

LITERATURE AND DISENCHANTMENT

*Plunge yourself into the unknown that pierces deep.
Make yourself turn around.
(René Char, Feuilletts d'Hypnos, 1946)*

Literary criticism much too often ignores the contributions of the sociology of religions. And yet it would benefit from understanding that all culture has its source in a religious relationship to the world, even a negative one, and proceeds from a separation of the visible from the invisible. Such, in fact, is the principal characteristic of the religious element that Dilthey, for example, emphasizes. “Everywhere we encounter something that bears the name religion, its distinctive mark is its dealing with the visible”.¹

Throughout the 18th century there was an “exhaustion of the

¹ Dilthey, *Le Monde de l'esprit*, Paris, Aubier, 1947, tr. M. Rémy, p. 381.

reign of the invisible”, that Marcel Gauchet, expanding on the famous expression by Max Weber (*Entzauberung*) called “the disenchantment of the world”.² In 1733 Voltaire, acknowledging the pangs of conscience that shook Europe at the end of the 17th century, noted in the sixteenth *lettre philosophique* (“On Mr. Newton’s optics”):

A new universe was discovered by the philosophers of the last century, and this new world was all the more difficult to recognize in that no one even thought that it existed. It seemed to the wiser ones that it was brazen to even dare dream that one could guess the laws by which the heavenly bodies move and how light acts.

Descartes, Newton, Kepler fashioned a “new universe” issued from the Copernican revolution, no longer centered, subject to laws and scientific experiments, where God no longer had a place, a fact well established by the anecdote recorded by Alexandre Koyré at the end of his important book *Du Monde clos à l’univers infini*:

Questioned by Napoleon about the role that God played in his *System of the World*, Laplace, who one hundred years after Newton had bestowed its definitive perfection on the new cosmology, replied, “Sire, I had no need of that hypothesis”. But it was not Laplace’s system, it was the world that was described in it that had no further need of the hypothesis of God.³

God left the world because he no longer spoke to men. In the traditional order, theological and Aristotelian, everything spoke of and unceasingly proclaimed the word of God: the movements of physical space, the hierarchical structure of the human community. The world was word, and man listened to this word.

² M. Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985, p. 1. For Max Weber, the expression “disenchantment of the world” signifies in a more restrictive manner “the elimination of magic as a technique of salvation”, cf. *L’Éthique protestante et l’esprit du capitalisme*, Paris, Agora, 1985, p. 134.

³ A. Koyré, *Du Monde clos à l’univers infini*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, p. 336.

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In Aristotelian space, as in the human community, things had their proper place that they tried to attain; heavy bodies fell *in order to reach* the center of the Earth, lighter bodies rose because their natural place was above. Space *spoke*, it **judged** things, gave them directives, oriented them, like the human community judged and oriented men, and the language of each of these was ultimately but the language of God.⁴

If in the traditional order the world is word, and human word is word of the Word, after the 16th century the word became commentary: commentary on the Scripture given to the world by God because in Europe there was great expansion of printing, study of oriental manuscripts and the practice of written literature. Simultaneously, vision took the place of listening, observation that of contemplation,⁵ language became the instrument of representation and reading of the book of the World was transformed into a difficult exercise.⁶

Cartesian rationalism represented the world as pure extension (*res extensa*), object of knowledge of the knowing subject (*res cogitans*) and instituted the reign of a rational and technical individual who doubts, that is who refuses to speak the language of the world spontaneously and intuitively. The world itself became a pure object, a silent thing subject to reason and to technology, something mechanical controlled by intelligible laws. And if God left the world, it is ultimately because he could no longer speak to man. “Deprived of the physical universe and of the human community, his only organs of communication with man, God could no longer speak to him and left the world”.⁷ The disenchantment of things is first of all a form of silence.

Little by little the transparency of representation became un-

⁴ L. Goldmann, *Le Dieu caché*, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p. 41.

⁵ J. Brun, *L'Europe philosophe*, Paris, Stock, 1988, p. 142, “With Nicolas de Cusa, vision began taking the place of listening”.

⁶ On this point see M. Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, pp. 53-55, and Jean Brun who cites this significant text by Galileo (1623): “Philosophy is written in this vast book that is eternally open before our eyes—I mean the Universe—but one cannot read it before learning the language and becoming familiar with the characters in which it is written”. *Op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁷ *Le Dieu caché*, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

clear, blinded by the lights of 18th-century critical reason; the world and man (man become world, that is, individual) shattered the classical mirror and, in the 19th century, plunged into an obscure depth inversely symmetrical to the transcendental verticality of the theological order: pure otherness.

Then writing became Literature, an absolute that produces and seeks Meaning.⁸ Language became a tool of meaning and literature a polysemous universe whose excess of meaning questions the silence of a disenchanted world. In other words literature only became Literature when it invited the world to speak anew, through nostalgia for the word.

We are certainly too Weberian not to ignore that the explanation of the literary phenomenon through sociology of religion alone can only be partially sufficient.⁹ Nevertheless, we would like to show how the modern idea of literature was created at the end of the 18th century and at the beginning of the next century according to three principal patterns of the disenchanted universe:

- the troubling silence into which the world has sunk since Copernicus;
- the geology of the thing: while the Earth ricochets into infinity, the geological metaphor becomes the paradigm for the new depth of things and of this writing that we call "Literature";
- the archaeology of meaning: all meaning is now buried and Literature can only be poetic, creation and hermeneutics of the real.

For if Christianity must be recognized "as a matrix and determining factor in the genesis of the articulations that fundamentally singularize our universe, whether it is in the relationship with nature, forms of thought, the mode of coexistence of beings or political organization",¹⁰ if it truly is "the religion of the with-

⁸ P. Lacoue Labarthe and J.L. Nancy, *L'Absolu littéraire*, Paris, Seuil, 1978.

⁹ M. Weber, *L'Objectivité de la connaissance*, quoted in J. Freund, *Max Weber*, Paris, PUF, 1969, p. 26; "The irrational reality of life and its capacity for possible meanings remain inexhaustible".

¹⁰ *Le Désenchantement du monde*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

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drawal of religion'', literature is both nostalgia for the word and the poetics of disenchantment.

I. THE SILENCE OF THE WORLD

Sounds of voices

Little by little the word is disconnected from the thing and writing is no longer capable of making the words of the world heard, like frozen words, "words of blue, words of green, words of yellow, words of gold" (*Quart Livre*) that in fusing together surround Panurge and his companions with the rustling of reality. The world no longer speaks because language distances itself from it, because words turn in on themselves and become linguistic signs (we need only think of the theory of signs in the *Grammaire de Port-Royal*). The great novel of disenchantment is, as we know, *Don Quixote*. Lukacs, Foucault or Kundera have each attempted to explain what forms the modernity of this text: its hero's inability to understand the world.¹¹ Don Quixote sets out into the world and no longer understands it. The world is silent, and books no longer read, no longer speak of the world; they speak of themselves, they tell tales of fiction while the truth recedes.

His imagination (that of Don Quixote) is filled with everything that he had read in books, enchantments, quarrels, challenges, battles, wounds, gallantries, loves, tempests and impossible extravagances. And he had all this so well in his head that this store of imagined dreams was the pure truth for him and there was no other more certain story in the world.¹²

The folly of the character is the index of the metamorphosis of the language into linguistic signs and the creation of theme, literary folly, whose success in the 19th century is known inas-

¹¹ G. Lukacs, *La Théorie du roman*, Paris, Gonthier, 1963; M. Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, *op. cit.*; M. Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986.

¹² Cf. S. Felman, *La Folie et la chose littéraire*, Paris, Seuil, 1978.

much as it accompanied the birth of the modern idea of Literature.

Language relates stories, and Don Quixote, in the second part of the novel, becomes the real hero of the first part of the book that the characters encountered have read; language turns in on itself. It represents (itself).

The world is silent; Pascalian man shudders before the “eternal silence of infinite spaces”, but soon will be heard the hubbub of a language that, in dialogue, will not cease raising questions about the modalities of its functioning. Already Don Quixote conversed in vain with Sancho and Don Juan with Sganarella. In the 18th century Candide dialogued with Pangloss, Jacques dialogued with his master, Jean-Jacques confessed to Rousseau; one bantered and tested the subtleties of language. One wrote Letters that measured the impact of representation and that like “*liaisons dangereuses*” betrayed and enthralled the real to the text.

Language interrogates the world and interrogates itself. The sounds of voices, the questions and answers intertwine, and reality (of the text, of the world) becomes rhapsody. No longer can be heard the dialogues of Diderot to the agitated assemblies of the Convention. Language summons the world to respond to the questions it asks of it (which is what in the 18th century was called “philosophy”), but the world is obstinately silent and the silence of uncertainty and the unspeakable always succeeds in burying the Voltairian philosophical tale or the novels of Diderot.

Then the writer must resign himself to silence and agree to listen or to produce other noises that summon the world to respond but in a different manner: the sound of arms, the fracas of a revolution in progress, the gasps of the first steam engines announcing the arrival of industrialization.

“That is well said”, answered Candide, “but we must cultivate our garden”. In other words stop writing and philosophizing; if the world persists in its silence, if the questions remain without an answer, the world must be remade to human scale and a social, political, historical and economic order must be recreated, but also a literary one that speaks to man. We must repel the exasperating invisibility of the world that remains beyond language (like the magician of Leibnizian metaphysics as caricatured by Pangloss); we must remove God from the world that, by its very existence, holds language in check. It makes little

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difference whether God is good or bad, whether there is or is not a fatality to events; we must be quiet and make History. Man must be the inventor of his own Genesis; he must seek his accomplishment in technical and political action and use a word that rivals the divine word because it is just as creative: Literature.

The invention of Literature

The world is disenchanted, while History resounds. At the beginning of the 19th century everything changed, and after the bedlam of the revolutionary assemblies and tribunals, the generous proclamation of the rights of man and of the citizen and massacres of all kinds, silence fell once more across the world like darkness over a battlefield when the landscape has been reshaped by the rain of cannonballs, the piles of corpses, the horses' hooves and the tramping feet of infantrymen.

René moves forward in this world, this autumnal desert filled with the odor of death of History in progress, and he does not know what to say. He is alone and asks himself:

But how to express this crowd of fleeting sensations that I felt during my promenades? The sounds that passions make in the *void* of a solitary heart resemble the murmuring the winds and the waters make in *the silence of the desert*. One enjoys them, but one cannot paint them. Autumn surprises me in the midst of these uncertainties. I entered with rapture the months of tempests.

(Chateaubriand, *René*, 1802).

The *mal du siècle* is first of all a malaise of the writer: how to speak of (that is, how to make speak) the new world that man has just created, both ruined and new, disenchanted, and these unexplored territories that are individual interiority or the social realm? It is no longer a matter of philosophizing, of questioning the ancient world in vain; a word must be invented that knows how to listen to the disenchanted world: to speak it, to create it and tell its secret. This word is "Literature".

All of romanticism is there. In the desperate observation of the disenchantment of things ("this life that had at first *enchanted*

me was not long in becoming unbearable to me”, René exclaims), and the invention of the modern idea of Literature. But it is no doubt correct to note that the romantics of Jena (Schiller, the Schlegel brothers, Schleiermacher, Novalis, Tieck, Schelling) grouped around the review *Athenäum*, were the first to formulate this new idea between 1798 and 1800. “At times they spoke of poetry, at times of works, at times of novels, at times of romanticism. But they finally called it, for better or for worse, Literature”.¹³

What is Literature? The creation of a universe of meaning, absolute and polysemous in and through language. A poetics of the real in a sense, a human word, when the ancient affinity of the word and the thing is reconstituted but differently. For the thing is now word itself. Facing the silence of the world, from which all meaning has flowed, in the exile of the word and the confusion of human, political and mechanical noises: there is Literature. There exist (that is, are born, are written and disappear, like monads) literary texts, the sole depositories of meaning, alone capable of speaking to us. But literary meaning cannot be other than plural in a world where truths have taken the place of truth, texts have replaced writing, individuals the human community. This is Literature: the creation of universes that fill the infinite void of disenchantment, nourish meanings that fill the absence of meanings. This is Literature that creates worlds to recapture the lost sense of God.

This is why many writers of the 19th century proclaimed themselves magicians or seers,¹⁴ from Hugo to Rimbaud. *The Contemplations* or *The Illuminations* aim at the same goal: to decipher the meaning of the world by filling it with metaphorical meanings. In short, to reconcile listening and looking, for seeing is also listening, listening to the noisy silence of things.

¹³ *L’Absolu littéraire, op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁴ P. Bénichou, *Le Sacre de l’écrivain*, Paris, Corti, 1973; *Les Temps des prophètes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1977 and *Les Mages romantiques*, Paris, Gallimard, 1988.

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One day, on the edge of the moving waves, I saw,
 Passing, swelling its sail,
A rapid ship wrapped in winds,
 In waves and stars;
And I heard, leaning over the abyss of the heavens,
 That the other abyss touched,
Speaking into my ear a voice whose mouth
 My eyes did not see (...)

(V. Hugo, *Les Contemplations*, Book I, 1856)

Magician, the romantic author is also the prophet who listens and speaks the language of the world, who wanders in the desert of meaning in order to perceive (see and listen to) the truths better. And it can then be understood why one of the preferred metaphors of the 19th century was that of a ship. From Hugo's ship to the drunken vessel of Rimbaud, from the Baudelairean ship ("O Death, old captain, it is time! Lift anchor", *The Voyage, Fleurs du mal*) to Mallarmé's ship (see *Le Coup de dés*), from the *Jane Guy* of Poe's *Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym* to the whaling vessel of Melville's *Moby Dick*, the metaphor designated the literary search for meaning that always comes up against the edge of the overflow of meaning that envelopes things, of the lack of God, of the blank.¹⁵ Pym or Captain Ahab set off to seek whiteness (of the South Pole or the white whale), Mallarmé is struck with the horror-attraction of the blank page, and blankness is also perhaps that unknown feature that mobilized the poetic efforts of Baudelaire translating Poe ("At the heart of the unknown to discover something new") and of Rimbaud ("For he arrives at the Unknown").

For if the world is more and more silent from too many noises, since the revolutionary storm that swept away the Enlightenment, it has grown dark, and the elements rage ("Rise up quickly, desired storms that should carry René into the realm of another life",

¹⁵ Blank ("blanc") transformed into "the small yellow wall" in Proust. Cf. G. Bachelard, *L'Eau et les rêves*, Paris, Corti, 1940: "And in the whiteness, in the kingdom of the imagination, it will not be difficult. If a golden ray of moonlight falls across the river, the formal and superficial imagination of colors will not be troubled. The imagination of the surface will see as white what is yellow (...)"

cries Chateaubriand's character at the beginning of the century). Similar to the storm that sinks ships, like the frigate *La Méduse*,¹⁶ the world sinks into the abyss while Literature wanders on its surface to extract the blankness of meaning.

II. GEOLOGY OF THE THING

“We must cultivate our garden”

“We must cultivate our garden”, Candide announces at the end of Voltaire's tale. An affirmation of work as a distracting activity that makes it possible to forget the miseries of the world? Not only that. Rather we should see in this the metaphor announcing the new order of things. From now on the world is depth made up of piles of successive geological layers of meaning because it has a story itself, because it is just like man entering History. Replacing the transcendent verticality of the heavens is the geological depth of the thing. The thing does not have the intangible transparency conferred on it by classical representation. It is concretion and stratification.

Cultivating thus means leaning over the depth of the world, measuring the thickness of things and causing meanings to grow (exhuming). It means bringing to light, under the stormy sky of modernity, obscure networks of meaning. It means practicing the modern culture of disenchantment: producing “things hidden since the creation of the world”, which themselves produce this world.

“We must cultivate our garden”. In other words we must produce the world as geology. It is Literature that cultivates the meanings of an order that now does not cease collapsing under the void/fullness of its own otherness. In fact, “when the gods desert the world, when they cease coming to signify their other-

¹⁶ We know how successful was the theme of the romantic storm, from Géricault to Michelet (*La Mer*) and from the book by Deperthes published in 1781 and revised by Eyriès in 1815, *Histoire des naufrages*.

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ness, the world itself begins to appear other, to reveal an imaginary depth that becomes the object of a special quest, endowed with its end in itself and referring only to itself. (...) That which was but the means in the framework of a general understanding of the order of things now becomes a goal in itself. And so appears an autonomous activity of exploration of the sense world in the full range of its registers and the diversity of its modulations. At the center of its deployment, a multiform and obsessive search for the break of the everyday, for the internal transcendence of appearances, of the manifestation of the world as other to itself, of which should be shown, we believe, that this explains the essential development of Western art throughout its long duration and its explosion-radicalization of the last two centuries (...)''.¹⁷

Literature and geology

Literature becomes the book of the world while the world itself ceases to be the book of God.¹⁸ It is the component of a “culture” that produces multiple and infinite universes where, under the surface of the text, the otherness and the difference of multiple layers of meanings play among themselves, a play of plates of meaning, drifting significances. It produces because it cultivates. And the instrument that makes it possible to complete this work is writing: a matter itself dense, a material of exhumation and of construction. “For one hundred years all writing is thus an exercise of taming or repelling in light of this form-object that the author encounters inevitably on his path, that he must look at, confront, assume and that he can never himself destroy as author (...). The entire 19th century saw development of this dramatic phenomenon of concretion (...). Flaubert—to note here only the typical moments of this process—definitively constitut-

¹⁷ *Le Désenchantement du monde, op. cit.*, p. 241.

¹⁸ Cf. H. Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981.

ed literature as object with the arrival of a work-value: the form became the term of a 'fabrication', like a piece of pottery or jewelry (meaning that the fabrication was 'signified', that is for the first time presented as spectacle and imposed)".¹⁹

By writing, Balzac constructed an autonomous world that serves as "competition to civil status", and the novel is truly construction, the construction of a "reflected, coordinated, combined" work. The *Human Comedy* is the construction of a complex ensemble, "vaster, literarily speaking, than the cathedral of Bourges architecturally". It is also the construction of a social geology in which several layers of meaning succeed one another. The realist painting of society at the beginning of the 19th century, the identification of the social determinisms that fashion the individual, the classification of social species in terms of the influence of the social environment imitated from Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (as defined in the preface of 1842).

Although Balzac's writing has the dense materiality conferred on it for example by long descriptions, Flaubertian "style" is this substance worked and reworked, always tested by the "right tone of voice", which compensates for the evanescence of a reality undone by the failures of History, the stupidity or the mediocrity of men. Examples of this could be multiplied, but we would also like to show briefly how much poetry itself became geology by the 19th century.

And first of all because the poetry of Hugo, by breaking up the Alexandrine and favoring nouns over verbs, opens the path to the poetic revolution of the 19th century thanks to which the poem was to become an explosion of words, a geyser of meaning that springs from profound layers of significance. "Thus under each Word of modern poetry lies a sort of existential geology where the total content of the Noun is assembled, and not just its elective contents as in classical prose and poetry (...). The Word is here encyclopedic, it contains simultaneously all meanings among which a relational discourse would require it to select".²⁰

¹⁹ R. Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, Paris, Seuil, 1953, p. 37.

²⁰ *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, op. cit., p. 37.

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This is the poetic text, clear-obscure fountain of sense, “discourse full of holes and of light”,²¹ rugged territory where various strata of meaning flourish and are lost. This is what a geology of poetry demands: the panic springing up of meaning and not the peaceful representation of things.

From now on “never can a throw of the dice do away with chance”, never can a turn of the spade do away with the terrifyingly sudden appearance of the obscurity of meaning, whether it takes the name “Spleen” (Baudelaire), folly (Nerval) or “season in Hell” (Rimbaud).

“We must cultivate our garden”. The literary text must be thought of as the geology of meaning but also as an archaeological site, a realm where meaning takes shape by itself in a field of excavations.

III. ARCHAEOLOGY OF MEANING

The archaeological paradigm

“We must cultivate our garden”. This also means we must discover ourselves as other than what we are, acted upon by an archaeology, a semantic past (passive) that must be explored and deciphered. “The great modern reversal corresponds to the movement by which, with outside determination being undone, men are led to think of themselves as others with regard to the given situation as a whole, including their own reality, according to a two-fold dynamic necessity of reduction of all reality as other and of its constitution as other than it is”.²² The metaphor for the otherness of self is archaeology. Has it been sufficiently noted that Voltaire’s *Candide* (1759) appeared at a moment in time between the two major works of Winckelmann, founder of modern Greek archaeology: *Reflection on the Imitation of Works of the Greeks in Painting and in Sculpture* (1755) and *History of Art in Antiquity* (1764)?

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²² *Le Désenchantement du monde*, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

It would be good to use the excellent works of Georges Gusdorf on the birth of the human sciences to examine how they are formed on the model of archaeology, which perhaps thus becomes one of the paradigms for modernity, taking the place of the theological discourse that underlies traditional enchanted order. And first of all because it combines recognition of the entropic dynamics of History and the pattern of burying. Historicity is evaluated by the depth and the obscurity and clarity that are the measure of truth. Wrote Winckelmann, “The history of ancient art that I have undertaken is not a simple chronicle of successive periods and the changes that took place in them. I use the term ‘history’ in the broadest sense given to it by the Greek language; and my intention is to attempt to present a system (...) and to show the origin, progress, the change and the fall of art along with the different styles of nations, periods and artists, and to prove it all, as much as possible, *from ancient monuments that are still in existence*”.²³

In other words archaeology is hermeneutics. And the human sciences are a hermeneutics of the human reality that explains its appearance and immediacy by discovering the hidden and ancient laws that produce it. A veritable “archaeology of knowledge” in a sense, if we may quote the title of the work by Michel Foucault in which he attempted to renovate the history of ideas.

Literature is archaeology, the product of a polysemous text that creates and explores its laws in the very moment of its writing. Artistic development of a hermeneutics of signification, poetics of the real. And has it been sufficiently noted also that Schleiermacher, who figured among the *Athenäum* group, was one of the masters of hermeneutics, and that the group of Jena romantics were strongly influenced by the works of Winckelmann? And this is essentially because the romanticism of disenchantment is a poetry of ruins”.²⁴

“We must cultivate our garden”. This means, then, we must

²³ Quoted in D. Boorstin, *Les Découvreurs*, Paris, Laffont, 1988, p. 527.

²⁴ One of the works announcing this is the book by Volney, *Les Ruines ou méditations sur les révolutions des empires*, 1791.

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excavate the ruins. The modern idea of Literature is formed from a reflection on ruins and fragments, the *Witz*. “Romanticism discovered the beauty of ruins to which it gave a sacred value. The ruin, the fragment can also be read either as debris, the results of a completed movement, or as a stage, a cross-section in the development of a project in actual course of realization, in the sense of the growth of composition and not in the sense of decomposition, of the decay of structures”.²⁵ In other words “we must cultivate our garden” means we must encourage development of the ruin. The romantics of the *Athenäum*, admirers of Winckelmann, set up the path that led from the theory of the literary fragment defined as accomplished/unaccomplished element of meaning (like the archaeological ruin of which it is not known if it is perhaps hiding other ruins under its foundations) to literature conceived as production and growth of meaning or as a poetic and polysemous spring.

The human sciences and Literature are creations of a disenchanting world, littered with ruins, ruins of an ancient order, ruins of an order to be built. We know the role that archaeology plays in psychoanalysis. Jacques Le Rider correctly notes, “The archaeological metaphor runs through all of Freud’s work”. Already in the *Studies in Hysteria*, Freud wrote, “I will develop a process of working through the layers of pathogenic psychic material that we can rightly compare to excavation techniques at the site of a buried city”. In 1897 he confided to Fliess that he had dreamt of Pompeii (letter Nr. 60); he knew all the details of it from books and did not visit the site until September 1902. And in the analysis of the Dora case, published in 1905, he said, “Given the incomplete nature of the results of my analysis, I can only follow the example of researchers who consider themselves quite happy when they have brought to light treasured, although degraded, vestiges of long-buried Antiquity”.²⁶

Nor let us forget the long commentary that Freud made on a

²⁵ G. Gusdorf, *Fondements du savoir romantique*, Paris, Payot, 1982, p. 462.

²⁶ J. Le Rider, “Freud et la littérature”, in *Histoire de la psychanalyse*, Paris, Hachette, 1982, p. 61.

novel whose principal character is an archaeologist, *Delights and Dreams in the Gradiva of Jensen*, 1906. If Freud is the archaeologist of the unconscious, then similarly the other great founder of the human sciences, Marx, who worked “in the garden of Epicurus”, is the archaeologist of society. He brings to light the functioning of the social and of ideology from the hidden laws of economic infrastructure. As for Saussure, is it necessary to point out that his *Cours de Linguistique générale* is but an exhumation of the laws of language?

A poetry of the real

Literature, in this disenchanted context, is itself a veritable archaeology of significance, excavation and research, in and by the text, of a transcendent meaning, of semantic depth and otherness. It is a poetry of the real. The engaging search for what Marcel Gauchet, using the title of a book by Yves Bonnefoy, named “The Back Country”, “the infinite effort to bring forth the order out of familiar contexts: (...) the unfathomable back country that can be discovered in the midst of a landscape already seen a hundred times”.²⁷

Modern Literature is indeed the archaeological quest for a buried model of the world, no more radical and meta-physical than any lost country, but the presence of an immediacy located below, beneath the text. This is the land, the realm of Literature’s odyssey: the edges of meaning where in the gap of a metaphor, of a sonorous harmony, of a romantic intrigue, the sensible presence of the world penetrates. Writing must dig into the depths of the earth, while God is lost in celestial infinity.

Literature is the cultivation of the native soil to which disenchantment attaches us:

Hic est locus patriae, says a Roman epitaph. What is a fatherland without the soil that marks it, and should this soil not be important?
(Y. Bonnefoy, *Les tombeaux de Ravenne*, 1953)

²⁷ *Le Désenchantement du monde*, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

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It must exhume the immanent secret of “all things from here”²⁸ by digging (and by underlying) our native soil so that from there can filter the glow of a sensible truth, buried under the ruins of the retreat of God.

Modern Literature is the book in which the world is reconstructed as word, where the polysemy of words checks the evanescence of the real and recreates it, that is no longer works at reinforcing the evidence of a divine meaning but at pulverizing our culture into an archipelago of meanings.

The world is no longer a book, the book is the world, and Literature, the plurality of worlds in the Galilean infinity of the stars. The word of God ebbs under the writing of men, the transcendence of the World collapses in the disenchanting immanence of ruins.

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God is far and there is Literature. There is this human writing, too human, that invites us to accept the metamorphosis of a meaning now pulverized into meanings that are strewn through our culture but that fleetingly, around a ruin, across an instant, in the miracle of a word, the perfume of a hawthorne tree or the detail of a small piece of yellow wall discover presence.

God is far, but the gods, these partners of immanence, have perhaps returned for whoever, reader or author, is a good archaeologist of ruins, a master of unveiling.

Is not the era of disenchantment that of the return to the Greeks, unceasingly proclaimed by a part of our modernity, from the romantics of the *Athenäum* to Heidegger, by way of Hölderlin, Hegel, Marx, Freud or Nietzsche?²⁹

²⁸ Y. Bonnefoy, *Anti-Platon*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1947.

²⁹ In a recent interview with K. Brincourt, (*Figaro littéraire* of 2 May 1989), E. Jünger himself remarked, “Today’s world, which speaks with the universal language of technology, brings the emergence not of spiritual unity but a new polytheism”.

This return to the Greeks also seems to be at the heart of the most modern science when, for example, it reflects on the concept of autonomy in the cognitive sciences (J. Varela, *Autonomie et connaissance*, Paris, Seuil, 1989) or in physics

In any case the question can be asked, and the poet's statement is subject for meditation:

The gods are back, friends. They come at the moment of penetrating into this life; but the word that revokes, under the word that deploys, has re-appeared as well, to make us suffer together.

(R. Char, *La bibliothèque est en feu*, 1956)

In short, we can hope. Provided that we do not ignore (and how could we?) "the word that revokes", the most modern and most visible advance, the most disturbing one also, of our disenchanting modernity. When the difficult practice of Literature is dissolved in the evanescence of information, the endurance of thought in the modes of ideology, the necessity of knowledge in the fallacious demand of know-how and make-known. When the eternity of the word, or at least the permanence of writings, has been replaced by the ephemeral of communication.³⁰ When, even more fundamentally, the ruins of disenchantment are but the debris of Western culture shattered by the dictatorship of European sciences since Galileo and Descartes.³¹ When the ruins of modernity are but the stigmata of barbarism. Unless we believe blindly with Husserl that, "the Ark-origin of Earth does

(cf. I. Prigogine, I. Stengers, *La Nouvelle alliance*, Paris, Gallimard, 1979: "The metamorphosis of contemporary sciences is not a breaking away (...). They (peasants and sailors) know that the weather cannot be commanded and that growth of living things cannot be hurried, this autonomous process of transformation that the Greeks called *physis*. In this sense our science has at last become a physical science since at last it has admitted the autonomy of things, and not only of living things", p. 294. For an illustration see the theory of dissipative structures developed by Prigogine).

³⁰ This topic has been dealt with a great deal recently. See for example, G. Lipovetsky, *L'Ère du vide*, Paris, Gallimard, 1983 and *L'Empire de l'éphémère*, Paris, Gallimard, 1987; A. Bloom, *L'Âme désarmée*, Paris, Julliard, 1987; A. Finkelkraut, *La Défaite de la pensée*, Paris, Gallimard, 1987; M. Henry, *La Barbarie*, Paris, Grasset, 1987.

³¹ This is the collapse that Husserl analyzed in his time under the title "Krisis" in the famous lectures he delivered in 1935 in Vienna and in Prague.

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not move”,³² that “the crisis of culture”³³ and the reign of technology cannot durably affect the life of the spirit and that, indeed, the gods have returned.

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³² Manuscript by E. Husserl, May 1934, translated by D. Franck, in *Philosophie*, No. 1, January 1984.

³³ H. Arendt, *La Crise de la culture*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972.