

THE THIRD ARTICULATION: LITERATURE

Thanks to the particularly penetrating analysis of André Martinet, we now know that the complementary existence of two levels of different articulation is one of the most remarkable specific characteristics of language. To the first level belong all facts concerning significant units, the meaning and inflection of words, syntactic groupings and the composition of a discourse; the second articulation is that of non-significant elements that we call phonemes. In other words, it is at the second level that we pronounce articulate sounds, while to the first we owe the possibility of formulating groups with meaning. The first articulation could be visualized as the molecular and cellular level in which the simplest elements, having a very limited autonomy, are organized according to affinities having the force of law; the second articulation would thus represent the atomic level, that of elementary particles identified by their role in groups.

For those who are not familiar with structuralist vocabulary, it suffices to recall that for a long time we have been able to distinguish, although in a less pertinent manner, between these two different linguistic levels that are the equivalent of

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grammar (morphology, syntax, stylistics) on the one hand and phonetics on the other. From our point of view, the differences or the nuances between these two nomenclatures are not of the maximum importance for the moment. What must be kept in mind of these few elementary ideas is the image of language conceived as an endless chain of structures, whose number is severely limited. There again we find the resemblance to organic chemistry which, even though it has a reduced number of elements at its disposal, is not able to exhaust the infinite play of their combinations. With an average of about thirty sound elements, any language can forge a vocabulary of several thousand or tens of thousands of words; with a limited number of rules and paradigms, it is capable of placing words in new structures that are more and more complex and of an infinite variety.

We may be surprised to see that the numeral sequence of the two articulations under consideration do not reflect their true relationship. Simple structure being the raw material for complex structure, logic would deduce that the latter be placed after the former; in assigning second place to phonemes, simple units without which structures having meaning would be impossible, linguistic analysis, in a way, puts the basement above ground. It may also be that the observation does not seem pertinent. The matter is clear enough that we are not going to involve ourselves in a quarrel over words. If it is proven and accepted that two levels exist, it is sufficient to have posited their existence: their order will be that of the importance we want to give them. When there are only two people, one can sit at any place at the table.

However, words are never innocent. So that what follows may be clear, we must insist upon this point so that we will not need to return to it: the language of numbers pleads in a contrary sense to that of linguistic analysis. On the one hand, when there are two, one may be placed before, alongside or behind. On the other hand, in the series 1, 2... it is understood that 2 is composed and located after 1, which owes it nothing. This is not the case with the two levels of articulation. The importance of this observation becomes obvious from the moment in which the existence or at least the suspicion of a third articulation is suggested. To discuss it, we must know where to

locate it correctly: what will be its possible relationships with the already identified articulations? It is not clear why we can call it third since the route is interrupted: if it exists, it could not proceed from 2, but from 1. If we wish to clear the road and continue the journey, we must keep in mind that for us 1 is 2 (articulation of significant units) and 2 is 1 (articulation of non-significant units). This is for the requirements of the demonstration and with no intention of rearranging the furniture of a neighbor in a better way. In addition, out of a concern for clarity we will try to use this ciphered language as little as possible.

This slight inconvenience has perhaps not escaped the attention of the linguist, but if he has seen it he need not dwell on it. It presents no problems from his point of view, and the hazard we are pointing out is too far away to be real. For the linguist, the two articulations are marvellously sufficient: if the opinion of a non-specialist could be of any interest whatever, I should not hesitate to say that I think as he does. The second articulation can express everything: this is without doubt the reason it has the place of honor. It is the second articulation that makes the immense flock of significant units advance to the sound of the same flute: words, discourse, poems, all that we could dream of saying and that has not yet been expressed. Each literary work being an autonomous unit having meaning, there is no difference in nature, only in hypostasis, between the statement of a poem and the advertisement for shaving soap, between the unadorned word and the sum of words making up Baudelaire's *Les Chats*. Put another way, from the linguist's point of view we are always on the same level and working with the same material. Literature, that belongs to the level of articulation of units having meaning, is subject to the same laws and is organized according to the same internal structures, although to tell the truth it has particular manners and behavior, duly interpreted and explained by stylistics.

All of this is quite clear, except for the last point. Linguistic analysis has made us too accustomed to the coherence and pertinence of structures for us not to feel, in this highly-organized landscape, the incongruity of literature. Going back to the pastoral image we used above, literature does not seem to figure in this

landscape as just one more sheep in the flock. We have long given up the attempt to make it keep step: we are merely content to consult it in order to know what pace is suitable to it, which proves that it has tastes and rights of its own. We would like to know it better, this strange beast that does not frequent the pasture of the others and does not eat out of the hands of the grammarians.

The most astonishing thing is that these latter do not take exception to it. Better yet, they make an inventory of its extravagances and blunders and waste their time with the secretly embarrassed good nature of someone who is not sure that he has understood the joke. Stylistics is fond of its singularities, from which it draws information, since we are unable to decipher its laws. Stylistics especially strives to measure the differences of the literary discourse with regard to the established norms that give such fine results in the study of significant units. These differences are numerous enough to justify the establishment of an excellent analytical process, differential stylistics, a rather new discipline that is far from having said its last word.

Thus it becomes evident that the literary discourse, which we may just as easily call poem, can and must be defined by specific structures; more precisely, by those that separate it from the strictly linguistic level. Naturally, it does not turn its back on the language on which it depends and without which it is inconceivable. There is a source of ambiguity in this situation that strikes us without our having to look for it very far. On the literary level, everything is ambiguous, beginning with its name. The literary discourse is first of all a discourse, which implies that it must bend itself just like any other discourse to the exigencies of linguistics analysis. But it is at the same time literary, a fact that strongly limits the first assumption, because I do not know whether the linguists are speaking of a botanical or a philosophical discourse, or something else that is merely a discourse.

There is, then, discourse on the one hand and literary discourse on the other. The one evades the other; within the limits that are to be defined, it forgets an allegiance that it has not promised but that seemed to be inscribed within the nature of things. We might say, to simplify, that it both escapes its destiny and does

not escape it, which only renders the same ambiguity. We have no instrument capable of measuring the degree of liberty that a poem grants itself. There is, however, a fundamental question that arises and one we should be able to answer: does it escape enough from linguistic norms so that it is free from their gravitational force and can go beyond their laws to form a different level of articulation? Is Valéry's definition of literature as a language within language—and one that resembles the more modern one that makes literature a parasite of language—a pirouette, a tangential explanation or a true definition?

This question was not invented *ad hoc*. The relationship of linguistics with literature presents more than one problem, and linguists are not the last to be preoccupied with the matter. A correct answer, if such a thing were possible, would be important from the epistemological point of view as well as from that of methodology. The problem will be better situated if we compare its case with those of levels 1 and 2, already known.

It is evident that the level of meanings is not confused with that of phonemes, and that at the same time it is not a stranger to it. The ambiguity only exists for one who does not look closely enough. Phonemes combine to form significant units: in these it is fundamental that sounds are perceived at the same time that their particular identity has lost all its interest. I perceive *o* and conceive *eau*. Perhaps it is the same for the literary level, that organizes significant units into groups in which they are not intended to be conceived but can be rapidly perceived, in view of the synthesis of a superior conception. When Apollinaire writes that "*les vaches du couchant meuglent toutes leurs roses*" I conceive practically none of the significant units he presents me with. It is also evident, and more than evident, that that is not what he is proposing to me. He offers me the bread and salt that symbolize the entry into the kingdom. To argue about the taste of the bread and the quality of the salt would be tantamount to a refusal.

If that is true, a corollary is presented. We know that the specificity of phonemes is not defined by the same norms as morphological or syntactical structures. For example, characteristics such as the discrete nature of the sign or the linear development of the message could not change levels without

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peril. By extrapolation, and supposing that literature forms a third level, the structures of the preceding level would survive but would be limited to a simple linguistic examination. They would be neither pertinent nor useful from the point of view of the poem. Linguists partially accept this reasoning, even without having recourse to the hypothesis of the third level. By simple intuition, they mistrust the value of linguistic norms applied indiscriminately to literary analysis. On the other hand, it would be easy to turn the proposition around: since it is evident that the norms of the second level are not sufficient to analyze a poem, it follows that this latter belongs to a different level.

We would say that everything is put into place by the recognition of a third level of articulation. Unfortunately, we are far from the mark, and it will not be easy to establish its specificity. The doubt remains, but the situation does not seem dramatic. For the most part, the place reserved for the poem inside linguistic analysis seems satisfactory. Linguistics devotes itself to the study of language, and that is not only the indifferent instrument, it is the sentient body and perhaps the soul of literature. Expression fulfills a specific function, communication, that is also the object of literature. All communication has a content that linguists prefer to call message: and it is not inconvenient that the content of a poem be considered as a message such as linguistics conceives of it. Thus, when the linguist analyzes a poem, he loses none of the advantages acquired and is not without defenses, which does not prevent the literary critic—be he historian, comparatist, psychologist, impressionist or structuralist—from analyzing on his own, and using different methods, the content of the same message. There is a place for everyone. It is unnecessary, therefore, to establish boundaries where there is no need for them and where transitions occur smoothly, where the linguist always feels at ease.

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All the above is perhaps not as clear as it seems. We know in advance that the expressions of literature do not have the virtue of pertinence: it would be surprising if the ones we use to describe literary situations possessed it. All words are full of

ambushes—not to mention the surprises reserved by concepts. It has not been proved that we all speak the same language, in literature; on the other hand, by accepting a ready-made dress for a poem we risk including under one heading apparently similar objects without having examined their incompatibilities. The idea that the non-linguistic critic has an exclusive right over a literary text (and thus over the discourse) has all the appearance of an admission of impotence, and we have already said that the idea that we have of the literary discourse conceals more than one ambiguity. It will be useful to take a closer look at this point.

Have we the right to claim that literature is a communication? For the linguist, this is defined by the presence of a speaking subject, a statement and an interlocutor who, as his name shows, is also a speaking subject. Better yet, it is clearly specified that communication necessarily implies a response that allows it to be considered as a social fact belonging to the group of exchanges. Now, it is evident that literature excludes the idea of exchange between the speaking subject and an interlocutor who would not deserve the name. The relationships that are established between the two are of quite a different order. In the presence of a communication (in the linguistic sense) the interlocutor may adopt two different attitudes according to the nature of the statement: he may negotiate, when it is a question of purely assertive content, or know it and assume it in the case of apodictic statements that close the door on discussion. In the latter case, it is understood that the interlocutor is not able to inflect the discourse even if the communication remains open. If he remains without reply it is not because of the subject that transmitted the message to him but because the discourse closed on itself and that, not being able to modify the facts of reference, he is unable to modify the discourse expressing them. A sentence such as “John died Saturday” being necessarily true, is not negotiable, and an answer will have to be a lateral and superfluous comment. Carrying things to their final consequences, we find that this situation is not correctly described when we call it a communication: in reality, it is only a communiqué.

It is easily understood that the poem is the same thing. It does not belong to the category of negotiable communications:

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the reader does not intervene in the composition of the text, and his presence is not explicitly foreseen. Even more than in the theater, he feels that he does not inhabit the same space: not only can he not change what has been said, but access to this world is denied him. He views the poem as he would look at fish in an aquarium: they are there, quite close to him, but he cannot touch them without breaking the glass and destroying the display. He feels this necessary solitude, sometimes cruelly, and we must believe that the author has also felt it in his time. The modern epoch has experienced this inconvenience and instinctively palliates it by inventing the figure of the critic, who is made responsible for giving the true answer. It is an illusion that has no follow up, because the critic can negotiate nothing and, if he has a dialogue, it is a dialogue of the deaf. Substitution of a discussion of the poem justifies itself in the same way.

However, if it is true that the poem is a *communiqué* to be taken or left, it is not the first nor the only one of its kind. Life, especially modern life, offers us examples on all sides and not only in the field of literature. The road sign that draws the attention of the motorist to the proximity of a ditch is informative: it is a sign that is proposed but not imposed, it does not know to whom it is speaking, it leaves the pedestrian indifferent and perhaps the shepherd with his flock does not even know how to decipher its message. In the same way, the press, the news reports, manuals, laws, are informative texts: they all give information in the same definitive manner that expects no reply and scorns the idea of an interlocutor. These things are said because they are said and in order that everyone can draw the profit he likes from them.

We would say that this is the case with a poem, since it deals with a speaking subject, a message and a reader who listens even if he does not respond. Let us remember, before we continue, that in the described condition it is not the speaking subject who determines the passivity of the interlocutor but the necessarily peremptory or true nature of the facts stated in the speaker's message. This is not without importance. The literary discourse is in the same situation, but it is peremptory only in order to affirm what is not true. It is toward the content of the statement that we must now turn.

The message is at the same time form and content. In linguistics, as in cybernetics, it is defined as a system of signs transmitted by a sender that contain the information to be communicated. It obeys its own laws. The transmission of the message implies the use of a code or a system of signs that must first of all be intelligible. This is normally obtained by a complex of transmutations fixed by common agreement, or in any case, communicated in advance to the receiver. These conditions are not met by the literary message.

Intelligibility is not a specific characteristic of the literary discourse: it may be given or refused or unilaterally proposed by the sender. It is true that the poet uses a special code, but there is no example of a code explicitly communicated by the author. It is also certain that the author sometimes indicates perspectives and tracks that facilitate the interpretation of the text, but these clues are themselves in code. It is certain, finally, that rhetoricians and critics often offer norms for decoding, but these are systems established without the knowledge of the sender that precisely denote the malaise of the reader in the presence of a "message" whose total intelligibility is denied him.

It is, however, also evident and surprising that the reader accepts the author's point of view and justifies the use of the unilateral message, coded and not negotiated. At the beginning, he makes this major concession to take as necessarily true the poem's assertions. No one deceives him: he asks to be deceived. He knows the apodictic value of statements such as "the moon saddened" or "memories are hunting horns," but it is a knowledge he does not intend to use against the author. It is a contract drawn between the author and the reader, and the only code, but a universal one, on which they have agreed beforehand. It must be recognized that it exists at the base of every literary "message," but it should also be recognized that it does not aspire to the decoding of the poem nor to the reestablishment of its intelligibility.

Nevertheless, let us admit that there is a message, although shaded, in the literary discourse, so different from a discourse: we will find just as many difficulties from the point of view of its content. The message, in fact, is not an empty phonic envelope: it presupposes an anchorage in reality. If I say *taxi*

I am referring to a concrete object that I could determine even further by means of articulation. If I say *kindness* I am referring to a series of circumstances and concepts whose parallel synthesis I am certain to encounter in the mind of my interlocutor. If I say "John died Saturday," I may be asked, "Which John?" There is an organic relationship, and one that is at times difficult, between the sonorous or significant envelope and the real or signified content. The difficulty has been avoided by the insertion of a third concept into the Saussurian binomial—the referent, the real object of the content, intended to soften the fall of reality into the discourse. Now, it is easy to observe that the literary discourse has no referent, unless we concede that Baudelaire's *Les Chats* is a dissertation on cats.

It is not a matter of having recourse to a paradox but of measuring the distance that separates the normal linguistic discourse from the literary discourse. Literary discourse is nourished with the unreal, as we are. Reality is made up of black holes that we must fill in with memory and imagination: I cannot see the six faces of a cube at the same time, nor can I see them in the same perspective, which does not prevent my conceiving them correctly. A child who is building something with blocks reserves spaces for a block whose surfaces of contact do not correspond to his view of the block, and he does not err. He has, therefore, wagered against what he sees or, more exactly, he has instinctively corrected and completed the message of his perceptions. I write to my friend to give him some good news: I "see" his face beforehand and from afar, and I thus have a head start on reality. I do not like the decision he has just made: "Put yourself in his place," someone suggests to me, and I put myself in his place, which means that I am creating literature.

Literature begins where the real referent disappears. Someone may suggest Charlemagne to me as a referent. I could, if need be, formulate some modest statements about him, on the subject of the *missi dominici* or on his coronation. If I say that Charlemagne broke an arm during a boar hunt in the Ardennes and that an unknown young girl helped him and took care of him on that occasion, my referent has changed its physical state and evaporated. Furthermore, it is important to remember that literature always begins as a tergiversation of history: the real referent

is a useful trampoline for beginners. Nevertheless, there are two totally different ways to speak about Charlemagne, or the Princess de Clèves, or myself, because there is also a non-referent "myself." The obvious difference with regard to a purely linguistic discourse is that it keeps me attached to the real referent and to its factitious environment, while in literary discourse I construct and invent my referent as I formulate my statement. In retrospect, my referent did not exist before the discourse; actually, an infinity of possible non-referents exists in literary discourses that have not yet been expressed.

The first consequence of this situation is that literature feeds on the untrue and does not tolerate the presence of a real referent. That seems to go against the fundamental law to which we have been taught to submit from an early age: a poem imitates nature. In reality, this is a paralogism: it is not a choice but a necessity. The poet imitates nature because he cannot totally escape it. When someone sees me visit a doctor and leave his office with a little less money in my pocket than before, he would be mistaken to deduce that I had gone there to leave money for the doctor. The observation and imitation of nature are the honorariums that the author pays: most often he does it with bad grace, and there are also those who get by without paying. The author is obliged, because he profits from nature for the same reason as he profits from words, to complete them and direct them toward higher ends.

The second consequence is that literature, being a *forma mentis*, is a way of knowing with which we have all been equally provided at the start. Lying is an art as universally known as the technique of breathing. It does not follow from this that all liars are poets, but the opposite is certainly true. Truth is highly respectable: mathematics, physics, history itself, offer guarantees but do not result in poetry. To speak about a lie is not sufficient: contacts with the real must be broken, the literary discourse cannot be confronted with anything certain. A portrait of the president of the Republic may be excellent, but its merit will always be that of its referent. Inversely, the statue of Antinous may be beautiful, because the person of Antinous no longer shifts the imagination toward reality.

From this fact, literature, along with the other arts, acquires

a sense of gratuity that seems inherent. Like gratuity, speaking for the sake of speaking is not a specific characteristic of language; we may make use of it as a provisory boundary between the second and third articulation. In fact, we must admit that a discourse that does not describe things but creates them by stating them, has other needs, liberties and prestiges than ordinary language. That is not new and should not be surprising. We have become used to it at least since Malherbe's *joueur de quilles* or the Kantian finality without end. It must be added, however, that gratuity is too grand a word, one that describes only a partial aspect of the problem, that of the relationships of literary discourse with outside reality.

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Seen from within, the landscape is different. The literary imagination seems to be the result of mental activities that are too constant and too fundamental to be considered as fortuitous or disinterested.

I am not referring to the content of these activities but to their program and especially to their times of repose. I wonder, for example, what a dog is doing when he is doing nothing. Like all living creatures, he is programmed; there must be an internal screen on which lights appear and disappear according to stimuli. And if there is no stimulus? It may be that the "black box" remains at a standstill, but I admit that I have difficulty in conceiving an absolute vacuum. In any case, such a vacuum is impossible for man, unless there is a flat electroencephalogram.

At night I dream, as we all do. During the day I think about various things: what has been said to me, what I should answer, what I have done or what I ought to have done. That does not occupy my entire waking day, and I have long empty moments in which stimuli do not automatically appear: I call such moments disposable. It is not a matter of a vacuum, because the time fills by itself without my intervening to direct or choose. It could be called reverie, but reverie is not well thought of, it is applied to *lazzaroni*, poets and musicians. However, what else are we doing when we are doing nothing? When we are strapped into our seat on an airliner or when we are roasting ourselves on the beach?

I follow a long interior monologue: this is a more acceptable term for a reverie. More exactly, it follows me, it releases and recaptures me, and I let myself be carried away. I think without thinking, just as I breathe or as my heart beats. In all these cases, I am powerless to control. My thought is not coherent or, if it is, it alone is aware of the fact. It comes, then it wants nothing more to do with me and is replaced. It comes back, prowls around, shows itself and hides; sometimes I have felt it without having time to perceive it. I pass lightly over images without choosing, I see one thing in another, I am relieved by the sensation of finding myself again for the pleasure of recounting improbable adventures to myself: the satisfaction of a pertinent response that I have not made, a meeting with a memory whose purpose I do not grasp, the lure of a success that I would do well to achieve. In short, I talk nonsense. I do it without remorse since it is not really me. The phenomenon comes and goes as in a railroad station, but it is a station that never closes. I love to be thus solicited from the right and the left while I am being pulled or pushed forward: backward, it would be waking up. It is strange to observe also that the mind does not like silence. As soon as the push becomes less strong, I surprise myself in the act of addressing a coherent discourse to myself or, at the worst, mentally humming an old trite melody. Fortunately, the mental phosphenes quickly take up their comforting round again. It could be said that I am making a mental film, and I find the expression rather pertinent. It would be completely so if it were specified that I am only the invited guest.

If we may be permitted to generalize, we will see that the life of the mind is an endless carpet, pushed by memory and pulled by the imagination. It is characterized by its incessant flux at the same time as by the arhythm of its tropisms. As imagination, it has no form but constantly looks for one; as memory, it has no memory of itself. If it had its own memory it would be able to go over the same circuits more than once; if it had form it could express itself. Of course, this applies only to those disengaged moments in which memory plays with imagination, and there is no decision as to the winner. The important thing in all the above is that the confluence, permanence

and versatility of these activities represent not so much a faculty as a necessary function.

No doubt the reader has already divined that it is in this unstable domain of mental disengagement that I believe the *primum movens* and methodology of literary creation are located. It is such an ambiguous space that it will not be easy to proceed rapidly. Before trying to find out how the roots take hold, it is advisable for us to ask ourselves what the relationships are of disposable moments in the mind with consciousness on the one hand and language on the other.

In general, we do not like these disengaged periods. Our first concern when they announce themselves is to invest them, that is, to spend them in some other way. To the question, "What are you doing when you are doing nothing?" it is probable that most answers would be, "I am bored." Day-dreaming, idly gaping, fantasizing, all that belongs to the category of reluctant pleasure, occupations in which we have the impression of spending without profit. We avoid this impression by giving a reassuring meaning to the content of the "unfocused" mental period and by rationalizing it. It is a relief that we find in pastimes—in the current meaning as well as in the Jansenist meaning of the word. During these periods, the individual behaves passively; he assumes that there is activity or at least individual initiative in pastime, which makes it a conscious activity and in which the consciousness believes it has recovered its liberty.

Pastimes and amusements have numerous possibilities that it is not our concern to analyze here. Literature is one of them, as are the other arts, but we can direct the unconscious activities of mental life toward reasonable horizons through sports, dancing, games, the relative stupidity of mass media and, more radically, through alcohol and drugs. Most of these supplementing means end with results that are contrary to those we thought we were seeking. Every drug user thinks at first of his complete liberty and takes the quickest way to become a slave. This evolution is inherent in a religion of progress that stakes more on instruments than it does on man. On the one hand, the instruments tend to become ends in themselves and on the other, as St. Augustine saw, man tends to enjoy *per se* what he should only be making use of. I mean by that that it is not the idea of

pastime that is responsible for abuses; it is primarily the basic idea that conscious life and the rationalization of its course is necessarily progress.

To tell the truth, what should interest us here is strictly literary diversion. It is obtained through ways that appear to be easier. There is, in fact, a fundamental characteristic in this pastime that separates it from others: the universality of its raw material. In order to paint we need a material support that we must create or obtain. In order to dance we must have an accompaniment. In order to become drugged, we must procure the drug. For literature, the knowledge of the language seems to suffice, and language is the most equitably distributed of all social capital. This situation is not without its drawbacks. On the one hand, some create literature without intending to or without realizing it. On the other hand, literature is for some rather disreputable, insisting on its verbal nature and easy to confuse with what we all do every day.

In fact, it is not at all the same thing. Ordinary discourse is intended to express situations and relationships concerning facts that serve as referent: literary discourse is a clandestinely-born embryo resulting from a badly-administered disposable time in the mind and nourished by a consciousness that only much later knows what it expresses and how it expresses what it does not know. In the deterioration of mental disposable time, the relationships with language are too tenuous for most of us.

The carpet of images that the life of the mind unrolls when it is at rest belongs, not in numerical order, to two different phases of mental activity. Some incidences are anterior to the verbal stage, others are given names and terms and often imitate coherent discourse, although with the incoherence that is characteristic. It sometimes happens, for example, that I feel an uneasiness or an obscure irritation that has no known name and to which I have not had time to affix an explanation: I know, but I have not needed to explain it to myself, that it is because down at the end of the street I have seen someone I do not like, and he is going to make me waste my time stupidly. At this stage, it is only a feeling: it is toward this category that all the episodes of my film tend. They do not need words, but the feeling quickly drifts toward a discourse, and I say to myself what

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I have just said, that this imbecile is going to make me waste my time stupidly. I finish by saying this textually but in a vivid speech that sees the words in their totality without the sonorous context that plays the role of moderator for the exclusive use of those who would actually listen to the statement. More or less formless, globalized and deprived of structure, the expression is there as the consequence of an elaboration that is somewhere between conscious and automatic.

There are times when the image does not suggest a noun, whether common or proper. I see, as in a dream, the steep street of an unknown city, one that probably does not exist; or I see a look that I cannot identify, or I feel a desire to leave. These are phosphenes of the imagination: they pass too quickly for me to assign words to them. I am not even sure that I have clearly distinguished them; perhaps I am mistaken. To be certain, I must see them again. In any case, admitting only personal experience I could not affirm that what comes before words really exists. I should rather say that they are fireworks that do not go off and fall into the darkness before having produced their little spark. I sometimes run after these will-of-the-wisps, but even if I bring something back with me after my exploration, I am not sure it is the same thing I went looking for.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to bring back to the surface of consciousness something that a different tropism has just dislodged. It is in this way that the game becomes exciting and deceptive at the same time. Often we do not think of it as a game but as hard work without recompense. Thus it is natural that we shun this unpleasant job. It is particularly hard and offers no reward if the subject does not have a wide-open fan of associations: literature presupposes a chosen expression, and a limited imagination does not offer a choice.

It is at the level of the evanescent images of mental life, dream or disengaged or unfocussed mental time, that this choice operates. It postulates the support of language, naturally, but in reality it demands more, it must go beyond language. The discourse must express what does not exist and even more what must not exist. It is not an object that is being represented, it is *the* object: it is easily recognizable, but no one can identify it. My image of the Parthenon has all the defects that we know

the monument has, but it is clear and distinct in the sense that I could not confuse it with any other image-document. Kafka's castle is not to be found anywhere, and I am unable to provide it with contours: it is a nothing that leaves no imprint. Its image is eloquent because it has all the attributes of living matter and yet owes nothing to stone. Literature is the finest example of annihilation that can be imagined: it creates while the plastic arts are satisfied with salvaging.

That is not the only reason literature is the most complete and consummate art. By its form, situated at the level of what we do every day, based on graceless phonic signs and on concepts that are thousands of years old, it is this level, the third, that assures the regeneration and the extension of the boundaries of all our mental life. Poetry is the natural prolonging of a necessary exercise; the absence of literature is equivalent to amputation or the suppression of a higher level that is the spirit of the language.

We said above that language disposes of a very limited number of signs from which it is able to form an unlimited number of combinations. But infinity is the most serious of our prohibitions. It is only through literary language that we can take liberties with the law, bypass the impossible and go beyond the limits that have been imposed on us. Infinity being an effective challenge, language is a useful workyard. Intelligence, provoked and stimulated by being limited, finds there the possibility for new explorations and discoveries and a continual annexation of the unknown. Since creation and duration are inexhaustible, we respond to this challenge with a literary creation, which makes language an endless verbal carpet.

The number of structures belonging to the third level is however very limited, as is the case with the two preceding levels. The number of possible combinations must not deceive us about the basic simplicity of the system. Literature, as such, proposes two ends: one, to remove us from unengaged mental time and our inner emptiness to help us forget the horrible advice of Socrates who wanted us to study ourselves in order to know ourselves. The other end is providing a method of knowledge that consists of revealing the Unknown or the Inaccessible by means of words. It is easy to see that these two

designs of literature are contradictory: the race for fictive knowledge is accompanied by the refusal of the real knowledge of oneself. However, we already know that this is not the only ambiguity of literature. The existence of a vast amount of introspective literature does not argue against this hypothesis: there is a good chance that in these cases we do not write to know ourselves but to make ourselves known to others. As for the achievement of the two ends mentioned above, it comes about, on the one hand, through the multiplication of pleasing sounds or by the snares of the imagination in a restricted style with regard to ordinary diction, and conceived to keep the attention in a state of alert; and, on the other hand, by an adventure (or more recently by the absence of an adventure, which amounts to the same thing) whether personally negotiated or not. The first process is related to the methods used by music, while the second operates more or less dispassionately with concepts. The result is, at an early stage, a renewed occasion to thrill with arrogance while looking down on the shipwreck of others (Aristotle's *katharsis*); further on, a thrilling knowledge that seeks itself with a sidelong, doubting and impassioned look, in the world of others. The heuristic virtues of literature are consequently very modest, hardly more than a window open on a corner of an unreal sky. However, many windows give a view of entire sections and perhaps even more of a sky. The fact of opening the windows does not mean the abandon or resignation of individuality as in the case of obsessive rhythms or hallucinatory ecstasies. On the contrary, it is a creative activity that enriches subjectively through the unexpected it presents and objectively through the discoveries it makes transmissible through language.

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From all that has been said, it seems that we could draw a conclusion concerning the fundamental characteristics of literature. It could be defined as the blocking up of a disposable mental time that becomes exhausted in a constrained discourse. This definition has a better chance of being understood after the preceding analysis of which it is the result. For this same reason, no further comment is necessary, and I shall thus only add a few clarifications of details.

Just as disengagement of the mind defines the passage from an involved mental activity to a neutral one or to a feeling of temporary liberty for the trains of thought, the blocking up presupposes the inverse passage or the return from a state of disengagement to a state of necessity. This is where the literary discourse begins. It is born as an imitation of no matter what linguistic discourse: there is an author who composes a statement using the vague contours of his inner dream as a referent. On the other hand, there is a receiver who consents to dream about the proposed referent. The difference is first of all psychological and resides in a different state of the spirit: everything must begin with a disengagement of mental activity that makes the contract between the author and his reader possible so that ghosts may be spoken of. This contract is open to all those who know the language, but it is easy only for certain ones, always the same, who are the sportsmen, the players or the addicts of literature. The others automatically prefer some other more clamorous or immediate blocking.

Disposable mental time is not absolute. It does not create a vacuum that suppresses all the residues of consciousness in order to make room for the expected message, as mystical ecstasy does. Above all, it suppresses neither language nor memory, two inexhaustible sources that are at the same time two limitations. It is not uniform in its data. In the labor of childbirth that follows and is rather similar to the two designs of the discourse, the discussion that cuts in between the imagination and its project, then between the project and its expression, will never be repeated, either in the same mind or in another. The author cannot remake his dream, and the reader would not be able to capture it in its purity, all the more so because it is not pure from the moment it has become a discourse. Literary discourse is restrained: the author takes a position with regard to language, from the very fact that he does not ask it to state a message but to model the form of a project.

The production of the discourse is the most painful part of literary childbirth. For the speaking subject it is not a matter of saying what he sees or what he feels: he must visualize what has never been seen, he must furnish the image of what is not in us in an imaged or perceived state. There is no true poet who

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does not find himself in distress before the difficulty of his task. One who composes without effort says only what has already been found in literature. It is also the area in which the poet will receive a thousand hypocritical aids, crutches that will help break his fall. The constraint of the expression is often understood as style, prosody, lexical invention, versification or no matter what conditioning or prejudice of the time. It is perhaps none of these, and these fireworks are only snares: the constrained discourse is the one that does not take the responsibility for transmitting plausible messages but only sentient images. This result is obtained by submitting the language to a metaphoric distortion, contemptuously: the only means to attain the unreal is the extrapolation of the known truth. The blocking up is dissipated in the discourse because, as Alain said, "The work terminates and erases the dreams." With literary discourse we have not abandoned our ghosts, but they come less often to visit us in the more certain world of consciousness; they become objective and tend to become well-bred.

The definition thus offered is up to a certain point deceptive. It is helpful to know that the cerastes is a viper, because I already know that a viper is a serpent and belongs to the class of reptiles: the cerastes is thus integrated into a reassuring structure and becomes a family portrait in an album. We will not find the same clarity for our definition, but it was the most important to point out. A clear definition is not a true definition. After all, I succeed in placing the cerastes, but I still do not know what it is like.

There are several reasons for this difficulty. First, the production of ghosts and the elaboration of the discourse are produced in a darkroom to which we do not have access: we are on the other side of the door and we imagine the pictures being developed. Then, the literary discourse has three presences: they can be analyzed separately, but the sum of the three analyses is not the solution we are looking for. In exchange, we cannot either suppress or ignore them. I suppress the author, and I obtain the continuation of the *Aeneid* or the poems that Chenier did not have the time to write. I suppress the text, and I am in possession of the entire library of Alexandria. I suppress the

reader, and I become the general who set fire to this sea of useless signs.

There are three persons in one in the literary discourse: one, the reader; two, the text; and three, the author. The most modern approach to literature favors the text, and I do not say that it is wrong. Academic and university studies are more interested in the third person and on the off chance examine the studies and experiences of the author, the anecdote or the conceptions, or the connections; this research continues to give results, although it feels somewhat shamefaced now, handicapped and shaken as it is by the brilliant offensive of the second person. The first, which flourished with impressionist criticism, is underlying even in enterprises that least admit it.

This situation is confused and normal. The three perspectives are welcome but insufficient, and their synthesis does not seem possible. I would not be able to define the work except through new discourse: if my discourse is new it has modified the facts of the problem, and if it repeats it is not new. Ezra Pound said that poetry is something new that remains new. What I myself could say of poetry would be a message that is not new from the moment it is stated, or a literary discourse that would be new but different. To feel and dream poetry beyond the boundary of words is the only direct approach. To prowl around the words or around the author is a doubtful pleasure if it sees nothing beyond.

This approach does not invalidate any research; on the contrary, it legitimizes all research. It adds to the synchronic perspective of the constrained discourse a diachronic dimension of the biographical or psychoanalytical disengaged mental time of the author, and it does not abolish the pressure of individual psychology on the reader. Nothing is useless, since nothing is definitive. In addition, it is thanks to this disposition of attack on three fronts—of which one (that of the reader) is in constant movement—that a text that has been frozen for hundreds or thousands of years, and that seems no longer to have a secret, could dissipate only one blocking in of mental disengagement. A second reading or a second reader would find the different water of Heraclitus' river. The same text will never be interpreted twice in the same way. On the other hand, the oldest and most

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out-of-date texts conserve their chances intact, waiting for a favorable moment of disposable time. This is why also, as a corollary, a non-literary text such as this one has no chance of survival or of dissipating anything whatever. If we should admit that one of the commentaries that have proliferated around Baudelaire's *Les Chats* is definitive it would do away with the necessity for the poem, and there would be nothing left to do but send *Les Chats* to the furrier.