui du Québec et de la culture québécoise. (13-14)

While this figure stands in for the fragmented, piecemeal nature of the dispossessed post/colonial citizen, *l'entre-deux*, we might also take from it notions of nature and of defense. The scarecrow is an agricultural figure, made up of not just any remains but of those resulting from growing crops. It is there to defend the fields against predators, to scare off any creatures that would steal from the farmers' land. In this the figure further suits Miron, as defender of not just a culture in the literary or artistic sense, but as

everything that goes into making up a society, land, work, cultivation as well as culture.

Miron did not himself come from an agrarian background, but he did grow up in a rural

environment, as did most Quebecois.[7] It embodies the relation of the poet to Québec and

of Québec to Canada. The term 'rapaillé' can also of course refer to the book itself,

pieced together from fragments of various cycles and reworked six times.

Miron writes in "Un long chemin" of the first time he heard the term "conscience

colonisée" used in reference to French Canadian writing and how it resonated with him,

shocking him and then becoming an obsession. The idea that he and his kind were

dominated by outside forces inimical to their own identities was central to his politics and

to his writing, carried out within the context of that struggle. Thus one of the roles of

poetry for him is to help establish a collective being and place it in history.

> Je vois la poésie comme une anthropologie, comme une défense et illustration
> d'un être collectif. La poésie est ce qui nous fait être et nous pose dans la durée
> alors que l'existence se dissout dans le temps. (qtd. in Royer 74)

To place a people in history means that there is some continuity of place over time, that

there is a shared sense of belonging, a strong sense of place on which cultural identity

and consciousness can be developed. One can go out to meet others when one has a

secure place to which to return. Those from a particular environment can best engage

with people in other places from a strong enrooted place, as we saw with Glissant. Miron

insisted on his role as "anthro-poète," emphasizing the personal link between his poetry

and the culture and society of Quebec. In the above quote he also alludes to the great

French poet Du Bellay, thus subtly drawing wider circles, confirming ties to the world at

large, temporally as well as geographically. Poems are also rooted in a culture and

---

[7]   Miron's father was a cabinetmaker, and many of his male relations were woodsmen or trappers.

language, and yet easily go out in quest of the other, take risks in pursuit of knowledge.

Miron always included his political prose writings in editions of *L'homme rapaillé* while he was alive; the only edition that does not include them was issued after his death by Gallimard, in a series devoted exclusively to poetry. Pleau notes that these essays in the back of the book "confèrent au livre une portée qui dépasse la personne de Miron ainsi que le domaine de l'expression poétique" (97). This is technically true but establishes yet another facile division among personal, political, poetic, of the sort that Miron sought to obviate. Given that some of the poetic texts are in prose (generally the more didactic ones) there is more than a juxtaposition of prose writings with poems. The best examples of the prose poems are "Notes sur le poème et le non-poème" and "Monologues d'une aliénation délirante," in which lines in verse are interspersed with sections in prose form.

Miron said "J'ai renouvelé mon personnage" after the first edition of *L'homme rapaillé*, in which he was "Amnésique Miron." "Quand j'ai retrouvé la mémoire, je n'avais plus de mots. J'étais dépaysé dans cette époque moderne, déphasé dans mes mots" (qtd. in Royer 79). Why did he insist on himself as "Archaique Miron" when working on his newer, more narrative poetry: "C'est pour creuser ma singularité. Chez Picasso, on voit très bien le fonds archaique où il a puisé pour construire sa singularité. Il y a toujours une résonance archaique dans la modernité, c'est-à-dire une résonance qui traverse les siècles" (qtd. in Royer 79). Miron wished to title a new series "Rumeurs du poème"

> parce qu'il me semble que je commence seulement à écrire la poésie que je voulais écrire. J'ai souvent répondu à une urgence, qui était celle du Crois-ou-meurs ou de l'être-ou-ne-pas-être, et il s'est trouvé que ces poèmes ont coincidé avec la prise de conscience du peuple québécois, dans les années soixante et soixante-dix. Mais souvent aussi je me disais que j'aimerais écrire quelque chose

de plus personnel. Je pense que je commence seulement à l'écrire vraiment. (80)

He believed in rewriting many times in order to "éliminer les automatismes du langage.

C'est la dixième version d'un poème qui est la plus spontanée" (81). As Dominguez points

out, he did make progress in his goal to move 'from exile to *appartenance*.'

Expansion

> A partir du moment où Miron consentit à rasssembler ses principaux poèmes en recueil en 1970, il ne parait plus avoir remis en question l'unité du livre ainsi constitué. La logique à laquelle obéit généralement Miron, c'est bien celle du *rapaillage* – de l'expansion continue du recueil, poursuivie jusqu'en 1994 : et non pas celle de la fragmentation ou de la dispersion. (Pleau 102 n.7)

The "long chemin" of Miron's poetry "serpente sur les sentiers qui sillonent

l'ancestrale province de Québec et mènent à la modernité montréalaise" (Montbertrand,

1985 12). This journey through space and time links the history of the "ancestral"

province to the present day. The word 'ancestral' is a strong one, given the ongoing

lament that Quebec lacks history and heritage, that folklorized French Canada has more

in common with young, unsophisticated America than with Europe and its intelligentsia

(Grandpré). Yet, "l'avenir est aux sources" ("L'héritage et les descendances," 177). This

gathering of past into present will allow for a resolution to Québécois identity crisis and

for Québec to take its rightful place within a larger whole in a global society. Poetry is

charged with the role of maintaining this promise of continuity.

Time in Miron's work is made up of instants, as Montbertrand points out; there is

no sense of unified time and history, much like Glissant's depiction of the Antilles as

being in a melancholic space outside of time and history. The experience of time as

'rapaillé' is the experience of the colonized. Without a structure to time there is no

organizing principle and hence a permanent feeling of being lost and the loss of any

reason to live, thus the obsession with suicide and death (Montbertrand). Quebec has

always been a colony and so has no direct ancestors; the present is always suspended

with no link to the past (Montbertrand). The movement must expand the scope of the

circle and not simply extend into nothingness: "le temps c'est une ligne droite et

mourante / de mon oeil à l'inespéré" ("Vérité irréductible").

Miron's refusal to ever be truly finished with his texts showed "une volonté

d'effacer ou d'aplatir la dimension temporelle de l'écriture. […] Mais se réserver le droit

de revenir à tout moment sur le texte, c'est aussi se permettre d'en actualiser le sens, en

réduisant à rien l'écart historique qui pouvait exister entre l'instant du premier jet et celui

de la correction" (Pleau 147). Pleau gives the example of the phrase 'loi d'émeute,' and

how it changed through different versions of one poem according to changing legal or

political uses of the expression (89-96). We have seen that meaning is reactualized at the

moment of reading; here the writer himself continues to activate new meanings by

changing the text, often according to turns in the political situation given that a poem's

first appearance was often public recitation at a particular event or in the context of a

particular political moment. While Miron was trying to revive or recreate the history of

his compatriots, he was invoking a newer history as he went along, in order to keep his

poems up-to-date, that is, comprehensible to others. Another impetus to these attempts to

close the historical gap is that "[t]o have a history […] is to be indecipherable" (Simpson

117). Thus to bring poems with him into the present and future is to always

recontextualize them for maximum accessibility, to forge a connection with contemporary

readers by cheating the normal process of textual calcification.

Montbertrand traces in the Mironian corpus "une isotopie de la réduction ('réductivité') et une isotopie de l'expansion ('expansivité') correspondant respectivement à un mouvement centripète et à un mouvement centrifuge" (14). Repeated images of enclosure, imprisonment, of shrinking space, refer to Miron's comparison of Montreal to the wide-open landscapes of his childhood as well as to the reduction of the dispossessed person, who is left to turn in circles within a small space, "[d]ans le refoulement constant dans mon irrationalité dans laquelle CECI me rejette à tout moment."

Enacting an opposing, centrifugal force on the poet, victim of a "processus de dé-création […] de dé-réalisation" of "Ceci," is love or the lover, according to Montbertrand (15). "Elle représente la libération, le mouvement ascensionnel qui brise le cercle" (15). She is also associated with "l'ouverture, l'encerclement, la verticalité" (15). Thus she would seem to embody every possible movement to form a whole. This reliance on womankind to serve as a unifying presence and as a stand-in for la mère patrie is problematic, as it is with Glissant (and as with the French national anthem *La Marseillaise*). She is positioned outside of the struggle, not as an active participant but as "un refuge en même temps qu'un lieu de ressourcement" (Brochu 68). In Brochu's reading she may be timeless and transcendent, "le moyen d'accès privilégié à cet espace autre […] [m]ais la femme est d'abord immanence, terre, le poète 's'enfonce' dans son corps" (69). This idealized female, captured in the wordplay of "mon Québec, ma terre amère, ma terre amande" ("Compagnon des Amériques") that conflates earth, country, mother and lover, is jarring in the context of talk of liberation.

Nor should we reduce Miron's conception of love to physical or romantic love.

Love among people generally can be a path toward wholeness, but another bond between

poetry and love is that for both, "ils ne s'épanouiront vraiment qu'au jour de la dignité

retrouvée" and so are tied to the future (Nepveu, *Les mots* 153). In his struggle to pass

beyond the circle of repetition that governs individual lives and cultures Miron repeats

difference, linking phrases through the sounds that echo from one line to another and

through the continuing dialectic between 'je' and 'tu.' Unity sought through dialectic is

not a frozen or closed unity but one in which figures act in relation. Among the terms

most frequently reoccurring in *L'homme rapaillé* are amour/forms of aimer; homme; and

poème/poésie (Desroches 10), indicating the significance of this link between

poetry/writing and love for and among people.

   Movements of reduction and expansion are seen in line length—more ample lines

contrast with certain shorter lines that "correspondent souvent aux moments de

dépression, de déréliction et de vision d'une réalité sombre" (16). Given all of these

forces, "Cette poésie, qui exprime l'état d'un 'homme rapaillé', repousse et dépasse le

processus de 'dé-création' et de 'dé-réalisation' dont est victime le Québécois Miron. Elle

représente, ironiquement, l'effort du poète colonisé, rapaillé, de se 're-intégrer', dans

l'homogénéité d'une structure poétique" (17). I believe that despite the presence of both

movements, the movement of expansion, of 'débordement', takes precedence, in the

forms his work takes and in its distribution and reception. Although he must reduce

multiple spoken and written versions to one 'definitive' one, this one, as we have seen,

will be as authentic as possible and speak to as many people as possible. "La personnalité

de Gaston Miron […] déborde la seule écriture" (Gasquy-Resch 18).

   One example of a poem with short lines, suggesting *refoulement*, that nevertheless

expands through rhetorical figures and use of language is "Ce corps noueux" (28). Here is the poem in its entirety:

> Ce corps noueux
> ce regard brisé
> ce visage érodé
> ce feu aux cheveux
>
> ces mots dehors
>
> c'est toi, toi et toi
> et la blessure
> inlassable des rêves
> dans tes pas futurs

Through alliteration, assonance, repetition and imagery the trajectory of the poem is directed outward. The anaphor of 'ce' repeated four times, followed by the apophonic forms 'ces' and 'c'est,' calls attention to the here and now, the present time and place—which, because of the deictic quality of the demonstrative adjective, is not only wherever the poet speaking is but is wherever the reader of the poem is as well. A direct relation is established between this gnarled body with the broken gaze and the eroded face and the reading subject; the rhyme scheme of this first stanza, abba, forms a unity among these figures, that is even so broken by the lack of end rhymes in the rest of the poem and by the line "ces mots dehors," which begs the question 'outside of what' in that these very words are in our lives, in our eyes, our minds, our mouths. The repetition of "toi" can be interpreted as emphasizing his address of one person (perhaps his daughter, or another loved woman), but can also be read as addressing different parts of the poet, or several other people, indicating each one in turn: "toi, toi et toi." This sole punctuation mark, the

comma, suggests a break between the closed circle of 'ce corps' and 'toi' that opens onto the larger world, facilitates a move from the specific to the multiple. The lack of any other punctuation throughout allows for a sense of flow and openness, of circulation. In the striking counter-assonance of "la blessure inlassable" is an oxymoron of a wound that instead of being a source of weakness or frailty represents perseverance. That it is "la blessure inlassable des rêves" might suggest that dreams, ordinarily having positive connotations, are either wounded or are causing wounds. Whether a simple image of disillusionment, or, coupled with "dans tes pas futurs," a prediction of one element in a life that will nevertheless continue, this is an image of strength.

In the poem "Réduction," (p.48), the title of which points to the reductive tendency of which Montbertrand wrote, images of plenitude recur: "des heures puis des heures," "en tout et pour tout;" "les poumons soufflant comme une avenue" links individual respiration to crowds of people. Other lines suggest infinite emptiness as a kind of infinite plenitude: "l'abandon sans frontières, le monde/profond dans la désesperance." All the speaker has is his eyes, expanded phonetically—"mes yeux de z-yeux"—with which to see what is happening, despite what others ("les bulletins") try to tell him.

The truth in "Vérité irréductible" is irreducible in that it cannot be summarized. The continuous march of time, which resists definition, is juxtaposed with the material world, which is irrational, oblivious and quickly forgotten ("des rives insensées," "chair oubliée"). Lived experience will always expand beyond the limits of language, no matter how carefully the poet attempts to define or describe it, much as the gaze in "Petite suite en lest" moves from the wall to the sky to communion with all the other gazing eyes:

>attente des pans de murs
>attente des pans de ciels
>attente des yeux tissés de tous les regards

In "Pour retrouver le monde et l'amour," the unity of rhyme scheme, with many rich rhymes, presents the Mironian dream of a "monde insoupçonné, uni, sans dissidence" where "nous aurons retrouvé les rites d'aujourd'hui." In five stanzas of six lines each with the rhyme scheme a a b b c c // b b d d e e // f f e e g g // a a h h d d // i i a a j j, each new stanza carries over at least one rhyme from a previous stanza. The mythic voyage proposed by the speaker to his love is recounted in the future tense when "le passé, le présent [...] ne se voudront plus" and they are released from a painful relation to history in which "je ne vis pas une histoire je ne suis pour ceux qui font l'histoire à l'étage supérieur qu'une maladie du soubassement" ("Aliénation délirante"). The last line expressed in past conditional signals the possibility for a new relation to history, "une historicité à venir" (Nepveu, *Les mots* 156), that is the driving force for imagining the future, "temps du possible, essentiel dans l'écriture mironienne." "Le futur inscrit la continuité, la totalité" (153). Many of the poems, if they do not begin in the future tense, end on that note of hope:

>nous reviendrons nous aurons à dos le passé
>et à force d'avoir pris en haine toutes les servitudes
>nous serons devenus des bêtes féroces de l'espoir. ("La route que nous suivons")

>nous serons tous deux allongés comme un couple
>enfin heureux dans la mémoire de mes poèmes ("Jeune fille")

>je reprendrai haut bord et destin de poursuivre
>en une femme aimée pour elle à cause de toi ("Poème de séparation 2")

> sans plus de vue je continuerai, j'irai
> vers ma mort peuplée de rumeurs et d'éboulis
> je retrouverai ma nue propriété ("L'homme agonique")
>
> un homme reviendra
> d'en dehors du monde ("Pour mon rapatriement")
>
> il y aura toi et moi, et le coeur unanime
> je serai enfin dévêtu de ma fatigue ("Et l'amour même est atteint")

and so on. "La marche à l'amour" ends in the definitive present, but the speaker is still waiting for a future moment when the idealized lover arrives:

> je n'attends pas la fin du monde je t'attends
> dégagé de la fausse auréole de ma vie

The future unity and coherence Miron seeks will be hard won, in one critic's opinion. "Les poèmes de 'L'homme rapaillé' nous mettent en présence d'un être diffracté dont les multiples postures énonciatives tendent moins à refaire l'unité d'une voix poétique qu'à en exprimer les points de tangence" (Chamberland 64). The necessity of spanning great distances reappears throughout the poetry, but an end to the efforts appears possible: the word *fin* appears as often as *lointain*. Ricoeur's 'detour' is the passage through cultural myth necessary for returning to an increased understanding of oneself, and distance is central to lyric more specifically, as the singer/poet calls out from afar. For Miron, "la fusion entre la poésie et la subjectivité implique tout un jeu de différences et de ruptures. Le grand flot d'images rencontre sans cesse la discontinuité du vécu subjectif [...]. Le 'je' ne se noie pas dans l'histoire, il est en relation dialectique avec

elle" (Nepveu, *Les mots* 156). One specific striking aspect of this discontinuity is "la non-identité du 'je' et du 'moi'" (120); this is seen in Miron's odd use of pronominals in phrases such as "je me hurle dans mes harnais" and "je m'écris sous la loi d'émeute."

Despite these inevitable distances, Miron tends to identify quite closely with not only his fellow Québécois but with all of the natural and regional elements in his poetry and with the poetry itself: "Miron dit que le 'moi-même' et la poésie sont indissociables" (Nepveu, *Les mots* 155). It is finally his unique poetic voice that brings together disparate entities, no matter how difficult it is for him even to coincide with himself. Marc Plourde points out that the indigenous flora and fauna in Miron's poems are not simply objects to him, "he identifies with them [...] they are his own feelings and desires" (119). "Je suis le rouge-gorge dans la forge," Miron writes, and not 'Je suis comme le rouge-gorge...'

To cover these distances, the subject expands his circumference through many means, a principal motor being rhythm. As rhythm moves the subject along… "Le rythme comme mouvement du sujet est un avènement du sujet. Le sujet ne lui préexiste pas. Rien n'est garanti. Ni su d'avance. Le rythme est donc une permanente non-coincidence à soi en même temps qu'une rencontre" (Meschonnic qtd. in Chamberland 33, n. 3). There is a quality of wandering here, of *errance*, and for Chamberland, walking is the movement propelling Miron's work:

> Un mouvement inquiet, d'incessantes allées et venues, les hauts et les bas d'un 'voyage' épuisant, néanmoins sans cesse repris par un marcheur infatigable, acharné : tel me parait être la caractéristique majeure de la diction du poème mironien—de son faire mobilisant tout le corps, rythmique et syntaxique, du poème. (35)[8]

---

[8]   Chamberland continues: "Marcher, dire : le mouvement de la marche fait la scansion du poème de Miron. Le dire est un marcher, le marcher donne son pas, sa tournure et son allure au dire. 'Je n'ai jamais voyagé/vers autre pays que toi mon pays'. Le pas est allongé, déterminé; le souffle est ample. Une

A tireless energy is sensed in the work that moves onwards and upwards.

The physicality in the poems takes on another dimension when we recall that Miron often performed poems orally before publishing them in print. Miron's poetry, "vouée à l'oralité plus qu'à l'écriture," was qualified as "d'abord une présence charnelle" (Gasquy-Resch 16). In the act of performing his poetry in the public square, Miron expands his consciousness of dispossessed identity to influence others, and causes his sounds to reverberate among the many voices of those who have had similar experiences but not the means to express them. "[J]'avance quelques mots… / quelqu'un les répète comme son propre écho" (179). Orality, as Grandpré points out, is not primitive or merely precedent to writing, not its opposite nor its inferior, and is an aspect of many cultures, among them Québécois (906).

Miron emphasized his connection to the earth, joking that his identity was "humusien." The word "terre" appears 30 times in HR (Desroches, *L'Espace* 10) Lines such as "nos visages de terre cuite" ("La route que nous suivons") and "nous vivrons sur la terre" ("La marche à l'amour") also align "terre" with "nous." It was in nature that the inside and outside of thought and experience best came together, away from the cities, where one had the most direct contact with the world. For Nepveu, "c'est dans la douleur que la fusion avec le monde se réalise le plus pleinement [...]. La douleur établit dans le texte mironien le régime de la compassion, elle devient un principe de dépassement du moi et de communication" (*Les mots* 151). This lends a romantic cast to the enterprise: the anguished poet in solitary communion with nature. Yet, as Plourde points out, while

---

pause isole d'abord un segment, ralentit le mouvement d'avancée pour en signifier le suspens d'un seul coup de voix: un vers. Le marcheur est en route depuis toujours et ne perd pas de vue sa lointaine destination, disant, d'un pas redoublant un pas, le retour vers le proche, le natal" (35).

flowers, trees, birds and other natural elements are common in the work, they are never generic but specifically named and indigenous to Quebec.

Birds and flowers were not the only elements he took from life in Quebec; he borrowed many habits of spoken language as well, as Glissant did with creole. His poetry is replete with "l'excès métaphorique, de l'énumération et de la répétition, d'une incohérence qui mime le monologue [...] du théâtre" (Nepveu, *Les mots* 149). He used terms like *brunante* for *crépuscule*. Colloquialisms, wordplay, rhetoric, explicatives, interjections, substantives "are not appendages to his poetry but part of its basic fabric" (Plourde 117). When Plourde was translating Miron, he had the poet record himself reading aloud as an aid, so important were the emotional tone and music to each piece.

'Un homme à tout faire'

With the founding of L'Hexagone in 1953, "il ne s'agit pas de créer un régionalisme de plus, ni de gommer la dimension politique, mais d'inscrire dans l'ici le cœur même d'une francophonie à créer, avec et, parfois, malgré la France" (Brochu, "Préface" 7-8). Miron did not publish his own work through L'Hexagone (apart from in their very first publication, *Deux Sangs*, which, along with poems by Miron and Marchand, included drawings by Carle, Rinfret, and Ganzini), preferring to leave that to journals that shared his politics, but he did help many other poets get their start. Part of his thinking behind publishing in small reviews, as he explained in "Un long chemin," was his belief that anyone could and should take part in Québécois cultural life, and not solely for monetary gain. The press ran on a subscription basis, making readers responsible for the success of the endeavor, as subscriptions covered approximately one

third of printing costs. This arrangement allowed them to publish and distribute young,
unknown poets, which might have been cost-prohibitive otherwise.

Working horizontally across the domains of writing, editing, and publishing
allowed Miron to serve as the connection among the various activities. "Il craignait
tellement de ne pas 'bien' écrire, de ne pas 'bien' servir la langue française, de ne pas être
à la hauteur de l'Histoire, qu'il s'acharnait à occuper l'espace littéraire en son entier, de la
production matérielle des textes aux processus de leur réception et de leur reproduction"
(Filteau 7).

Miron wrote that "le poème doit penser le monde." As much of a burden as this
responsibility seemed to be to him at times, it opened a wide space for a new Québécois
imaginary to infuse the cultural landscape, where the role of the poem was to "dire
l'aliénation, cette situation incommunicable." The situation was incommunicable because
the very root of alienation is the inability to communicate with society. In poetry Miron
could represent both "le Québécanthrope/ce garçon qui ne ressemble à personne" and le
'compagnon des Amériques,' "porteur des germes de ton espérance / … haleur de ton
avènement." The notion of increasing maturity--or, more accurately, the greater
seriousness with which one is perceived--is found in the change from *garçon* to
compagnon. Finally Miron could reunite what he saw as the privileged poet and the
humiliated everyman, repossess his language, and aid in bringing to life a national
consciousness based in national culture, in a literature that would be "québécoise dans le
monde et au monde."

CONCLUSION:

"le souvenir et l'espoir, contraires fleurs"[1]

As a response to the question "What does the poem convey and how do we apprehend it?" I have shown, in the examples of these four poets, how the movements effected by each poet lead the reader on a particular journey that integrates that reader's lived experience and enlarges her understanding of the world. With each poet—anyone who writes in ways that push language to its capacity—comes a growth in our capacity to understand the world around us and to speak about it. Part of the work of the poet is to expand the perimeters of language and in so doing to articulate what we have not managed to say with ordinary language. This effort still cannot capture everything that we desire to say, yet it presents us with the possibility that those things can be said, or that they can be alluded to sufficiently to satisfy us. This crossing through the text follows particular patterns, as I have shown, and it is the trajectory of these crossings that determines where in the text our own horizon intersects with that of the writer.

We live with absence, and seek what we lack. Poetry, for all of its own elusiveness and fragmentation, holds up to us the dream that makes us human, by offering moments of wholeness, however illusory: the poem is the "instant ultime de point-remède" (Teyssiéras). It is able to bear this responsibility by directing us to particular paths that

---

[1]   Glissant, *Un champ d'îles* 11

launch us toward an understanding of our own that also serves to complete the intention of the poet, both writer and reader striving toward an experience that is shared, albeit wholly different. Thus not only does the poem bring something to us, the reader, but we have in us the key to the poem. Our perceptions bring the poem full circle to a moment of totality for reader and poem.

A phenomenological approach, with its focus on the senses rather than reason, means that we do not necessarily have to have knowledge or understanding of a woman's experience, for example, or the experience of linguistic otherness to be guided along a path that connects these experiences with our own. The poetry of the four poets studied here requires work on the part of the reader and this is natural, as it should be. We are obliged to bring our own memories and experiences to bear to forge a connection with the poem. It is at these moments that we feel a sense of fullness—even if only the fullness of possibility, of wider potential opening before us—or even joy. Responses to great poetry are visceral, sensual; poetry grabs us and opens us to the world, to contact with the world, and this contact constitutes the feeling of being wholly present that we seek. The complementary character of poetic speech lies precisely in this interplay between poem and reader.

Everyday life is lacking in that what we are able to say about it is limited, both by the nature of ordinary language and by the emotional depth of some experiences that impede their articulation. The only way to fill that void is through poetic language, whatever form it may take. In the famous lines of American poet William Carlos Williams's poem "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," "It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there." This is what

Miron meant when he wrote "Le poème refait l'homme" in "Notes sur le non-poème et le poème."

The joining of horizons that constitutes understanding, according to Gadamer, situates us within a web of associations. How do horizons fuse when understanding is partial at best? I have answered this in a few ways: through the guidance of textual movements; through the in-the-moment experience itself of reading the poem; through the incomparable proximity to the thought processes of another person. Furthermore, the lack of understanding in itself responds to a need: one modality of reading "répond à un profond désir d'incompréhension; au besoin d'entrer dans le poème comme dans une matière opaque, muette, silencieuse, afin d'en éprouver d'abord l'épaisseur" (Doumet 47-48). We are back to the visceral, sensual pleasures of the materiality of language, of the experience of, momentarily, being present, before a word calls us away to our own memories, experiences, associations, or we are jolted to attention by another turn of phrase. As Bonnefoy wrote: "One needs to leave the text, it's true, but one also needs to have gone into and crossed through it as well; one needs to have made a place for oneself here and there in the text for a more panoramic view of that world outside that it breaks up and that we must unify" (802-03). That is, even though we leave the text to reflect on our own contributions to it—lift our eyes from the page, to use Bonnefoy's term--we must have been in the text and we must return to it to complete this operation. We must have fully taken part in the text to know what role we ourselves can play.

The points at which poem's and reader's horizons intersect depend on several factors. In terms of temporal distance, the poetry in this dissertation is not so far removed from us; yet, due to the particular accumulation of experiences, influences, memories,

geographies of a given poet, we must go to meet the poem in its specificity. Due to the universality of certain human affective experience, we can find points of encounter that spark recognition in us, those moments in which we bring to bear our own experience and memory on the poem and thus complete it in our turn.

These moments of recognition or correspondence are one of the primary ways that we enter into poetic readings and grasp at least something of what is being conveyed. However, with the poets in this dissertation, it often feels as if there is no real entering point, or if there is, the thread we managed to pick up is quickly lost. The poem becomes not a threshold, a frontier of knowledge, but a barrier, an impediment to experience. Just as Humphries said that one has to let Glissant's *Les Grands chaos* pour over one like water, there are times when one has to simply enter into a poem, treating it like a novel experience of which the import can not be immediately grasped. Perhaps we catch a glimpse of something familiar rendered unfamiliar, warranting a second look, or perhaps we cannot realize the effects of reading it until later, as often happens with film or visual art, or with formative events in our own lives that we don't realize were formative until years later.

The horizons of the poets themselves are at some remove from the cultures they are part of, in relation to which they have been outsiders to varying degrees, or where they have been caught between two cultures and thus lacking a stable situation of belonging. No doubt this is a factor in their close attention to language, primary mode of communication within a community, and a source of some anxiety or at least interest when one is to any measure alienated from that community. Looking at them through a framework of endlessly intersecting horizons allows for a dismissal of standard notions of

inside and outside, center and periphery, mainstream and marginal.

The poetry I chose to work with is difficult and resistant to analysis or interpretation. An important aspect I wished to look at more than the actual "message" of the poetry was how those messages are conveyed, and how they are conveyed to readers who are not necessarily aware of all of the ways in which information about the poet and his or her intentions is being transmitted to them. For this reason, I began by determining what there was to know about the poet him- or herself, his or her surroundings, influences, interactions with other writers, their own thoughts on their writing processes and interests; their *parcours*. Then I read the poetry again to determine overarching movements or trajectories, and the operation of these movements and what they conveyed took precedence much of the time over close readings of poems to arrive at global meanings. I used close readings to show textual movement at the semantic level, but otherwise I undertook to situate each poet existentially and to follow the paths that their work took. This involved situating them and then reflecting on how their situations permeated their work structurally and thematically.

We must not be troubled by difficulty or uneasy about uncertainty in any case; as much as we may grasp of a poem, poetry is that which resists complete understanding. This can be disturbing to the reader, especially one who seeks to construct an argument based on her interpretations: "un reste d'inexpliqué [...] apparaît comme une menace. [...] D'une seule de ces poches de résistance peut venir le démenti capable de renverser son édifice" (Doumet 16). The poem itself has nothing to prove; those who would interpret it are anxious to account for every detail, to create a whole and unshakable meaning, but this is not possible. The unknown helps us to interrogate the known; one of the roles

poetry has taken on, after all, is to render the known unfamiliar and show it to us again. The meeting of writer's and reader's horizons creates a tension that cannot be dissolved, though it demands interpretation, which is never completed yet can rule out certain uncertainties and approach certain certainties. If the text becomes overly familiar then it seems to be just an extension of the reader; if all remains unfamiliar, then the reader cannot participate. This need for tension and for difficulty can be seen in the texts of Heidegger, where he seeks to talk about language and poetry without resorting to received ideas and clichéd language himself, thus rendering his own texts more difficult of access.

It must be said, too, that an important dimension of poetry, and this is more true, again, in the modern age, is its resistance to commodification, due to its being difficult or having a reputation as such and to the lack of serviceable information found in it. We can assume that poets do write in part to be read, since they publish their poems; but books of poems are not bestsellers that are turned into movies or seen on Oprah. It would be difficult for a poet to "sell out" in either sense of the term or to put poetry to utilitarian uses. Indeed, Adorno wrote that "art maintains its integrity only by refusing to go along with communication" (443).

Then we must ask what it is to read and to analyze a text, and more specifically what the differences are between analyzing poetry and analyzing prose. The term "genre" refers to expectations readers make of texts, a set of rules and expectations that assist in literary communication between writer and reader, and to sets of conventions for reading that differ according to the attributes of a text. Reading poetry necessitates knowledge of versification and rhetoric, for example, and readers may expect to see the privileging of

sound over sense or recondite language. When speaking of genre conventions we must also ask about the rules governing transgressive/transgeneric or hermetic texts. What other genres do the texts of these poets participate in; how are they intended and received? If poetry marks a limit (of language and of the experience of language, of presence, of knowledge) it cannot reasonably be expected to fit one single genre. Yet we all feel we know poetry when we see it. I use the term "contemporary" in my title when I could have easily used the word "(post)modern": poetry referred to as modern in any time is seen as what most breaks with tradition, and this in itself implies a profound awareness of tradition. Literary creation involves a dialectic between innovation and memory or tradition: in this way meanings do not remain static but evolve.

We do not read poetry for the same reasons or in the same way that we read other texts, even other literary texts; in many cases, readers expect poetry to be more difficult, feeling that there is a mode of reading that they have not been taught, or a code for deciphering poetry which they have not been given. One problem in approaching difficulty lies in the conceptual metaphors of a difficult subject as an adversary and thinking as a struggle. A difficult text acts in contradiction to the conduit metaphor that implies that what we read is nothing more than a vehicle for transporting information. When a reader says that the message didn't come across to him, or he didn't 'get it,' or the idea wasn't put across sufficiently, he is implying a fault on the part of the vehicle or its contents, rather than considering his position as receiver. If he does not know what the message will be or how it will be delivered, he might need to be both more open and more attentive to what is coming his way and where exactly it might arrive. Readers might be unaware of considerations that language can "mean" in different ways, or that

the idea that something deeper lies behind language could be just another myth of transcendence. We are less likely to believe that poetry will affect us physically than, say, a suspense story or even a political manifesto, but it can and does. Poetry is about difficulty, it is for difficulty; it is a true home for paradox and contradiction, which are not welcome in other kinds of texts. It is home to a poet's situatedness in all its complexity. Language is not always meant for communication; Heidegger would say that it was never intended for that in the first place. While such an aporia would seem by definition impassable (a-porous), it also can be seen to multiply our possibilities; and thus the choices we make and the consequential responsibilities we bear.

Teyssiéras suggests that while we may have gotten rid of rhyme there is nothing we can do about rhythm; there is a beat that insinuates itself. This remains one familiar landmark in some of the poetry here, one element that can help ground a reader trying to make sense of it.

In terms of differences among the four poets studied, two striking differences between Risset and Teyssiéras versus Glissant and Miron are that 1) the first seem to form interior movements or movements that turn inwards or in upon themselves while the latter go outwards and 2) the former also seem to follow or be guided by language while the latter make a greater effort to control it. This is not to say that the women do not craft what they write--we know that women's voices and forms are most often described as natural while men are thought to have acquired skill--but their poetry seems to be more of a co-creation with language than a shaping of it, echoing Heidegger's remark that "the way to language intends to let language be experienced as language" (*OWL* 119). While Risset and Teyssiéras seem to let language operate they also generate more organized or

controlled movements: return and pulse. Circularity is more coherent and a pulse is a regular rhythmic beat. This is too small a sample to make wide generalizations but would be worth pursuing. It would be interesting to see what other genres of movement can be found and whether any particular aspect of identity can be matched with them. One thing I can say is that, despite the regularity of movement and reluctance to bend language noted above, the work of Risset and Teyssiéras is more radical and more profound than that of the other two, and I have remarked the overall tendency in contemporary French poetry that women are doing the more revolutionary work. In considerations of gender and literary genre, Risset and Teyssiéras challenge genre as well as literary gender stereotypes in similar ways. Multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and effects opens the work to readers' active intervention and participation, which in turn revives the work's significance.

Risset holds up a model of decision-making, of alternatives in her early work. The mixed signals her works sends readers—hermetic yet insisting on reader agency--continues in her later work, though that poetry is less intimidating only because the texts are shorter. Glissant's work enacts the thickness of individual and collective existence through the materiality of his language and the layering of lived and thought experience. Unlike that of Risset, the poetry of Glissant becomes denser over time, more and more resistant to anything other than reading with beliefs and expectations held in suspension. His need to build a collective history in which individuals can root themselves directs the movement of overlaying identities,languages, histories on top of one another. The pulse in Teyssieras's work animates a dialectic between presence and absence that informs our orientation to our surroundings and to ourselves. The need to belong, and to create a

world worth belonging to, informs Miron's drive to expand. For all of them form is indissociable from content, just as their work, as much postwar experimental work does, enacts the inseparability of language and experience and registers the effects on discourse of the loss of a master narrative. As much as we try to identify, categorize, situate ourselves, our purpose and our relation to the world are never clear. To make simple statements that claim transparency is almost dishonest. "Le sens n'est [...] pas réductible à un énoncé. Il est le mouvement de l'énoncé vers la langue qu'il mobilise, et qui l'accueille. En quoi il reste informulable" (Doumet 42).

As "[e]xpansive, inexhaustible and inclusive" as poetry is (Fetzer, "Fate" 162), the work of understanding I can do in this dissertation is necessarily limited. Whether textual movements enrich readers' experience of poems without their full awareness or whether it has heuristic value in the study and appreciation of poetry and its makers, the colligation of horizons of these poets, these poems, and this reader will lead to other paths, other voyages, in the collective creation of meaning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. London: Continuum, 2004.

Alcoff, Linda Martin. "The Concept of Experience." In Fisher and Embree. 39-56.

Baudot, Alain. *Bibliographie annotée d'Édouard Glissant*. Toronto: Éditions du GREF, 1992.

Beaujour, Michel. "The Game of Poetics." *Yale French Studies* 41 (1968): 58-67.

Bernabé, Jean and Chamoiseau, Patrick and Confiant, Raphaël. *In Praise of Creoleness. Eloges de la créolité*. Trans. M.B. Taleb-Khyar. Paris: Gallimard, 1993.

Bishop, Michael, ed. with Christopher Elson. *Contemporary French Poetics*. NY: Rodopi, 2002.

Bishop, Michael, ed. *Thirty Voices in the Feminine: Beauvoir, Ernaux, Yourcenar*. Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996.

---. *Women's Poetry in France, 1965-1995: A Bilingual Anthology*. Winston-Salem, N.C.: Wake Forest University Press, 1997.

Bishop, Michael. *Contemporary French Women Poets*. 2 volumes. Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995.

---. *The Language of Poetry*. NY: Rodopi, 1980.

Bloois, Joost de; Sjef Houppermans; and Frans-Willem Korsten, eds. *Discern(e)ments: Deleuzian Aesthetics/Esthétiques deleuziennes*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004.

Bonnefoy, Yves. "Lifting Our Eyes From the Page." Trans. John Naughton. *Critical*

Inquiry 16 (1990): 794-806.

Britton, Celia. *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999.

Brandt, Joan. *Geopolitics: The Politics of Mimesis in Poststructuralist French Poetry and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Brindeau, Serge. *La poésie contemporaine de langue française depuis 1945*. Paris: Saint-Germain-des-Près, 1973.

Brochu, André. "Poésie et militance." *Études françaises* 35.2-3 (1999): 67-71.

---. "Préface." In Gasquy-Resch. 7-18.

Brophy, Michael and Mary Gallagher, eds. *Sens et présence du sujet poétique. La poésie de la France et du monde francophone depuis 1980*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006.

Ceccatty, Rene de. "Jacqueline Risset des deux côtés des Alpes." *Le Monde* 19 May 1995, sec. "Monde des Livres". Lexis-Nexis. Brown U Lib. 12 May 2005 <http://web.lexis-nexis.com>.

Chamberland, Paul. "Le poème refait l'homme." *Etudes françaises* 35.2-3 (1999): 31-39.

Champeau, Serge. *Ontologie et poésie : trois études sur les limites du langage*. Paris: J. Vrin, 1995.

Cloutier, Cécile, Michel Lord and Ben-Z Shek, eds. *Miron ou la marche à l'amour*. Essais. Montreal: Hexagone, 2002.

Colebrook, Claire. *Gilles Deleuze*. NY: Routledge, 2002.

Collot, Michel. *La poésie moderne et la structure d'horizon*. Paris: PUF, 1989.

---. "Se retrouver paysage." In Brophy and Gallagher, 105-116.

Couffon, Claude. V*isite à Edouard Glissant*. Entretiens réunis par Gérard Cléry. Paris:

Caractères, 2001.

Coward, David. *A History of French Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

Dash, J. Michael. *Édouard Glissant*. NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

---. "Libre sous la mer - Submarine Identities in the Work of Kamau Brathwaite and

    Edouard Glissant." In Reiss. 191-200.

De Grandpré, Chantal. "Gaston Miron lu de France." *The French Review* 59.6 (1986):

    903-910.

De Schutter, Helder. "Intercultural communication: process of understanding or means of

    resistance?" Conference: Interculturalism. Probing the Boundaries. Milan, 30

    October-1 November 2003. Accessed July 17, 2005.

    <http:www.interdisciplinary.net/ci/interculturalism/IC1/DeSchutter

    %20paper.pdf>.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*. Ed. David Lapoujade. Trans.

    Michael Taormina. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004.

Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."

    Writing and Difference. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press,

    1978. 278-293.

Desroches, Vincent. *L'Espace rapaillé*. Unpublished dissertation. 2000.

---. "Présentation: En quoi la littérature québécoise est-elle postcoloniale?" *Quebec*

    Studies 35: 3-12.

Dibble-Dieng, Meadow. *Liberation Journals: Twentieth-century francophone literary*

    journals and the struggle for sovereignty. Unpublished dissertation. 2005.

Dominguez, Muriel F. "From Exile to Appartenance: The Poetry of Gaston Miron

Reexamined." *The French Review* 67.6 (1994): 1013-1023.

Doumet, Christian. *Faut-il comprendre la poésie?* Paris: coll. "50 Questions,"

Klincksieck, 2004.

Duran, Jane. *Toward a Feminist Epistemology*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991.

Embree, Lester, et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*. Boston: Kluwer, 1997.

Favre, Yves-Alain, ed. *Horizons d'Édouard Glissant*. Pau: J&D Editions, 1990.

Fetzer, Glenn. "Avènement de la parole : Illusion et réalité chez Anne Teyssiéras et

Céline Zins." In Bishop, *Thirty Voices in the Feminine*. 218-225.

---. "The Fate of French Poetry." In Gallagher and Walhout. 152-169.

Filteau, Claude. "Présentation." *Études françaises* 35.2-3 (1999): 7-9.

Fisher, Linda, and Lester Embree, eds. *Feminist Phenomenology*. Boston: Kluwer, 2000.

Fonkua, Romuald. *Essai sur une mesure du monde au XXe siècle. Édouard Glissant.*

Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002.

Forsdick, Charles. *Victor Segalen and the Aesthetics of Diversity*. Oxford University

Press: 2000.

Forsdick, Charles and David Murphy, eds. *Francophone Postcolonial Studies.* London:

Arnold, 2003.

Fortin, Andrée. *Passage de la modernité. Les intellectuels québécois et leurs revues

(1778-2004)*. Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006.

Friedman, Maurice. "Intersubjectivity in Husserl, Sartre, Heidegger, and Buber." *Review

of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* 21: 63-80.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. 1960. 2nd rev. ed. Trans. revised by Joel

Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Crossroad, 1990.

Gallagher, Susan VanZanten, and M. D. Walhout, eds. *Literature and the Renewal of the Public Sphere*. New York: St. Martin's, 2000.

Gasquy-Resch, Yannick. *Gaston Miron: Le forcené magnifique*. Montréal: Hurtubise HMH, 2003.

Gauvin, Lise. "Note éditoriale: 'En mémoire du futur'." *Études françaises* 35.2-3 (1999): 3-4.

Gavronsky, Serge. *Six Contemporary Women Poets*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997.

---. *Toward a New Poetics*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1994.

Genette, Gérard. *Seuils*. Paris: Seuil, 1987.

Gervais, André. "Morceaux de l'avant-texte de trois poèmes de L'homme rapaillé." *Études françaises* 35.2-3 (1999): 195-208.

Glissant, Edouard. *Black Salt*. Trans. Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1998.

---. *The Collected Poems of Edouard Glissant*. Trans. Jeff Humphries. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2005.

---. *Le discours antillais*. 1981. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

---. *Les Indes. Un champ d'îles. La terre inquiète*. Paris: Seuil, 1965.

---. *L'Intention poétique*. 1969. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

---. *Introduction à une poétique du divers*. Paris: Gallimard, 1996.

---. *Poétique de la relation*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.

---. *Soleil de la conscience*. Paris: Seuil, 1956.

---. *Traité du tout-monde*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

Glock, Hans-Johann. *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Gourgouris, Stathis. *Does Literature Think? Literature as Theory for an Antimythical Era*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Gratiant, Gilbert. *Fables créoles et autres récits*. Eds. Isabelle Gratiant, Renaud Gratiant, Jean-Louis Joubert. Preface by Aimé Césaire. Paris: Stock, 1996.

"Gruppo 63." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2005. Encyclopædia Britannica Online 1 May 2005 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?tocId=9126222>.

Hallward, Peter. *Absolutely Postcolonial: writing between the singular and the specific*. Manchester, UK: University of Manchester Press, 2001.

---. "Edouard Glissant between the Singular and the Specific." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 11.2 (1998): 441-446.

Hàn, Françoise. *L'évolution des paysages*. Saint Siffret: Éditions Cadex, 2000.

Heidegger, Martin. *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.

---. *On the Way to Language*. 1959. Trans. Peter D. Hertz 1971. New York: Harper, 1982.

---. *Poetry, Language and Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper, 1975.

---. *What Is Called Thinking?* New York: Harper, 1968.

Hiddleston, Jane. *Reinventing Community: Identity and Difference in Late Twentieth-Century Philosophy and Literature in French*. London: Legenda, 2005.

Hitchcock, Peter. "Glissant and Opaque Space." *Imaginary States: Studies in Cultural Transnationalism*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003. 33-63.

Hotte, Lucie. "Identité collective et identité individuelle: Le Sujet poétique en poésie franco-ontarienne." In Brophy and Gallagher. 169-179.

Humphries, Jeff. "Introduction." *The Collected Poems of Edouard Glissant*. Trans. Jeff
Humphries. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2005. xi-xxxiv.

Ihde, Don. "Text and the New Hermeneutics." In Wood. 124-139.

Jakobson, Roman. *Huit Questions de poétique*. Paris: Seuil, 1977.

Kattan, Naim. "Miron et l'universel." in Cloutier and Lord. 115-119.

Kearney, Richard. "Between Tradition and Utopia: The Hermeneutical Problem of
Myth." In Wood. 55-73.

Kitagawa, Joseph M., and Charles H. Long, eds. *Myths and Symbols: Studies in Honor of
Mircea Eliade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 1980.

Lechte, John. *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Mailhot, Laurent and Pierre Nepveu, eds. *La poésie québécoise*. Montreal: Typo, 1996.

Malpas, J., U. Arnswald, and J. Kertscher, eds. *Gadamer's Century*. Cambridge, Mass.:
MIT Press, 2002.

Marcel, Jean. "Rutebeuf et Miron : contemporains ? L'amour est morte." *Études
françaises* 35.2-3 (1999): 25-30.

Marx-Scouras, Danielle. *The Cultural Politics of Tel Quel: Literature and the Left in the
Wake of Engagement*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1996.

McGimpsey, David. "The Death of Miron: Public Poetry and Quebec Separatism."
Michigan Quarterly Review. 39.1 (2000): 41-62.

Medina, José. *Language*. New York: Continuum, 2005.

Miron, Gaston. *Courtepointes*. Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1975.

---. *L'Homme rapaillé*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1970.

---. *L'Homme rapaillé*. Paris: François Maspero, 1981.

---. *L'Homme rapaillé*. Paris: Gallimard, 1999.

---. *Un long chemin: proses, 1953-96*. Marie-Andrée Beaudet and Pierre Nepveu, eds.
　　　　Montreal: L'Hexagone, 2004.

Montbertrand, Gérard. "L'Homme rapaillé de Gaston Miron : Réduction et expansion."
　　　　Romance Notes 26.1 (1985): 12-17.

---. "Saignement du temps dans L'Homme rapaillé de Gaston Miron." *The French
　　　　Review*. 62.2 (1988): 283-291.

Morier, Henri. *Dictionnaire de poétique et de rhétorique*. Paris: PUF, 1998.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Résistance de la poésie*. William Blake & Co./Art & Arts, 1997.

Neel, Jasper. *Plato, Derrida and Writing*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University
　　　　Press, 1988.

Nepveu, Pierre. *Les mots à l'écoute. Poésie et silence chez Fernand Ouellette, Gaston
　　　　Miron et Paul-Marie Lapointe*. Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1979.

Noguez, Dominique. "Le poète en souffrance." *Études françaises* 35.2-3 (1999): 13-24.

Olson, Alan M. "Myth, Symbol, and Metaphorical Truth." In *Myth, Symbol, and Reality*,
　　　　ed. Alan M. Olson. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980. 99-125.

Pleau, Jean-Christian. *La révolution québécoise. Hubert Aquin et Gaston Miron
　　　　au tournant des années soixante*. Quebec: Fides, 2002.

Pleynet, Marcelin. "La poésie doit avour pour but…" *Théorie d'ensemble*. 1968. Paris:
　　　　Seuil, 1980.

Plourde, Marc. "On Translating Miron" in *Embers and Earth (Selected Poems)*, Trans.

D.G. Jones and Marc Plourde. Montreal: Guernica, 1984. 113-122.

Randall, Marilyn. "Resistance, submission and oppositionality: national identity in
French Canada." In Forsdick and Murphy. 77-87.

Reiss, Timothy J., ed. *For the Geography of a Soul: Emerging Perspectives on
Kamau Brathwaite*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth:
Texas Christian University Press, 1976.

---. *La métaphore vive*. Paris: Seuil, 1975.

---. "The Problem of the Double-Sense as Hermeneutic Problem and as Semantic
Problem." In Kitagawa and Long. 63-79.

---. *The Rule of Metaphor*. University of Toronto Press, 1977.

---. *Soi-même comme un autre.* Paris: Seuil, 1990.

---. "Temporal Distance and Death in History." In Malpas, Arnswald, and Kertscher.
239-255.

---. "Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language." In Valdes. 65-85.

Risset, Jacqueline. *L'amour de loin*. Paris: Gallimard, 1988.

---. "Les avant-gardes littéraires en Italie et en France dans les années 1960." 13 May
2002. Conf. Frontières italiennes. ENS, Paris. 13-18 May 2002.
<http://www.diffusion.ens.fr/index.php?res=conf&idconf=50>.

---. "Le chant de la dépossession." *Le Monde* 13 March 1998, sec. "Monde des
Livres". Lexis-Nexis. Brown U Lib. 25 May 2005 <http://web.lexis-nexis.com>.

---. *Les Instants*. Tours: Farrago, 2000.

---. *Jeu*. Paris: Seuil, 1971.

---. *Petits éléments de physique amoureuse*. Paris: Gallimard, 1991.

---. "Questions sur les règles du jeu." *Théorie d'ensemble*. 1968. Paris: Seuil, 1980.

---. *Sept passages de la vie d'une femme*. Paris: Flammarion, 1985.

---. *La traduction commence*. Paris: C. Bourgois, 1978.

---. *The Translation Begins*. Trans. Jennifer Moxley. Providence, R.I.: Burning Deck, 1996.

Roche, Denis. "La poésie est inadmissible. D'ailleurs elle n'existe pas." *Théorie d'ensemble*. 1968. Paris: Seuil, 1980.

Royer, Jean. *Introduction à la poésie québécoise*. Quebec: Bibliothèque Québécoise, 1989.

Saleh, Nadia. "Subversive and Plural Perspectives in Re-Reading French and Francophone Women's Poetry." *Symposium* 4 (2000): 204-209.

Sheringham, Michael. Review of André Frénaud: entre l'interrogation et le vide. *The Modern Language Review* 87.3: 769-770.

Simpson, David. *Situatedness, or, Why We Keep Saying Where We're Coming From*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

Stamelman, Richard. *Lost Beyond Telling: Representations of Death and Absence in Modern French Poetry*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Stevens, Christa. "De la société répétée à une mondialisation imprévisible: les discours insulaires de Gilles Deleuze et d'Édouard Glissant." In Bloois. 223-236.

Stout, John C. "Le Blason contemporain: On Women Poets' Objectifying of the Male Body." *Romance Studies* 21 (2003): 53-69.

---. "Entretien avec Anne Teyssiéras." *Dalhousie French Studies* 58 (2002): 131-142.

---. "Entretien avec Françoise Hàn." *Dalhousie French Studies* 51 (2000): 184-194.

---. "Writing (at) the Limits of Genre: Danielle Collobert's Poetics of Transgression."

    Symposium 4 (2000): 299-310.

Teyssiéras, Anne. *Boule de cristal*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1982.

---. *Le Chemin sous la mer*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1992.

---. *Cinq étapes pour une attente*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1971.

---. *Les Clavicules de Minho*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1986.

---. *Dernier état*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1974.

---. *L'Écaille des eaux*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1975.

---. *Épervier ma solitude*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1966.

---. *Fragments pour une captive*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1969.

---. *Golem*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 2000.

---. *Instants pour la seconde vie*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1994.

---. *Juste avant la nuit*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1979.

---. *Parallèles*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1976.

---. *Le Passage de l'arbre mort*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1998.

---. *Le Pays d'où j'irai*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1977.

---. *Poèmes en Kabbale*. Mortemart: Rougerie, 1984.

Thomas, Jean-Jacques, and Steven Winspur. *Poeticized Language; The Foundations of*

    Contemporary French Poetry. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press,

    1999.

Valdés, Mario J., ed. *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection & Imagination*. Toronto, University of

    Toronto Press, 1991.

Vaysse, Jean-Marie. *Le vocabulaire de Heidegger*. Paris: Ellipses, 2000.

Wing, Betsy. "Introduction." In Glissant, *Black Salt*. 1-18.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *De la certitude*. Trans. from German by Jacques Fauve. Ed. G. E.
M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Paris: Gallimard, 1976.

Wood, David (ed.). *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*. New York:
Routledge, 1991.