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Ethics and Aesthetics I: Lacan, Kierkegaard, Sophocles, Anouilh

Joseph S. Jenkins

Ethical conclusions are often affected by aesthetic factors. This is a phenomenon all the more important where these factors influence decisions unawares. Faced with a problem so broad in scope—as broad as human nature itself—it is futile to seek the one formula or conclusion. Rather, I propose to explore the intersection of ethics and aesthetics in a number of localities, hoping that in the continuing course of these potentially separate encounters some meaning may be made.

I begin this first paper of the series with an interpretation of Jacques Lacan's *Seminar VII*. This *Seminar* provoked controversy in its radical break from the traditional Aristotelian/Kantian line of ethical analysis. Instead of seeking the highest good, Lacan proffers ethics as a consideration of the relationship between an action and the desire that inhabits it (Lacan 359, 361). He proposes that the tragic sense of life—the triumph of being toward death—is the proper dimension of ethical consideration (361). By relating ethics to the high aesthetic of tragedy, Lacan speaks to the intersection I seek to explore.

The *Seminar* imparts no coherent description of the intersection; statements from various chapters must be assembled and interpreted. Part One of this paper takes on that project, based on my translation of Alain Miller's published transcripts. Part Two is a study of the Creon figure depicted in the *Antigone* plays of both Sophocles and Jean Anouilh. Lacan uses Sophocles's *Antigone* as his tutor text for research on both ethics and aesthetics, while Kierkegaard sees the two fields as strictly separate. By comparing those views in the context of Anouilh's post-war tragedy, I investigate aspects of the ethics/aesthetics intersection more specific to the late twentieth century.

PART ONE

Lacan's principal writings on aesthetics are contained in a Section of *Seminar VII* entitled "The Essence of Tragedy." Reminding us of Kant's position that the category of the beautiful can be

transmitted only by example (299), Lacan advances the aesthetics of psychoanalysis by way of illustrations from Sophocles's *Antigone*.

Lacan pronounces a true sense of tragedy, based on the attraction of the audience to the beauty of Antigone herself (290). This beauty derives from her positioning within a certain limit zone that Lacan describes as "the Limit of Second Death" (291). This is the zone in which death encroaches on life, and life on death, figured notably in Antigone's condemnation to be placed alive in her family tomb.

Lacan presents the Limit of Second Death, beginning with a history in which the Greek gods inhabited that same zone. These Greek gods were associated with certain initiation rites concerning love. Different trances and invocations, associated with different gods, effected diverse love reactions on the part of initiated subjects (302). For us in the modern world, these Greek love gods are no more, but the Limit of Second Death remains, and reflective phenomena of beauty still appear here (302). Lacan implies a certain parallelism between these aesthetic phenomena and the love gods that once resided in their place.

Lacan both corroborates the existence of these phenomena, and illustrates their functioning, in his exposition of the Sadean idea of *crime*: Sade's natural order is constituted by a certain formative power which alternates instances of generation and corruption (302). This power manifests itself in a continuing reproduction of forms (303). Crime is the transgression of the natural order: Humans may, by singular excess, deliver nature from the chains of its own laws (303). The *telos* here is a return to nothingness: the site of creation *ex nihilo*.

Lacan draws a parallel between this Sadean return to *ex nihilo* and Freud's myth of original crime in *Totem and Taboo* (303). According to this myth (Lacan 212-13), the Jewish people convey a certain message by the fact of killing a prior Egyptian Moses figure who was bearer of the Word of the Egyptian God Akhenaton. Akhenaton represents a purely intellectual form of monotheism: the one and only God, at once master of the world and dispenser of light and clarity of consciousness. The Jewish people do not convey that Word; they in fact replace it with the Word handed down by the Midianite Moses—the Word of the mystery God of the Burning Bush that substitutes the trauma of Commandment for Akhenaton's rationality. The message of the Jewish people that

Freud describes (and on which Lacan insists) is conveyed by their murder of the Egyptian Moses figure, which enacts the Father murder by the primal horde. This murder initiates the process of cultural transmission as an infinite mourning of and for the Father, in which iterations of Him are continuously re-murdered and re-sublated as a symbolization of Himself. God is thus the structure of his own death, and as such has always been dead. Dead-as-such, He organizes—in his absence, in his being-as-lack—the symbolic order of language and law. And Freud's scandalous articulation of this lack at the center of creation both performs a return to the site of *ex nihilo* creation—in a manner similar to that of the perpetrator of Sadean crime—and gestures to similar returns as the basis of continuing creations in the sphere of art.

The fundamental Sadean fantasy involves eternal suffering (303). This thought, at the limit of Second Death, is not the annihilation of the victim, but rather a play of pain—a suffering as *stasis*—which requires the victim as support, and which creates a space in which the phenomena of beauty may occur (303). This is the limit that Christianity has put in place of all other gods. The crucifixion image secretly pulls the strings of our desire. Being subsists in suffering, beyond all concepts, *ex nihilo* (304).

Although Lacan does not say so explicitly, this Limit of Second Death is in affinity with the Lacanian real, from which the Thing (*das Ding*), like the crucifixion image, also pulls the strings of our desire. Lacan seems to equate the pulling of these strings—that is to say, the gravitational field of *das Ding*—with the phenomenon of the beautiful. Such an interpretation is loosely corroborated by Lacan's Chapter Eight statements to the effect that sublimation (of which the experience of art is an example) is an elevation of the object to the dignity of *das Ding* (134). More direct corroboration can be found in Lacan's Chapter Fourteen description of the effect on desire of beauty phenomena at the Limit of Second Death (291): He states that these phenomena cause the line of desire to reflect, refract, deflect, and re-double, continuing its course, deprived of an object, in the field of a lure (291). There again, beauty's effect on the line of desire seems analogous to the gravitational field of *das Ding*.

Lacan notes an analogy (304) between his interpretation of the Sadean victim's function (not as object of beauty, but as a signifier for the limit of suffering) and the Kantian de-emphasis of the object

in aesthetic judgments of taste. While this may be true, it ignores a crucial difference: Both Kant and Lacan rule out the concept as the basis for aesthetic judgment, but Kant replaces it with an "accordance in the play of the mental powers" (*Critique of Judgment*, Sec.15), while Lacan posits something much darker. Lacan's beauty derives from the residual trauma of the real, from the original lost object that is the site of the death drive.

Lacan's reading of beauty in *Antigone* centers on the Greek term, *àte*, which Lacan tells us is often translated as discord, or the atrocious, but which he traces to the connotation of a limit beyond which human life cannot long endure (305, 315). Through this connotation of suspension of life in the face of its extinction, Lacan has positioned *àte* at the Sadean Limit of Second Death. *Antigone* can tolerate neither the memory of her father nor her dependence on Creon, so she no longer wishes to live; in other words, the *telos* of her desire is beyond *àte* (306). It is not that she chooses divine law over mortal law¹; she rather retreats to a horizon, a limit, which is a zone of legality, an *order* of law, but is not developed in the signifying chain (324).

The limit to which Lacan here refers is the structural limit of the signifying chain—the first signifier, the S1. It is this S1, coming from without, that both causes the subject to come forth and inflicts the first wound to fullness and plenitude. This subject is constituted both by the signifying chain that flows out of S1, and by the residual in the real that is incommensurable with that chain.

Lacan's *Antigone* insists on Polynices's burial rights to preserve Polynices's name, which is to preserve the value of his being regardless of his actions during his lifetime (324-25). In making the jump from name to being, Lacan implies the affinity of the name with S1, which brings the subject into being by allowing it to experience its first interpellation.² This radical beginning is also referred to as *ex nihilo*, out of nothing—the nothing from which the signifying chain will spring forth.

The significant point for Lacan is that the preservation of Polynices's being is important only to *Antigone*. She is the one who experiences the desire to wipe away Oedipus's crime (324). The body of his son, blanketed by the wind with dust, evokes both the bare beginnings of this crime's fading and the funerary preservation of Polynices's name. In the face of Creon's wrath, *Antigone* responds simply that regardless of his law, Polynices was her

brother. Lacan describes this as her holding herself at the *ex nihilo* limit, which is a convergence point in Lacan's reading here, in that it figures both (a) Antigone's insistence on Polynices's name, in its affinity with S1, which is the *ex nihilo* birth of the subject in language, and (b) the limit of Second Death—*àte*—, which is evoked both implicitly, in her willingness to die at the outset of the play, and explicitly, in her condemnation to live burial.

For Lacan, the beauty of Antigone arises from her holding herself at the *ex nihilo* position. He describes her simple response to Creon—He is my brother—as transfixing her, imprinting her indelibly on the memory (325). It is a violent illumination, a flash of beauty, at the moment she crosses into *àte* (327).

At this point—the moment of the flash—we must shift our discussion away from aesthetics. For despite the affinity of Lacanian beauty with nihilism, the Lacanian aesthetic plays a markedly functional role with respect to his ethical theories.

Lacan gives clues at several points in his text as to the function of beauty. It blinds and dazzles, allows something to escape unseen; it touches us and causes our critical judgment to vacillate (327). Beauty is visible desire that flows from Antigone's eyelids (327). Lacan also says that the true sense of beauty—and tragedy—is its *émoi* (290). He goes to great lengths to insist that *émoi* denotes not an emotion, but the subject's loss of rapport with power (292). Once we have glossed the fundamentals of Lacanian ethics, the functional nature of these descriptions will be clear.

According to Lacan, ethics involves the judgment of actions, but only of those actions which themselves contain (or should contain) judgments (359). The ethics of psychoanalysis, far from being a return to instincts, measures an action in terms of its relationship to the desire that inhabits it (359, 361). For Lacan, the space of this consideration is the tragic sense of life—the triumph of a being-for-death—, which he illustrates here again through Sophocles's *Antigone* (361). Lacan distances this tragic realm from the Aristotelian/Kantian line of ethical thinking, which begins by identifying the highest good with happiness, and founds a myriad of societal systems that organize collective strategies to attain such happiness based on the production and ownership of goods (314). We can descry here a possible motive for Lacan's insistence on the definition of *émoi*: *émoi*, in the context of tragic catharsis,

shakes the subject's rapport with the power structures that organize the world of goods.

The ultimate question of Lacanian ethics is contained in the title of *Seminar VII*'s final chapter: "Have you acted in conformity with your desire?" To the contrary, giving ground from one's desire ("céder sur son désir") is always accompanied by *betrayal* (370). Such betrayal involves either the subject's betrayal of his or her own path or destiny (something that cannot be defined, but only felt), or else the subject's toleration of his or her betrayal by another. Both betrayal of self and tolerance of betrayal cede to the traditional idea of the betrayer's good—something like the saying "for his own good" (370). Once such a disavowal of desire has occurred, the subject is left with nothing but a return to the service of goods.

In this context, Lacan defines desire as the metonymy of our being. This desire is situated not only in modulations of the signifying chain, but also in what is signified by our *acts*: that which we are and that which we are not. Lacan illustrates this metonymy with what he calls "eating the book" ("manger le livre"). Eating the book is a sublimation of hunger: not a change of object, but a change of aim. The book does not fill my stomach, but becomes who I am. And the price that one pays for this sublimation is *jouissance*. It is the object, the good, that one pays for the satisfaction of one's desires (371).

While Lacan's illustration of "eating the book" is not a model of clarity, it seems fairly clear that his reference to the *satisfaction* of desires refers in fact to the giving ground *from* one's desires. Otherwise put, to satisfy is to modify, moderate, attenuate desires in the chain of signifiers. Such an interpretation is useful, because it is consistent with the formulation that Lacan seems to be working toward: the foregoing of *jouissance* as the price one pays for giving ground from one's desires. Slavoj Žižek's gloss supports this view:

Is not desire as such already a certain yielding, a kind of compromise formation, a metonymic displacement, retreat, a defence against intractable drive? 'To desire' means to give way on the drive—insofar as we follow Antigone and 'do not give way on our desire,' do we not precisely step out of the domain of desire, do we not shift from the modality of desire into the modality of pure drive? (172)

Zizek illustrates via *Antigone* one possible (the radical) scenario under Lacan's formulation: desire does not give way; the subject shifts into pure drive modality; *jouissance* is achieved. But *jouissance* brings pain as well as pleasure; it is unmediated exposure to trauma in the real. As *Antigone* attests, utter *jouissance* is death.

The question remains as to how radically Lacan's maxim should be interpreted: His statements to the effect that "the only thing one can be guilty of is to have given ground from one's desire" (370) could be understood to command that no ground be given at all. It is more useful, however, to read these statements as descriptive rather than proscriptive: as an explication of ethical tradeoffs and an aetiology of guilt. But one cannot read this text in its entirety without acknowledging Lacan's incitement to venture closer to (or more frequently toward) *jouissance*. It is this incitement that has been criticized as irresponsible, furthering a notoriety that Lacan seems to invite. Perhaps he took more seriously the structural observation that there is never only one desire from which to give ground. Since desires are always multiple and conflicting, this maxim—even if read as descriptive—clarifies very little. Lacan rarely referred to the maxim after *Seminar VII*.

Regardless of our positions on these issues, we can now discern the function of aesthetics in Lacanian ethics. It is an interconnection he neither explains nor even directly states. But somehow this illumination, this beautiful blinding light that we experience at the Limit of Second Death, puts us in a state that makes us more likely to venture closer to the *jouissance* that has its site at that limit. And art, by raising objects to the dignity of *das Ding*, provides them with that same illumination and thus should have the same effect.

PART TWO

In his opening monologue, which also marks the inauguration of his rule, Sophocles's Creon expresses his contempt for a king who is afraid to follow "the course that he knows is best for the State" (192). This statement takes for granted that Creon in fact knows what is best, and that such knowing can somehow be "contained" within the person of the king. This course he feels he knows can be viewed as the chain of signifiers he will promulgate as law, beginning with the edict that Polynices remain unburied.

But contrary to the implications of Creon's statement, such chains are not solely constituted from within the subject; rather they are determined by the symbolic Other. They are the heteronomy within even a king's autonomy.

Creon's desire flows beneath that signifying chain. Its object can be discerned in his constant fears that his rule is being threatened by anarchists, and in his ironically self-reflexive diatribe against money as the downfall of civilization (198). Creon's obsessions reveal the throne as the object of his desire. They expose the law he promulgates as the metonymy of his being in pursuit of that object. The throne of Creon's desire must be absolute and good for a lifetime. It is a desire that kingly knowledge of the good and promulgation of law be fully contained in his person.

Creon continually gives ground from his desire: he cedes on his first impulse to punish Ismene along with Antigone (204); he orders that Antigone be buried alive at a distance "to absolve the State [himself] of her death" (218); he belatedly revokes Antigone's death sentence. These actions are classic illustrations of the "dialectic of desire" described by Slavoj Žižek in *Looking Awry* (21): Creon's original demand is for absolute power and self-containedness. This demand can be seen as a reaction in the real to originary loss in the face of *das Ding*, the primordial Thing-of-loss. However, this original demand is caught up in the desire dialectic of the symbolic realm, wherein the absolute nature of the demand is modified and moderated. Only in the drives, in the realm of the real, does the original demand persist. This is the site of *jouissance*, whose abandonment Lacan describes as the price one pays for giving ground from one's desire. It seems that Creon has abandoned it entirely; his dialectic results in the diminishing of his throne to a mere simulation of power and self-sufficiency. At the play's end he has lost all his loved ones and demonstrated in public his inability to rule. Lacan would judge this the proper result: Creon has acted in utter non-conformity with his desire, and thus has been barred absolutely from *jouissance*.

Sophocles sees fit not only to bar Creon from *jouissance*, but to mock him in the process. The Sentry who arrives with the news of Polynices's first mysterious burial is impertinent to Creon's face, then promises the audience he will disappear to evade Creon's law. Finally he "gives ground" from that promise, reappearing

with the following words to adumbrate Creon's ground-giving to come:

O king,
A man should never be too sure of anything... (200)

Creon endures these comic barbs for reasons similar to those explored by Kierkegaard in a chapter of *Either/Or* entitled "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama": Creon, who sees himself as lawmaker, may be read as a figure that imagines he is his own creator. This is to fail to recognize the determining fateful factors such as inheritance and the will of the gods. Creon's attempt to make universal law is the assertion by an empirical subject of himself as pure form, as the universal liberator. For Kierkegaard, such over-reaching is as much an example of comic subjectivity as of ethical failure.

Kierkegaard sharply separates these ethical questions with their comic tendencies from the beauty of the truly tragic. Such beauty requires an ambiguity of guilt on the part of the tragic hero, whose freedom of action is constrained by the fateful factors. The mood of tragedy is the suffering of this hero—not a mood reflective of sin and guilt, but gently and deeply sorrowful, like a child's unquestioning compassion for an adult's pain.

Clearly Creon is no tragic hero. While Kierkegaard would point to his culpable disregard of fateful factors, Lacan would say he was distanced from his *Ding*. Otherwise put, Kierkegaard removes Creon from the tragic/aesthetic realm to the domain of ethical interest, while Lacan considers Creon's ethics within the dimension of the "tragic sense of life" (Lacan 361), but demotes Creon from hero status because he fails the ethical test. Lacan's and Kierkegaard's ethics are not here compatible: Kierkegaard urges Creon to respect the fateful factors, while Lacan sees such respect as a giving ground from Creon's desire. However, both Lacan and Kierkegaard can join voices in condemning Creon because his character represents movement from hubris to vacillation: Kierkegaard says he moved too late, while Lacan maintains he shouldn't have moved at all. For Lacan, *das Ding* is the fateful factor worthy of respect. In effect, he has replaced the fateful factors exterior to Creon with the ex-centric factor of *das Ding*.

Jean Anouilh, writing in post-war France (1946), figures Antigone in a context of meaninglessness. This is a heroine who

does not believe in gods, who admits that priestly ministrations over the dead are an absurd charade. Anouilh's Creon is a compromised (Vichy-type) politician who claims to have accepted the crown because it was a job that had to be done, but who also admits that his "trade forces [him] to be loathsome" (35). The play's climax is a dialogue between Creon and Antigone, in which he tries to convince her to give up her quest. He portrays Polynices as "a cheap, idiotic bounder, ...[a] cruel, vicious little voluptuary...[, a] little beast with just wit enough to drive a car faster and throw more money away than any of his pals" (39). Oedipus is "too chicken-hearted to have the boy locked up" (39), and so allows Polynices to "go off and join the Argive army" (39). From there, Polynices sends back assassins to murder his own father.

There is a point at which we may believe that Antigone is convinced, until Creon paints a picture of the small domestic happiness that Antigone can expect from a life with Haimon. Antigone replies enraged:

What are the unimportant little sins that I shall have to commit before I am allowed to sink my teeth into life and tear happiness from it? Tell me: to whom shall I have to lie? Upon whom shall I have to fawn? To whom must I sell myself? Whom do you want me to leave dying, while I turn away my eyes? (41)

From here forward, Antigone's defiance of Creon becomes increasingly extreme. She trumpets her sealing of her own fate, despite his desperation to save her, as a mark of the impotence of his supposed power. Once Antigone has crossed the point of no return—which is also the Limit of Second Death—, references to beauty begin to appear:

Antigone. I want everything of life, ... otherwise I reject it! I will *not* be moderate.... I want to be sure... that everything will be as beautiful as when I was a little girl. If not, I want to die!

Creon. Scream on, daughter of Oedipus! Scream on in your father's own voice!

Antigone. ... We are of the tribe that hates your filthy hope, your docile, female hope; hope, your whore—

Creon. ... If you could only see how ugly you are, shrieking those words!

Antigone. Yes, I am ugly! Father was ugly, too.... But Father became beautiful... At the very end. When all his questions had been answered....When all hope was gone... Then he was at peace; then he could smile, almost; then he became beautiful ... (42-43)

Antigone accuses Creon of defending compromised happiness, but can describe as alternative only the beauty she experienced as a little girl. She associates beauty with her father as well—in his moment at the limit, when all hope was gone. Both these instances of beauty share a distance from meaninglessness. There is no alternative that leads toward meaning (alas, there is none to be found); the only remaining option is escape from the consciousness of its lack. Beauty is the effect of an escape available only in infancy and death.

Anouilh links ethical teachings with the Limit of Second Death he depicts. The Anouilhian chorus describes tragedy as a space where each character's destiny is known, a place of tranquillity, restfulness, fellow-feeling, and innocence. It is in this tragic space that one "shouts aloud":

Chorus. ...you can get all those things said that you never thought you'd be able to say—or never even knew you had it in you to say. And you don't say these things because it will do any good to say them: you know better than that. You say them for their own sake; you say them because you *learn* a lot from them. (24, emphasis added)

It is these didactic ambitions of the play that dull its aesthetic effect. While Anouilh's Chorus speaks of destiny and fellow-feeling, the play does not succeed in evoking them. The fateful factors, described by Kierkegaard as necessary to the aesthetic effect of ambiguous guilt, are drown out by incessant political message. The bulk of the play is an exposé on the ethical shortcomings of fascism and bourgeois society. Antigone is rendered "ugly" in the central scene with Creon, and never fully regains her beauty: In the final moments before her death—when the aesthetic potential of her position is at a maximum—, Antigone asks her guard to conceal a letter that admits her confusion (50)—the implication being that compromise has infiltrated even at the limit.

Anouilh's didactic emphasis is particularly ironic in the existentialist context of the play. Anouilh invokes the absurd meaning-

less of life, and accompanies it with the lesson of one character's right reaction to meaninglessness, while another character acts wrongly. While this self-contradiction is too obvious to explain, it is also unlikely that Anouilh intended irony, given the serious state of the post-Holocaust France in which he wrote. Anouilh here earnestly tries to reconcile existentialist meaninglessness with traditional ethical judgments of human actions.

Kierkegaard would see this as a confusion of domains: For him, to seek edification in the theater is problematic—as mystified as going to church for aesthetic reasons, or seeking to be converted by a novel (149). While intervening war and holocaust have emphasized the importance of the ethical/political over that of the aesthetic (or at least made us more uncomfortable with the notion that the aesthetic might possibly influence even our own views on the ethical/political), Anouilh's *Antigone*—read through Kierkegaard—seems to confirm that ethics and politics are still nonetheless addressed in the art work *at the expense* of the tragic aesthetic. The art work seems diminished when placed squarely at the service of a political agenda.

In Lacan the ethical action produces effects of beauty, while Anouilh's work gives the impression that the one is pursued at the expense of the other. Perhaps the ethics that Anouilh pursues in his *Antigone*—the ethics we have already seen to be in conflict with his existentialist philosophy—finds its motivation in a pathological object related to the World War just ended. Faced with a radical object like the Holocaust, it is understandable that Anouilh's ethics would tend to find its ground in opposition to that empirical object. To the contrary, the Lacanian ethic avoids such an object: Like Kant's categorical imperative, the Lacanian "maxim" is an *a priori* that refers to no object in the empirical realm as its determining ground. In fact, the moderate interpretation of the maxim that I describe above, which limits itself to description of the price paid in *jouissance* for action in non-conformity with desire, would, if we accept it, go beyond "maxim" status—which Kant defines as based on personal inclinations—to the status of "law," which "holds for all irrespective of their inclinations" (70). The "moderate" interpretation of Lacanian ethics seems much less moderate when we consider that, by leading us to it, Lacan positions his ethics of "Last Judgment" (361) as transcendental law.

The distinction between empirical and transcendental standards of ethics is important, but it is not enough to explain why one diminishes while the other produces aesthetic effect. The explanation for aesthetic production in Lacan lies in his recognition of Kierkegaard's dictum on the necessity of the fateful factors to the tragic aesthetic. In his narration of *das Ding*, Lacan has himself evoked fateful factors for a public that, since Kierkegaard, has largely lost its faith in God and all other absolute truth discourses. In a return to *ex nihilo* similar to the Freudian *ex nihilo* literary return he describes, Lacan's narration of the myth of *das Ding*—a myth of the ex-centric dead God in you more than you—has supplied the fateful factors likely to move a post-modern audience: The fateful factors in the myth of *das Ding* produce a gravitational field of aesthetic effect without requiring a live God and without producing empirical meaning.

Joseph S. Jenkins is a doctoral candidate in Comparative Literature at UCLA.

NOTES

¹ This is the traditional Hegelian reading of Sophocles's *Antigone*, which Lacan rejects.

² The unexplored pre-supposition here is to equate being with becoming. However, an exploration of this issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

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STATES OF IDENTITY

*Limits and Possibilities
of Writing "French"*



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DEPARTMENT GRADUATE STUDENTS' SECOND ANNUAL
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*Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouvait ici
l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.*

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

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Introduction

When we began preparations for the Second French Graduate Student Conference at UCLA, we learned very quickly that the concept of "being late" is a phenomenon that haunted not only the Romantics. To follow an original event of any kind is a challenging task, but the successful outcome of our conference *States of Identity: Limits and Possibilities of Writing "French,"* documented by the high quality of the present proceedings, demonstrate that there can be original "seconds," as paradoxical as this might sound.

Our "Call for Papers" for a conference on "identity" in the context of 'French' writing generated national and international responses from students in different disciplines such as Art History, ESL, Philosophy, Theater, as well as French, German and Comparative Literature thus underlining the interdisciplinary appeal of this conference.

Denis Hollier's thought-provoking keynote address on the very timely and controversial question of teaching literature in translation inaugurated the three-day event. Hollier's talk was complemented by insightful responses from Janet Bergstrom and Andrea Loselle from the perspective of film and poetry. We want to thank all three of them for setting the stage for an intellectually challenging yet collegial discussion among students, faculty and the many guests from outside the academic community.

Though the papers presented by the graduate students in six panels contributed much to our knowledge regarding individual aspects of "identity" in different cultures and time periods, the subsequent discussions made it clear that attempts to reach "sameness" regarding a given problem were inevitably deferred by new questions and concerns. What remained was the realization that in spite of the plurality of opinions, we had achieved "identity" in the overarching collective gesture of intellectual

exchange. It is this discovery that justifies this conference and our work in the humanities in general.

This conference and the publication of its proceedings would not have been possible without the generous financial support from our sponsors and we want to thank the Borchard Foundation, the French Consulate at Los Angeles, the UCLA Graduate Student Association, the Center for Modern and Contemporary Studies and the Campus Programs Committee of the Program Activities Board. Last but not least, we want to express our gratitude to the UCLA French Department and its faculty, whose continued support, encouragement and presence during the panels was much appreciated by the graduate students. A special thank you is due to Jean-Claude Carron for his introduction of the keynote speaker and tireless personal *engagement* in the organization of this conference.

Our last acknowledgment goes to the graduate students of the French Department who contributed in many ways to the successful outcome of this event and sacrificed much precious time to meetings and other organizational tasks. We hope that the success of the first two conferences will serve as motivation and inspiration to those who are currently working on next year's conference, which we are all eagerly anticipating.

The Editors

Diane Duffrin

Markus Müller

States of Identity

Limits and Possibilities of Writing "French"

*Selected Proceedings from the UCLA French Department
Graduate Students' Second Annual Interdisciplinary Conference,
April 25-27, 1997*

Friday, April 25, 1997

SOUTH BAY ROOM OF SUNSET VILLAGE COMMONS

4:45 p.m. Introduction of Keynote Speaker

Jean-Claude Carron, UCLA

5:00 p.m. Keynote Address

Denis Hollier, Yale University

"Blanchot, Speaking in Tongues: Otherness in Translation"

Respondents

Janet Bergstrom, UCLA

Andrea Loselle, UCLA

7:00 p.m. Reception

Saturday, April 26, 1997

NORTHRIDGE ROOM

9:00 a.m. Panel #1

Grafting Past to Present: Hybrid Identities

Moderator: Michael Stafford

1. "Norman French, Latin and Scots English: Three versions of the *Leges inter Brettos et Scottos*," *Kristen Over (UCLA, Comp. Literature Program)*
2. "Verlan: An Expression of Beur Identity or Reversal by Inverse," *Amy Wells (Texas Tech University, Dept. of Classical and Modern Languages)*

3. "Marcel Mauss on Nationalism: An Approach to *The Gift*,"
Luke Bresky (UCLA, Dept. of English)

10:45 a.m. Panel #2

The Politics of Pedagogy: Translating Culture in the Classroom

Moderators: Natalie Muñoz, Marcella Munson

1. "Silent Words: Language as an Obstacle to Immigrant Integration and Identity in French Society," *Katharine Harrington (Texas Tech University, Dept. of Classical and Modern Languages)*
2. "*The Guest* in the Classroom: The Voice of Camus in Multicultural Academic Discourse," *Ajanta Dutt (Rutgers University, ESL Program)*
3. "Radical Chic(k): The American Roots of Marie de France,"
Susan Purdy (University of Western Ontario, Dept. of French)

2:30 p.m. Panel #3

Bodies in Writing: Feminine Identity and the Literary Text

Moderator: Heather Howard

1. "Discordant Locations for the Me-ospheric Void: Théophile Gautier vs. *La Sylphide*," *Regina Fletcher Sadono (UCLA, Theatre Arts Dept.)*
2. "The Bodypolitics of Feminist Science Fiction: Elisabeth Vonarburg's *Le silence de la cité*," *Lorie Sauble-Otto (University of Arizona, Dept. of French and Italian)*
3. "The 'I' Which Is Not One: Dual Identity in the Case of Simone de Beauvoir's Autobiography," *Kim Carter-Cram (Idaho State University, Dept. of Foreign Languages)*

4:15 p.m. Panel #4

War and Remembrance: National Epitaphs of Self

Moderator: Stacey Meeker

1. "Proust's Poetics of Recontextualization," *John S. LaRose (Louisiana State University, Dept. of French and Italian)*
2. "The Body and the State: Fantasies of Identity in Genet's *Pompes Funèbres*," *Leslie Ann Minot (UC Berkeley, Dept. of Comp. Literature)*
3. "Ecriture et Mémoire: Identity and Collective Memory in Jorge Semprun's *L'écriture ou la vie*," *Marcus Keller (California State University Long Beach, Dept. for German, Russian and Romance Languages)*

Sunday, April 27, 1997

SOUTH BAY ROOM

9:00 a.m. Panel #5

Lieux de Mémoire: Negotiating Boundaries of Francophone Identity

Moderator: Anne-Lancaster Badders

1. "Exile and Identity in the Plays of Maryse Condé," *Melissa McKay (University of Georgia, Dept. of Romance Languages)*
2. "Personal and National Narrative in *Une vie de crabe* by Tanella Boni," *Laura K. Reeck (New York University, Dept. of French)*

10:45 a.m. Panel #6

Representation and the Reconsideration of Identity

Moderator: Diane Duffrin

1. "Classical Aesthetics, Modern Ethics: Lacan, Kierkegaard, Sophocles, Anouilh," *Joseph Jenkins (UCLA, Comparative Literature Program)*
2. "The Stage of the Stage: Representation from Corneille to Diderot," *Ben Kolstad (UCLA, Comparative Literature Program)*

Open Discussion

Closing Statement

Markus Müller, UCLA

