

Foucault and Literature: Finitude, Feigning, Fabulation

by

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## Abstract

The dissertation is composed of two related parts, each applying aspects of Michel Foucault's thought to contemporary American avant-garde writing.

Part One brings together Foucault's neglected early essays on literature, reading them against the backdrop of the major works published during this period (1961-1966) and deducing from them a method and framework of interpretation, which I call *feigning*.

Feigning, in turn, reveals the themes common to Foucault's early work: finitude as a strict limit, the sovereignty of language as proof of this limit, and repetition as 1) the proof of sovereignty, but also 2) the form of an incredible experience that disrupts the origin, calls being into question, and requires a complete openness to the "irreducible enigma the world conceals" (Legros 111).

Feigning as such is applied to contemporary works of American "fabulation" by Robert Coover, John Barth, and Donald Barthelme. My reading of these authors demonstrates the reach and relevance of feigning as a rich, complex method of interpretation that is not limited to the French avant-garde of the mid-twentieth century.

Part Two of the dissertation reevaluates the method of feigning according to Foucault's return to art and writing in his final work. Here, literature functions not simply as an "experience of the outside" that casts everything in doubt, but serves instead as equipment and aid in the critical, careful assessment of the formation of self. Renewing the themes of Part One and drawing on the pure research of Foucault's final lectures, I argue for the potential of feigning as an "art of life" that bears upon the cultivation of attitude and *ēthos*.

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## Dedication

To my wife, Róisín, who patiently listened to every word of this dissertation (and a good deal more besides), whose love made this work possible, and whose wit made it better.

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## Introduction

"Just as there had been a Foucault who seemed likely to become a psychologist or psychiatrist, there was now a Foucault who seemed likely to become a major literary critic."

– David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*

"I wonder if it is not possible to construct or, at the very least, to outline from a distance an ontology of literature."

– Michel Foucault, "Language to Infinity"

"Through literature, the being of language shines once more on the frontiers of Western culture.... This is why literature is appearing more and more as that which must be thought."

– Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

Even a cursory reading of Michel Foucault's work reveals a deep and abiding interest in literature – an interest that he pursued with vigor throughout the 1960s. And yet, few scholars have attended to the writing of this period, which includes not only essays on the literature of Friedrich Hölderlin, Raymond Roussel, Claude-Prospér Crébillon, Georges Bataille, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Gustave Flaubert, Pierre Klossowski, Stéphane Mallarmé, Jules Verne, and Maurice Blanchot; but also roundtable discussions of literature for radio La Chaîne Nationale and radio France Culture; and presentations and debates organized by Philippe Sollers and the influential authors and critics of *Tel Quel*. My dissertation aims to address this lacuna in the vast body of Foucault scholarship by attending to this considerable and rich collection of work, which constitutes nothing less than an oeuvre.

Of course, references to Foucault abound in humanities scholarship, where his name has become the simple, transparent sign of intellectual relevance (a sign often deployed, nevertheless, without any rigor since much of his oeuvre remains ignored and his most cited works so often misread). And, on the other hand, no university course in literary criticism or theory is complete without reference to *The History of Sexuality* or *Discipline and Punish*, or else to New Historicism and Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, which stands as the singular proof that Foucault indeed offers something substantial to the study of literature. And yet, despite Foucault's status as the most cited author in the humanities<sup>1</sup> – or despite the now orthodox position of his work (or rather, a segment of his work) as literary theory – hardly anything at all has been thought or said about his early engagement with literature or his actual works of literary criticism.<sup>2</sup>

There are, however, a few notable exceptions. Simon During, for example, offers an admirable summary of the early work, including Foucault's book on Roussel (*Death and the Labyrinth*, 1963) and his essays on Bataille ("Preface to Transgression," 1963), Klossowski ("Prose of Acteon," 1964), and Blanchot ("Thought of the Outside," 1966). David Carroll discusses this same work at some length, and from a critical perspective, as part of the broader argument of *Paraesthetics*. More recently, Timothy O'Leary's *Foucault and Fiction* offers a comprehensive, erudite interpretation of Foucault's early engagement with literature, interspersed with readings of Irish authors from Jonathan Swift to Seamus Heaney (though these latter often appear incidental to the writing on Foucault). And a handful of journal articles and book chapters, published over the last few decades, consider either certain aspects of Foucault's literary work (Timothy Rayner on "Thought of the Outside" and "Behind the Fable," Pierre Macherey on *Death and the*

*Labyrinth*, Kas Saghafi on Foucault and Blanchot) or else take some position on the general category of "Foucault and literature" (Jon Simons, Dieter Freundlieb, Jacob Fisher, John Rajchman). And yet, the tendency, with each of these studies, is always the same: to read Foucault's earlier, lesser known writing according to the later historiographies and so to project the later forms of critique backward onto the literature essays, reading the latter as the nascent or partial (and hence non-serious) version of the former.

My dissertation, on the other hand, offers an original reading by taking Foucault's early works of literary criticism completely seriously – that is, by interpreting them at the level of their argument and by bringing them together in a general method of interpretation, which is formed and refined throughout the following chapters according to both my reading of Foucault's work and through application to works of literature other than those discussed by Foucault. This method, which I call *feigning*, is outlined below, along with a consideration of its originality and an overview of its application.

Of course, a reading as such need not separate the engagement with literature from Foucault's broader intellectual project. On the contrary, the dissertation hopes to foreground precisely their complementary argument and themes, which are especially apparent in Foucault's early critique of finitude and his final turn to the Greeks and the care of the self. My intention here is not to establish, once more, the early work as the non-serious preliminary of a more robust and valid oeuvre but rather to maintain the direction and force of its argument by appealing to the later work and attending to issues that remain after Foucault's turn from literature. This aspect of the project, which composes the second half of the dissertation, is also outlined below.

## Feigning as a Method of Interpretation

Feigning is not a term that Foucault uses. He never refers to its etymology, to its relation to *fiction* or *fate* or *fable*, or to its potential as a method of criticism or as an art of life. In his considerable oeuvre, it rarely appears.<sup>3</sup> In the early essays on literature, for example, it occurs only once and then only in a footnote to some remarks on simulacra in the works of Klossowski, where Foucault misquotes a certain "wonderful phrase" from Jean-François Marmontel: "feigning would express the untruths of sentiment and thought" ("Prose of Actaeon" 153n3). In fact, Marmontel had written that *simulation* should express the untruths of sentiment and thought, while *feigning* would express the "untruths of the imagination" (*Oeuvres* 380).<sup>4</sup> A minor error in a minor text, no doubt. Yet, in these few sentences – in the constellation of their different terms, but also in the interplay of Marmontel's original phrase and Foucault's misquotation – the common themes and concerns of the early essays on literature come together: untruth and the imagination as modes of critique, simulation and dissimulation as the form and the function of a critical language, but also the potential of this language to reveal, in turn, the limits of sentiment and thought a propos the ordering of experience. In short, this brief reference to feigning, and all that could be associated with it, allows me to pull together different works of Foucault (from within different phases of his thought and among them), to interpret these works according to the thread that runs through them (according to repetition, finitude, and openness), but also to illuminate their significance and potential for literary criticism.

All of this is in fact accomplished here through feigning as a general method of interpretation. On one hand, this method extends Foucault's own reading of certain

authors; on the other hand, and more substantively, feigning offers a framework – a method composed of common themes and concerns – for interpreting works of literature beyond the French avant-garde of the mid-twentieth century. At a general level, feigning as such isolates the form and function of the specific language that Foucault identifies with the being of literature.<sup>5</sup> In every object of his literary criticism – from Sade and Flaubert, to Roussel, to Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski, to Sollers and Robbe-Grillet – language arranged within the work, language as literature, takes the form of reduplication – that is, of simulation and repetition. According to the method of feigning, this reduplicative language carries out, in turn, four related tasks or functions:

1. Reduplication establishes the sovereignty of a language that precedes the speaking or writing subject and that carries on indefinitely beyond the moment of its apprehension. When Foucault mentions the "streaming" of language ("Behind the Fable" 138; "Thought of the Outside" 152, 166–167; "Distance, Aspect, Origin" 107) or language as an endless "murmur" ("Language to Infinity" 91, 95, 97; *Order of Things* 114; "Distance, Aspect, Origin" 107), he is referring to its sovereignty: to its raw, unfettered being apart from any original speaker or writer, which is the being revealed, for example, by the "doubled language super-imposed on itself" in the works of Roussel (*Death and the Labyrinth* 102) and hence by a narrative structure that "repeats the mechanism that creates the narrative" (ibid. 55. For my discussion of *Death and Labyrinth*, see Chapter One, pp. 37–38).

2. This language of repetition constitutes, in itself, an impossible experience because it forms a work that is self-contained but also indefinite and potentially endless. The form of the work alone (apart even from its content, though of course supported by

it) constitutes, in Foucault's words, an experience of the outside: an experience that originates not from the knowing, experiencing subject, but rather from this language that warps time into a circle, that confuses the orders of Same and Other, and so completely undermines the unities of perspective and identity. At the same time, the reduplicated content is transformed, along the line of its iterations, from representation, to simulation, to a pure simulacra that confounds the possibility of identity-as-original-presence, but now at a different level of the work (on simulation, simulacra, and the experience of the outside, see my discussion of Foucault's essays on Klossowski and Blanchot, pp. 39–42 and pp. 42–47 respectively).

3. A reduplicative, sovereign language as such establishes the strict finitude of the subject by simple virtue of its sovereignty and by virtue of this experience that cannot be reduced to the originating function of the knowing, experiencing subject. In this sense, Foucault's literary criticism grounds and broadens the critique of finitude first introduced in the *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* and developed in *The Order of Things*. The language of repetition, that is, proves the naiveté of a thought of finitude that promises to reveal what it already assumes in advance, which is 1) that knowledge of the figure of man, whose positivities or empirical contents fill the empty category of the subject, will reveal nothing less than the conditions of the possibility of experience itself, and hence 2) the assumption that experience is founded by the subject that orders it prior to the moment of its apprehension. Against this thought, a reduplicative, sovereign language that comes from elsewhere to bear on experience and the experiencing subject establishes finitude, instead, as a simple restriction and as the strict limit that marks all life (on this

point and on point 4. below, see especially my discussion of Bataille and of Foucault's "Preface to Transgression," pp. 47–52).

4. In place of an analytic and critique that posits the subject as both source and object of a potentially endless knowledge, a reduplicative, sovereign language demonstrates instead the necessity of non-knowledge and *not-knowing* in the form of a constant questioning and a complete openness to experience.

Such is the form and such are the functions of feigning according to my reading of Foucault's early essays on literature in conjunction with the critique of finitude. Of course, the question remains, why bring these essays together into a method at all? What does this work (or rather, my reading of the work) offer to the study of literature that could not be found elsewhere? After all, as the above description of feigning no doubt suggests, Foucault's literary criticism occurs within a certain cultural and intellectual milieu that no doubt marks the conditions of the possibility of its appearance. From the focus on form (on repetition and the sovereignty of language), to an insistence on the problem of the being of literature, to the radical questioning of the contents that fill the empty category of the subject, Foucault's literary work forms part of a tradition represented, in Paris in the middle of the last century, by Roland Barthes and structuralism, Jacques Lacan and psychoanalysis, and Gilles Deleuze and the French turn to Nietzsche. Indeed, Foucault cites these same modes of enquiry (and, in one place or another, these same authors) as consonant with his own work. Each, that is, "arose from a dissatisfaction with the phenomenological theory of the subject, and involved different escapades, subterfuges, breakthroughs, according to whether we use a negative or a

positive term, in the direction of linguistics, psychoanalysis, or Nietzsche"

("Structuralism and Post-Structuralism" 438).<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, specific connections between feigning (as described above and as formulated throughout the dissertation) and the work of these others are readily apparent. Barthes, for instance, pointed long before Foucault to the possibility of a literature without a corresponding humanism – literature, that is, as a "dream and menace," which denies the subject-as-origin according the raw, sovereign being of its language: "the Word shines forth above a line of relationships emptied of their content," Barthes writes, "and this void is necessary for the density of the Word to rise out of a magic vacuum, like a sound and a sign devoid of background" (*Writing Degree Zero* 46–47). At the same time (which is to say, several years before Foucault would publish his first works of literary criticism) Lacan was already formulating a relation between language, finitude, and non-knowledge. The "Instance of the Letter," for example, outlines the ineluctable difference between a sovereign language, the object of its enunciation (that is, the possibility of its meaning), and the empty subject that momentarily comes between them – hence, language as Other, which flows through the self and overflows it, constituting its interiority yet in the same moment revealing both 1) its characteristic "lack of being" (*manque à être*) and 2) its overdetermination by the limit (*manque* as both "lack" and "want," emptiness and desire). In Lacan – or rather, in this single yet programmatic statement of his psychoanalysis whose dates of delivery (1957) and of publication (1966) correspond so closely to Foucault's engagement with literature – so many consonant themes appear. From psychoanalysis, too, it may seem that Foucault adopts the model and significance of repetition – a term of equal importance for Freud as for Lacan. But

repetition in Foucault's literary criticism owes more to formalism (repetition as proof of the sovereignty of language) and to Nietzsche (repetition as critique of the subject-as-origin). Hence, the connection between the early work of Foucault and that of Deleuze, which appears at the same time and that provides a theory of repetition as both 1) a simulacrum, which "is not just a copy, but that which overturns all copies by *also* overturning the models" (*Difference and Repetition* xx), and therefore 2) a form of critique that, like Nietzsche's Eternal Return, "has no other sense but...the absence of any assignable origin" (ibid. 125). The status of repetition in the Nietzschean philosophy of Deleuze, in other words, mirrors the function of repetition in the literary criticism of Foucault.

And yet, despite their shared themes and concerns or the apparent similarity of their work, Foucault nevertheless stands apart from these others. If he inquires, along with Barthes, after the being of literature, his inquiry is nevertheless freed, on one hand, from a focus on the signifying function of a language that simply illuminates the world and offers it to experience (either immediately or else at a remove that, for the mythologist, is only ever superficial),<sup>7</sup> and on the other, from the criticism of political economy and bourgeois ideology to which the function of literature, for Barthes, is always reduced. Similarly, the affinity between Foucault and Deleuze a propos repetition only appears out of context – that is, removed from the thought of repetition-for-itself and of repetition in relation to difference-in-itself within *Difference and Repetition*. For, in this context, the difference between Foucault's limited use of repetition and Deleuze's global thought of repetition becomes clear: Deleuze, that is, stretches repetition over the history of philosophy until it covers its entire surface, becoming nothing less than the

form of time and of being-as-becoming; repetition for Foucault, on the other hand, is relevant only within the domain of literature and in relation to specific works – that is 1) as the formal aspect of the being of literature, and 2) as the function of the Other-as-Same – of the simulation, simulacra, or double that dissimilates the subject-as-origin. Or again, if Foucault's early writing is prefigured by Lacan, his literary criticism (and in fact, his entire oeuvre beginning with *History of Madness*) is nevertheless freed from a thought of the unconscious that amounts to a second self, hidden and more interior than the self given to knowledge yet absolutely essential to it, like a warp that threads above and below the weft of its nature. For psychoanalysis, repetition becomes the revelation of that nature: the double as a secret self, relegated to a deep interiority through the mechanisms of desire and repression yet revealing itself to the canny analyst through dreams or neuroses. The double in Foucault, on the other hand (which is simply the description of the function of the double in literature *as literature*), is completely exterior, stemming from a language that is outside of the self and that reveals only its determination by the limit. In short (and paraphrasing Foucault on his relation to structuralism), feigning as a method of interpretation exists alongside these other modes of enquiry but not within them. Compared to the grand, complex system of their thought, feigning offers something simpler (that is, something more focused and more nuanced) by remaining at the level of the work – of its form and content – where it offers a rich, original reading of an array of French authors from Sade and Flaubert to Sollers and Robbe-Grillet.

#### Application of Method: Feigning and Fabulation

If the originality of feigning becomes clear relative to the intellectual milieu of its appearance, the consistency, validity, and value of feigning as method is demonstrated

instead by its application to works of literature other than those discussed by Foucault. And that is precisely the goal of the second chapter, where I demonstrate that the reduplicative language of feigning and its attendant functions are not restricted to the French avant-garde of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but are found instead in works of literature closer to our own time – in the works of Robert Coover, John Barth, and Donald Barthelme. Of course, Robert Scholes joined these authors some time ago under the figure of "fabulation," defined as literature that presents some aspect of a world "clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know" (*Structural Fabulation* 29). The works of fabulation as such offer an incredible experience, at the level of their content, analogous to that of the French avant-garde, with its outré eroticism, its serious use of myth and fable, or its episodic narratives that are simultaneously disjointed and repetitive. Moreover, in the interplay of their form and content, these works again carry out the functions of feigning by demonstrating 1) the folly of closure in the face of these incredible experiences and against the conditions of finitude, 2) the possibility of openness fostered in the process of reduplication, and 3) the value of an experimental language that forces an openness by requiring of its reader a constant questioning.

These arguments represent, schematically, my interpretation of Coover's *Spanking the Maid* and *Briar Rose* (pp. 73–79 and pp. 79–84), Barth's *Chimera* (pp. 84–89), and Barthelme's *Snow White* (pp. 89–94). If the more substantive applications of feigning are restricted here to these works and these authors it is because, first and foremost, the notion of feigning itself demands some rigor – the rigor provided by a boundary, by the limit of an oeuvre, and by what (though Coover and Barth are still writing) constitutes a more or less finished movement. Of course, there are other works – other forms of

writing, other literary movements – that could accomplish as much. But the works of fabulation, more than any form of literature I am aware of, prove that the central themes of Foucault's early work are not restricted to the *nouveau roman* or to the literature of Roussel, Klossowski, Blanchot, or Bataille.

Of course, all of these works in French and English remain on the fringe of our culture. Like the Cynic art that runs through Western history (Foucault, *Courage of the Truth* 177–190), they no doubt remain "elitist and marginal" (ibid. 189). And yet, as I attempt to show at different points of the dissertation, the works of fabulation nevertheless form part of a more or less unbroken line, running from the end of the eighteenth century, through the works discussed by Foucault, to our own time and our own culture. As part of this tradition (which composes something not so grand as a counter-culture yet certainly introduces a *difference*, however local) these works of fabulation demonstrate the value and relevance of experimental or avant-garde language – a strange and rarefied language that exists for itself, no doubt, but also a language that bears on the subject by virtue of this same sovereignty, outlining both the great dominion of the limit and the need for complete openness. In this sense, the works of fabulation are both companions of critique and the proof of its necessity – hence their special relevance to the thought and writing of Foucault.

But that is not all: the relation of Foucault and fabulation runs in the other direction, too, since feigning contributes to scholarship on the fabulists by offering an original reading of Coover, Barth, and Barthelme. Granted, some observations and arguments about the function or form of fabulist literature are consonant with the project outlined here. Jackson Cope, for instance, associates Coover with Jorge Luis Borges (a

figure often cited by the early Foucault) according to the common goal of their work, which is a "loss of self through the act of imaginative projection" (4). At the level of its content, too, "ritual and contingency" in Coover's writing "[are] always jostling us against a sense of ourselves" (ibid. 135). For Cope, in other words, Coover's work bears on the self in a mode similar to feigning, which turns the self around and hollows it out in the course of a total questioning. John Vickery, too, claims something similar a propos "mythic figure, reference, plot, and commentary" in Barth's *Chimera*, "which far from making a smooth, harmonious surface and controlled perspective" instead combine to form a work "in which contradiction, disavowal, transformation, juxtaposition, and repetition bewilder, disconcert, frustrate, or infuriate" (429). In Barth, as in Blanchot or Klossowski, the incredible experience of myth is separated from its old, didactic function to become instead the ground of non-knowledge. And if *not knowing* as such represents the principle at the heart of Bataille's writing, it also describes the function, according to Jeffrey Nealon, of "ironic dissimulation" in the works of Barthelme, insofar as these latter are composed by a "topological ground that makes all understanding problematic" (127).<sup>8</sup>

And yet, even within a description of their similarity, the originality of feigning compared to all of this scholarship becomes clear. First, feigning allows a comprehensive comparison to the authors discussed by Foucault, which locates fabulation within a tradition stretching back at least to Sade and Flaubert. Second, the framework of feigning correlates all of these functions – loss of self, dissimulation, *not knowing* – to a specific form (that is, to reduplication as a more robust practice than the doubling normally associated with, for instance, metafiction), which is grounded, in turn, by Foucault's

thought of the being of literature. Third, beyond the introduction of Foucault (and all that might be original in his criticism) to scholarship on the fabulists, feigning departs, too, from the latter a propos both method and result: *method* since it avoids all of the assumptions and pitfalls of a naïve psychoanalysis,<sup>9</sup> and *result* because it offers something beyond the recovery of self and of meaning from within a literary practice (and through the very devices) that would deny both.<sup>10</sup> Feigning, on the other hand, departs from the characteristic modes and findings of scholarship on Coover, Barth, and Barthelme by casting finitude, in all these works, as a strict limit, by holding up the sovereignty of language as proof of this limit, and by reading repetition as 1) the proof of sovereignty, but also 2) the form of an incredible experience that disrupts the origin, calling the status of the subject into question and requiring, in turn, a complete openness to the "irreducible enigma the world conceals" (Legros 111).

#### Reconsideration of Method: Feigning as an Art of Life

If feigning as such offers an original reading of Coover, Barth, and Barthelme – and if these readings in turn establish the validity and productivity of feigning as a method of interpretation – some unresolved issues nevertheless remain. After all, Foucault turns away from literature around the time of his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France when he begins to focus, instead, on the archeology and genealogy of discipline and sexuality. Following this turn, I argue, important questions persist regarding the value and status of openness as the goal of all these works, from Sade and Flaubert to the American fabulists, interpreted here through the framework of feigning. And so, in the second part of the dissertation, I address these questions and these problems of method by drawing on Foucault's turn to the Greeks and his final work on

the culture and care of the self. If the early work ends, that is, with the requirement of a vast and endless questioning that hollows out the subject and forces a complete openness, Foucault's final work establishes instead the role of art and writing in the cultivation of identity in the form of attitude and *ēthos*. Drawing on the pure research of Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France from 1982 (*Hermeneutics of the Subject*), 1983 (*Government of the Self and Others*), and 1984 (*Courage of the Truth*), I recast feigning as a technique of review and preparation: a reconsideration of experience that evaluates the relation of the self to what is known and what was done, but also an invitation of possible experience that equips the self against the limits that beset it.

For the Stoics, Cynics, and Epicureans of the first and second centuries, that is, the self is always susceptible to the conditions of finitude – to ignorance and forgetfulness, to passion and appearances; its openness therefore remains undirected and it cannot get outside of itself to direct itself. So, for example, Seneca tells Lucilius, *nemo per se satis valet ut emergat* (*Epistles* LII.1–2): "no one is strong enough by himself to rise above the waves" and so "he needs someone to give him a hand, someone to pull him to the shore" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 145n4; for my reading of the ancient techniques of the self in the context of feigning, see Chapter Three, pp. 107–113). Such, precisely, is the role of feigning as a positive technique or art of life, which addresses itself to the limit by equipping the self against it – against the thought that slips beneath the watchful eye of critique, against the forgetfulness that undermines every principle and precept, against the passion and desire that compromise the *logos*.

Feigning, after all, describes an art of repetition that, by virtue of its form, effects a review. But feigning is also the technique par excellence for inviting experience by

modeling that which cannot originate from the subject yet nevertheless affects what is possible for it. The self as such reviews and tests itself according to a certain willed openness, but it also evaluates everything according to "the faculty of the use of the other faculties" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 456) – according, that is, to the *logos* as the critical instrument and aid for discovering not what can be known, nor what might be hoped for in a future world, but what ought to be done in this life and in this world.

The potential of feigning as equipment and aid in the relation of the self to itself is moreover demonstrated by my reconsideration of the works of fabulation (Chapter Three, pp. 118–123) and, more substantively, by my expanded reading of the early Greek novel (see Chapter Three, pp. 123–131 and Chapter Four, pp. 140–142), the latter of which Foucault discusses briefly in the lectures of 1982 and, in a slightly different modality, in *Care of the Self*. In Xenophon's *Ephesian Tale*, Heliodorus's *Ethiopian History*, and Achilles Tatius's *Adventures of Leukippe and Kleitophon*, I find a reduplicative language (at the level of their form), focused on passion and the limit (at the level of their content), which imparts over and over again a specific lesson on the relation of self to self (at the level of their function) – all of which combine to form a positive art of life, understood, once again, as equipment and aid in the formation of attitude and *ethōs*.

And yet, the early Greek novel remains a singular example, completely tied, I argue, to the spiritual and cultural milieu of its appearance. And so, once more, the question remains: where else might we find this form of feigning – this "discourse-recourse" (ibid. 469) that functions as *paraskheuē* or equipment? Does it pertain only to the golden age of the culture of the self, with its forms of self writing and its didactic novels? Once again, and in the final chapter, I demonstrate that feigning is not limited as

such to the specific time and culture discussed by Foucault but is apparent, too, in works of literature from our own time and our own culture – that is, in works of feigning that now carry out, according to their reduplicative form, two discrete but related functions: 1) detachment from the self through the simulation and dissimulation that casts everything in an ironic light, and 2) conversion to the self according to the review and the test that bear upon attitude and *ēthos*. Feigning as such, in other words, offers in succession a distance and a proximity: an experience of the outside that constantly clears the ground for a return. Barth's *Sot-Weed Factor*, Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice*, and Barthelme's *Dead Father* therefore demonstrate the work of conversion as a willed progression toward the self as goal, which is also a recognition of the self that is always given in advance – the self in its frailty and ignorance, the self in thrall to passion and appearances. (For my reading of these works, see Chapter Four, pp. 145–156, pp. 156–166, and pp. 166–173 respectively).

Through their circular journey, through the interplay in these works of Same and Other, but most of all, through characters who *will* a movement toward themselves, Coover, Barth, and Barthelme establish the possibility that feigning might constitute, for us, a positive example and a positive art of life. And in this sense, their writing becomes like the *Hupomnēmata*, which function "as books of life, as guides for conduct" (Foucault, "Self Writing" 209) insofar as their lesson and model becomes *prokheiron* or near at hand and bears, like a *basanos* or touchstone, upon the moment of review or upon some imagined experience.

Of course, reading Foucault's early and final work as such and casting feigning as a *tekhnē tou biou* or art of life requires some distinctions and clarification regarding the

status, in our culture, of avant-garde art and its relation to the will. These clarifications, in the form of an "ethic of reading," close out the argument here, but they also highlight both the originality of feigning and (by way of conclusion) its possible direction and future objects as a method of interpretation and as a special mode of critique.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the Thomson Reuters Web of Science index of book citations ("Most Cited Authors").

<sup>2</sup> Several commentators have already made this point. In an early (and now characteristic) description of the issue, David Carroll writes that "with all the interest literary critics and theorists have taken in Foucault's work, it is surprising that so little attention has been paid to these texts in which Foucault has the most to say about literature and language" (68). Ten years later, Dieter Freundlieb would note this same absence in North American, British, and German scholarship (302). Jacob Fisher claims the same, with respect to French scholarship (289n1), and more recently, Timothy O'Leary confirms that the trend persists in the first decades of this century (*Foucault and Fiction* 43n1).

<sup>3</sup> And in these few instances, the terms *feindre* or *feinte* are only ever used in the mundane sense of "pretend" or "put on," where either of these synonyms would convey the same meaning. Some examples: "*Il faut donc feindre de ne pas savoir qui se reflétera au fond de la glace*" ("Les suivantes" 472; "we must therefore pretend not to know who is to be reflected in the depths of that mirror," *Order of Things* 10); "*feinte simplicité*" and "*feinte inertie*" ("Un si cruel savoir" 220, 222; "feigned simplicity" and "feigned inertia," "So Cruel a Knowledge" 58, 60); "*l'équivoque qui règne entre folie et feinte, maladie et supercherie*" ("Médecins, juges et sorciers au XVIIe siècle" 764; "the ambiguity that exists between madness and trickery, illness and deception," my translation).

<sup>4</sup> *"Pourquoi du verbe simuler n'avons-nous que le participe, et ne disons-nous pas, comme les Latins, simuler et dissimuler? Feindre exprimerait les mensonges de l'imagination; dissimuler exprimerait les mensonges du sentiment ou de la pensée."*

Thanks to Michelle Sabourin for help with translation here and elsewhere in the dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> For Foucault's discussion of a possible ontology of literature, see especially "Language to Infinity," which I consider at length at the beginning of Chapter Two.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault makes this connection retrospectively, in an interview with Gérard Raulet a year before his (that is, Foucault's) death, but he has said the same elsewhere and much earlier. In fact, his comments on the intellectual milieu of mid-twentieth century Paris, drawn out in different interviews over three decades, demonstrate a remarkable consistency. In 1969, for example, he would claim that the work of Barthes, Lacan, and Deleuze (among others like Claude Lévi-Strauss or Louis Althusser) was "directed less toward the analysis of structures than toward the putting into question of the anthropological status, the status of the subject, and the privileges of man. And my method is inscribed within the framework of this transformation in the same way that structuralism is – along side of the latter but not in it" ("Archaeology of Knowledge" 55). A decade later, he would describe the "point of convergence" between his own work, that of perceived structuralists (including Barthes and Lacan), the "literary experiences" of Blanchot and Bataille, and the turn to Nietzsche in Klossowski and Deleuze: "it was more or less this complex of thought and analysis that...served as a basis for and a confirmation of something much more radical [than structuralism]: the calling into

question of the theory of the subject" ("Subject, Knowledge, and 'History of Truth'" 58). See also David Macey, who notes in his biography of Foucault that structuralism, psychoanalysis, and the engagement with Nietzsche represent the "negative unity of an alliance of theorists in revolt against the banality of contemporary forms of humanism and the fading charms of existentialist phenomenology" (171).

<sup>7</sup> For Foucault's discussion of the inadequacy of structuralist approaches to literature, see, for instance, *The Order of Things* pp. 47–49.

<sup>8</sup> At a general level, too, the terminology of the dissertation and that of the secondary scholarship appears to share a certain affinity. Some distinction is therefore required between *fabulation* (as Scholes's term for discussing the works of Coover, Barth, and Barthelme) and *feigning* (as my term for interpreting and applying Foucault's works of literary criticism) compared to, say, *metafiction* or even *postmodern*. After all, the latter two terms have become standard, at least in popular venues, to discussions of Coover or Barthelme ("masters of metafiction" according to a recent New York Times review) or Barth (already a "postmodern old master" in a now-dated article on David Foster Wallace in the New York Review of Books). These same terms appear, too, scattered throughout the scholarship of the last few decades, where, nevertheless, they are rarely used in any systematic way. Granted, Scholes refers to metafiction throughout his books, but there, the term is subsumed under fabulation as one of its possible forms. Similarly, here, metafiction – which, strictly speaking, describes only the process by which the work calls attention to itself as a work – is expressed by *reduplication*, which I subsume under the method of feigning as the identification of its formal element. Feigning, like fabulation,

therefore offers something at once more specific and more general than these other terms: more specific than *postmodern*, a term that has lost all definite reference since its appearance thirty-five years ago in Jean-François Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition*, and more general than the metafiction that, more often than not, refers to the author's ability to inhabit their work (Cf. the argument here regarding the distance of the author according to a corresponding proximity of language in the works of Coover, Barth, and Barthelme, pp. 69–70, 74–75).

<sup>9</sup> Some examples from the scholarship: for Wright, drawing on Freud and Lacan, "Obsessive desire" and "libidinous pleasure" in Coover become the signs, thinly veiled and without any guile, of an unconscious that reveals itself (for the astute reader-as-analyst) through repetition. Shaw, following a "Freudian model of trauma" reaches much the same conclusion (132), while for Bush, repetition in Barth becomes instead "the triumph of the death drive" and of the instinct to preserve an ideal self (189). In Barthelme and especially "in the formation of the self in the father-son relationship" of *The Dead Father* (89), Juan-Navarro finds all of this and more: the Freudian ego and the id, condensation and displacement, the death instinct and the Oedipal complex, but also a relation among the Lacanian orders of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary. In each case, fabulation therefore becomes like the "indefinite monologue" of the analysand that awaits the "absolute gaze of the watcher" (Foucault, *Order of Things* 488), who discovers through its mad repetitions the limit (the Desire, the Drive, the Instinct) that betrays a secret and necessary nature.

<sup>10</sup> Bush, for example, finds in Barth "a self that affirms itself, its subjectivity, by citing itself" (176). Similarly, Edelstein reads *Chimera* as the simultaneous expression of both Barth's "artistic self-consciousness" and a broader, modernist "human self-consciousness" (100). A propos the recovery of meaning, on the other hand, Nealon finds in Barthelme an aesthetic that unwittingly "preserves the privilege of the subject as the locus of the text's revelation" (127), while Shaw, reading Coover, argues that the subject grounds all meaning through the "stylized gesture" of repetition (137).

## Chapter One: Foucault, Finitude, Feigning

### The Empty Category of the Subject and the Figure of Man

For nearly a decade, Michel Foucault wrote and spoke about literature. In a period when he would complete three major works – *A History of Madness*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things* – he would also publish essays on Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Pierre Klossowski. He wrote, too, about violent desire in the works of the Marquis de Sade, the disappearance of the gods in the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, and unimaginable figures in the labyrinths of Raymond Roussel. At conferences, in interviews, and in essays, he considered the emergence of the *nouveau roman* and its authors – Philippe Sollers and Alain Robbe-Grillet. The work of these writers, though disparate, nevertheless shared certain features that represented, for Foucault, "the frontier between the philosophical and the non-philosophical" ("Functions of Literature" 313). Each addressed, that is, the traditional problem of experience – not according to the philosophical monument of "Hegelianism deeply penetrated by phenomenology" ("The Subject, Knowledge, and the 'History of Truth' 44–45), whose subject preceded the experienceable world and ordered it in advance, but according instead to those limit-experiences that establish the subject's essential finitude without granting, at the same time, its founding function ("How an 'Experience Book' is Born" 30–32): impossible, irreducible experiences that dissociate the self from itself in a space created by the "distance and proximity of the same" (Foucault, "The Prose of Actaeon" 134). In the self-negating discourse of Blanchot, the endless simulacra of Klossowski, and the strange eroticism of Bataille, Foucault would therefore find the frontier – that thought of the outside – where subjectivity, experience, and philosophy were all made

permeable.

Although he may have retrospectively considered this engagement with literature as merely "a rest, a thought on the way, a badge, a flag" ("Functions of Literature" 307),<sup>1</sup> Foucault's early essays nevertheless respond to a series of questions that would persist, in different forms, throughout his entire oeuvre:

Can it be said that the subject is the only form of existence possible? Can't there be experiences in which the subject, in its constitutive relations, in its self-identity, isn't given any more? And thus wouldn't experiences be given in which the subject could dissociate itself, break its relationship with itself, lose its identity? Wasn't this perhaps the experience of Nietzsche, with the metaphor of the Eternal Return? ("The Subject, Knowledge, and the 'History of Truth'" 49)

Of course, the question immediately arises, what more could be given the subject when it has been granted so much already? Since the end of the classical age, it has been foundational: it confers authenticity and reveals origins. So, for instance, a general and continuous theory of history becomes possible for Hegel only when the subject reveals itself to itself as pure Spirit according to a progression "from certainty to the truth through the work of the mind and of reason" (Foucault, *History of Madness* 350). For Husserl, the entire empirical domain appears "purely as a correlate of the subjectivity which gives it ontic meaning, through whose validity the world is at all" (127). And for Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, both heirs to the phenomenological tradition, the subject furnishes the world with meaning and constitutes, according a logic of signification and a grammar of the first person, all that can be given to experience (Foucault, "Structuralism and Post-Structuralism" 436–437).<sup>2</sup>

And yet, the subject as such remains a general, abstract category. Its capacity to establish meaning in the world – its infinite task and the measure of its worth – becomes possible only with the arrival, at the dawn modernity, of the figure of man, whose finitude, Foucault argues, supplies the empty category of the subject with its contents. When Kant, in the *Logic*, asks *Was ist der Mensch?* then the three fundamental questions of the *Transcendental Method* – What can I know? What should I do? What can I hope for? – find both their common locus and the possibility of their solution (Foucault, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* 74–83). At the same time, according to a profound "archaeological mutation" (Foucault, *The Order of Things* 340), natural history becomes biology, the analysis of wealth becomes economics, and general grammar becomes philology (ibid. 235–270). The secrets of nature, of production, and of language are now revealed by the plain and discernible positivities supplied by the figure of man: its body, its desire, its speaking thought. In medicine, too, with the appearance of Bichat's anatomo-pathology, the inescapable fact of death "leaves its old tragic heaven," from which it reigned since the Renaissance, and now reveals to knowledge the secret movements of life (Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic* 172).

Hence, Foucault says, there appeared at the end of the classical age an "obligation to work backwards – or downwards – to an analytic of finitude in which man's being [would]...provide a foundation in their own positivity for all those forms that indicate to him that he is not infinite" (*The Order of Things* 343). At the moment of its appearance, in other words, the figure of man is already an impossible paradox – a necessarily limited figure in whom knowledge will nevertheless be attained of what makes all knowledge possible (ibid. 347). The understanding of finitude since Kant, which has set the limits of

experience according to the philosophical status of the figure of man, is therefore determined in "a mode of thought in which the rightful limitations of acquired knowledge (and consequently of all empirical knowledge) are at the same time the concrete forms of existence, precisely as they are given in that same empirical knowledge" (ibid. 270). When the positivities supplied by the figure of man (its speaking, its desire, its body) are founded upon themselves as fact, then an endless oscillation occurs between the identification of empirical contents and the foundation for their identification as such. The analytic of finitude, in other words, is beset by a confused "repetition of the positive within the fundamental" (ibid. 344) where the figure of man represents, in the same moment, the fundamental source and subject of an experience where it remains, in its knowable dimensions, the positive object.

Foucault's hope that the subject might be given something more is grounded precisely in these contradictions that have sustained the figure of man and all of the "warped and twisted forms of reflection" that take this same figure as their point of departure (ibid. 373). Insofar as the category of the subject is filled and defined by this figure, its legacy is marked by a "pre-critical naiveté" (ibid. 349). And much of Foucault's work could be read as an attempt to reveal that naiveté – to show, precisely, how the "pre-critical analysis of what man is in his essence becomes the analytic of everything that can, in general, be presented to man's experience" (ibid. 372).

At the same time, this work outlines the possibilities that remain for a subject freed from the figure of man and so liberated from an analytic and a critique that promises an endless accumulation of knowledge only by assuming, in advance, both a finitude and an originating function that limit the contents of experience. As early as his

*Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, which he submitted as the complementary thesis of his doctoral dissertation, Foucault thus introduces the possibility of "a critique of finitude that could be as liberating with regard to man as it would be with regard to the infinite, and which would show that finitude is not an end, but rather that camber and knot in time when the end is in fact a beginning" (124). Had Sade and Hölderlin not already revealed, in a line of thought contemporary with Kant and Hegel, those impossible desires that trace the limits of morality and reason? And hadn't Nietzsche already pointed the way when he opposed the eschatology of Hegel – which is also that of Marx and Auguste Comte (Foucault, *The Order of Things* 349) – with the death of God and the laughter of the last man? Or when, in a simple gesture, he completely undermined the possibility of a human essence revealed in the movement of history by suggesting instead the possibility of an Eternal Return?

#### Foucault and Literature: Finitude and Feigning

From the *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* and *The History of Madness*, to *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The Order of Things*, Foucault thus dramatizes the accidental appearance of the figure of man and heralds the possibility of its disappearance.<sup>3</sup> But the critique of finitude that grounds this dissolution is nowhere better realized than in Foucault's early essays on literature. And yet, as Timothy O'Leary has recently pointed out, this work has received surprisingly little critical attention (*Foucault and Fiction* 43n1). This lacuna in the vast body of Foucault scholarship is all the more surprising because Foucault's early essays offer a rich and complex understanding of literature and of avant-garde writing in particular. According to Timothy Rayner, however, it is precisely the complexity of this work that has resulted in its obscurity: "many readers of Foucault

today," he argues, "prefer to ignore his early literature phase" given its "excessive formalism" and its "perceived esotericism" (30).<sup>4</sup>

Both O'Leary and Rayner address this issue by interpreting the literature essays according to Foucault's later notion of the "experience book." Each appeals, that is, to Foucault's claims that "an experience is always a fiction: it's something that one fabricates for oneself" ("How an 'Experience Book' is Born" 36) and that "an experience is something that one comes out of transformed" (ibid. 27). So, for example, Rayner correlates the forgetting of self that underlies Foucault's discussion of literature with the "desubjectifying experience of the outside" (33) in Blanchot's reading of the Orpheus myth. This connection is particularly insightful not because it establishes the pervasive influence of Blanchot on Foucault's early thought – Foucault had already admitted, in fact, that "at that time, [he] had dreamt of being Blanchot" (Foucault, qtd. in Miller 82) – but because it allows Rayner to outline, in precise terms, the movement in language from the interior of subjective experience embodied in the "intentional moment of writing" (36) to an exterior composed of a "cacophony of anonymous voices" (ibid.): from the characters of a work, their dialogue, and the circumstances of the adventure, to that "immigrant discourse" deposited in the narrative "by a voice that cannot be assigned" (Foucault, "Behind the Fable" 140–141). For Foucault, this voice creates a space of "disappointment and metamorphosis" where the hero who "came in search of a truth that he knew from a distance" is presented instead with "a reality that he never expected," whereupon the outside intrudes upon experience, and that reality becomes "himself and the world transfigured by each other" (ibid. 144).

The difference introduced by experience is also central to O'Leary's comprehensive

study of Foucault's early work. Experience, O'Leary notes, takes two forms in Foucault's writing: the first outlines the "general, dominant form in which being is given to an historical period as something that can be thought" ("Foucault, Experience, Literature" 14). Experience, in this sense, describes not only the limits of what can be given to knowledge, in the sense of *savoir*, but a more general *éprouver* or sensibility that nevertheless takes specific objects (such as the "ambiguity of popular attitudes" toward the criminal under the Ancien Régime) and comprises specific practices – such as the "great confinement" of madness in the classical age (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 83; *A History of Madness* 44–77). The second form of experience, which O'Leary connects to the possibilities of fiction and fictive language, points, on the other hand, to an "erosion from the outside" (Foucault, *The Order of Things* 56) – to the effect upon general experience of *l'étrange*, of the strange and the foreign. Fiction, O'Leary argues, especially evokes this experience of the outside by presenting "that which does not exist, insofar as it is" (*ce qui n'existe pas, tel qu'il est*; Foucault, "Distance, aspect, origine" 280). Fiction as such is an experience *qua* experiment: an attempt to foreground, disrupt, and so modify some aspect of general experience.<sup>5</sup> And so, O'Leary argues, the characters of Beckett's *The Unnamable* experiment with the "everyday experience of self" according to a radical questioning that proceeds not from doubt to certainty, in the manner of Descartes's reflections on the *cogito*, but "from certainty, through doubt, to a splintering of the self and its hold on the world" ("Foucault, Experience, Literature" 22). An experiment as such, in other words, intrudes upon and transforms reading subjects' "understanding of themselves as centers of rationality, language, and experience" (ibid.).

Any reading of Foucault's early essays on literature must account for the work of

Rayner and O'Leary because they alone, among the handful of scholars who attend to these essays, distinguish certain of Foucault's persistent concerns: 1) the form and function of an intrusive, anonymous discourse, and 2) the radical potential of experience-as-experiment. In some ways, however, their interpretations remain inadequate. Rayner's contribution, though nuanced and original, is brief – a single paper indicating the possible shape and character of a future scholarship. Moreover, Rayner is interested in Foucault's essays on fiction only for the light they might shed on the method and truth value of the later historiographies. Foucault's readings of Blanchot and Jules Verne, his early concept of fiction, and his later notion of the "experience-book" are important for Rayner, in other words, only to the extent that they offer "a new, immanent perspective on Foucault's critique" (27) and promise to "defuse the apparent epistemological skepticism that is often taken to haunt Foucault's work" (40).<sup>6</sup> O'Leary, too, focuses on Foucault's later thought. His interpretation of experience, which guides his reading of the early work, derives for the most part from Foucault's interview with Duccio Trombadori (especially "How an 'Experience Book' Is Born" 25–42) and from the various introductions to *The Use of Pleasure (Essential Works 1 199–205, Use of Pleasure 4–7)*. Moreover, O'Leary's account of the literature essays, while comprehensive and systematic, is nevertheless connected, in rather superficial ways, to notions of resistance and "subjugated knowledges" derived from the later histories.<sup>7</sup>

These attempts to connect the phases of Foucault's thought are doubtless worthwhile, if only to gather the early work together for the first time and to invest it with the value already accorded to the later historiographies – a tendency that in fact characterizes nearly all of the secondary scholarship on Foucault's literature essays.<sup>8</sup> And

yet, by focusing solely on the connection to the historiographies, O'Leary, Rayner, and others who have studied the early work elide the difficult idea at the heart of Foucault's engagement with literature: the possibility of a sovereign language that reveals the prospects for a subject whose finitude no longer sustains its founding functions, but establishes instead the necessity for a complete openness and the capacity to "wonder at the irreducible enigma the world conceals" (Legros 111). This is not the possibility of an experience whose strange content surprises and modifies subjectivity while nevertheless leaving the idealist subject intact as a necessary and prior order; nor is it that mystical experience, at once more common and more exceptional, exemplified by Borges's Tzinacán in "The Writing of God," whose individuality is obliterated by the divine Wheel and its gift of perfect knowledge. This experience is instead much closer to the example of Rameau's nephew, that "figure of unreasonable existence" who prefigures Nietzsche, Gérard de Nerval, and Antonin Artaud and who "reduces in advance the whole movement of nineteenth-century anthropology" (Foucault, *History of Madness* 350).

Rameau's nephew, a figure whose importance for Foucault cannot be underestimated, offers for the first time, that is, "that *fully conscious* eccentricity, that systematic will to delirium, which is lived as a total experience of the world" (ibid. 347). Diderot's narrator, of course, is astonished by this delirium, which threatens his own reason. And yet, Rameau's nephew, the "*derisory* figure of the unwanted guest" (ibid. 345) – the madman capable of "being, just he alone, at once dancer and ballerina, tenor and soprano, the entire orchestra, the entire theatre" (Diderot 69) – reveals in delirium the "imminent *power of derision*" (*History of Madness* 345). Rameau's nephew carries on multiple sides of multiple conversations, divides himself into multiple interlocutors, the

better to refute the consensus that reason demands he achieve with himself: "Devil take me if I have the faintest idea of what I really am" (Diderot 46). And yet, in his delirium and as the embodiment of unreason, Rameau's nephew is nothing other than himself: he is neither object, nor lesson, nor Other, but precisely the Same – in thrall at once to "the urgency of being" that is his finitude and "the pantomime of non-being" that fosters his total experience of the world (*History of Madness* 347).

Of course, Rameau's nephew is mad, and his experience is singular. Perhaps it was always Diderot's aim to show that "it is impossible to remain in a decisive and indefinitely resolved fashion at the distance specific to unreason" (ibid. 351). The delirium of Rameau's Nephew, in the end, becomes the idiocy of madness, and the total experience that this delirium fostered, in a scintillating flash of unreason, is henceforth stripped of any language, save for that which reappropriates madness as the "dull truth of error" and so as the "*a contrario* proof" of the "positive nature" of reason (ibid. 516). For Foucault, moreover, the implications of Diderot's text could never be fully understood or appreciated at that point in Western culture when "the demand was being formulated, most imperiously, to interiorize the world, to erase alienation...to humanize nature, [and] to naturalize man" ("Thought of the Outside" 151).

And yet, Foucault points out, after Rameau's Nephew, there nevertheless remained "a form of thought whose still vague possibility was sketched by Western culture in its margins" (ibid. 150). For a long time, this thought was still tied to the experience of unreason; after all, the works of Hölderlin and Nietzsche at either end of the nineteenth century and of Roussel in the twentieth have always been marked (in one form or another and to different extents) by the madness suffered by each of their authors.

Only with the works of Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski would the "essential lack" proper to the subject once more allow – or rather, require – a total experience of the world (Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation* 205). For Blanchot, "the self has never been the subject of this experience. The 'I' will never arrive at it, nor will the individual, this particle of dust that I am" (ibid. 209). Similarly, Klossowski, in his reading of Nietzsche and the "ecstatic moment" of the Eternal Return, argues for "the loss of a given identity" and the "successive realizations of all possible identities" (*Vicious Circle* 57). And for Bataille, "Being is 'ungraspable.' It is only 'grasped' in error" (*Inner Experience* 82). Against this error, which for Kant represented the possibility of an endlessly accumulating knowledge, Bataille proposes instead an experience whose principle is *not-knowing*. And against the perils of madness that followed from the "test of unreason" (Foucault, *History of Madness* 352), he outlines instead a *feigned* madness, where finitude becomes "the necessity...of challenging everything (of putting everything into question) without permissible rest," and so an endless challenge to being that could allow experience "to lead where it would [without] some endpoint given in advance, to no harbor (but to a place of bewilderment, of nonsense)" (*Inner Experience* 3).

For Foucault, this total questioning, this complete openness, and thus, this total experience of the world is available only through a sovereign language whose figures are the limit and its transgression, the double, and the thought of the outside.<sup>9</sup> This is not a discursive language, which remains "ineffectual when asked to maintain the presence of these figures and to maintain itself through them" ("Preface to Transgression" 76); nor is it that "equally perilous" language of fiction, which "risks setting down readymade meanings that stitch the old fabric of interiority back together" ("Thought of the Outside"

152). This experience, rather, requires an extreme language freed from the demands of *mimesis* – a language, in other words, that deliberately renders an impossible space. Against the language of fiction, which "tirelessly produces images and makes them shine," this language reconfigures images in a series of repetitions "that undoes them...that infuses them with an inner transparency that illuminates them little by little until they burst and scatter in the lightness of the unimaginable" (ibid. 152–153). This is a language of simulation and dissimulation, of distance and detachment, which could best be called *feigning*.

Feigning, of course, shares a common etymology with *fiction*, but where the latter is associated with imitation and the discovery of truths, in the sense of *mimesis*, feigning instead is the dissimulation one carries out with oneself<sup>10</sup> – hence Marmontel's insistence that "feigning would express the untruths of the imagination" (*Oeuvres* 380; qtd. in Foucault, "Prose of Acteon" 135). Feigning as such takes a specific form (repetition), conveys a specific theme (the dissimulation of an impossible similitude), and carries out a specific function (distancing, detachment, and dissolution). Feigning therefore "divests interiority of its identity, hollows it out, divides it into non-coincident twin figures, divests it of its unmediated right to say *I*, and pits against its discourse a speech that is indissociably echo and denial" ("Thought of the Outside" 163). Feigning, in other words, has an effect – the dissolution of those undue limits imposed by the legacy of the figure of man. But it also offers a critique – a thought of finitude that establishes the possibility and necessity for a total experience of the world.

Feigning a "Total Experience of the World":

Foucault on Roussel, Klossowski, Blanchot, and Bataille

Feigning as such brings together the closely interwoven themes of Foucault's early essays on literature. At the heart of this work lies the form and principle of repetition, which, like the infinity whose possibility it heralds, is that "concept which corrupts and upsets all others" (Borges, *Labyrinths* 202). In all of the works Foucault discusses – from Sade and Roussel, to Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski, to the *nouveau roman* of Sollers and Robbe-Grillet – repetition remains the principle of language *qua* literature: a language, in other words, that escapes from the dynasty of representation through an imperious and endless duplication.<sup>11</sup> Like the bizarre images painted by Magritte, but in a different modality, the language of feigning therefore demonstrates that while "resemblance predicates itself upon a model it must return to and reveal," simulation instead "circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar" (ibid.). Simulation as such dramatizes the sovereignty of a language that precedes the speaking subject and the capacity of a language without origin, without *telos*, to bear upon the subject from elsewhere, from outside. In Foucault's early work, moreover, *to simulate* retains its original meaning, which follows:

Does not 'to simulate' mean 'to come together,' to be at the same time as oneself, but shifted slightly from oneself? To be oneself in a different place, which is not...the native ground of perception, but at an immeasurable distance, in the most proximate outside. ("Distance, Aspect, Origin" 99)

Repetition, in the language of feigning, therefore represents a disruption that is both slight and profound: a defamiliarization not of the object, as Viktor Shklovsky famously outlined, but of the self. In the form of repetition, that is, feigning is a language that guarantees "the disappearance of subjectivity in the withdrawal of origin" (ibid. 108).

On Roussel (*Death and the Labyrinth*, 1963)

Thus, in the book on Raymond Roussel – his most sustained reflection on literature – Foucault explores that "machine for repetition" (*Death and the Labyrinth* 100) and those "monstrosities without family or species" (ibid. 40) that create and populate the fantastic worlds of *La Vue*, *Le Concert*, and *La Source*. These works, Foucault says, admit no order in advance. Rather, like pure simulacra, "they are reproductions but so anonymous, so universal, that they bear no relation to any original model. No doubt, they represent nothing other than what they are (they are reproductions without having to resemble anything)" (ibid. 113). Of course, simulation as such is not limited to content and the level of the scene, but rather organizes the language of the works themselves. A brief example: *Impressions of Africa* opens between two senses of the past participle *retenu* ("restrained" and "memorized"). Naïr, tied to a pedestal, weaves together the gossamer strands of a vegetable substance, "crossing, knotting, intertwining the dream-like threads a thousand different ways to merge in a graceful design" (7). At every moment, he is guided by a formula, which he recites from memory while he weaves, composed of phrases that determine his movements and so produce the design itself. Whether or not this strange scene results from the "metagrams" that Roussel apparently used to compose several of his works,<sup>12</sup> it doubtless provides a succinct metaphor for much of his writing: a language composed of phrases worked into a formula (hence, phrases made prosaic and universal) produce the work, in turn, as if by themselves.

Hence, rather than progress in linear order toward some revelation whose fundamental truth could be glimpsed in advance, Roussel's works (as the metagram and the example of *retenu* demonstrate) instead create a "provisional morphological

field...[where] each element of his language is caught up in an innumerable series of contingent events" (*Death and the Labyrinth* 26). And yet, this language, "arranged in a circle within itself, hiding what it has to show" (ibid. 137), is nevertheless revelatory since it offers, in a definitive manner that seems to prefigure and confirm Bataille's edict for a complete openness to the world, a "perspective extended to infinity in the hollow of words" (ibid.). This perspective is not Roussel's, of course, for Roussel is finite. His works are the absolute proof of his finitude: they are composed of sovereign mechanisms that, once set in motion, "already promise the end when they will be repeated, the end which is a willed death and a return to the first threshold" (ibid. 30).

Roussel's works therefore reveal an endless oscillation, in the language of simulation and dissimulation, between those experiences that establish pure finitude and therefore put being into question and those experiences, henceforth possible, that overflow and hollow out the self. For, once the work is set free from the person who wrote it, there can be no revelation of some troubled interiority, nor of an individual and singular truth that nevertheless applies equally to all, but only a sovereign language of "analogies and opposites, resemblances and dissimilarities...where being is made volatile, becomes sketchy [*deviant grisaille*] and ends by disappearing" (ibid. 139-140). The arbitrary restraints that Roussel used to compose his works – homonymic puns, endlessly regressive parentheses, self-generating repetitions – ensured that his oeuvre would outlive its author, but in this language, only Roussel's ghostly double is retained for posterity. And with each repetition of the work, each "suicidal and murderous gesture" (ibid. 163), the double becomes that reflection where the speaking and writing subject must confront its own limits.

On Klossowski ("Prose of Actaeon," 1964)

This experience of the double reappears in a slightly different modality in Foucault's essay on Pierre Klossowski – that is, as an experience of anxiety wrought by the Other as an imperceptible copy through a displacement that conceals itself through the processes of doubling. Reduplication as such represents, after all, the form and function of feigning, which expresses "the untruths of the imagination" (or, in Foucault's misquotation of Marmontel, the "untruths of sentiment and thought") through a repetition that confounds the distinction between Same and Other: between being-as-singular-identity, rooted in a thought of the origin, and that which simulates and dissimulates the origin through a simple, imperious repetition.<sup>13</sup>

So, for instance, in the first part of *Roberte Ce Soir*, Roberte is simultaneously made *l'objet* four times over: 1) in the photograph of her lecture, whose description opens the scene; 2) as the "*object* of a pure spirit" to whom she is named and denounced by Octave (24); 3) as the "object of [the] conversation, of [the] thoughts" of Octave and Antoine (25); and 4) as the object of the images that interrupt and repeat the dialogue – Roberte before her mirror, "attentive and severe sister, unbelieving and austere" (36) and Roberte half nude before the fire, "the object of the judgment, of the intention, of the desire of others" (40). In *La Vocation*, in *Le Soffleur*, and especially here in *Roberte*, Klossowski's language, Foucault says, thus "recasts itself, projects back over what it has just said in the helix of a new narrative...[whereupon] the speaking subject scatters into voices that prompt one another, suggest one another, extinguish one another, [and] replace one another" ("Prose of Actaeon" 134).

Does this language of Klossowski's not therefore feign – that is, render in and

through a language of simulation and dissimulation – an experience similar to that of Nietzsche's as he walked along the shore of lake Silvaplana (an experience that Nietzsche could only point to with a hastily written aphorism and, as though laterally, with the example of Zarathustra)? Experience as such, after all, would free thought from the model and limit of an already-determined being according to the "imperceptible divergence of the same" (ibid. 126) – according, that is, to a forgetting and a kind of *anamnesis* that abolishes identity only so it may return as the possibility of innumerable identities: "at the moment the Eternal Return is revealed to me," Klossowski says, "I cease to be myself *hic et nunc* and am susceptible to becoming innumerable others...[through] a necessary circular movement to which I abandon myself, freeing myself from myself" (*Vicious Circle* 58).

Klossowski thus writes from and toward an experience that is similar in form and effect to the labyrinths created by Roussel: an experience rendered, in Foucault's words, through a "repetition which – whether by essential fate or by sovereign will – means the elimination of the self" (*Death and the Labyrinth* 30). But where Roussel's worlds are filled mostly by objects (bizarre machinery, lifeless human tableaux, cages and restraints of different size and composition) Klossowski's work is populated instead by "simulacra men" ("Prose of Actaeon" 129). For Foucault, the feigning of impossible figures in the form of a wholly possible life is appropriate, perhaps even necessary, given the aims of Klossowski's language. After all, "men are much more vertiginous simulacra than the painted faces of the deities. They are utterly ambiguous" (ibid.). How better to feign the impossibility of distinguishing between presence-as-being and that which simulates and dissimulates being than through the proliferation of beings-as-signs (or signs-as-beings)

without model or origin? In Klossowski, men therefore adopt the role of the gods, and as such, they exist through signs that, like the religious images that mark the transubstantiation, indicate presence only through absence. Each, that is, presents "an image dependent on a truth that is always receding" (ibid. 127–128). Hence, identity – for the simulacra men as for the absent gods – can never be assigned; their being is heterogeneous, and they are capable of a complete openness where impossible, ineffable experience flows through them and overflows them.

This special relation of openness and experience is mirrored, too, in Klossowski's *Le Bain de Diane*. If Actaeon could describe his impossible experience, he would require a language analogous to that of Klossowski: what is the speaking subject in the face of a deity whose reasoning can only be madness to man? What could this subject hold for itself or maintain in itself when in thrall to an overwhelming desire, an impossible metamorphosis, and an imminent death? What could this subject speak at all when confronted with the limits of speech, thought, and being? For Foucault, "Klossowski's language is the prose of Actaeon" (ibid. 133), but where Actaeon is silenced by metamorphosis and death, Klossowski's language is capable of maintaining itself in an experience that constantly threatens to dissolve it. Against the limits imposed by the deity, and against the more general limit assigned by identity, Klossowski therefore offers a "transgressive speech" addressed to a pure silence (ibid.). After all, Actaeon transgresses the law and limit of the god through a simple, incredible experience – that of simply witnessing Diana at her bath. The transgression must be punished in turn, and so the hunter is transformed into a stag and made silent:

And though she would fain have had her arrows ready, what she had she took up,

the water, and flung it into the young man's face. And as she poured the avenging drops upon his hair, she spoke these words foreboding his coming doom; "Now you are free to tell that you have seen me all unrobed – if you can tell." (Ovid 3.186–193)

In Ovid especially, this silencing is emphasized because it provides the tragic dimension of the myth: silent, Actaeon cannot call out to his hounds, who take him for a stag and who hunt and devour him. In Klossowski, on the other hand, the transgression occurs not through *seeing* but through *speaking*, in a language that overcomes the false limits that would silence it, in a speech therefore posed against the tragedy of a lost experience. And in this speech, the speaking subject is nothing but the simulacra that compose it and the incredible experience that overwhelms it.

On Blanchot ("Thought of the Outside" 1966)

For Foucault, the "simulacral space" carved out and mapped in the works of Pierre Klossowski represents nothing less than the "still-hidden contemporary locus of literature" (ibid. 134): the anxious and ironic experience of repetition and a simulation that challenges the distinction between Same and Other hence binds together the diverse authors and the diverse essays that compose Foucault's early engagement with literature. And yet, for Foucault, the works of Maurice Blanchot nevertheless stand apart from all the others because they outline, in the most definitive terms, the real possibility of an "experience of the outside" ("Thought of the Outside" 149): an experience wrought by a sovereign language whose function and form mirror the simulations and dissimulations of Roussel and Klossowski in works that nevertheless appear "rootless and without foundation" – in works composed, that is, by "a discourse appearing with no conclusion

and no image...free of any center, unfettered to any native soil; a discourse that constitutes its own space as the outside toward which, and outside of which, it speaks" (ibid. 153).

What are these experiences of the outside, without parallel, that are nevertheless captured by and faithful to this sovereign language? For Blanchot, like Klossowski in particular, they are first discovered through the myth that functions as analogue: cunning Ulysses, for instance, outwits the Sirens, who are reduced to an episode in a life and an adventure that will be recounted forever; and yet, Foucault says, the possibility remains that "behind Ulysses's triumphant narrative, there prevails the inaudible lament of not having listened better and longer, of not having ventured as close as possible to the wondrous voice that might have finished the song" (ibid. 162). Lashed to the mast, Ulysses is both a lesson on the perils of unrestrained desire and, in the face of looming madness, an example of resourcefulness and ingenuity. But an impossible experience is lost to Ulysses as he prevails over the Sirens' song: he has left behind a double who offers, at an otherwise impossible distance and through an impossibly alluring voice, the story of his own life.

The choice and fate of Ulysses are transposed, on the other hand, in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice: even as Orpheus endures "absolute loss and never-ending lament" (ibid.) there yet remains the impossible experience of the stolen glance and the face of Eurydice: "behind Orpheus's laments shines the glory of having seen, however fleetingly, the unattainable face at the very instant it turned away and returned to darkness" (ibid.). These figures of Ulysses and Orpheus are intertwined in Blanchot's writing as the double whose repetitions would destroy its origin and the possibility of an impossible

experience, and so in a work of language where "the gaze of Orpheus acquires the fatal power that sang in the voice of the Sirens" (ibid.).

But myth remains, in Blanchot as in Klossowski, only an analogue and an iconic sign. What, then, is the language faithful to the experience of the outside? In the first place, it is entirely sovereign: there is no subject at its source, nor does it construct and reveal some interior. It is not, in other words, a reflexive language, which "runs the risk of leading the experience of the outside back to the dimension of interiority" and denies the danger and anxiety of this experience in "a description of living that depicts the 'outside' as the experience of the body, space, [and] the limits of the will" (ibid. 152). It is a language, instead, whose "power resides in dissimulation" (ibid. 167) – that is, a language of feigning.

In Blanchot's writing, moreover, feigning is the impossible likeness not of things, nor between people, but rather of that which "lies between them" (ibid. 153). Feigning as such becomes an experience that is contained neither by the brute exteriority of objects nor by the secret interiority of the subject: an experience, in other words, of "encounters [of] the proximity of what is most distant, [of] the absolute dissimulation in our very midst" (ibid.). Writing about Blanchot, Foucault hence describes not simply the fictitious but rather the language proper to feigning, which renders encounters and describes their possibility even while mediating them (in the strictest sense of coming between them; in the sense, described by Nietzsche in his essay on truth and lying, of a sovereign and arbitrary metaphor that overtakes and replaces its object and so comes between an experience and its expression). This language comprises the interstices of experience while nevertheless remaining absolutely necessary to it – hence the "proximity of what is

most distant" – but also the "absolute dissimulation in our very midst," which makes possible by doubling and yet by doubling conceals and dissimulates any "originary" of the experience. Feigning therefore does not "reveal" an interior – it does not consist in "showing the invisible" (ibid.) – but, by deliberately remaining at the level of a doubled language, reveals instead those impossible experiences that cannot be reduced to the structure of being-as-origin: in Foucault's words, it shows "the extent to which the invisibility of the visible" (which is interiority as abiding identity, the structure of being-as-origin, or a human nature) "is invisible" – that is, how interiority might be denied and returned to invisibility in the movement of a dissolution (ibid.).

The double is therefore central to the works of Blanchot. In fiction, an interior is constructed that absorbs and orders the contents of experience according to the fixed characteristics of an identity. In feigning, on the other hand, interiority becomes inaccessible when the double, which is pure exteriority, calls identity into question. The double as such is not a thing in the world but the effect upon being of a sovereign language. To feign is to create this effect: to fashion being-as-sign from the endless streaming of language while nevertheless remaining faithful to this streaming, this constant murmur, by acknowledging its absolute sovereignty:

To lend an ear to the silvery voice of the Sirens, to turn toward the forbidden face that has already concealed itself, is not simply to abandon the world...it is suddenly to feel grow within oneself a desert at the other end of which (but this immeasurable distance is also as thin as a line) gleams a language without an assignable subject, a godless law, a personal pronoun without a person, an eyeless expressionless face, an other that is the same. (ibid. 163)

The double – this "other that is the same," this being-as-sign – constantly threatens to dissolve its origin (feigned through language, the double precedes its origin and carries on indefinitely without it). Soon after Thomas enters the boarding house in Blanchot's *Aminadab*, for example, he is chained to a tired and ailing companion named Dom, whose face is obscured by a second face tattooed over the original. When Dom speaks, Thomas mouths his words, which are "so foreign to any and every truth and at the same time so imperious" (24). In his efforts to find the upper rooms of the boarding house, Thomas is continually accosted by a series of uncanny resemblances – among rooms, among images and objects, among the tenants and the servants. He scrutinizes everything in detail and with great effort, but nothing will yield its secret, and everything remains mysterious. In the end, Thomas is exhausted. As he falls ill and loses the inclination to move or to speak – to inquire of the nature of the boarding house and its inhabitants or even his own fate within it – Dom, now unfettered and healthy, no longer tattooed and in reality bearing a precise resemblance to Thomas, becomes the double who speaks for him. Thomas's final question – "Who are you?" – is addressed in complete darkness to no one.

What, then, is the origin? Confronted as such by the double and the endless streaming of language, only its absolute finitude remains for certain. The origin, in other words, is denied any positive knowledge, but, like Rameau's Nephew, remains in thrall to appearances (the boarding house and its inhabitants are transformed from one moment to the next; Thomas is never certain where he is or who he is speaking with). In the language of feigning, moreover, appearances pile up – each resembling the other, each negating the next, like Klossowski's simulacra; "each reversal seems to point to an

epiphany; but in reality each discovery deepens the enigma, increases the uncertainty, and unveils one element only to veil the relations between all the others" (Foucault, "Prose of Actaeon" 128).

The double nevertheless emerges from the confusing array of appearances as the most immediate and accessible simulation (Thomas, after all, is chained to Dom), but as simulation, the double exists at an inaccessible distance (despite their proximity, Thomas nevertheless mishears Dom's incessant speech). The double and the origin therefore become "powerfully linked by a constant questioning...and by the uninterrupted discourse manifesting the impossibility of responding" ("Thought of the Outside" 165). The origin, in its vain attempt to distill some truth from the interminable signs of feigning – to match each appearance to its real cause and each simulation to an abiding source – is forced to maintain a complete openness. Even as its signs threaten to dissolve the model on which it is based, the double therefore offers an experience that the origin would otherwise deny in advance. This experience neither promises the light of knowledge nor stems from it; rather, like the growing darkness that consumes Thomas's identity, it concerns the limits imposed on experience and the possibility of their transgression. It is, in other words, an experience of the outside.

On Bataille ("Preface to Transgression" 1963)

This play of a non-necessary limit and its transgression, in a language that feigns an impossible similitude, owes much to the philosophy and literature of Georges Bataille. The precursor of Blanchot, Klossowski, and the authors of the *nouveau roman*, Bataille's language most closely resembles that of Sade – the precursor of them all. And apart from the sheer volume of the latter's writing, Bataille's works are entirely similar. Both depict

eroticism in a language derived from, and in apparent service to, "the most clear and simple positive reason" (Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation* 220) – hence, for instance, the simple preface to all of the obscenities that compose *The Story of the Eye*: "we merely took any opportunity to indulge in unusual acts" (4). But as Foucault points out, Bataille's "rigorous language" ("Preface to Transgression" 70) – his comprehensive and placid depiction of an extraordinary eroticism – is not intended to elicit the apparent truth of sexuality. After all, as an aspect of finitude, sexuality had long been confirmed in the "serenity of anthropological truths" as the limit that discloses "the secret of man's natural being" (ibid.). Rather, through an insistent, repetitive description of the aspects and conditions of finitude, Bataille reveals that the limit is neither origin nor foundation: it confirms nothing but itself as limit.

Thus, for instance, Robert, Charles, Eponine, and the unnamed editor of *L'Abbe C* are subject to every kind of impotence: lassitude, torpor, apathy, the abulia of extreme drunkenness, and the "fascination of sleep" (24). *Blue of Noon* begins with the "nauseous carnival" of Dirty and Troppmann in the cellar of a London bar; beset by filth, sickness, perplexity, hiccups, and laughter, they appear as the "grim response to the grimmest of compulsions" (5). Simone and the narrator of *The Story of the Eye* are infatuated with the body's excreta, which they openly elicit at every opportunity. And in all of these works, death and sexuality are everywhere, and everywhere they are linked by the simple fact of finitude: "life is always a product of the decomposition of life" (Bataille, *Death and Sensuality* 55).

Of course, these aspects of finitude need only appear once or twice to establish context or else the weakness and flaws of a character, which ground, in turn, the motives

that normally advance a narrative: unfulfilled desire becomes unbearable and leads, as though naturally, to deception; the drunk and apathetic become poor, and their poverty breeds desperation; sickness, which is abhorrent, leads to death, which is tragic. Such are the devices common to fiction, which are "not meant to be read at the level of their writing or in the specific dimensions of their language" but rather for the "emotion, fear, horror, or pity that words [are] charged to communicate...through their pure and simple transparency" (Foucault, "Language to Infinity" 97). In the language of feigning, on the other hand, these limits are simulated and dissimulated until it they no longer serve as representations. So, for example, the insistent perversity of the characters of *The Story of the Eye* cannot be considered an attribute or characteristic because there is nothing outside or beyond it: it illuminates nothing and refers only to itself. Once again, Bataille's works mirror those of Sade: the "repetitive force of a narration that encounters no interdict" reveals in each the "infinite power of negation that expresses, and then by turns and by a circular experience annuls the notions of man, of God, and of nature" (Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation* 220).

In Bataille's writing, in other words, finitude no longer sustains the functions attributed to it since Kant but becomes instead a simple restriction and limit, its status as such illuminated by "an essential test for a thought that centers on the 'origin'" carried out, in turn, by a language "that comprehends both finitude and being" (Foucault, "Preface to Transgression" 75). Hence the importance, for Bataille, of the image of the eye and of the line without beginning or end that traces the circumference of its globe. The figure of the eye, of course, has long been associated with understanding and knowledge. The eye is the basis of empiricism: its gaze discovers the truth. "The eye

becomes the depositary and source of clarity," Foucault says; "it has the power to bring a truth to light that it receives only to the extent that it has brought it to light; as it opens, the eye first opens on the truth" (*Birth of the Clinic* xiii). But the eye does not simply gaze upon the world to register the truth of what it sees. Rather, insofar as the gaze belongs to the subject-as-origin, it indicates instead the "endless task of absorbing experience in its entirety, and of mastering it" (ibid. xiv). The eye, in other words, represents the "absolute, absolutely integrating gaze that dominates and founds all perceptual experience" (ibid. 165).<sup>14</sup> In Bataille's writing, on the other hand, the knowing eye becomes the unseeing eye, and finitude is transformed from the *a priori* basis of knowledge (finitude as the quantifiable and so as the positive or knowable) to the necessity of non-knowledge (finitude as the requirement for a complete openness). Particularly when the eye is excoriated from the skull and seems merely a token of death, or when it rolls back into the skull in a moment of ecstasy or agony, it becomes both mirror and lamp (Foucault, "Preface to Transgression" 81): upturned or excoriated, the eye nevertheless reflects a pure finitude that is also a critique of all that has been assumed on the basis of that finitude. At the same time, even as light no longer passes through it, the unseeing eye illuminates what in being cannot be reduced to the functions of the subject-as-origin.<sup>15</sup>

In Bataille's writing, the bizarre constellation of the eye, sexuality, death, and the sacred hence mark, in turn, the limits of knowledge, of human nature, and of identity – and in one sordid and violent motion, the idealist, non-necessary limit is profaned and transgressed. After the cleric Don Aminado desecrates the Eucharist, he is murdered by Simone, who inserts his enucleated eye into her own body. This ineffable experience

offers nothing to knowledge but evokes instead a series of questions that cannot be sensibly answered: what does the eye see when it becomes the prop of an obsessed sexuality? What natural limits are traced by such a singular and depraved eroticism? What remains of "the limit of the Limitless" (ibid. 71) when divinity and its signs are thus desecrated? What knowledge of the individual is gained when the "stable, visible, legible basis of death" (*Birth of the Clinic* 196) is displaced by the "mute and exorbitated horror of sacrifice" ("Preface to Transgression" 83)?

What remains, finally, for the subject whose necessary and sacred signs – the tokens of its essential characteristics – are so easily transfigured in a brief experience that cannot be accounted for? Doubtless, in such impossible experiences, and in the "measureless void left behind by the exorbitated subject" (ibid 82), only the confusion of a strict finitude – that is, finitude as the "limitless reign of the Limit" (ibid. 71) – remains.

Of course, as Foucault points out, Bataille remained "perfectly conscious of the possibilities of thought that could be released by [such experiences], and of the impossibilities in which [they] entangled thought" (ibid. 71). Indeed, these experiences of the limit and of transgression, to the extent that they are thought according to and against the finitude of the subject, "are situated in an uncertain context, in certainties that are immediately upset so that thought is ineffectual as soon as it attempts to seize them" (ibid. 73). And yet, for Bataille, more than any other writer discussed in Foucault's early essays, this ineffectuality of thought represents, precisely, the opportunities now available to the subject. Against the figure of man and the Kantian finitude that would secure for the subject an endless accumulation of things to be known, Bataille reveals instead that more strict thought of finitude that marks the necessity of an endless questioning. Such is

Bataille's "Inner Experience," which begins with the happy decree that "he who already knows cannot go beyond a known horizon" (*Inner Experience* 3). Such, in short, is the experience feigned by a language that hollows out the subject so that it might finally accept the new principle of its finitude, which is the pure wonder of *not-knowing*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> On Foucault's revision of his intellectual biography and the omission of his early interest in literature, see Faubion ("Introduction" xiv–xv) and O'Leary (*Foucault and Fiction* 58–59).

<sup>2</sup> On the transcendental subject in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, see also Foucault, "The Subject, Knowledge, and the 'History of Truth'" 45, 49 and "An Historian of Culture" 78. For Foucault's polemical reading of Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski against the dominant approach to philosophy in France (represented, in the mid-twentieth century, by phenomenology and existentialism), see "How an 'Experience Book' is Born" 30–32 and "The Subject, Knowledge, and the 'History of Truth'" 43–46, 48–49.

<sup>3</sup> More precisely, Foucault's first archaeologies attempt to "understand how man had reduced some of his limit-experiences" – and in particular, madness and death – "to objects of knowledge" ("The Subject, Knowledge, and the 'History of Truth'" 71). They also attempt to understand how the validity of these objects in a given field of knowledge (*connaissance*) is correlated with the formation of a determinate subject according to a particular *savoir* – that is, according to the conditions of the possibility for every *connaissance*. Thus, for instance, madness emerges as an object of knowledge at the end of the classical age not according to the subject's essential capacity for organizing its experience of the insane (and thus liberating the hidden but necessary truth of insanity), but rather with the formation of a subject that recognizes itself as rational according to the division between reason and unreason. Similarly, the object of the criminal emerges only with the formation of the juridical subject, the object of economics with that of the

laboring subject, the object of sexuality with that of the desiring subject, and so on. The recognition of the historical constitution of the subject in turn allows Foucault to perform a genealogy defined as a "form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, [and] domains of objects...without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness through the course of history" ("Truth and Power" 118). Here, ridding the subject of its founding function is more than a methodological *a priori* that would allow genealogy to achieve an objective history of thought and to identify the conditions of its possibility. Rather, to the extent that genealogy follows Nietzsche in the analysis of *Herkunft* or descent, it actually "permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 374). In this sense, Foucault's historiographies recover those forgotten experiences (of the self, its apparent limits, its relation to the world) that are irreducible to the founding subject as such, and that herald the possibility of its dissolution by rendering the figure of the self "completely 'other' than itself so that it may arrive at its annihilation, its dissociation" ("How an 'Experience Book' is Born" 31).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. John Rajchman, who argues that Foucault's early work is widely dismissed according to a "dramatic cultural shift" in which, according to Rajchman, Foucault himself participates – to wit, "the passing of a modernist sensibility combined with an alteration in the political self-image of the intellectual" (38). Rajchman, however, overlooks Foucault's persistent concern with the problem of subjectivity in his early literature essays when he argues that "the central questions in our era are not about

commentary, language, and avant-garde art...ours is an era of a politics of documentation, secrecy, and individuality which has made subjectivity our basic problem – our modern problem as political intellectuals" (ibid. 39). See also David Carroll, who argues contra Rajchman that "the disruptive, excessive, transgressive role [Foucault] assigns to a certain poetic or fictional practice of writing...is not just a characteristic of his 'early work,' but a fundamental component of his entire critical production" (108).

<sup>5</sup> The Latin *experiri* is literally "to try" or "to test"; "experience," O'Leary points out, thus derives from "experiment." This relation was apparent in English until the nineteenth century, when the nominal form of experience referred to both a trial or test and to the truth it would confirm. In French, however, this double meaning is still apparent: when Foucault writes *faire une expérience*, O'Leary notes, the phrase can be translated as either "have an experience" or "make an experiment" ("Foucault, Experience, Literature" 19–20).

<sup>6</sup> Rayner's approach is similar, in this sense, to David Carroll's "paraesthetics," where Foucault's early essays serve the "analysis of the conditions of Foucault's critical perspective" in the later historiographies (Carroll 108).

<sup>7</sup> This perhaps explains why O'Leary's interpretation of literature often appears incidental to his reading of Foucault's early work.

<sup>8</sup> As James Faubion points out in his introduction to the second volume of the *Essential Works*, for example, Foucault's "many investigations into avant-gardist art...are intimately related to [his] project," and although "they may not have been an integral part of what the project had become, they nevertheless were its 'ontological preliminary'" (xiv). Faubion makes a similar argument in his general introduction to *Death and the*

*Labyrinth*, where he relates the book on Roussel to both the literature essays and to Foucault's later historiographies (xi–xxii). See also Rayner (pp. 29–30) and Carroll (pp. 77–79, 107–108, 118–129). For an alternative account, see O'Leary ("Foucault's Turn from Literature," especially pp. 104–109).

<sup>9</sup> In the works of Sollers, and Robbe-Grillet, moreover, these figures are "Dreams, madness, folly, repetition, doubling [*le double*], the disruption of time, [and] the return [*le retour*]" ("Debate on the Novel" 72).

<sup>10</sup> To feign is "to conjure up (delusive representations); to picture to oneself, imagine (what is unreal)...to put a false appearance upon; to disguise, dissemble, conceal" (OED).

<sup>11</sup> This is a language of repetition, but not the repetition of (that is, proper to) language, for language is repetition through and through. What is a word, but the conjuring of some thing that already exists elsewhere? But this only applies to things, real or imagined. What of the more abstract elements of language: articles and conjunctions, aspect and tense, number and agreement? Here, too, language is nothing but repetition. The principle underlying each of its elements, as Saussure famously pointed out, is convention: without the possibility of an endless shared repetition, references dissolve, and language becomes absolutely foreign. This principle applies not only to phones and their combination, nor only to words and their relation within the structure of a proposition, but to the proposition itself and to its relation with other propositions (rhetoric, after all, is proof of this last). The repetition central to Foucault's early work is instead like those *heterotopias* found so often in Jorge Luis Borges – to those figures that "secretly undermine language...[and] desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest

the very possibility of grammar at its source" (Foucault, *The Order of Things* xix). These are, more precisely, the figures of a Rousselian language: "like daily language, it repeats incessantly, but the purpose of this repetition is not to gather and pass on" nor is it "to express in a better way what has already been said" (Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth* 46–47); rather, this repetition shatters discursive language, and from its "scattered pieces, inert and shapeless, create[s] the most incredible meanings by leaving them in place" (ibid.).

<sup>12</sup> See *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* 3–4:

I chose two almost identical words (reminiscent of metagrams). For example, *billard* [billiard table] and *pillard* [plunderer]. To these I added similar words capable of two different meanings, thus obtaining two almost identical phrases. In the case of *billard* and *pillard* the two phrases I obtained were:

1. *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard...* [The white letters on the cushions of the old billiard table...]

2. *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard...* [The white man's letters on the hordes of the old plunderer...]

...The two phrases found, it was a case of writing a story which could begin with the first and end with the latter.

On the relation of this method to Roussel's oeuvre, see Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth* 15–30, 32–49.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Deleuze, who argues that repetition is a "necessary and justified conduct only in relation to that which cannot be replaced. Repetition as a conduct and as a point of view

concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities" (*Difference and Repetition* 1). At first glance, repetition as such appears incommensurable with a simulation and a simulacrum that is effective as conduct (as the practice and form of feigning, as a specific mode language that composes a specific literature) precisely because the double is indistinguishable from the origin. And yet, these theories belong to the same thought of repetition, especially with respect to its ironic or critical function: if, for Deleuze, only the singular may be repeated (since that which is exchangeable is simply displaced in a relation of equivalence), singularity itself nevertheless disappears in the circular movement of repetition. Singularity as the precondition of repetition, but also singularity as its own murderer: in repetition, the singular becomes indistinguishable from itself within the cycle of its iterations; the singular folds into itself and becomes non-singular. The death of singularity is also, necessarily, the death of the origin (as an original difference that grounds all subsequent differences) and of identity (which is distinguishable only through difference and within a thought of the origin). In this sense, Foucault writing about Klossowski and literature therefore prefigures Deleuze writing about repetition and difference, a fact that is not at all surprising since both are prefigured by Nietzsche and by "the eternal return [that] has no other sense but this: the absence of any assignable origin" (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 125).

<sup>14</sup> The eye and its gaze are therefore intimately linked to the transcendental reflection Foucault outlines in *The Order of Things*, where "the conditions of possibility of the objects of experience are identified with the conditions of possibility of experience itself" (265). Reflection as such moreover establishes the gaze as an intermediary between the

subject as both source and object of knowledge, as between, for instance, the pairing of observer and observed in psychoanalysis (and through a practice typical of all the human sciences), which "double[s] the absolute gaze of the watcher with the indefinite monologue of the surveyed – thus keeping in place the old asylum structure of a non-reciprocal gaze, but balancing it out, in a non-symmetrical reciprocity, with the new structure of a language without response" (*History of Madness* 488).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Barthes's reading of Bataille, which is entirely consonant with the interpretation here and that associates the metaphor of the eye with the sovereignty of language, but also connects a sovereign language as such to the being of literature. How, Barthes asks, "can an object have a story?...[I]t can pass from *image* to *image*, in which case its story is that of a migration, the cycle of the *avatars* it passes through, far removed from its original being" ("Metaphor of the Eye" 119). For Barthes, that is, the object of the eye is repeated in form and circumstance, and its different qualities (globular, wet, luminous or darkened) form a closed circle of metaphor without origin through images that are pure simulacra. But the question remains, to what end? On one hand, "It is a case of signification without a thing signified" (ibid. 123) – that is, a demonstration of the possibility of a purely sovereign language composed of images (without motivation or source) arranged in a circle. On the other hand, this language is transgressive: "the transgression of values that is the avowed principle of eroticism is matched by – if not based on – a technical transgression of the forms of language" (ibid. 125-126): at the level of its form (and independent, even, of what it expresses beyond the circular image of the eye and its circulation as metaphor) Bataille's work therefore "transforms all

experience into language that is *askew* (*devoyé*, to borrow [a] Surrealist word); this is literature" (127).

## Chapter Two: Feigning and Fabulation

### "Language to Infinity": Foucault on Death, Reduplication, and the Being of Literature

Finitude in itself is multiform, yet every form of finitude is presided over by the invariable limit of death. Wherever there is perception or desire or speech or memory there is also a design (necessarily limited and condemned to fail in advance) to preserve the finitudes themselves: to prolong some aspect of life and to ward off death. Yet among the forms of finitude, only language in its sovereignty is capable of maintaining death at an indefinite distance (Foucault, "Language to Infinity" 90–91) – not simply because the word conveys experience beyond the confines of individual life and memory but because language alone circumscribes death by addressing itself to it and by speaking endlessly about it. Thus, in a "task doubtless as old as the word" (ibid. 89), the ancient bards speak of the *nosoi* who bring pestilence and disease, the *kêres* who bring violence and murder, the *moirai* who measure out the duration of life, and the *theoi panôlethros* who bring life to an end. "To speak as a sacred orator warning of death, to threaten men with this end beyond any possible glory," Foucault says, "was also to disarm death and promise immortality" (ibid. 94).

Of course, this promise was reserved for the half-gods and heroes in the discrete and enclosed narrative of their adventure. And if the epic heroes averted death because their life was exceptional and their exploits worth recounting, their narratives nevertheless remained susceptible to a number of practical limits: the traditions that sustained the hero's life in myth would eventually die out, and the record of his or her adventure might become lost or else miscopied or perverted in translation. Those who spoke of and against death were therefore required to create a work of language and to

free this work from the individual who spoke, lived, and died. Some aspects of the work – the particular sequence of the adventure, the participants and their various roles – were no doubt preserved by rhetorical and mnemonic devices (the *hysteron proteron*, epithets, and other formulae) and by the familiar rhythms of the poetic structure itself. But the work achieved complete sovereignty only when it folded back into a "self-enclosed reflection" of itself (ibid.): in *The Odyssey*, the blind bard Demodocus, divinely inspired, recounts to Ulysses his exploits at Troy, and in the land of the dead, the spirit of Teiresias reveals the perils Ulysses must yet overcome. When the work calls attention to itself as a work and folds back upon itself as such, it creates, in Foucault's words, "a virtual space where speech discovers the endless resourcefulness of its own image, and where it can represent itself as already existing behind itself, already active beyond itself, to infinity" (ibid. 91).

The reflection upon death, in this sense, becomes "one of the most essential accidents of language" (ibid.) since the reduplications that arise from this reflection reveal the possibility and the necessity of a language that is completely sovereign.<sup>1</sup> For a long time, Foucault says in *The Order of Things*, language would retain this sovereignty; the functions proper to it, a propos the general domain of thought and experience, would broaden and proliferate until, by the end of the Renaissance, the order of language corresponded precisely to the order of things. And yet, if language was required to organize experience and represent thought to itself – and if knowledge, in the Classical age, was constituted entirely by "representations ordered in discourse" (Foucault, "The Order of Things" 264) – the isomorphic relation that arose between language and things nevertheless deprived language of its specificity and thus of its originating function.

Language, henceforth, was entirely dispersed, and in its absence, Foucault argues, the figure of man in his finitude first appears: a figure "who is as much one who lives, who speaks, and who works, as one who experiences life, language, and work, as one finally who can be known to the extent that he lives, speaks, and works" (ibid.). At the same time, language was no longer required to maintain death at a distance because language and death, along with the other forms of finitude, now belonged to the same empirical order: each formed a positivity and was therefore circumscribed and entirely determined by the particular knowledge it offered of the figure of man. "For Classical thought," Foucault argues, "finitude had no other content than the negation of the infinite" (*Birth of the Clinic* 197), but by the end of the Classical age, finitude provided the positive content that allowed the figure of man to assume "the critical role of limit and the founding role of origin" (ibid.).

The anthropological thought that appeared at the end of the eighteenth century thereby displaces language: the structure of finitude that sustained this thought (and that no doubt sustains it still) was incapable of recognizing a language that remained sovereign in relation to the figure of man while nevertheless marking its necessary limits. And yet, Foucault argues, "at the moment when language, as spoken and scattered words, becomes an object of knowledge," it also reappears "in a strictly opposite modality" within the reduplicative structure of the work, "where it can possess neither sound nor interlocutor, where it has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being" (*The Order of Things* 327). And if the sovereignty of language first emerged in the attempt to maintain death at a distance, it now carries out an opposite

task: arranged within the work, the question of language is posed precisely against the figure of man in his finitude.

Thus, at the end of the eighteenth century, Hölderlin presents the death of Empedocles as "the last mediator between the mortals and Olympus" – a death that marks in turn the "end of the infinite on earth" (*Birth of the Clinic* 198) and the return of finitude as a stark, menacing limit. In this space defined by the withdrawal of God and the frailty of man, Hölderlin reveals, on one hand, that a profound absence lies at the heart of language (that language appears without any source), and on the other, that language "can be transformed into a work only if, in ascending to its proper discourse, it directs its speech towards this absence" ("The Father's No" 19). At the same time, but in a completely different modality, Sade establishes the limitlessness of language in works that are absolutely comprehensive and yet "curiously double" ("Language to Infinity" 96). *Justine, Juliette, The 120 Days of Sodom*, along with the philosophical dialogues and moral fables therefore outline "everything, before Sade and in his time, that could have been thought, said, practiced, desired, honored, flouted, or condemned in relation to man, God, the soul, the body, sex, nature, priests, or women" (ibid). These meticulous representations, Foucault argues, are not merely a pastiche of what has already been thought or said, nor are they simply an attempt at "breaking prohibitions" (ibid.); rather, in Sade's works, they are designed to be "repeated, combined, dissociated, reversed, and reversed again" and to exhibit "all the branchings, insertions, and overlappings that are deduced from the human crystal in order to give birth to great, sparkling, mobile, and infinitely extendable configurations" (ibid.). The works of Sade hence demonstrate, in the first place, that that which might be based on "human nature," what can be said of it and

according to it, in fact extends indefinitely; knowledge of man as such becomes meaningless, succumbing to a great and overarching *si omnia nulla* fallacy: if everything, then nothing. But it also proves that language – even the most attentive language in service to a strict rationality – can be extended to a limit where it overwhelms its object. Freed from the "sovereignty of the name" and the demands of representation, language is "uttered at last for its own sake" in the reduplicative work where it emerges "in all its brute being as a thing" (*The Order of Things* 130).

Even if the writings of Sade and Hölderlin remain anomalous in the field of literature, or if their truth was reduced to an overwrought and alienated expression of madness (in the case of Hölderlin) or the declaration of a singular perversity (in the case of Sade), they nevertheless form part of a tradition, Foucault says, that persists in a more or less unbroken line from the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. The works that fall within this tradition are varied; they moreover appear "foreign" to Western culture and remain, in a sense, "afloat" within it (Foucault, "Thought of the Outside" 151). Yet each carries out an identical task, recovering language from its impoverished role in anthropological thought by revealing its real and enduring sovereignty. Flaubert, for example, recounts the temptations of St. Anthony in a book whose central element is the book whose images produce the temptations of St. Anthony (Foucault, "Afterword to *The Temptation of St. Anthony*"). Similarly, Bouvard and Pécuchet "occupy themselves by copying books, copying their own books, copying every book," perhaps even copying *Bouvard et Pécuchet* itself (ibid. 121). These forms of reduplication, Foucault argues, allow Flaubert to transform the "fleeting words" of the individual who speaks and who writes into the "enduring and distant murmur" of an

autonomous language (ibid.). At the same time, but in a different modality, Mallarmé reveals that "the being of language is the visible effacement of the one who speaks" ("Thought of the Outside" 166) by reducing himself within his own work to an "executant in a pure ceremony of the Book in which discourse would compose itself" (*The Order of Things* 333). And Roussel, at the turn of the twentieth century, "plays with the subject that speaks, with his repetitions and divisions" (*Death and the Labyrinth* 25) according to a "double language super-imposed on itself" (ibid. 102) and a narrative structure that "repeats the mechanism that creates the narrative" (ibid. 55).

Following Roussel, this tradition achieves its fullest and most coherent expression with the language of feigning. In the works of Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski and in the *nouveau roman* of Sollers and Robbe-Grillet, feigning establishes the absolute panoply of language by bending the linear lines of narrative discourse into a circle where iteration becomes the possibility of endless reiteration and where representation gives way simulation and dissimulation. The narrator of Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*, for example, recounts the melody of a song whose abrupt transitions and repetitions mirror the peculiar structure of the surrounding narrative (63), the scenes and objects of which (the pouring of a drink, the killing of a centipede, the glasses, the chairs, the writing desk and its contents) reoccur outside of any temporal sequence, apparently apropos of nothing, until the narrative and its source fade away before a procession of images with neither end nor origin: a "progression of names over a surface," as Barthes says, "which deposit a patina of tentative identifications, no single term of which could stand by itself for the presented object" ("Objective Literature" 12). Which veranda, for example, is the original veranda? Which centipede? Which writing table? Which chair? It cannot be the first iteration of

any of these because they are all introduced by the map placed at the outset of the work – that is, by an obvious reproduction of a space and of objects that doubtless have never existed in this exact place or in this precise configuration. Within the narrative frame, moreover, every scene occurs prior to its introduction in the temporal sequence of events; in this sense, each iteration (of a scene, of an object) is already a reiteration.<sup>2</sup>

This same effect is achieved in the early works of Blanchot whenever their content is doubled across aspects of the narrative. So, for instance, the characters of *Thomas the Obscure* are transformed, in each section of text, into whatever the narrative lands upon as theme and scene: when Thomas swims, "his limbs [give] him the same sense of foreignness as the water in which they [are] tossed," and Thomas confuses himself with the sea (8). In a subsequent fragment, Thomas is surrounded by absolute darkness; when he opens his eyes, he is presented with a "nocturnal mass which he vaguely perceive[s] to be himself" (14). Deprived of his senses, he can nevertheless reach into this darkness and touch his own thought, which exists apart from him and is composed entirely of the description of his circumstances. And when, in a later fragment, Thomas reads a book, the words on the page turn to consider their reader, deciphering him in turn and incorporating him into their own text: "for hours he remained motionless, with, from time to time, the word 'eyes,' in place of his eyes: he was inert, captivated and unveiled" (26). In a similar and perhaps more obvious mode, the eponymous hero of *The Last Man* speaks in "great sentences that seem infinite, that roll with the sound of waves, an all-encompassing murmur" (2), yet what the last man speaks, in the end, is the narrative itself as it accounts for the last man: "Later, he asked himself how he had

entered the calm. He couldn't talk about it with himself. Only joy at feeling he was in harmony with the words: 'Later, he...'" (89).

These figures of repetition, Foucault argues, are often "adjacent, fragile, and slightly monstrous" ("Language to Infinity" 93) and as such, they appear, at least superficially, to function at "the level of guile or entertainment" (ibid. 92). It is possible, too, that they are altogether unintentional or else concealed in the narrative, like the letter in Diderot's *The Nun* that tells of its own history or the tale within *The Thousand and One Nights* that tells of Scheherazade telling the tales of *The Thousand and One Nights* (ibid. 93). And yet, for Foucault, these same figures reveal, on one hand, that "the very power of illusion" becomes most apparent with the reduplication of language, and on the other, that "the reduplication of language, even if it is concealed, constitutes its being as a work, and the signs that might appear from this must be read as ontological indications" (ibid.). Language arranged within the work, after all, reveals the sovereignty of language; a language cannot be singular or sovereign as such without having, at the same time, a being that is specific to it and thus an ontology that could be deduced from it.

But the being of the work is not limited to this relation that it establishes with language. Rather, the work, by simple virtue of its being – or rather, as a condition of it – necessarily carries out a critical task: insofar as it is "dedicated to language" (insofar as the duplications proper to it, in other words, reveal language in its sovereignty), the work, Foucault argues,

gives prominence, in all their empirical vivacity, to the fundamental forms of finitude. From within language experienced and traversed as language, in the play of its possibilities extended to their furthest point, what emerges is that man has

"come to an end" and that, by reaching the summit of all possible speech, he arrives not at the very heart of himself but at the brink of that which limits him; in that region where death prowls, where thought is extinguished, where the promise of the origin interminably recedes (*The Order of Things* 418).

What remains for the subject when the reason accorded by the figure of man and all that is assumed on the basis of this reason is put in doubt? What remains when the necessary limits imposed by finitude can no longer be sidestepped by *a priori* categories of perception and when, as a result, the subject is no longer capable of ordering experience in advance? The answers to these questions are probably less important than the possibility of asking them – a possibility that arises precisely when language, arranged within the work, is shown to originate from elsewhere, when it undermines the apparent conditions of experience (by warping time into a circle, by compromising unity and totality, by making possibility irrelevant by making everything possible), and when it renders incredible experiences that overwhelm the experiencing subject. When the positivities supplied by the figure of man are no longer endowed with "transcendental value" (ibid. 270) – and when the *Menschenkenntniss* no longer maps out the space where the "extenuated truth which is the truth of truth keeps vigil and gathers itself" (*Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* 123) – then finitude reappears simply as itself: as so many forms of negation, as an array of limits unified by their simple and inescapable function as limit.

Moreover, if the "precritical analysis of what man is in his essence" determines, since Kant, "everything that can, in general, be presented to man's experience" (*The Order of Things* 372), then the dissociation of the figure of man from the subject and the

reintroduction of the subject's finitude as the negation of its various faculties necessarily (perhaps paradoxically) opens up the conditions of experience itself: whatever aspects or objects of experience could not previously be admitted according to the subject's ordering functions now return to the subject according to the conditions of *not-knowing*. Pursuant to Bataille's argument that "thought is itself the annihilation of thought" (*Unfinished System* 199) – and according to Heidegger's argument that radical finitude corresponds precisely to radical openness (Hatab, "Ethics and Finitude") – the conditions of *not-knowing* in turn make necessary a constant questioning: hollowed out through a sovereign language, beset by the limits of life and by the consummation of life at the limit of death, and confronted by an experience that originates from the outside and that constantly threatens to overwhelm it, the subject asks (without hope of an abiding response), What can I know? What should I do? What can I hope for?

#### Fabulation as Feigning: On the Criticism of Life

If, for Foucault, certain forms of reduplication allow the "single stringed instrument" of language to "stand upright as a work" and in turn reveal the work in its very being ("Language to Infinity" 92) – and if these same reduplications (whether obscure or obvious) appear in the oldest extant texts of Western literature and persist, in one form or another, throughout modernity – then the question remains, where else might this literature be found? Do works of language whose reduplications reveal their being *as literature* not persist beyond the French avant-garde of the mid-twentieth century – beyond the arcane pages of *Acéphale* and *Tel Quel* or beyond the singular example of the *nouveau roman*? Doubtless, we have not yet reached a point where literature as such might disappear – a literature, that is, whose outré eroticism, whose serious use of myth

and fable, and whose very form constitute an experience of the outside. Do we not, in fact, find this same content, this same form, and indeed this same function carried out in works, already well-known in our culture, of a certain strand of experimental writing represented by Robert Coover, John Barth, and Donald Barthelme? Robert Scholes, after all, joined these authors some time ago under the figure of "fabulation," which describes works that present some aspect of a world "clearly and radically discontinuous" from the world of common experience (*Structural Fabulation* 29). So, for instance, Barthelme's *City Life* and Coover's *Spanking the Maid* offer a distorted experience of time and perspective; Coover's *The Public Burning* and Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* refashion historical documents, figures, and events; and Barth's *Chimera* and Barthelme's *Snow White* recreate the fantastic worlds of myth and fable. In each of these cases, to fabulate is not only to recount in discourse – *fābulārī* – but rather, as the relation to fable and myth suggests, to recount the *fābulōsus* – the astonishing and incredible. Fabulation is not merely concerned, then, with the "representation of an action" in the manner of realism but rather with the deliberate (that is, readily apparent) fabrication of an "imaginative construct" (Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* 24). The "fabulist dimension" as such is therefore concerned entirely with "unreality" (ibid. 75).<sup>3</sup>

According to Scholes, moreover, the fabrication of an unreal and radically discontinuous world allows for the "distortion of habitual perspective" (*Structural Fabulation* 88) and therefore demonstrates, in turn, the possibility of literature to "function once again as a criticism of life with a validity beyond the merely personal" (ibid. 11). This capacity for general critique is most apparent, for Scholes, in the connection of fabulist works to the fable and its didactic function: whatever the

fabulation presents as discontinuous or incredible is nevertheless intended to "return to reality" and to bear upon "actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy" (*Fabulation and Metafiction* 124). Fabulation, in this sense, is purely allegorical: while the familiar symbols of the fable might be distorted or falsified, they nevertheless offer "fictional ideas of human essences" (ibid. 123). Fabulation is also, therefore, purely mimetic since "the order of fiction," for Scholes, "reflects the conditions of being which make man what he is" (ibid 106). As the creator of this allegorical work of revelation, the fabulator therefore demonstrates a remarkable authority, rendering incredible experiences and yet returning to an assumption about the ethical that is necessarily posited in advance. For Scholes, in other words, the fabulator reveals the truth of what has already been given to knowledge in the form of those "ultimate values" and "true truths" that derive from "human essence" (ibid. 119–120) according, in turn, to an authoritative ability to "reach beyond reality to truth, beyond the immediate and contemporary to those aspects of the real which will endure and recur" (ibid. 15).

An interpretation of fabulist literature according to the notion of feigning would of course begin from a radically different set of assumptions about the mimetic value of the work, the relation of the work to its author, the functions of the work in relation to its form, and the form of the work in relation to the conditions of experience. To feign, after all, is precisely to fable. *Fable* derives from *fābula*, which is derived in turn from *fārī* (to speak), whose past participle is *fātum* – that which has been spoken, hence fate or doom. The fable, as feigning, is always therefore the recounting of a discourse that, like the judgement of the fates, has already unfolded – that is, a doubled language. Thus doubled, the origin of the discourse is simulated, dissimulated, and lost: even as speech, the fable

must come from elsewhere, and by virtue of this sovereignty, it carries out the critical functions of feigning. Hence, if works of fabulation indeed offer a criticism of life, then they do so only to the extent that their reduplicative form reveals that life is marked through and through by the limits of life, that an experience remains incredible only to the extent that its contours and its implications are not known in advance, and that an experience cannot remain incredible as such if it is subsequently absorbed into the naïve categories of "human nature." Works of fabulation offer a criticism of life to the extent, moreover, that they are freed from their author and stand autonomous, not so that they may return to offer some fundamental truth according to the conditions of *mimesis* but rather so they might outline, on one hand, the strict limits of speech, memory, desire, and death – in short, the very "incomprehensibility of the world" (Legros 110) – and, on the other hand, the necessity, which results from these limits, for complete openness to the pure possibility of experience.<sup>4</sup>

On The Limits of Life: Closure and Openness in Coover's *Spanking the Maid*  
and *Briar Rose*

Considered as works of feigning, Coover's *Spanking the Maid* and *Briar Rose* form a diptych, the former establishing knowledge as a limit *qua* closure, the latter deriving from an array of inescapable limits the possibility and necessity for a complete openness. In the first work, which is composed of thirty-nine iterations of the same scene, there can be no question of an origin (of perspective, of intention, of language), nor even of beginning *in medias res*. In the opening scene, the maid enters: "deliberately, gravely, without affectation," she advances "sedately and discretely" into the master's room (9). After passing the master's "empty rumped bed and cast-off nightclothes," she hesitates

and re-enters (ibid.). Once more, "deliberately and gravely, without affectation," she advances through the door; "sedately and discretely," she passes again the "empty rumped bed and cast-off nightclothes" (ibid.). Now at the window, she draws the curtains and "gazes for a moment into the garden, quite prepared to let the sweet breath of morning blow in," only to enter the room once more, but now for the first time (10). The reduplications of language in *Spanking the Maid* are myriad; they occur at the level of the scene, as above, and across its iterations, such that the latter appear as either a few moments isolated from successive days and rendered similar by routine or as the same moments reoccurring through language arranged in a circle. In either case, the iterations of the scene do not merely resemble one another; rather, they are feigned simulations that unfold, like the images of René Magritte or the procession of objects in Roussel or Robbe-Grillet, "in series that have neither beginning nor end, that can be followed in one direction as easily as another, that obey no hierarchy, but propagate themselves from small differences among small differences" (Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe* 44).

It is impossible, then, to isolate from within the scene of Coover's work an original iteration – a first sequence of action or reflection that precedes and causes the rest. "How did it all begin," the master wonders; "was it destiny, choice, generosity?" (42). His question moreover mirrors that of the maid, posed in a previous iteration: "when, she wants to know...did all this really begin? When she entered? Before that? Long ago? Not yet?" (22). In vain, the maid seeks the origin of her predicament, a first event that explains the necessary sequence of all the others and that would deliver her from their interminable reiteration – hence, her "riddle of genesis," which distinguishes between change and condition and which she solves according to the invariability of

condition (and thus the fleeting nature of change), the invariability of change (and thus the provisional nature of condition), or the exact correspondence of condition and change as "coeval and everlasting" (97). The maid, in other words, is incapable of settling, even provisionally, on a first cause: she enters the master's room as she always has (perhaps as she always will), forever also opening the window, always committing some arbitrary error, never quite fulfilling the duty assigned her, and so never escaping punishment.

And yet, there are, of course, some variations among the renditions of this scene. They occur, on one hand, at the level of content; in some instances, for example, the maid has already entered the master's room and opened the window, and so she begins the iteration reflecting upon her duty (or else failing to carry it out), preparing for the master's lessons, or cowering in expectation of punishment. A more prominent variation occurs, however, at the level of perspective, which alternates, more or less evenly, between master and maid. Yet here, too, the difference between Same and Other – a difference that maintains the singular origin of identity – becomes confused and obscured. The master, perhaps predictably, is in thrall to the objects of duty and ritual, including, most importantly, the object of the maid; he is also, in this sense, beholden to these same objects and bound by the solicitude that the ritual assumes (toward the instruction manuals and the will of God, upon which the authority of the ritual depends; toward the maid, for whose benefit, he claims, the ritual exists). The scene therefore evokes the old problem of the master and the slave, where the identity and status of the former depends entirely upon the status and disposition of the latter. This confusion of identity – or rather, the refusal of a singular and original identity – is moreover mirrored at the narrative level whenever the apparent perspective of the iteration is unclear. Thus,

in the fourteenth rendition of the scene, the maid's interior dialogue appears within the structure of the master's narrative sequence,<sup>5</sup> while in the following rendition, the obverse occurs, and the master's thoughts are presented while the maid attempts to perform her duties.<sup>6</sup> The alternating perspective from which the scene is presented and the confusion of this perspective – which results precisely from the expectations created by the pattern of alternation – moreover resembles the narrative form and effect of Flaubert's *Temptation of St. Anthony*: "developed from one figure to another, a wreath is constructed which links the characters in a series of knots independent of their proper intermediaries, so that their identities are gradually merged and their different perceptions blended into a single dazzling sight" (Foucault, "Afterword to *The Temptation of St. Anthony*" 112).

Like the experience of the outside feigned by Blanchot or that of the double feigned by Klossowski, the confusion and loss of origin in *Spanking the Maid*, which "undoes every figure of interiority in pure dispersion" (Foucault, "Thought of the Outside" 156), moreover produces a profound anxiety. Throughout the iterations of the scene, the master betrays a fear of the limits that beset him, on one hand, and all that such limits render unknowable on the other. Thus, he dreams of "lechers and ordure and tumors and bottomless holes" (89). He dreams, too, of a lesson he can never completely recall and whose subject shifts, according to the limits of memory and the sovereign being of language, across a range of homonymic puns.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the master and maid alike worry that their interminable situation perhaps results from "some kind of failure of communication" (59, 65) or a fundamental "loss of syntax" (65) – despite their shared conviction that the maid's daily routine is, in fact, perfectible and despite the master's precise adherence to the manuals, which outline the type and severity of the maid's

punishment should she fail to perform her duties without error. That these punishments appear unavoidable and should always take the form of spanking, with its erotic and violent overtones, moreover points to the twin limits of rage and passion. Even though the master explicitly recognizes that the latter represents a kind of infirmity – a "fever of the mind, which leaves [him] weaker than it found [him]" (20) – he is nevertheless moved by the maid's slightest misdeeds or imperfections to a rage that "[turns] to ash with its uncontrollable heat his gentler intentions" (ibid).

The master is made anxious by the outside world, the world beyond the room where he and the maid carry out their routine, precisely to the extent that the outside represents the "natural confusion and disorder [of] a world without precept or invention" (71). And yet, confined to the room, the master is still beset by the limits of desire, speech, and memory: the outside cannot be so easily dispelled. Hence the importance, for both master and maid, of duty and ritual, which act against the disorder of the world, the limits of life, and thus the threat and anxiety of the outside by effecting a form of artificial closure. The maid's "natural eagerness to please" (19) and her "clear-browed self-assurance achieved only by long and generous devotion to duty" (17–18) are in fact neither natural, nor generous, but taught – imparted from the master according in turn to the duty that marks his status as master. The inescapable punishment of the maid is moreover required, the master teaches, to ensure that she fulfills every aspect of her duty without error. That punishment is necessary as such (and that it takes an obligatory form) is also inculcated by the maid as natural: God has ordained it and "Mother Nature designed [its] proper place" (64); hence, "every animal is governed by it, understands and fears it, and the fear of it keeps every creature in its own sphere, forever preventing (as he

has taught her) that natural confusion and disorder that would instantly arise without it" (63-64).

And yet, the identity of the maid and the master is never entirely secure, nor is the authority or acquiescence required of their relationship. The master is no longer young, and his mind is "clouded by old obscurities" (86); language streams over and beyond his examples and maxims, and their message is confused and lost. In thrall, moreover, to the bloody welts that appear when he spans the maid, he often forgets the precise nature of her offense or else the object of his lesson. Despite her apparent willingness and her devotion to duty, the maid, too, recognizes that "something is missing. Some response, some enrichment, some direction" (28). Like the master, her mind is also "clouded with old obscurities" (55) and her will diminished whenever she recognizes the inadequacy of the master's lessons, of her routine, of her punishment. Daily she removes the bed sheets to find some inexplicable object – a dried bull's pizzle, used razor blades, a dead mouse in a trap, broken toys, mirrors, torn and bloodied clothing, a wilted flower, a frog. And so, "no matter how much fresh air and sunlight she lets in, there is always this little pocket of lingering night which she has to uncover" (40) – something that refuses explanation, that cannot be known, and that remains incredible. As a form of closure, then, the routine is never wholly effective: whatever the wisdom of the master's lessons, whatever the punishment meted out, the outside seeps in, disrupts the scene, and prompts another iteration. And though master and maid alike hope that the scene might change – that the maid might rest for a day, that the master might walk through the garden – they nevertheless adhere faithfully to the duty and routine that closes off the possibilities of experience, the master returning to his confused dreams and the "art of the rod" (81), his

maid opting in the end for "this trivial round, these common tasks, and a few welts on her humble sit-me-down" (83).

If *Spanking the Maid* feigns a lesson in the folly of closure, then *Briar Rose*, with which it bears more than a superficial resemblance, outlines instead the limits of life that make questioning and openness necessary. Hence, for the princess of *Briar Rose*, there can be neither knowledge nor closure: enchanted, asleep, and deprived of memory, she dreams "of abandonment and betrayal, of lost hope, of the self gone astray from the body, the body forsaking the unlikely Self" (2). And yet, of every dream and every thought (and indeed, for the dreamer, there can be no difference between thinking and dreaming, between dream and experience), there is "no residue, save echoes of an old crone's tales" (84). Because the princess forgets, everything must in turn reoccur: the prick and pain of the spindle, the arrival of the prince and innumerable other princes, and the lessons from the witch who recounts to the princess the tale of her own life in myth and fable. Confined for a century, moreover, to the living death of the dream, she is simultaneously that abhorrent figure "who has renounced the natural functions" and who "invades the dreams of the innocent" (13), but also "the magical bride, of all good the bell and flower" (ibid.). Though her story is set in fable, it is nevertheless simulated and dissimulated through every recounting: she is sometimes brutalized by thieves or servants or animals; her suitors often fail to wake her; at other times, she is robbed and murdered. Hence denied any origin or an abiding identity – denied, even, the corporeal unity of the body – the princess's "departed self" becomes an "unkempt army marauding elsewhere to a scatter of confused intentions" (2), and her desire for integrity (for that homogenous and permanent identity, guaranteed by fate, that awaits her awakening) "is itself fragmented and wayward" (ibid.).

Of course, in the world of the dream, the princess is freed from the limits of time and the body; freed, too, of memory, she is moreover divested of "knowledge and its ignorant presumption" (Foucault, *History of Madness* 23). Yet the dream, which has always been linked to illusion and error, nevertheless imposes the more profound limit of delirium, and the princess's century-long enchantment becomes the imposition of a prolonged and irredeemable madness. Oscillating thus between freedom and limit, she is confined, on one hand, to the castle that houses the bed upon which she dreams, and on the other, to the dream-castle whose scene, like that of Blanchot's *Aminadab*, is transformed without apparent cause from one moment to the next. The princess is never certain where she is, and the castle's other inhabitants appear, transform, and disappear. Like Blanchot's Thomas, she is therefore required to maintain a constant openness toward an experience that threatens to overwhelm her. And, like Thomas, this openness manifests itself as a constant questioning. Hence, of herself, she repeatedly demands, "who am I? What am I?" (11, 12, 14, 17, 44). Of the witch's endless tales, she questions every detail, and of the witch herself – her only companion in this oneiric world – she constantly asks, "have I heard this story before?" (18, 23, 27, 41). These are, precisely, the incessant questions of *not-knowing*: no response can conclude them, and every question must be asked and re-asked according to a vigilant openness that, despite the princess's enduring sleep, in fact resembles a kind of "interminable wakefulness" (84).

The prince of *Briar Rose*, on the other hand, is completely awake. Like the characters of *Spanking the Maid*, he recognizes the allure and threat of the outside and the protection, however imperfect, of a knowledge and a quest that closes off its possibilities. Compelled by virtue, honor, and the "love of love" (46), he sets out to deliver the

princess from her century-long sleep, but also to "tame mystery" and to "provoke a confrontation with the awful powers of enchantment itself" (1). As long as his way remains unbarred and the successful conclusion of his task still possible, he is unconcerned with the limits of life or with the mercurial nature of identity – even if, like the maid and her master, he often has his doubts. Despite his "firm of sense of vocation" (21), he wonders, for instance, how his adventure began or if the adventure is, in fact, his at all. He recognizes, too, that he is either fated to disenchant the princess – in which case, he is that fabled prince whose story has already been told and retold – or else he has not been chosen for this task at all, but is rather destined to molder and die among the brambles. And he realizes, finally, that whatever the outcome of the adventure, he is compelled less by heroism than by desire, that limit of "sweet delirium" and "infamous cruelty" (4) whose consummation, he expects, would exceed "the imagination of ordinary mortals" (15). In this sense, the adventure itself thus describes a "commitment to the marvelous" and a desire for the incredible (9).

From the outset, the prince therefore entertains a certain openness. And as darkness sets in and he loses his way, now completely embraced by the briars and surrounded by the clattering bones of his countless predecessors, he begins to consider "the vanity of all heroic pursuits" and the "dreadful void" that no adventure can conceal (45). Transfixed by the enchanted vines that surround the castle, the prince becomes as motionless as the dormant object of his quest. Left with only his imagination and the delirium of pain, he begins to dream; in dreaming, he is freed from the briars and now wanders through an enchanted castle, which is not the castle that houses the princess, but rather that of the princess's dream. And so the prince's scene is transformed from one moment to the next:

rooms move or disappear (he can never find the princess's sleeping chamber) or else he is delivered by some sorcery to parts of the castle that remain otherwise hidden. But the scene is also repeated, "like a single dream redreamt" (76), and in repetition, rendered strange and so dissimulated: "nothing at this castle is simply what it is, everything here has a double life" (69). The parallel between the prince and princess's experience of confusion, finitude, and dissolution now grows and is also doubled: the experience is precisely the same. Indeed, the prince, in his delirium, imagines life as an enduring dream, "so strangely timeless and insubstantial" (25) – a life that is precisely his life, that is beset by so many limits, real and imagined, and whose derangement can be confronted only with that openness made possible by the vagaries of the dream itself.

The narrative structure of *Briar Rose* thus mirrors that of *Spanking the Maid* and oscillates between the unchanging scene of the princess who dreams of all possible princes and the prince who dreams the oneiric world of the princess. Unlike the earlier work, however, this alternating perspective is interrupted by a third – that of the old crone and enchantress, the feigner of all fable, who, like the fates she resembles, "sits spinning in the tower, entangled in her storied strands, joining thread to thread, winding them into seductive skeins" (56). Though confined by her own invention to the enthralled and dreaming world of the princess, she is entirely sovereign and bears no limit – neither life (since she is reanimated as fabler with every telling of her story) nor speech (since the fable must always be retold). She knows nothing either of desire, save for that she incites in the princess, and in contrast to her amnesic charge, her memory is absolute: of every tale told, over a century that passes like an interminable night, she recalls every detail. After all, the tale is always, to a certain extent, the same. Thus, she outlines the archetype of

prince and princess, but also that of the fable itself, adapting an array of types and adventures, from Perseus and Andromeda, to Scheherazade and Shahryar, to Esmeralda and Phoebus de Chateaupers, to the interminable rendition of the Briar Rose herself. And what the enchantress feigns, regardless of the characters or the scene or the particular unfolding of the adventure, is the indissoluble limit: "thus, her tales have touched on infanticide and child abuse, abandonment, mutilation, mass murder and cruel executions" (60), but also the boundaries of time and the body, "the passions of jealousy and desire, cannibalism, seduction and adultery, and the vicissitudes of day-to-day life in the eternal city of the tale" (58). In fable, she must continually remind the princess, too, of those human limits that beset her sleeping body: of excreta, disease, and decrepitude – of the countless lives that deteriorate beyond the borders of the spellbound kingdom.

Of the enchantress, the princess knows only this feigning of the limit, but the witch's feigning is not limited to the fable as such. It extends, rather, beyond the walls of the dream-castle to the real castle that she enchants, and beyond the confines of the latter to the ensorcelled briars that ensnare the prince. If the princess must be reminded of the real and imagined limits that beset her, the prince must instead be divested of whatever certainties he could recall to himself – of the heroism and virtue that qualify him for the quest, of the value and necessity of the quest itself. Laid bare and lacerated by the briar's embrace, surrounded by the ossified remnants of his predecessors, the prince is dispossessed of all but the inescapable limit. And yet, it is only here, in the fascination of the limit, that the prince might escape the briars, that he might also disenchant the princess, that he might yet reclaim the quest and innumerable other quests: "all around him, the pendulous bones whisper severally in fugal refrain: I am he who will awaken Beauty! I am

he who will awaken Beauty!" (15). And so it emerges as the prince, in his delirium, dreams of setting out for some other doomed disenchantment, and the princess resumes the dream from which she was never delivered, that the enchantress has feigned a return. The fate of the prince and princess is now the *fātum* itself – that which has been spoken – and forever after the enchantress will feign those limits that produce an oneiric delirium and the impossible experience of a marvelous dream.

The Death of the Author, the Life of Language: Forms of Feigning in Barth's *Chimera*  
and Barthelme's *Snow White*

In the middle of Barth's *Chimera*, Perseus describes the Elysian chamber that surrounds him "in a grand spiral like the triton-shell that Dedalus threaded for Cocalus" (61). A series of alabaster reliefs line the wall of the chamber. Each relief is wider by half than its predecessor, and each depicts a scene from Perseus's life. From his vantage above an altar in the center of the chamber, Perseus recounts the moments of his myth to the priestess who attends him, from his divine conception in a shower of gold to the death of Acrisius and the fulfillment of the oracle. After the seventh and final mural (whose marbled Perseus, accompanied by Andromeda and surrounded by the Perseidae, presides over the Mycenaean) the outer wall of the chamber winds out of view. After seven days and seven nights of recounting, Perseus discovers that the chamber in fact continues beyond the seventh mural along a spiral whose duration and circumference increases with every subsequent relief. The chamber thus becomes a temple, and the scenes of each mural, now increasingly specific, stretch interminably toward the Libyan desert and the moment of Perseus's death. After recounting in turn the lesser moments of his myth – scenes from his domestic life, his fear of ossification, the attempt to revisit his early

adventures and reclaim an heroic potency – Perseus finds his temple is neither Elysian nor Olympic; neither is he immortal, nor his myth (already cycled and recycled) yet concluded: beyond the vast and blank canvas of the final relief, the circular path of the temple leads, simply, to the blinding sands of the outside.

The temple of the "Perseid" mirrors the whorling form of the novellas that compose *Chimera*. In contrast to the static scenes of Coover – which are superimposed upon each other, each returning to the last and negating its discourse – Barth instead feigns a doubled movement: the first, which is chronological and discursive, progresses in a straight line from the "Dunyazadiad," through the "Perseid," to the "Bellerophoniad." The second movement, which is spatial, begins with the image of the circular temple and moves outwards, until every sequence of the work contains its predecessor in a growing narrative spiral. Thus, departing the temple, Perseus travels from Egyptian Chemmis to the kingdom of Joppa to live out his final mortal adventure. The whole of the "Perseid," already endlessly recounted, is retold in turn by an estellated Perseus, rendered immortal by his love for the Gorgon Medusa. At the same time, the adventures of Perseus provide the "Heroic Pattern" taught by Polyeidus and imitated by Bellerophon, each of whom are also John Barth – author of the "Perseid" and the "Bellerophoniad," but also genie of the "Dunyazadiad," who discusses with Scheherazade the possibility of a heptadic tale framed from the inside. This tale is precisely *Chimera*,<sup>8</sup> whose central myth circles outward – not toward the consummation of its discourse in the resolution of a mystery but rather toward the outside that promises its indefinite renewal. Barth, after all, wishes to return to the "original springs of narrative" (10) – to myth and fable as the art of

recounting, but also to their recounted theme: the "mythic hero's transformation...into the sound of his own voice, or the story of his life, or both" (199).

Such is the fate of the characters of *Chimera*. Perseus, a "born reviser" (60), begins his twofold death by erasing his name from the sands of the Libyan desert. Revived by Calyxa, he renews the "endless repetition of [his] story," which is also the careful examination of his "paged past" in the hope that he might "proceed serene to the future's sentence" (81). After rewriting the conclusion of his myth by forsaking Andromeda and meeting the gaze of a reborn Medusa, he dies once more, only to be instantly recreated as a constellation of "silent, visible signs" (133), rising and setting in concert with every renewal of his myth.

Sired by Poseidon and "cousin to constellated Perseus" (138), Bellerophon, too, strives for the immortality of the heroic cycle. Under the guidance of Protean Polyeidus – who oscillates between a blank page transfigured by a black mark and a marked page waiting to be revised – Bellerophon is transformed from demigod, to chronicler of his own myth, to the mythical narrative itself, whose daily recounting lasts all day and whose dramatic cycle corresponds to the diurnal tide: flooding, ebbing, reflooding. And yet, his name "from endless repetition" no longer designates Bellerophon as man or hero or anything at all (245): he wonders how many voices are telling his tale and cannot discern between voices that are all his own. "Loosed at last from mortal speech," his immortality is thus composed of "Bellerophon letters afloat between two worlds, forever betraying, in combinations and recombinations, the man they forever represent" (138).

Unlike her mythical counterparts in *Chimera*, Scheherazade strives not to invent her immortality, but merely to postpone her imminent death. Though certain events of her

life have already been endlessly retold as *The Thousand and One Nights* (and so, a form of immortality already obtained), she must yet relive the recounting of fables, already ancient and continuously retold, yet to be retold once more to Shahryar of the "Dunyazadiad." The reiteration of Scheherazade's recounting is contained, in turn, by the story of Dunyazade and Shah Zaman, the former outlining her sister's refabing, the latter reprising his missing part in *The Thousand and One Nights*. And all of these adventures are set down once more in the thousand and one nights of the "Dunyazadiad," which is "not the story of Scheherazade," but rather a further repetition of "the story of the story of her stories" (55). And, like each of its predecessors, this last iteration persists, according to the formula of the ancient Arab fablers, "until there took them the Destroyer of Delights and Desolator of Dwelling-places, and they were translated to the ruth of Almighty Allah, and their houses fell waste and their palaces lay in ruins, and the Kings inherited their riches" (55–56).

The characters of *Chimera* are situated precisely here, in the promised renewal at the outermost circle of the spiraled work, which is also the moment of desolation and the "night that all good mornings come to" (55). If they maintain death at an indefinite distance, it is because their lives are reanimated in myth and fable; if they overcome the invariable limits of life, they do so only by exchanging that which marks their lives as singular. Every character of *Chimera*, in other words, bears his or her own Bellerophontic letter, which is rewritten and reread with every iteration of their myth. Even if the most general scenes are maintained – Perseus beheads the Gorgon, Bellerophon plummets from Olympus, Scheherazade outwits Shahryar – the myth and the fable are always subject to a sovereign language: who is Perseus of the constellation, whose name was

already endlessly spoken before the oldest extent texts of his myth? Who is Bellerophon of the desert, forever shunned by all who knew his story? Who is Scheherazade of the ancient frame tale, whose wily fabling preserved the lives of a thousand and one virgins? They are all the broadest outlines of their myth, but they are all moreover subject to the vicissitudes of its renewal: mistranslations and adaptations abound and are repeated; miscopied, combined, and recombined, the original representations recede before an array of small differences and an endless procession of the double.

As the reactivation of myth and fable, *Chimera*, too, is double. But its reduplicative structure introduces an important difference: "referring only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority," the spiraled narrative of *Chimera* becomes "identified with its own unfolded exteriority" (Foucault, "What is an Author?" 207). Its language, now sovereign, therefore moves toward the outside where it constantly disrupts the naïve correspondence between an abiding interior and its representation, and where it proves, above all else, that "the work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer" (ibid.). Barth, after all, is a character, too: he is the genie of the "Dunyazadiad," who tells Scheherazade how the "narrative inexhaustibility or profligacy" of certain fables might postpone her death (20), but he is also John Barth, author of the "Dunyazadiad" and subject of its conclusion. He reappears, too, at the other end of *Chimera* as Polyeidus at the precise moment when the characters of the "Bellerophoniad" are revealed as "mere Polyeidic inklings, all written" (176). And he is once more John Barth, author of the lecture delivered daily within the kingdom of the "Bellerophoniad," which outlines his transition from writer of fiction to recounter among ancient recounters. Inserted thus into

his own oeuvre, Barth, as writing subject, is now laid open to the logic of its language and to the functions of feigning. In the movement from character, to author, to author-*qua*-character, he "cancels out the signs of his particular individuality" (Foucault, "What is an Author?" 208) and returns the work to its source in a streaming language, where it becomes nothing but the reduplicative sign of the author's dissolution. No longer strictly the analogue or example of an impossible experience, the myth and fable themselves now enact the doom of the author-within-the-work, who exceeds the limits of life only at the cost of assuming "the role of the dead man in the game of writing" (ibid.).

For Barthelme, on the other hand, the fable provides nothing more than a convenient image. Prior to any text and no doubt orienting everything that it contains, the binding of *Snow White* is pure white and the top of its pages dyed black so that, spread apart and viewed from above, the latter resemble strands of straight, black hair. At the opening page, six circles in vertical succession, white with black shading, depict the beauty spots that line up and down Snow White's body, but also represent, according to the placement of their opposing colors, those attributes for which she is best known: "the hair is black as ebony, the skin white as snow" (3). The binding and the dye, the typographic symbols, the description of physical features – even the first wide-margined fragment of text facing an empty verso – all evoke the simple fact of language in its material being: a black mark on a white page.

Barthelme thus introduces a completely different form of reduplication and a new mode of feigning. Like *Spanking the Maid* and *Briar Rose*, *Snow White* is confined to the level of the scene, but unlike Coover's works – and in complete contrast to the spiraled design that organizes the narrative of *Chimera* – the scenes of *Snow White* are almost

entirely discontinuous: the American president describes his solicitude for Snow White and the dwarves, bystanders react to ebony hair cascading from a window, a scene about meringue becomes a play about laying down arms, Paul conceals himself among an episcopal entourage, the dwarves offer a report on their professional and personal affairs – from one scene to the next, the narrative neither advances nor retreats but rather unfolds and dissolves within each of the work's discrete fragments. The scenes of *Snow White* are thus similar to those moments in Roussel when, a propos of nothing, an incredible mechanism appears, dazzles the characters who witness its operation, and immediately retreats to its source in a dispassionate language. But the work, in its discontinuous form, more closely resembles the fables of Jules Verne whenever "the storytelling text continually breaks off, changes signs, reverses itself, moves away, comes from elsewhere and as if from a different voice" (Foucault, "Behind the Fable" 139–140). What each voice speaks is furthermore defined by a second discontinuity whenever the work introduces a new discursive form – songs, poems and palinodes, dramatic dialogue, a questionnaire, quotations of gospel, copious title pages that introduce nothing but themselves – all of which appear between fragments of narrative discourse that moreover vary in tense and perspective.

And yet, a certain monotony hangs over this procession of disparate scenes: when both form and content are characterized by their absolute difference, then the work, like a calligram in reverse, emerges as the image of language itself, presented over and over again, reduplicated until the narrative fades away before the indelible being of the words that compose it: "the reader thinks he recognizes the wayward wanderings of the imagination where in fact there is only random language, methodically treated" (ibid.,

*Death and the Labyrinth* 40). The image, as a result, is always ironic. Even when its content is banal or its syntax monotonous – subjects or objects of a proposition are often repeated, for instance, within a scene or across multiple scenes – it also unavoidably undoes what it says. Thus, one or more of the dwarves (it is impossible to determine who) declares the value and necessity of "equanimity" – of a serene and constant composure – and within the same fragment, or perhaps in a later scene, he speaks and acts according to that value. The experience thereby foreclosed will nevertheless return; neither value nor conduct can preclude it because every declaration (and, within the work, every act) is subject to its own material conditions: it appears in different forms – a poem, a song, an excerpt of scholarly text – or else in the same form but uttered by a different speaker; it thus detaches from itself and becomes its own image, whereupon it establishes, from one iteration to the next and according to the "untamed, imperious being of words" (Foucault, "Language to Infinity" 327), the conditions for its own critique.

Snow White and the dwarves are unhappy; their life together, beset by misunderstanding and dissatisfaction, is moreover "trembling on the edge of monotony" (36). The dwarves create and impose a law; they declare what is valuable and what is worthless; they form a committee to solve problems, and they establish procedures to determine proper modes of conduct; they clean windows to better reflect the sunlight and so to create a sense that "man is perfectible" (8). And yet, nothing changes, and everything remains confused. Hence the prevalence, across the fragments and among their different forms, of psychological discourse and its promise of revelation.<sup>9</sup> At the outset of the work, the dwarves speculate that Bill's aversion to touch is a sign of withdrawal, "one of the four modes of dealing with anxiety" (4). Within a few fragments,

a title page introduces "the psychology of Snow White": "In the area of fears, she fears / Mirrors / Apples / Poisoned combs" (17). Snow White writes a poem whose theme is loss, and Bill later surmises that she "lives her own being as incomplete" (70). The dwarves declare that Hogo is motivated by the pleasure of vileness and Jane by an irredeemable malice. And in a subsequent title page, Freud explains the ineluctable mode of repression: "Some obstacle is necessary / To swell the tide of the libido / To its height, and at all periods / Of history, whenever natural / Barriers have not sufficed, men / Have erected conventional ones" (76). And yet, from one iteration to the next, this discourse cannot help but turn back on itself and reveal its own naiveté. Whatever interior it purports to disclose is immediately dispersed, according to the vagaries of the image, within the discrete confines of its scene and in relation to the other scenes. And vagary in the strictest sense: whether revealed through a naïve and reductive psychology or else by the thin narrative line that runs through its discourse, the interior, borne along by the material of language, continually wanders away.

"It is no wonder we are all going round the bend," Henry laments, "with this language dinning forever into our eyes and ears" (30). *Snow White*, after all, is a delirious work. Its language, like that of madness, is intolerable to the extent that it "retains and suspends meaning, laying out an emptiness where nothing is proposed but the yet-incomplete possibility that some meaning or another may come to lodge there, or still a third, and so on to infinity" (Foucault, "Madness, The Absence of Work" 295). If the work introduces a psychology, then, it is only to subject it to this "prodigious reserve" of language (ibid.), which feigns so many possibilities, casting everything, through the material being of its language, in an ironic light. If psychology, moreover, gives

prominence to the limit, it is only so the limit can be subjected to a double movement that functions as a critique: the first movement identifies the limit with a fear, a drive, or a sexuality and thus with a nature, where it grounds knowledge but also where it promises its endless accumulation. The second movement, on the other hand, cuts this discourse loose and allows its meanings to proliferate until the limit is reestablished as a simple restriction. From within each scene and from one scene to the next, the first movement dissolves into the second until the limit, outlined and established by a delirious language, once more becomes the source of confusion and the simple pre-condition for *not-knowing*.

*Snow White* thus forces an openness and requires of its reader a constant questioning. It moreover establishes a continuum among the works of Coover, Barth, and Barthelme, which unfolds in two directions at once, simultaneously tracing the distance of the author as writing subject and the proximity of language in its sovereign being. Coover, that is, offers an example and an iconic sign where feigning is carried out by the characters of a work, who experience its dissimulations and who either respond by pursuing a hopeless closure or else by reveling in a complete openness. Barth, on the other hand, broadens this experience to include the writing subject, who feigns his own being, becomes dissimulated and open, and demonstrates the imperative that "the work must be set free from the person who wrote it" (Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth* 156). And Barthelme, finally, feigns language in its own image, whereupon it confronts the reading subject who apprehends it and where it marks a limit that in turn opens up the conditions of experience. Across these modes of feigning, in other words, an experience is offered of increasing immediacy where language "manages to face up to the world,"

but also to "scintillate outside it" (ibid. "A Swimmer Between Two Words" 173) – to therefore function as a critique of everything that would deny or preclude it and to force an openness to the endless possibility of experience.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lacan, who established this possibility long before Foucault, albeit in a completely different modality. For Lacan, that is, the proof of sovereignty is established not by reduplication but in the distance between the material of language and the possibility of meaning: "we will fail to sustain this question" – that posed by language regarding its nature – "as long as we have not jettisoned the illusion that the signifier serves the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to justify its existence in terms of any signification whatsoever" ("Instance of the Letter" 416). For Lacan, that is, the material being of the signifier does not relate to the phenomenal being of the signified; if it points to the world, it does so only incompletely, and then only from within a closed and sovereign system. Moreover, meaning itself never penetrates this system but rather slides along each of its elements until either 1) it returns to the first signification that began this movement, closing it off in the circle of a tautology or else 2) it continues indefinitely beyond the first signification to become some other meaning completely removed from its origin: in either case, the signifier (as the material being of language) cannot be reduced to a function of signification-as-meaning.

<sup>2</sup> The result of reiteration as such is a profound and impossible shift in perspective from that of experiencer to the world of experience itself, like the "modern painting" that "nails the *spectator* to a single place and releases the *spectacle* upon him, adjusting it to several angles of vision at once" (Barthes, "Objective Literature" 18). Hence, for Barthes, the "definitive and central act of Robbe-Grillet's experiment: to keep man from

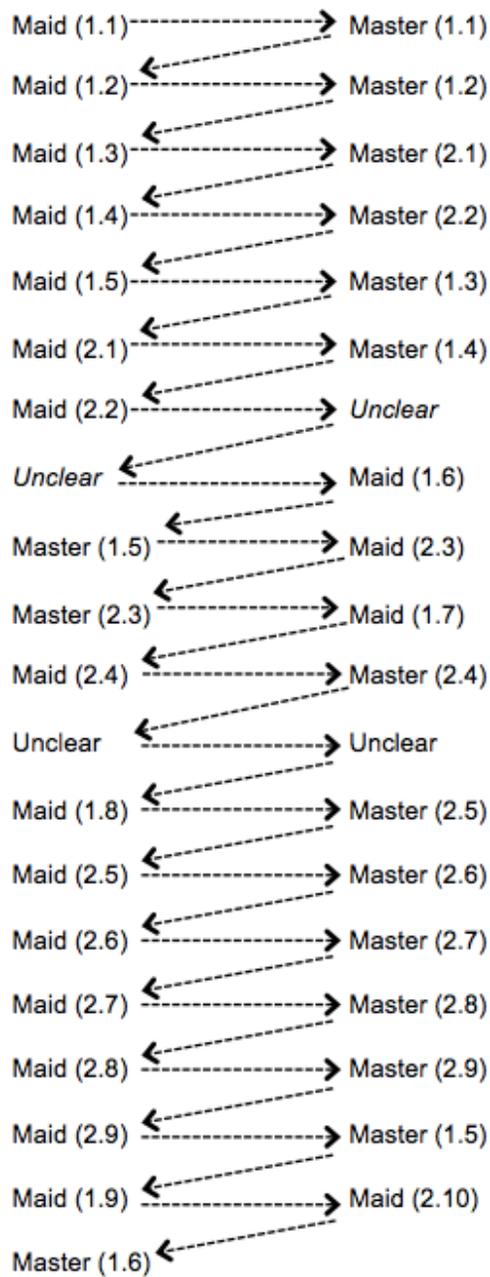
participating in or even witnessing the *fabrication* or the *becoming* of objects, and ultimately to exile the world to the life of its own surface" (ibid. 24).

<sup>3</sup> In this sense, fabulation is moreover similar to the poetry that, for Barthes, represents the zero degree of writing: "a poem is something that could never happen under any circumstances – except, that is, in the shadowy or burning realm of fantasy, which by that very token it alone can indicate" (*Writing Degree Zero* 120).

<sup>4</sup> Fabulation read as such (that is, through the framework of feigning) is set apart, too, from the rest of the scholarship on Coover, Barth, and Barthelme at the level of method and result. See Introduction pp. 13–14, 20–22.

<sup>5</sup> Iterations from the master's perspective involve some variation of 1) awaking, remembering, reflecting, and admonishing or else 2) observing, reflecting, threatening, and punishing. Iterations from the maid's perspective, on the other hand, involve some variation of 1) entering, opening, cleaning, discovering, and reflecting or else 2) recounting and learning, cowering, or being punished.

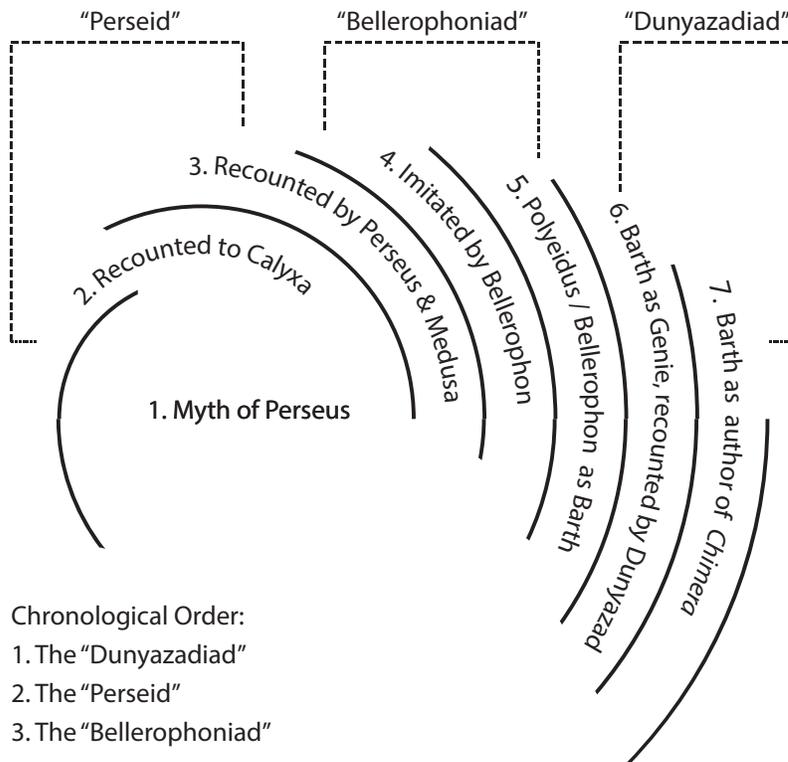
<sup>6</sup> The alternating and sometimes obscure perspective of *Spanking the Maid* is presented in the following diagram, where figures in parentheses indicate scene variation (as described in note 3. above) and number of iterations:



**Figure 1. Apparent Perspectives in *Spanking the Maid***

<sup>7</sup> The subjects of the lesson, which are often presented in pairs, include humility, humor, timidity, tumor, humidity, hymnody, humanity, and homonymity respectively.

<sup>8</sup> The seven spiraled frames of *Chimera* are presented in the following figure:



**Figure 2. Narrative Spirals in *Chimera***

<sup>9</sup> Or more precisely, the prevalence of a pre-Lacanian psychological discourse that cannot account for the subject's relation to language. See, for instance, Foucault on Lacan's critique of the phenomenological subject, "Structuralism and Post-Structuralism" (436–437).

## Chapter Three: The Return to Art in Foucault's Last Works

### A Reconsideration of Openness

The need for openness arises from the conditions of life, which is beset from beginning to end by the limits that demarcate it and that separate it from everything that is non-being and non-life. And yet, apart from this requirement and precondition, the question remains: what, precisely, is openness? What demarcates it and sets it apart from closure and non-openness? More important, how can openness be outlined or identified without instantly succumbing to the closure that identification entails? Or does openness, like the notion of human nature to which it is opposed, also give way to a *si omnia nulla* fallacy when it accepts everything, including all possible conditions for its identification and assessment? Can openness have a *telos*? Or does it collapse in indirection when it accepts all possible directions, all possible goals? Can openness, in other words, be meaningful? Or, in maintaining all possible meanings, does it disappear the void of endless possibility?

The aims of feigning as an art of simulation and dissimulation remain uncertain as long as these questions about the status and value of openness remain unanswered: what dangers might arise from dissolution and the total experience fostered by feigning? What ethical potential remains for an art and a critique whose foundation is *not-knowing*?<sup>1</sup> If, throughout Foucault's early work, these questions are never resolved, then with his turn from literature, they can no longer be posed at all: the experience of a streaming and sovereign language gives way to the description of statements and discursive formations, and openness now refers solely to the attitude of the archaeologist who discovers the rules of their appearance and their dispersion across the ruptures of history. And yet, the

decade-long development of archaeology and genealogy – and the question of sexuality as a moral experience in particular<sup>2</sup> – would lead Foucault back to the problematic of the subject, to techniques of the self, and to "the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as experience" (*Use of Pleasure* 6–7). In his final work, Foucault speaks once more of art, of *tekhnē*, of the possible functions of writing and reading, and of the critique that underlies and coincides with openness. A crucial difference, however, marks this return to the possibilities of art and critique: where the early work culminates in the often misunderstood claim about the death and disappearance of man, the last works undertake instead a history of *les modes d'assujettissement* – the techniques since antiquity by which the empty category of the subject is given content and meaning.

And yet, even as the object of Foucault's project is thus shifted, the process and ends of critique first outlined in the *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* and *The Order of Things* remain precisely the same: the last works comprise both an *askēsis* as "the critical work thought brings to bear on itself" and an openness that "free[s] thought from what it silently thinks" (ibid. 9). Foucault's last project, in other words, mirrors the object of its description: the *tekhnē tou biou* of imperial Rome, which converts the self to itself in a mode completely different from both the Platonic *epistrophē* that precedes it and the early Christian *metanoia* that will replace it. The purpose of this art and technique of life for the Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics of the first and second centuries C.E. is to test and question the relation of being and truth, of the self and the possibilities of experience. This capacity for questioning is possible, moreover, given the ontological status of *tekhnai*: they are produced by the self – the subject is free to make use of *tekhnē*

"according to [its] objective, desire, and will" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 424) – but they are different from the self. More precisely, *tekhnē* is the production by the self of something other than the self, and as such, it differs from *praxis* as an action that is wholly self-same since *tekhnē* effects instead a *distance* and a *detachment*.<sup>3</sup> In the Hellenistic and Roman texts of the first and second centuries, the *tekhnai tou biou* are thus able to "establish and test the independence of the individual with regard to the external world" (Foucault, "Technologies of the Self" 240). The goal of this testing, in turn, is precisely salvation, not in the Christian sense (which involves a ceding of the self to the absolute authority of God or that vested in the various figures of the church or the monastery), but as an "objective of philosophical practice and of the philosophical life" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 182) – salvation, then, in the sense of *sōzein*: to save from a threatening danger, to guard and protect, to maintain a state of purity.<sup>4</sup>

An interest in the possibilities of art – in a *tekhnē* of distance, detachment, and questioning-as-testing – therefore reemerges in Foucault's writing, albeit with different objects and according to a different language.<sup>5</sup> Yet the question remains, how is the relation of openness and feigning modified in the transition from an impure speech that would address a silenced experience to a testing and questioning of the already-said? No doubt, feigning remains, as Marmontel has argued, "a kind of chemistry that has its remedies and its poisons" (318): an experience of repetition where language, set free in the space created by the "distance and proximity of the same," detaches from itself to confront everything that it says. The purpose of this detachment, however, is no longer the dissolution of the figure of man, nor that of a founding and unified subject, but rather the critical, careful assessment of the formation of the self. If feigning proves that identity

can be endlessly extended in the flux of an impossible experience, it must now admit that 1) identity, in the form of attitude and *ēthos*, might also be changeable without being either volatile or completely naïve, 2) that the discrete elements of this attitude might be freely arranged, from one circumstance to another, according to a closure that is self-chosen, but also 3) that choice, for the fundamentally limited subject, remains free only when guided, at every moment, by the "suspicion, possible accusation, moral reproach, and intellectual refutation which dispels illusion" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 297) – guided, that is, by a constant, critical openness in the relation of the self to itself.

#### Techniques of Conversion: *Epistrophē*, *Metanoia*, and Feigning

Thus, feigning becomes an art of life and lends openness both its *telos* (as the guarantor of freedom in the cultivation of attitude and *ēthos*) and its meaning (by limiting its application and domain to this practice of cultivation). But prior to any of this, feigning as *tekhnē* – as both a "technical procedure" and a "prescriptive articulation" (ibid. 373, 447) – must coincide with and support a willed movement of the self toward itself, which is not merely a gaze turned from the world and fixed upon the self, but rather a "movement of the whole being, which must move towards the self as the sole objective" (ibid. 213). Feigning, in other words, must become a technique of *conversion*: a willed progression toward the self as goal, which is also a recognition of the self that is always given in advance – the self in its frailty and ignorance, the self in thrall to passion and appearances.

Of course, conversion as such, Foucault points out, has long been part of Western culture: as a practice and goal of spirituality and philosophy since antiquity, he says, it represents "one of the most important technologies of the self the West has known" (ibid.

208). From the earliest metaphysics, it appears as *epistrophē* and organizes the relation, in Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought, of the self to itself, to knowledge, and to the good. Conversion as *epistrophē* is moreover founded upon the recognition of finitude *qua* ignorance: to convert to the self is thus to convert the gaze away from the world, which is the world of appearance and illusion, precisely so the eye – the mirror that reflects and reveals the soul – can "bear the sight of being, and the brightest part of being, which is [called] the good" (Plato, *Republic* VII.518c–d, qtd. in Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 224n6).<sup>6</sup> Hence, too, the absolute importance, for Plato, of the *gnōthi seauton* – the principle that one must "know oneself" – and the oscillating relation it establishes between knowledge and ignorance: the self can know itself only when it recognizes the ignorance that is natural to it; ignorance is fully recognized only when the self converts its gaze away from the world and toward the soul that alone conveys the truth: "one opens one's eyes, one discovers the light and reverts to the very source of the light, which is at the same time the source of being" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 216).

So begins the great tradition, in Western philosophy, of the *gnōthi seauton*, where knowledge of being becomes inseparable from the form and status of knowledge itself. But conversion as a process and practice of the self would assume its real and lasting significance for Western culture, Foucault says, only with the later appearance of Christian *metanoia*, where the self once again turns to itself and discovers the limit that surrounds, conceals, and threatens the soul.<sup>7</sup> For Christian thought, the self receives the truth, which is the truth of the Word, only when it recognizes "the temptations that arise within the soul and the heart...[and] the seductions to which [they] may be victim" (*ibid.* 254). The self, compelled by the original knowledge of Revelation, converts to itself to

discover the source of its fundamental weakness and the origin of temptations that must be purged from the soul. To know the self, in this thought, is therefore to decipher the self – to understand the more or less permanent risk of deception, the seductions of the world and the devil, and the constant threat, for every thought and every act, of a "secret concupiscence" ("Technologies of the Self" 247). Conversion, in this sense, becomes "a method for deciphering the secret processes and movements that unfold within the soul and whose origin, aim, and form must be grasped" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 255). But to know the self as such, Foucault points out, is moreover to reveal the self – to disclose this weakness at every opportunity and to continually confess and repent to the self, to the other who is already saved, and to God. Hence the importance of the *publicatio sui*, the principle of self-showing that persists throughout Christian spiritual practice and that provides the goal, in Christian thought, of self-knowledge and self-examination ("Technologies of the Self" 243–245).

From ancient philosophy and early Christianity, feigning as *tekhnē* adopts these same broad principles of conversion – that is, knowledge of the self as the recognition of the limit that circumscribes being, and an acceptance of the limit that requires a continual examination of the self. And yet, in its relation to openness and experience, to testing and questioning, and to the cultivation of attitude, feigning must support a completely different mode of turning to the self and accounting for the self. After all, if Platonic *epistrophē* establishes the limits of memory and knowledge, it nevertheless promises access to the pure light of the *psukhē* – to the portion and kernel of the self that coincides with divinity, which exists both prior to and beyond the limits of life. In the Platonic practice of conversion, that is, the self turns to itself and grasps the "essential memory" of

being through a limitless recollection of "the other world" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 209); at the same time, it rejects the "prison" and "tomb" of the body and hence forgets the ignorance and frailty of life in "the world down here" (ibid). The same, of course, is true of Christian *metanoia*, where recognition of the limit – of the fallen and already defiled quality of life in this world – becomes a requirement to turn from the self, forget the self, and turn toward God and the divine essence. In each of these models, then, "the revelation of the truth about oneself cannot be dissociated from the obligation to renounce oneself" (ibid. 221), and conversion, like the deity or daemon who censures and prohibits, amounts to nothing more than a closure.<sup>8</sup> The *tekhnē* of feigning, on the other hand, reveals nothing but the immanence of the limit and offers nothing beyond the relation of the self to itself; moreover, it dwells on the limit only to give adequate form to this relation and to bear, in turn, upon the cultivation of an identity and an *ēthos*, which is neither prescribed by a rule or a law, nor fixed by a divine imperative, but instead remains open and variable according to a questioning of the self and so a "formative test of the self" (ibid. 449).

How, precisely, could feigning as *tekhnē* support this mode of conversion? How would feigning, moreover, constitute a test for the self or a questioning of the self that could bear upon attitude as a "way of doing things" and a style of life (ibid. 237)? In the first place, feigning is the *tekhnē* of detachment *par excellence*: its reduplications produce an image of the self that is sovereign and separate from the self; at the same time, it doubles this image and sets each iteration against all the others by depriving every image of its origin. In this procession of the double, the self as source and repository of desires, principles, and representations is simulated and dissimulated, detached from itself, and

annulled by itself. Feigning, in other words, is a technique of *not-knowing*, and its first goal is to divest the self of every certainty and open the self to every possibility through a process of endless questioning. Yet insofar as it bears upon the relation of the self to itself, this questioning and this openness must take a different form and carry out another function by prompting a second phase of feigning. Hollowed out and divested of everything that composes a naïve or secret interiority – oriented, moreover, to the limit that casts doubt upon every knowledge – the self returns to itself and converts to itself by testing and evaluating every principle, precept, and representation that could constitute the self. Feigning, that is, must become a technique of *review* and *preparation*: a reconsideration of experience that evaluates the relation of the self to what is known and what was done, but also an invitation of possible experience that equips the self against the limits that beset it. Feigning, after all, is an art of repetition that, by virtue of its form, effects a review. But feigning is also the technique *par excellence* for inviting experience by modeling that which cannot originate from the subject yet nevertheless affects what is possible for it. The self reviews and tests itself, in other words, according to a certain willed openness, but it also evaluates everything according to "the faculty of the use of the other faculties" (ibid. 456) – according, that is, to the *logos* as the critical instrument and aid for discovering not what can be known, nor what might be hoped for in a future world, but what ought to be done in this life and in this world.<sup>9</sup> Hence, finally, the role of this technique in the cultivation of identity: feigning becomes an exercise of and for *ēthos* – a willed simulation and an auto-critique that addresses, precisely, a way of doing and a mode of being.

## Techniques of Review and Preparation: Feigning as *Askēsis*

As a method of conversion, then, feigning must reflect all of the "prescriptive figure[s]" of return that Foucault finds in the Greek and Roman texts of the first and second centuries (ibid. 250) – "*eph'heauton epistrephein, eis heauton anakhōrein, ad se recurrere, ad se redire, in se recedere, se reducere in tutum*" (ibid. 248): the self turns back to itself, withdraws and retreats into itself, and returns to the safe harbor of the self as "the aim, the end of an uncertain and possibly circular journey – the dangerous journey of life" (ibid. 250). Beset by constant need, by desire and passion, but also by forgetfulness and ignorance, the self confronts and mitigates the danger of life only through this process of withdrawal and return, whose goal is not the revelation of a secret being, nor the discovery of concupiscence that threatens the soul, but rather the self as the sole object that can be willed "freely, absolutely...without being determined by anything external...without relating to anything else" (ibid. 133). Hence the necessity, in this thought, of all the practices that preserve this freedom of will and that equip the self against the danger and uncertainty of life – against the thought that slips beneath the watchful eye of critique, against the forgetfulness that undermines every principle and precept, against the passion and desire that compromise the *logos*.

Such is the goal, Foucault says, of the *meletan* and the *gumnazein* – of exercises upon thought (review of the past, screening of representations, meditation on death and evil) and of the body (abstinence, privation) performed and cultivated by the Cynics, Epicureans, and Stoics during "the golden age of the culture of the self" (ibid. 30). Hence, for example, Seneca is *speculator sui*: "he inspects himself...he examines with himself the past day, *totum diem meum scrutor*...[and so] he takes the measure of things said and

done" (*Moral Essays* I.2; qtd in Foucault, "About the Hermeneutics of the Self" 206). And yet, Foucault points out, Seneca reviews himself not to find fault, nor to exercise a judgement whose aim is punishment or penance; he is less a "judge of his own past," that is, than a "permanent administrator of himself" ("About the Hermeneutics of the Self" 207). Neither is anything revealed or interpreted in this administration of things said and done: it is "not at all a question of discovering the truth hidden in the subject...nor a supernatural affinity" (ibid.) that would turn the self away from itself and toward the divinity. The examination, rather, submits the self as the locus of conduct, knowledge, and the limit to "the trial of real and possible action" (ibid. 208) by recalling errors already committed, by recognizing the relation of error to limit, and thus by measuring, simply, "the distance which separates what has been done from what should have been done" (ibid. 207). Moreover, this measurement is not based upon a rule that censures and prohibits (and that would close off experience and choice) but rather upon the willed openness that "enables reason in its free employment to observe, check, judge, and evaluate" everything that has unfolded in "the flow of representations and the flow of the passions" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 457).

The review and the examination therefore involve a certain vigilance or watchfulness, which coincides with the movement of conversion and return: the self, like an attentive watchman or a shrewd assayer, surveys itself and, by virtue of this attention and care, becomes more proximate to itself.<sup>10</sup> But this requirement for proximity, which arises according precisely to the "distance still remaining between self and self" (ibid. 223), is not restricted to the backward glance or the moment of review. It must be sought, rather, in the present moment and thus against the "spontaneous flux" of images, of the

world of appearance, and of the representations given to thought (ibid. 298). So, for example, Plutarch suggests the subject turn away from the world and away from others according to a principle of "non-curiosity," which directs the gaze "away from the outside in order to lead it back within" ("On Curiosity" 515d, qtd. in *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 226n49). This same exercise of looking, of converting the gaze to the self, is also recommended by Marcus Aurelius: "pay no attention to the wicked character, advance straight to the aim," toward the goal that is precisely the self, "without looking from side to side" (*Meditations* IV.18, qtd. in *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 227n56) – that is, without yielding to the distractions of the world, of passion or appearance, but maintaining instead a vigilance over the self. Hence, Foucault says, the subject guards against *polupragmosunē* – against restless curiosity, which is openness without direction – by turning the open and questioning gaze upon itself. The goal of this questioning, in turn, is twofold: in the first place, the subject examines every representation and every appearance according to a "voluntary attention whose function [is] to determine [their] objective content" and hence to "define, with regard to each, in what they consist" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 298). And yet the subject, as such, aims not to decipher the world, nor to accumulate a knowledge of things, but rather to establish the value of all things in relation to itself and so to determine the appropriate "attitude to adopt towards them" (ibid. 299).<sup>11</sup> Second, by testing each representation or image and by confirming, in turn, its value in relation to the self, the subject, in Foucault's words, "sees himself independent of the bonds and constraints to which he has had to submit his opinions and, following his opinions, his passions" (ibid.). The self, in other words, exercises itself upon the flux and flow of experience precisely so it may free itself, insofar as possible,

"from all this tissue that surrounds, fixes, and delimits it" and to thereby secure and preserve, at every moment, the "freedom entailed both by indifference to things and tranquility with regard to events" (ibid.).

Hence, the subject carries out an auto-critique with respect to the past, evaluates appearances and representations in the present moment, and achieves in turn a certain proximity with itself. And yet, if the subject, in all these ancient practices, works toward the sovereignty of the *logos* and the "condition of *ataraxy*" as liberation from the limit and the world (ibid. 458), then it must also attend to the future. Such is the goal, Foucault says, of the meditation on death or *meletē thanatou*, which brings the final, inevitable limit to bear on the present. Like the review and the screening of representations, the *meletē thanatou* separates and distinguishes the moments of experience and determines the value of each in relation to the self. The purpose of this exercise is not, however, to decide what attitude to adopt regarding each thing but rather to view the course of life "through the gaze of death" (ibid. 479), whereupon each act, Aurelius says, becomes "stripped of all casualness" and every thought shed of "repugnance for the empire of reason" (*Meditations* II.5, qtd. in *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 479). Armed thus with *logos* and assured, through this reflection upon death, of the value of every thought and every act, the subject is freed, in turn, "from egoism and resentment at destiny" (ibid.).<sup>12</sup> The *meletē thanatou* is similar, in this sense, to the more general Stoic exercise of *praemeditatio malorum* or meditation on future evils, which also brings future misfortune to bear on the present. However, this exercise is not limited to the singular moment of death, nor even to the "different open possibilities" of experience (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 470); in the *praemeditatio malorum*, rather, "all possibilities are given" (ibid.) in

a methodic attempt to "seal off the future" by simulating "all representations that could move and disturb [the] soul" (ibid. 473). The self, in other words, opens itself to the uncertainty of experience, to every danger and misfortune, and through this doubled work of the imagination (of thought upon thought) it equips the *logos*, insofar as possible, against the interference of passion and of catastrophe.

This practice of simulation and the open invitation of experience is not limited, finally, to the work of thought upon thought but appears, too, in the *gumnazein* or exercises upon the body. In this thought, of course, the body is neither an object of knowledge nor a prison or tomb that conceals the true self as *psukhē*; instead, the body is simply the locus of finitude and the limit – of passion and frailty – which represents, in turn, the opportunity and necessity to test and prepare the self. Hence, for instance, the Stoics and Cynics suggest exercises of privation and abstinence, of courting and bearing the limit by enduring hunger and fatigue, heat and cold. Through this endurance, Foucault says, the subject cultivates both *sōphrosunē* – which is not strictly wisdom in the Socratic sense, but rather a certain control over the self – and *andreia*, or courage, in the form of "resistance to external events, misfortunes, and all the rigors of the world" (ibid. 427). As test and preparation, these simulations are moreover extended beyond the body and the moment of privation to compose a "double exercise" of thought and reality (ibid. 432) – hence, for instance, the striking example of Epictetus, who combines the *praemeditatio malorum* with reality and the present moment to prepare against misfortune and the passions:

At the very moment you are kissing your child in a legitimate impulse and expression of natural affection, say to yourself constantly, repeat in a whisper...or

say anyway in your soul: "tomorrow you will die." Tomorrow, you, the child I love, will die. Tomorrow you will disappear. (*Discourses* III.xxiv.88, qtd. in *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 433)

Hence, in the cultivation and care of the self, every moment – even the moment of innocent passion – represents the necessity and opportunity to test the self through simulation (that is, to detach the self from the body as the locus of disturbance and the limit) and to preserve the self against the real possibility of misfortune, the real effect of the limit, and the "real fragility" of life (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 433).

Of course, all of these exercises of review, evaluation, and simulation are specific to the culture of the self, whose themes of return and care, Foucault points out, "[have] never been dominant for us as it was possible for [them] to be in the Hellenistic and Roman epoch" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 291). And yet, whatever the distance between this ancient thought and modern culture,<sup>13</sup> the practices and techniques of conversion and care nevertheless pose, for modernity, a question and a challenge: hence, Foucault asks, "is it possible to constitute, or reconstitute, an aesthetics of the self? At what cost and under what conditions?" (*ibid.*). As an experiment of the self that directs an open and attentive gaze upon the self, does feigning not constitute, precisely, an aesthetic as such? After all, the parallels between feigning and all of these ancient practices – of the *meletan* and the *gumnazein* – are clear enough: in the first place, both the review and the screening of representations require a detachment and a return according to the evaluation of past conduct and a vigilant watch over the self in the flux of representations. Second, the unfettering of the will and the *logos*, as the object of all this work of self upon self, further requires a simulation and a dissimulation: the meditation

on death and misfortune, for instance, feigns danger in advance only to nullify it *qua* danger in the present. Similarly, by separating out the moments of experience, the screening of representations becomes an exercise of "instantaneous perception" that provides a "disqualifying, reductive, and ironic view of each thing in its specificity" (ibid. 306). Third, all of these practices are predicated on an understanding of finitude as strict limit that makes necessary, in turn, a complete openness and an auto-critique. And yet, these same exercises also mark the difference between the phases of feigning and the possibility that feigning might constitute an art and aesthetic of the self: the questioning and testing that foster an openness *qua telos* now direct this openness toward the separation of the self from passion and desire, frailty and ignorance – from the limit that represents, precisely, the distance between the self and itself. At the same time, the questioning and testing whose goal was dissolution now allows for conversion and return – that is, for a proximity of self to self in the free arrangement of attitude and *ēthos*.

#### Directing Openness: Feigning as *Tekhnē*

And yet, an apparent discrepancy arises immediately between feigning as an art of life and this Roman and Hellenistic care of the self: does all of this administration and preparation – this *askēsis* or "exercise, practice, and training" in thought and in reality (ibid. 210) – not suggest a certain austerity, or least a restrictive principle that would require certain acts or certain forms of experience while closing off or denying others? Does this same principle not also form and require, in advance of any experience, an *ēthos* and attitude of restraint? Certainly not, to the extent that ancient *askēsis* invites every experience (or, at least, the possibility of every experience) in advance. Nor could these exercises preserve an *ēthos* and attitude that is unchanging. Rather, misfortune and

catastrophe, danger, and the limit are all simulated and endured only to free the *logos* from everything that could undermine it. The *logos* as such returns to evaluate conduct and choice and to ensure that attitude and *ēthos* (whatever their particular form or the particular circumstance) remain freely adopted, defended, modified, or abandoned.

The subject in all of these exercises, in other words, becomes like the "philosopher-scout in the game of tests" (ibid. 441), who is "sent ahead," by virtue of a willed vigilance and a willed simulation, "to determine what may be favorable or hostile to man in the things of the world" (Foucault, *Courage of the Truth* 167).<sup>14</sup> Rather than preclude experience, then, the subject-as-scout must instead will and cultivate a complete openness to the stream of representations according to both the "present test of thought" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 471) and the doubled exercise of imagination and reality that gives "the entire future in order to simulate it as present" (ibid.). The subject, that is, cannot assume an attitude or *ēthos* in advance of these exercises, but must cultivate, on the contrary, a general openness according to the *askēsis* that "does not reduce" but rather "equips and provides" (ibid. 320).

As a vigilant watchman who surveys every appearance and representation, as a scout who invites experience and endures every limit and misfortune in advance, the subject moreover resembles the *stultus* who 1) orients to both past and future and is therefore "dispersed in time" (ibid. 132) and 2) remains completely open and therefore "lets all the representations from the outside world into his mind" (ibid. 131). And yet, the subject who wills openness and the subject who is *stulta* must differ fundamentally because the latter cannot separate, in Foucault's words, the flow of representations from "his passions, desires, ambition, mental habits, illusions" and thus from "the subjective

elements that are combined in him" (ibid.). The *stultus*, in other words, is completely subjected to the limit without recognizing it: one who "remembers nothing, who lets his life pass by" – hence, one who cannot "direct his attention and will to a precise and well-determined end," which is the self as an object of the free movement of the will (ibid.). *Stultitia*, in this sense, represents a failure of will in light of the limit (or rather, in complete ignorance to the limit that nevertheless besets the *stulta*, disrupts the will, and disrupts the *logos*). In other words, the openness of *stultitia*, like that of *polupragmosunē*, is undirected – an openness without purpose and aim. The subject of *askēsis*, on the other hand, wills an openness to the world and to every experience according to two active and oscillating goals: 1) the "constitution of *paraskheuē*" or equipment that is "both an open and directed (*finalisée*) preparation" of the subject against danger, misfortune, and the limit (ibid. 319), and 2) *sōzein* or salvation, which, like the self fully converted and proximate to itself, represents the "vigilant, continuous, and completed form of the relation to self closed in on itself" (ibid. 184–185).

And yet, these goals are not reached as if spontaneously: the self cannot save and preserve itself as such through a simple, congenial movement of the will. Neither could ignorance, in Foucault's words, "escape from itself on its own" (ibid. 129), nor openness find the direction that equips and prepares the subject, without the benefit of an *intermediary* and an *aid*. After all, the subject, both inside and outside of *askēsis*, remains "badly formed, or rather deformed, vicious, in the grip of bad habits" (ibid.). Hence, Seneca tells Lucilius, *nemo per se satis valet ut emergat*: "no one is strong enough by himself to rise above the waves," and so "he needs someone to give him a hand, someone to pull him to the bank" (*Epistles* LII.1–2, qtd. in *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 145n4).

For the philosophical sects of the first and second centuries, this other who intervened was of course a teacher, a mentor, or spiritual advisor: a friend or master "who care[d] about the subject's care for himself" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 58–59) and whose discourse, relative to the subject-disciple, was therefore characterized by openness and solicitude.<sup>15</sup> In a more general sense, however, the aid that could direct the open and questioning gaze, that could moreover secure the objectives of care and cultivation, was an art or *tekhnē* that existed outside of the self and that (by virtue of this distance and separation) could bear upon the self: the *tekhnē*, in other words, that addressed the limit and so freed and directed the will.

Hence, for example, the *hupomnēmata* or notebook, written correspondence, and the treatise all come between the flux of experience and the subject who writes and who reads.<sup>16</sup> More precisely, in this thought, discourse *qua tekhnē* "plays the role of a companion" (Foucault, "Self Writing" 207) – a double and an aid that offers, according to its distance from the self, "a test and a touchstone" (ibid. 208). How else might the subject, beset by forgetfulness and ignorance, recall "the fragmentary *logos*" that organizes the relation of self to self (ibid. 211)? How else, given the limits of imagination and of memory, might the subject carry out the simulation or the review that is adequate to this relation? Thus, to every moment of *askēsis* corresponds a discourse, an art, a *tekhnē* that fosters vigilance, that aids memory, and that supplements the imagination. As a corpus and oeuvre of the already-said, discourse must therefore become *logos boēthos*: a "discourse-recourse" against everything that disrupts the will and the *logos*, and so everything that creates a distance between what is known, what was done, and what ought to have been done (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 469). Discourse as such (as *logos*

*boēthos*) must then carry out three functions according to the following three limit-conditions:

1. The self cannot adequately administer itself, in the moment of review and evaluation, without the benefit of a *tekhnē* that aids memory by reiterating past conduct or circumstances; this same *tekhnē*, Foucault says, moreover "reactivates" certain principles and precepts (whether general or circumstantial) "in order to make them more vivid, permanent, and effective for [the] future" (Foucault, *Fearless Speech* 150).

2. Neither could the subject develop *paraskheue* or prepare against misfortune according to the doubled test of thought and reality without a *tekhnē* that exists apart from the self, yet is *prokheiron* or "ready at hand," like a constant voice "making itself heard and promising help" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 324).

3. Nor, finally, could the subject cultivate openness, invite experience, or simulate everything that might affect the *logos* without a discourse that constitutes a "regular and deliberate practice of the disparate" ("Self Writing" 212): a discourse composed, that is, of "heterogeneous elements" (*ibid.*) that come from the outside, that introduce the strange and the foreign, and that intervene between the self and what is already known.

What does this aid, this voice, and this practice of the disparate offer, in turn, but a unity in the form of identity – a unity cultivated through art and *tekhnē* and revealed through attitude and *ēthos*?<sup>17</sup> Such is the role of feigning, which finds its ultimate form and content in this model of discourse-recourse. As *tekhnē*, that is, the work of feigning offers a double divided in two: an image of the past self that reveals the limit and so serves as a constant reminder and permanent lesson, and an image (never static but always changing according to the necessity of testing and questioning) of a future self

that is fully proximate to itself. In the movement of conversion, after all, "the subject must advance towards something that is himself...yet [also] something that is not given" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 248). This division and doubling is required, moreover, given the status of the *logos*, which ensures the ethical arrangement of *ēthos* and attitude only when it is freed from the limits and danger of life. In support of this freedom, the work of feigning, like the *logos boēthos*, must offer a recourse – not only as something outside of the self that bears upon the self through a willed return, but also as a "virtual and effective presence" that coincides with the self as the locus of thought and conduct (ibid. 324). And yet, this presence – this other-as-double and double *qua telos* – does not represent a truth that is hidden from the subject, like the Platonic double who is already privy to the heavenly *eidoi*, who already resides in the soul, and who is revealed in the movement of *anamnesis*. Nor is the image of a past self reiterated and brought before the self only to be purged and renounced, like the Christian double constructed by the *publicatio sui* who represents the secret, sinning self and who withers away before the divine *aletheia*. The feigned image of the self as a divided double instead offers veridiction and bears upon the truth by acknowledging the limit that besets the *bios* and by opening the subject, in turn, to risk and to change – veridiction, then, as both "a practice which finds its function of truth in the criticism of illusion, deception, trickery" and a "practice which finds [the object of its] exercise in the transformation of the subject by himself" (Foucault, *Government of Self and Others* 353–354).

#### A Reconsideration of the Works of Feigning

If this second phase of feigning lends openness direction and meaning through the cultivation and arranging of attitude and *ēthos* – and if feigning as such becomes an art of

life or an aesthetic, in the sense of work carried out by the self upon itself – then the works of feigning themselves now emerge in a new, entirely negative light. From Klossowski, Blanchot, and Bataille, to the *nouveau roman*, to the American fabulists, feigning, that is, now appears entirely skeptical. After all, these works compose, by virtue of a sovereign and reduplicative language, an impossible experience, a *non-knowledge*, and a double whose proximity to the self disrupts the origin and fosters a distance. And yet, this same reduplicative structure also models an experience of the outside, recounts the already-said, and fosters a review. If the experiment thus feigned of self upon self results in closure or in *stultitia* as undirected openness, then the works themselves nevertheless affirm something in the course of denial, like the overlapping of *kataphasis* and *apophasis* in a *logos* that simultaneously negates and uncovers (Heidegger 137–138) – hence, like a negative theology or an admonitory tale.

Barth's *Chimera*, framed by the *Thousand and One Nights*, demonstrates precisely as much insofar as the latter is intended to demonstrate simply (if naively) the admonitory force of the fable. Doubtless, Barth's genie hopes the *alf laylah wa-laylah* recounted in the "Dunyazadiad" will perform once again its original function: that it will stay Shahryar's hand and spare Scheherazade's life. But recounted and reworked by Barth the author, the "Dunyazadiad" becomes instead the admonitory tale of Scheherazade, who chooses death and destruction over the limits of life and who is denied, in turn, the freedom of either death or choice. Of course, the meaning and function of the *Thousand and One Nights* is particular to the ancient Eastern culture for which it remains the sedimented, literary record. Yet, the ancient Western myths framed and introduced by the

"Dunyazadiad" carry out a similar task by demonstrating the great dominion of the limit and the failure of both will and of *tekhnē* in the distance fostered by naiveté and passion.

Hence, for instance, Barth's Perseus reviews his whole life: middle aged, potbellied and drunk, he recounts his myth to the captive audience at Mycenae, outlining each evening the exploits of his youth. "Daily, hourly," he later reviews the spiraled murals at the temple in Chemmis, which are no mere representation but rather a precise, marbled mirror of the events that compose his myth – as though "Medusa herself had rendered into veined Parian...our flesh and blood" (*Chimera* 66). An important difference, of course, marks these two occasions of recounting and evaluation since each corresponds to a separate circumstance, to a discrete *tekhnē*, and to a discrete relation of Perseus to himself – to the golden haired hero, but also to the slovenly king of Mycenae, and to all that remains possible beyond his life and his myth. In the first instance, the nightly recounting is directed by a fear of ossification and of the limits that beset the drunk and aging hero: "somewhere along the way," it seemed as though Perseus had "lost something, took a wrong turn, forgot some knack" (73), but through careful review, he might yet "see the pattern, find the key," and reclaim the mythic adventure that has wholly determined his attitude and *ēthos* (ibid.). In this case, Perseus aims not for openness, but for a knowledge that, though hidden or secret, nevertheless directs every relation in advance according to a naïve hope for rejuvenation. At Mycenae, after all, Perseus has recourse only to his own myth, which is the most proximate *tekhnē* and is moreover dependent upon memory and subject to every vanity and conceit. The host of doubles at Chemmis, on the other hand, come from elsewhere to confront the hero with what he has forgotten or ignored. Each image takes on the value of reality and event – of

the *fātum* itself – and Perseus, "like a bard composing, who reviews each night his day's invention in order to extend it on the morrow" (97), invites an experience of the unknown and unremembered by reviewing what has already come to pass. In seven days and seven nights of recounting, now "undeceived" and prepared to return to life and the world, he is freed from the naïve project of "Being Perseus Again" (100).

But what is the result of all of this work that Perseus carries out on himself? What is the result of this freedom rendered through a *tekhnē* that feigns a divided double: an image of the self-as-lesson and an image of the self equipped for the dangerous that lie ahead? Hollowed out and returned to life and the kingdom of Joppa, Perseus yields instantly to passion – to fury at the sight of Danaus and Andromeda, to desire for the gorgon who solidified his fame, to fear of the mounting limits of life. Hence, he abandons the lessons of *tekhnē* and the advice imparted by Athena – feigner of images and source of the double – to "sit tight, hang loose, stand fast, let things come" (100). Rushing, then, to embrace the Medusa, Perseus is totally dissolved, separated from his mortal self and so removed from life and the world. If he is thereby freed from every limit, it is not in the sense that would allow a proximity of the self to itself but rather in a distance that is comparable only to death.

Bellerophon, on the other hand, never risks openness. Though entirely free and "wretchedly content" (141), he nevertheless remains in thrall to his story and beholden to the "Pattern of Mythic Heroism" (140). From childhood, he follows without question the path laid before him by a host of myth and fable, living out the phases common to each: departure, initiation, return, reign, death. If, throughout his adventure, Bellerophon is confronted with questions (about the authenticity of his divine lineage, the value of his

heroic feats, or the relation of fate to choice and will), he nevertheless holds fast to the Pattern as taught by Polyeidus and borne out by the "Perseid." If he recounts, in turn, its intricate signs and themes, he nevertheless fails to evaluate his choices or to prepare against the inevitable misfortune that lies ahead. For Bellerophon, rather, the already-said is useful only to the extent that it accounts for events already unfolded and so defends the course of his "hero-work" (169). In other words, Bellerophon fails to consider the relation he ought to maintain with himself, instead remaining closed to the possibilities of risk and choice. Though equipped with the myriad examples provided by Polyeidus, he neither tests himself nor converts to himself but rather emulates the myth-as-model until he becomes lost in the distance of an endless recollection. Left only with the broken memory of his mortal folly, bereft of either identity or *telos*, he is transformed into the sovereign language of the tale itself – into a work that constantly digresses into "mad side-notes, notes of notes for notes" (157) that multiply and undermine the "ideal *Bellerophoniad*" (144) until the narrative collapses in a stream of incoherence, overtakes its author and subject, and becomes meaningless.

So *Chimera* presents the danger of a future world, a sacred text, a divine promise, and a secret knowledge. Between the admonitory tales of Scheherazade, Perseus, and Bellerophon (and so between the points of failed openness and obstinate closure) every work of feigning can moreover be plotted, reevaluated, and reconsidered. The master and maid are beholden to routine and the law of the manual, Barthelme's dwarves are continually led astray by the precepts of a naïve psychology, Simone and the narrator of *The Story of the Eye* are captive to an erotic obsession: in thrall to a law, a text, a precept, a passion, the self turns away from itself. If, on the other hand, certain characters are

made completely open – by virtue of an incredible experience, a sovereign language, or the will to *not knowing* – their openness nevertheless remains undirected. Rameau's nephew, the prince and princess of *Briar Rose*, and Thomas of *Aminadab* are deprived of aim or goal; in the world of the dream, bounded by delirium, they are moreover subject to the vagaries of madness and so denied both choice and identity.

#### Proto-Feigning: The Early Greek Novel as Analogue and Model

And so, the question remains, is feigning only ever a negative lesson as such? Or, in positive terms, what possibility remains for a reduplicative, sovereign language – an art and a *tekhnē* – that offers veridiction and that promotes a proximity of the self to itself? Once again, this art is prefigured by ancient literary works that appear as precursor and analogue. Yet, the literary emblem here is no longer the *Odyssey*, whose narrative precedes its hero and carries on indefinitely without him, but the early Greek novel of the first and second centuries. Of course, Foucault points out, "many uncertainties remain in connection with this literature, relative to the circumstances of its emergence and success, the date of the texts, and their possible allegorical and spiritual significance" (*Care of the Self* 228). And yet, in their form, in the persistence of their themes, and in their apparent function, the works of Achilles Tatius, Xenophon of Ephesus, and Heliodorus nevertheless compose a form of *proto-feigning* that outlines in turn the possible shape and features of an art of life according to 1) repetition and the already-said, 2) passion, the eye, and the limit, 3) the test of virginity, and 4) techniques of care.

1. *Repetition and the already-said*. In the first place, these works resemble the *hupomnēmata* as a collection of the already-said. The *Aithiopika* alone includes allusions, quotations, and echoes of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; the histories of Herodotus, Hesiod,

and Thucydides; the orations of Demosthenes; the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles and the comedies of Menander; the philosophy of Plato and Epicurus; the science of Artemidorus and pseudo-Aristotle; the poetry of Moschos; the biographies of Philostratos and Philon of Alexandria; along with Greek and Roman myth, folklore, and religion.<sup>18</sup> In the Greek novel, moreover, the fate of the heroes is always provided at the outset by oracles or through dreams: in each case, the events that follow – the narratives themselves – are merely the *fātum* come to pass and made manifest: a repetition of that which has been spoken. Across all of the works, finally, these events are reduplicated until a pattern emerges that defines them all: a devastating and unconsummated passion, a departure and journey, misfortune and countless tests, endless lamentation that takes parallel form between the man and the woman, intrigue and dissimulation, the preservation of chastity at all costs, a prophecy and a dream delivered and fulfilled, and a reunion and return to the homeport that closes the circular narrative.

2. *Passion, the eye, and the limit.* Second, the Greek novels are filled with figures and themes that demonstrate, above all, the dominion of the limit. Hence, for instance, the figure of the eye: no longer the reflected image that pierces the veil of mortal life to reveal the otherworldly *psukhē*, not yet the medium of a limitless empiricism, the eye, in all these works, remains the transparent sign and conduit of finitude and the limit. So Kleitophon describes the gaze of desire and the doubled image of the object of passion: "the pleasure of this vision slides through the eyes into the breast and there attracts the beloved's image, catching it on the soul's mirror-plate and printing its picture there. Beauty's effluence, drawn on unseen rays to the erotic heart, imprints a shadow image in its depths" (*Leukippe and Kleitophon* 5.13, 239). As long as the eye can see, then, it is

subject to beauty and to the desire that undermines the will. So Kalasiris, who had long remained master over his passions, becomes overwhelmed in the presence of Rhodopis:

The constant sight of her proved too much even for me: the self control I had practiced all my life fell before her assault. For a long time, I pitted the eyes of my soul against the eyes of my flesh, but in the end, I had to admit defeat and sank beneath the weight of carnal passion. (*Aithiopika* 2.25, 399)

The will of the heroes of *Ephesian Tale* and *Leukippe and Kleitophon* is undermined, too, by the object of desire; so Anthia kisses Habrocomes's eyes, saying to them, "it is you who have often brought me grief, you who first implanted the goad in my heart" (*Ephesian Tale* 1.9, 133), and Kleitophon, overcome with passion at the sight of Leukippe, remarks that "beauty's wound is sharper than any weapon's, and it runs through the eye, down to the soul. It is through the eye that love's wound passes" (*Leukippe and Kleitophon* 1.4, 179). When Kleitophon's gaze is returned, moreover, the incredible experience of the limit is repeated and so compounded: gazing into the eyes of Leukippe, Kleitophon is filled with "admiration, amazement, trembling, shame, shamelessness" (*ibid.*); his eyes deceive and betray him, bringing delirium and passion to the eyes of Leukippe, where it is deposited and reflected in the oscillating *mise-en-abyme* of a gaze met and returned.

Of course, erotic love, desire, and passion are not the only forms of finitude. But for the ancients and for this thought that centers on the relation of the self to itself, they represent the living form of Eros, the god of the "limitless reign of the Limit" (Foucault, "Preface to Transgression" 71). Passion, as such, therefore "captures" and "conquers"; through the eyes of the beloved, it infiltrates the soul, sets it "aflake," and undermines

every virtue (*Ephesian Tale* 1.3–1.4, 130). Hence Habrocomes and Anthia, who both disdain Eros, nevertheless succumb to a passion that becomes "master of all things" (ibid.). Their haughty disdain gives way before the specter of madness and death; Habrocomes's "whole body had wasted away and his mind had given in" (ibid. 1.5, 131) while Anthia, overcome by shame and passion, is "expected to die at any moment" (ibid.). Soon married, their desire consummated and their lives spared, they are nevertheless soon separated, whereupon the oracle reveals the lasting reach of Eros: "for them, I see terrible sufferings and toils that are endless; both will flee over the sea pursued by madness" (ibid. 1.6, 132). The fate of Habrocomes and Anthia is mirrored, moreover, by the heroes of the *Aithiopika*, who hold Eros in the same contempt and who are subject to the same avenging passion that undermines virtue, choice, and the relation of self to self. Thus, Theagenes fears for his life, "so terrible was the evil that had struck him" (ibid. 3.18, 422), while Charikleia, "her body having quite succumbed to the disease" (ibid. 4.9, 434), laments above all else the loss of will and *logos*: "I am caused even more pain by not having overcome that malady at the outset, but having instead succumbed to a passion whose temptations I had hitherto always resisted, and the very mention of which is an affront to the august name of virginity" (4.10, 434).

3. *The test of virginity*. If passion as such is linked to guilt and shame, madness and death – and if desire undermines the will and disrupts the *logos* of the heroes who, regardless of any effort or preparation, remain entirely susceptible to the fury of Eros – then how might the relation of self to self be protected and still cultivated? This problem and its solution represent, precisely, the "seriously didactic" and positive function of the early Greek novels (Morgan 72). Since passion and desire cannot be overcome either by

work carried out upon the self or by an effort of the will, then it must be consummated – not simply in the sexual act (which remains private and without aim beyond the fulfillment of erotic desire) but in the public union of the lovers that takes "the form and value of a spiritual marriage" (Foucault, *Care of the Self* 228): an act and a marriage, in other words, that represent, Foucault says, "a choice, a style of life, a lofty form of existence that the hero chooses out of the regard that he has for himself" (ibid. 230). Rather than dismiss passion and desire as appearance and as distraction from the heavenly forms, turning away from "those shapes of grace that show in the body" by deeming them "copies, vestiges, shadows" (Plotinus I.6.8), the spiritual marriage represents instead an acceptance of the limits of life in this world.

Within the framework of this union and its mutual choice and commitment, moreover, all of the trials and misfortune faced by the heroes, by woman and man alike, take on their full meaning:

When the most extraordinary occurrences separate the two protagonists and expose them to the worst dangers, the gravest will of course be that of falling prey to the sexual cupidity of others. The greatest test of their own worth and their mutual love will be that of resisting at all costs and of saving that virginity which is essential to the relationship with themselves and essential to the relationship with each other. (ibid.)

So, for example, Anthia is reunited with Habrocomes only after "wanderings over land and sea, escaping robbers' threats and pirates' plots and brothel-keepers' violence [πορνοβοσκόσ ὕβρις], chains, trenches, fetters, poisons, and tombs" (*Ephesian Tale* 5.14, 169). Yet, the real test throughout their adventure, for Anthia in particular but also for

Habrocomes, is the preservation of virginity, which refers every trial and misfortune back to the original moment of passion and to the choice that could protect the will and preserve the *logos* – hence virginity as the "metaphorical figure of the relationship to self" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Self* 450). Of course, the practice of abstinence entails, if not a closure, then at least the sacrifice of a complete openness. Beset by a passion that is equivalent to madness and death, however, the spiritual marriage remains the only willed choice that could preserve the relation of self to self. Chastity, in this sense, becomes the outward form given to this choice, which alone, under these circumstances, preserves the faculty of the *logos* and the possibility of openness. If abstinence as such entails a closure, in other words, it nevertheless secures, for the subject of this choice and practice, an independence and freedom in the face of an overwhelming experience.

4. *Techniques of care*. The heroes of the early Greek novel must therefore maintain a constant vigilance by always keeping before them both 1) the real fragility of their promise in light of the limit that besets the self and besets the other,<sup>19</sup> and 2) the ideal of purity as a choice realized in the practice of abstinence. Each hero, in other words, must feign a divided image of the self that is *prokheiron* or "ready at hand" throughout the constant danger and misfortunes that will test their choice and their commitment. Such is the function, no doubt, of all the parallel lamentations of the two lovers, which are repeated over and over again within these works and among them. These long, frequent monologues, after all, outline the series of misfortunes and dangers already suffered, the dismal prospects for the lovers' future union, but also the commitment,

renewed at every obstacle and outrage, to abide by the difficult choice that now arranges the relation of the self to the other and to itself.<sup>20</sup>

But that is not all. The lovers, in each case, are equipped and prepared by techniques of care that preserve this choice and the chastity that designates and underlies it. First of all, abstinence itself is a form of *gumnazein*: having abided by the practice all their lives, the heroes are equipped to safeguard their purity following the disruption and danger of passion and misfortune. Second, the heroes are often guided and reassured through recollection of the already-said – of the maxim or precept that, like a passage collected in the *hupomnēmata*, is "true in what it asserts, suitable in what it prescribes, and useful in terms of one's circumstances" (Foucault, "Self Writing" 212). Third, danger, misfortune, and the trials of life all call for a certain mastery of experience, which takes the form of an invitation. The lovers, of course, consider their future whenever they lament the misfortune that has befallen them. But every adventure is moreover marked by a portent – a dream, an oracle, a divination – toward which all of the characters are constantly oriented. The science of the high priest Kalasiris is typical of this invitation, which grants, in turn, *paraskheuē* or equipment:

While it is possible to see the immutable dispensations of fate, it is not permitted to escape them. Insofar as such circumstances admit a comfort, it is foreknowledge that dulls the agony of misfortune; for in calamity... what is unexpected is unbearable, since it reduces the mind to cringing terror, but what is foreknown is easier to endure, since we can think rationally about it, and by becoming accustomed to the prospect of disaster, we are better able to handle it. (*Aithiopika* 2.24, 398)

Finally, as the form and function of both the already-said and the invitation of experience already suggest, the characters of the early Greek novel (and particularly its heroes) make continual use of rational argument, which is not only the outward form of *logos* and critique, but also an exercise that equips and protects. So, for example, Charikleia, in defending her choice to disdain Eros and marriage, "makes great play with that subtlety in argument whose various forms [her adoptive father] taught her as a basis for choosing the best way of life" (ibid. 2.33, 406). Of course, Charikleia's resolutions against marriage are upset by the overwhelming and dangerous experience of passion; yet, the work she had always carried out upon her self also safeguards the chastity that, regardless of trial or misfortune, will secure her future union with Theagenes. For, Charikleia, like so many other characters in these works, must dissemble and dissimulate to ensure her safety and her freedom. Hence, she wards off danger and unwanted desire by posing as a priestess of Artemis and sister to Theagenes. So, too, Kalasiris, who recognizes that "art can bend even nature to its will" (ibid. 3.17, 423), ensures that Charikleia and Theagenes consummate their love by feigning to cure them of "the effect of the evil eye" (ibid.). Similarly, Anthia of *Ephesian Tale* poses as a votary of Isis to fend off the proposals of Psammis and so "remain[s] chaste, after practicing every device of virtue" (*Tale* 5.14, 169), while Leukippe safeguards her purity and escapes danger by twice feigning her own death.

Through the reduplication of language, an orientation to finitude as a strict limit, the theme of life lived as a constant test, and the demonstration of techniques of care, the early Greek novels therefore indicate the potential shape and function of a positive feigning. As an art and aesthetic of life, after all, feigning must become a *tekhnē* that is

both a skill, a set of rules, and a craft, but also a device composed of wiles and cunning.<sup>21</sup>

In the early Greek novel, these two dimensions of art are clearly borne out in the preservation of virginity, which remains, Foucault says, "the figurative expression of what, through the trials and tribulations of life, must be preserved and maintained to the end: the relationship to one's self. Once again, one lives for one's self" (450).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Where *ethical* is defined, following Foucault in his last work, as that which concerns a mode of life: that is ethical which accords to a way of living; hence, a discourse is ethical to the extent that its *logos* is exemplified and manifest in the subject who claims it by speaking it but also by acting on it. The ethical question and the test of ethics is therefore, precisely, "can you give an account (give the *logos*) of your behavior, of your way of living?" (Foucault, *Courage of the Truth* 149) – "*didonai logon* (giving an account of oneself)" (ibid. 161) – where *logos* is distinct from *epistemē* since it is connected to the form of the *bios* according to *ēthos*. See, for instance, Foucault's lecture of January 6, 1982 (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* pp. 1–22, 25–30) and the comparison of the Delphic principle to "know oneself" (*gnōthi seauton*) and the late Hellenistic principle of "care of the self" (*epimeleia heautou*), which outlines a difference between knowing a truth that is separate from ethics and knowing a truth according to and following an ethical transformation.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, "The Return of Morality" 252, "An Aesthetics of Existence" 49, "Technologies of the Self" 17, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* 229–230, and *The Use of Pleasure* 9–11.

<sup>3</sup> For the difference between *tekhnē* and *praxis*, especially with respect to Aristotle's view of moral knowledge, see Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 312–319. Despite the emphasis here on distance and detachment, Foucault's discussion of the effects of *tekhnē* differs significantly from that of both Husserl and Heidegger. As Foucault explains in his 1980 lecture at Dartmouth,

for Heidegger, it was through an increasing obsession with *techne* as the only

way to arrive at an understanding of objects that the West lost touch with Being. Let's turn the question around and ask which techniques and practices form the Western concept of the subject, giving it its characteristic split of truth and error, freedom and constraint. ("About the Hermeneutics of the Self" 223–224)

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the various senses of *sōzein* as it appears in Hellenistic and Roman texts, see Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 182–184.

<sup>5</sup> This difference is reflected at the level of both terminology and style. Regarding the latter, which Gilles Barbadette and André Scala call "clear, pure, and smooth" relative to the earlier work, see Foucault's final interview, "Return to Morality" 242–243. The change in style no doubt reflects Foucault's method in the later work, which he describes in the 1982 lectures as "rather plodding and meticulous" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 252) and "slow and plodding" (*ibid.* 254). At the level of terminology, on the other hand, doubtless the most significant change is Foucault's shift from a discussion of "the subject" to that of "the self," which again reflects the different objects of study in the later work and in particular Foucault's turn to the Greeks: "because no Greek thinker ever found a definition of the subject and never searched for one," Foucault argues, "I would simply say that there is no subject" ("Return to Morality" 253). Throughout the great corpus of texts from late Antiquity, rather, Foucault finds the description of "an experience not of the subject but of the individual, to the extent that the individual wants to constitute itself as its own master" (*ibid.*) – hence, the shift in all the later works from *sujet* (the subject), *assujétir*, *sujétion* (to subject, subjectivation), etc. to a constellation of terms around the individual: *soi* (the self), *rapport à soi-même* (relation to oneself), *rapport de soi à soi* (relation of the self to itself), etc. This shift, finally, is apparent in

both French works translated to English and work originally carried out in English – for example, the working sessions with Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow ("On the Genealogy of Ethics"), the lectures at Dartmouth ("About the Beginnings of the Hermeneutics of the Subject"), or the lectures at Berkeley (*Fearless Speech*) – all of which accord very closely to the translations a propos both style and terminology.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Plotinus on access to the beautiful, whose "fountain" and "principle" is the good (I.6.9; 89): "he that has the strength, let him arise and withdraw into himself, foregoing all that is known by the eyes, turning away for ever from the material beauty that once made his joy. When he perceives those shapes of grace that show in body, let him not pursue: he must know them for copies, vestiges, shadows" (I.6.8; 87).

<sup>7</sup> The Platonic and "ascetic-monastic" models of conversion, Foucault argues, "both dominated Christianity and were afterwards transmitted through Christianity to the whole of Western culture" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 257). For further comparison of Platonic *epistrophē* and Christian *metanoia*, see Hadot (from whom Foucault largely adopts the notion of conversion) 175–182.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, *Apology* 31d: "something divine and spiritual comes to me... a sort of voice that comes to me, and when it comes it always holds me back from what I am thinking of doing, but never urges me forward." See also Foucault on the "daemonic ban," *Courage of the Truth* 77–81.

<sup>9</sup> The Kantian question "what can I know" is contained, in this schema, by the question, "what can I hope for?" which proceeds from the acceptance of finitude as a strict limit to interrogate the validity of a given knowledge. The prospects for the subject, in other words, are shaped by the limit that puts every knowledge into question, which is

the same limit that makes critique a constant necessity because 1) every knowledge must be questioned and 2) questioning always remains partial and inadequate according the limits that beset the questioning subject, its will, its *logos*. These questions are referred, in turn, to the question about ethics – "what should I do?" – which is fundamentally a question about the content of the relation of the self to itself (that is, a question about the attitude, the preparation, and the techniques that could evaluate knowledge or conduct and that in turn affect the prospects for the subject who knows and who acts).

<sup>10</sup> The metaphors of the watchman and the assayer are used by Epictetus to describe the Cynic (*Discourses* I.20, III.12) and by Foucault to illustrate the role of vigilance in the cultivation of the self, but also the changing modality of vigilance between the culture of the self and later Christian practices. See, for instance, "Course Context," *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 503; *Courage of the Truth* 311; *Care of the Self* 63.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Aurelius asks, "should the subject, with regard to these things and in accordance with the content of the representation, employ a virtue like gentleness, or courage, or sincerity, or good faith, or *egkrateia* (self-control)?" (*Meditations* III.11; Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 298). Epictetus, on the other hand, correlates attitude to the subject's relative dependence upon (or freedom from) a given representation or event (*Discourses* III.iii; Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 298-299).

<sup>12</sup> The *meletē thanatou*, Graham Burchell points out, therefore mirrors "the greatest weight" of Nietzsche's Eternal Return (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 488n4) and thus the possibility that "every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great" will return to the subject, who must now consider every

thought and every act as if each would occur and reoccur without end (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 273–274).

<sup>13</sup> The notion that the subject should attend to itself and care for itself remains obscured in particular by the practice of renunciation in Christian spirituality, but also according to the subject-as-object that first develops with the *gnōthi seauton*, which survives to modernity through the Kantian analytic of finitude. Moreover, the culture of care (and indeed the specific practices that compose this culture) is grounded in a morality that is specific to the Greeks and Romans of the first and second centuries.

<sup>14</sup> The scout, Foucault points out, is a metaphor used by Epictetus to describe the Cynics:

In fact the Cynic really is a scout for men, finding out what is favorable to them and what is hostile. First he must scout accurately, then return to tell the truth, without being paralyzed by fear so that he designates as enemies those who are not. (*Discourses*, III.xxii.24-25, qtd. in *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 451n8 and *Courage of the Truth* 175n5)

The Cynic, as such, exhibits *parrhēsia* as the free, frank, and courageous telling of truth (a notion that will be central to Foucault's last lectures). But the sense of scouting as openness and an invitation to experience is perhaps best expressed by Seneca in his reading and use of disparate authors and philosophies, "for I am wont to cross over even to the enemy's camp – not as a deserter, but as a scout [*tanquam explorator*]" (*Epistles* I.2 §4-5, qtd. in "Self Writing" 213).

<sup>15</sup> That is, by *parrēsia* defined as "saying everything, telling the truth, and free-spokenness" (*Government of Self and Others* 77), which is framed, in turn, by *eunoia* – speaking "only out of benevolence for the other" (ibid. 372).

<sup>16</sup> There are, of course, other techniques of the self, but the act of writing and that of reading – indeed, the material being of discourse itself – are indispensable to the care of the self and range over each of its elements. In Foucault's words, "taking care of oneself became linked," in the Hellenistic age, "to constant writing activity. The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity" ("Technologies of the Self" 232). Moreover, the "care of the self involved a new experience of self" that was rooted in introspection (ibid.), and so a "relation developed between writing and vigilance. Attention was paid to nuances of life, mood, and reading, and the experience of oneself was intensified and widened by virtue of the act of writing. A whole field of experience opened which earlier was absent" ("Techniques of the Self" 232–233). Regarding the indispensable role of writing and reading in the practice of the self, see also *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 355–359.

<sup>17</sup> "Just as a man bears his natural resemblance to his ancestors on his face," says Foucault, paraphrasing Seneca's letter on gathering ideas (*Epistles* II.84),

so it is good that one can perceive the filiation of thoughts that are engraved in his soul. Through the interplay of selected readings and assimilative writing, one should be able to form an identity through which a whole spiritual genealogy can be read. (Foucault, "Self Writing" 214)

<sup>18</sup> These allusions, paraphrases, and quotations are noted, of course, by Reardon (as editor of *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*) and Morgan (as translator of *An Ethiopian History*).

<sup>19</sup> Every character who meets Anthia, for instance, is enthralled by her beauty and immediately falls in love; hence, she must balance the possibility of faithfulness to Habrocomes with the consequences, in each case, of spurning the others.

<sup>20</sup> The lamentations of Habrocomes and Anthia, which introduce the second book of the *Ephesian Tale* and recur throughout, are characteristic:

At last Habrocomes recovered and lamented their misfortune. 'What will happen to us,' he exclaimed, 'now that we are in a savage land, handed over to lustful pirates? The oracles are beginning to be fulfilled. Already Eros is taking his revenge on me for my arrogance... Was it for this that I kept myself chaste up to now, to submit to the foul lust of an amorous pirate? And what are my prospects for the future, reduced from a man to a prostitute, and deprived of my darling Anthia? But I swear by the chastity that has been with me from childhood till now, I could not submit to Corymbus. I will die first and prove my chastity with my own dead body! (*Ephesian Tale* 2.1, 138–139)

Anthia immediately replies in parallel form, outlining the danger that threatens their chastity (which represents, in turn, the only valid choice available to the lovers in the framework of the care of the self) and the commitment to preserve this choice whatever the risk or cost:

'How quickly,' she exclaimed, 'we are being forced to remember our oaths! And how soon we are experiencing slavery! A man is in love with me and has been

expecting to win me over and come to my bed after Habrocomes; he expects to sleep with me and satisfy his lust. But I hope never to be so much in love with life; I hope not to survive to face the daylight after my degradation. Let us be resolved on that. Let us die, Habrocomes. We shall have each other after death, with no one to molest us. (ibid. 139)

<sup>21</sup> Such, of course, are the various senses of τέχνη as collected by Liddell and Scott.

## Chapter Four: Feigning as an Art of Life

### The Early Greek Novel Versus the Work of Fabulation

If the early Greek novel, with its recurring theme of virginity, becomes the emblem and analogue for feigning as an art of life, then the emphasis now clearly shifts from the impossible experience of Actaeon to the figure of chaste Diana: from the bold hunter whose "sorrow was the crime of Fortune, not his guilt" (Ovid 3.144–145) – who is transformed, robbed of courage and voice, and confronted, for the first time, by terror and shame – to the deity whose wrath at the sight of Actaeon reveals, above all else, the absolute value of her purity. After all, the virgin goddess, in the form of Artemis, figures in each of the Greek novels: she provides the *fatum* to Leukippe in a dream (*Leukippe and Kleitophon* 4.1, 222), Anthia is worshipped as her living image (*Ephesian Tale* 1.2, 129), and Charikleia is dedicated to her "sacred service" (*Ethiopian History* 2.33, 406). And just as the experience of these women is paralleled in each narrative by that of the men, so too the appearance and intercession of Diana/Artemis is mirrored by the light and care brought by her twin, Apollo: the god who is doubled, god of the muses, the oracle, and the *fatum*, the god of knowledge and of medicine – the god, that is, of recounting and reflection, but also of protection (hence the epithets *Alexicacus* and *Acecius*, the god who averts and wards off evil, but also *Epicurius*, the god who offers aid).<sup>1</sup> So, for instance, the *Aithiopika* begins with Charikleia, equipped with the quiver and bow that signify her service to Artemis and crowned with the laurel sacred to Apollo, imploring the twinned gods to protect the chastity that she values even beyond life:

What end will you bring to our torments? If it is an inviolate death, then my end will be sweet. But if someone is to have his way with me – as not even Theagenes

has – then I shall forestall the outrage by hanging myself, preserving myself as pure as I now preserve myself, even unto death. My chastity will make a fine shroud! (1.8, 358)

And yet, this appeal for protection and salvation is completely lodged in the spiritual life of ancient Hellenistic culture, with its gods and their special attributes, their relation to the other gods, their intercession in the lives of individuals, and their ability and desire to affect the course of human events. At the same time, this appeal is only meaningful within the relation of man and woman in a "marriage tie [that] serves to define a whole mode of existence" (Foucault, *Care of the Self* 159) and according to the chastity that 1) precedes and defines this relation and that 2) represents, in turn, "a style of living, an aesthetics of behavior, and a whole modality of relation to oneself [and] to others" (ibid. 192).

The protection of virginity, in other words, remains a discrete and singular metaphor: a sign whose force and value, a propos the relation of the self to itself, could never be fully realized beyond the Hellenistic culture of the first and second centuries. Moreover, the persistent theme, in all the Greek novels, of virginity preserved at all costs foregrounds the necessity of protection while leaving to one side, as it were, the necessity of openness – of the veridiction, critique, and questioning that must precede and underlie the cultivation of an attitude, an *ēthos*, a style of living. After all, it is not the attitude itself (whatever its form or whatever the circumstance) that must be protected at all costs, but rather the will and the *logos* that direct an open gaze upon the self and that assay the self. Protected as such and freed from the disruption and interference of the limit, the will

and the *logos* alone, in the form of a watchful eye and a permanent test, guarantee the ethical ground of every *ēthos* and attitude.

Hence, for all of its parallels with feigning (its reduplications, its focus on passion and the limit, its apparent didactic function) the early Greek novel nevertheless remains a rare and limited example – an instance, only, of *proto-feigning*. And so, once more, the question arises: what possibility remains for feigning as an art of life beyond this singular, ancient culture and this singular theme of chastity? What possibility remains, moreover, for a sovereign work of language that, like Klossowski's daemon, "simulates Diana in her theophany and inspires in Actaeon the mad hope to possess the goddess" (Klossowski 35) – a work that composes, in the same moment, "Actaeon's imagination and Diana's mirror" (ibid.) and so mediates an experience of the outside and an aesthetic "put to the test" (ibid. 38)? A work of language and a literature as such would carry out, according to its reduplicative form, two discrete but related functions: 1) detachment from the self through the simulation and dissimulation that casts everything in an ironic light, and 2) conversion to the self according to the review and the test that bear upon attitude and *ēthos*. A work as such, in other words, would offer in succession a *distance* and a *proximity*: an experience of the outside that constantly clears the ground for a return.

Would this literature not therefore offer the "distortion of habitual perspective" that Scholes attributes to works of fabulation (*Structural Fabulation* 88)? Would it not moreover constitute, at the same time, an "ethically controlled fantasy" (*Fabulation and Metafiction* 124) to the extent that it reviews and assays every principle, precept, and representation that bears upon the self? In this sense, certain works of the fabulist oeuvre

move beyond the purely negative functions of the admonitory tale to compose instead a positive art of life. If Barth's *Sot-Weed Factor*, Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice*, and Barthelme's *Dead Father* share certain features with the other works of feigning (to wit, a recounting of the *fābulōsus* that vivifies the great dominion of the limit and so the need for complete openness), they are set apart, nonetheless, by the theme and structure of the *journey*. After all, the journey is defined by distance and difference – by an experience of the outside and encounters with an Other. Yet, difference is always defined in relation to the same; insofar as the journey is circular, the movement of distance becomes the movement of proximity. Hence, where the admonitory works are defined, according to their negative function, by spiraled narratives, shifting perspectives, and the reiteration of static scenes, the works of a modern art of life are marked instead by the movement of conversion, and so by a progression toward the self that becomes, once more, "the aim, the end of an uncertain and possibly circular journey – the dangerous journey of life" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 250).

#### The Life and Lesson of Ebenezer Cooke

"Condemn'd by Fate, to way-ward Curse, / Of Friends unkind, and empty Purse, / Plagues worse than fill'd *Pandora's* Box, / I took my leave of *Albion's* Rocks" (1.1–4, 11). So begins the original journey of Ebenezer Cook's "Sot-Weed Factor," whose ingenuous Merchant Stranger travels from England to Maryland in search of opportunity only to find corruption, folly, and deception in the taverns, plantations, and courts, and "Hell and Bedlam" everywhere else (14.23, 24). Wandering through a bewildering land, he is moreover accosted by whores, thieves, and murderers, "Who when they cou'd not live at Home, / For Refuge to these Worlds did roam, / In hopes by Flight they might

prevent, / The Devil and his fell intent" (2.26–29, 12). Soon, Cook's merchant falls ill, succumbing for a long time to the "seasoning" of the new world émigré. Upon recovering, he trades his "British Wares" – the sum of his wealth – for tobacco; in return, he is robbed of all but his life and persecuted for the crime of being swindled. Escaping, finally, to the English fleet, he returns home, cursing the Americas and all who would inhabit "this Cruel, this Inhospitable Shoar" (20.34, 30).

Feigned by Barth, the story of the composition of the original "Sot-Weed Factor," which is the story of the life and journey of its author, unfolds along the same broad lines: a scandal and a departure; a dangerous voyage; the incredible experience of another world; sickness, madness, and ruin; and an accelerated rhythm of incredible, connected events that lead back to the homeport and the point of departure. Moreover, if its Hudibrastic couplets set Cook's original apart from everyday discourse and mark its status and function as art, so too the eighteenth century dialect of Barth's *Sot-Weed Factor* calls attention, at every moment, to its absolute artifice – to its function as pure object and pure *tekhnē*, which comes from elsewhere to confront and to admonish.<sup>2</sup> And yet, an important difference, at the level of both form and content, marks Barth's feigned account of Cook's original verse: where the latter functions as satire (as ironic critique of new and old worlds a propos the representation of colonial adventure) Barth's *Sot-Weed Factor* detaches from the work at its center to feign its source and wellspring – to account for and reproduce, in a sovereign, reduplicative language, the long and difficult formation of a will to satire and a will to question. Hence, Barth's poet-hero progresses along a circle whose points of departure, change, and return follow: 1) *stultitia* and undirected

openness, 2) the naïve direction of principle preserved at any cost, 3) the lesson of the outside and the Other, and 4) openness directed in the relation of self to self.

### *The Poet-Hero as Stultus*

The recounted journey of Ebenezer Cooke begins, for a brief moment, *in medias res* – its mid-point offered in advance, like a distant goal pursued only to be surpassed. Here, in the middle of his life, the poet-hero, after all, presents a living spectacle:

He walked and sat with loose-jointed poise; his every stance was angular surprise, his each gesture half flail. Moreover there was a discomposure about his face, as though his features got on ill together...no sooner were [they] settled than *ha!* they'd be flushed, and *hi!* how they'd flutter, and no man could say what lay behind them. (3)

And yet, if the remarkable appearance of Ebenezer Cooke obscures his thought and sentiment, separating them from his conduct like a mask concealing its wearer, it nevertheless corresponds to an equally remarkable and constant disposition – to wit, a complete openness, which he lives as a total experience of the world. In thrall to appearance and to the pure possibility of choice, he performs the "pantomime of non-being" (Foucault, *History of Madness* 347); unable to choose among the attitudes that define a style of life, he opts instead to adopt them all. And so he remains merely the "reflection of his situation" (*Sot-Weed Factor* 44), in thrall to a totalizing *kairos*: "one day cocksure, one day timorous; one day fearless, one day craven; now the natty courtier, now the rumped poet – and devil the hue that momentarily colored him, he'd look a-fidget at the rest of the spectrum" (ibid).

In his pure openness, Ebenezer Cooke therefore resembles an array of characters from the works of feigning – the prince and princess of *Briar Rose*, Thomas the Obscure, and Thomas of *Aminadab*. But above all, he resembles Rameau's Nephew, that "figure of unreasonable existence" (Foucault, *History of Madness* 350) who refuses to reach consensus with himself and who is marked, at every moment, by absolute difference. And yet, the poet-hero stands apart from all these others since his openness results neither from delirium, nor from a will to *not-knowing*, but rather from his peculiar training and education.

From childhood, that is, Ebenezer Cooke cultivates an openness-*qua*-curiosity since, his tutor teaches, curiosity was "most conducive to exhaustive and continuing rather than cursory or limited study" (7). Seeking, then, the pleasure of an arbitrary and apparently endless knowledge – gifted, too, with "great imagination and enthusiasm for the world" (8) – the child Ebenezer Cooke carries out the constant questioning of *not-knowing*. And yet, if the poet-hero always cultivated a total curiosity, it nevertheless remained undirected, like the *polupragmosunē* that distracts the self, turning it away from itself. Hence, "the variety of temperaments and characters that he observed" in both the world and in art "was as enchanting to him as the variety of life-works, and as hard to choose from among" (11). Every philosophy and every opinion moreover appeared worthy and viable, so that he could settle on none. And so, "dazzled, he threw up his hands at choice, and like ungainly flotsam rode half-content the tide of chance" (ibid.).

Hence, the journey of *The Sot-Weed Factor* begins with the formation of the *stultus* – of that peculiar figure who, already a man, remains yet "no man at all" (44). Equipped with reason – with the critical instrument and aid of *logos* – the poet-hero

nevertheless lacks the will to direct it. As such, he remains in thrall to appearance, to circumstance, and to the will of others. At Cambridge, he makes "little or no distinction between, say, the geography of the atlases and that of fairy stories," and every subject of study becomes the same "pleasant game" (8) Soon failing, he must make his way in the world, but every trade and profession, however exalted or ignoble, holds the same appeal. Thus, he moulders, unmoving, in his rooms, overwhelmed by abyssal openness, until the appearance and intercession of his former tutor leads Ebenezer to London and to the scene that opens the work. There (once more) he languishes in the coffee houses and taverns, silent among his companions, the world flowing through him and overflowing him, "like a fitful sleeper in a warm wash of dreams" (44). And here he might remain forever, if not for the unkind friends who mock his strangeness and goad him from silence, imposing their will upon him and prompting the long, dangerous voyage of the "Sot-Weed Factor."

Hence, more than a *Bildungsroman* that outlines a formation, an apprenticeship, an education,<sup>3</sup> Barth offers instead a *fable*, in the strict sense of "that which deserves to be told" (Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men" 173) – a work, that is, whose "game of the 'exemplary fabulous'" functions as both "lesson and example" (ibid.). And with the first turn of the circular journey of *Selbstbildung*, the didactic work and the work-as-object feigns a lesson on the danger, precisely, of undirected openness – of the *stultitia* "that is not settled on anything and not satisfied by anything" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 131).

*The Naïve Direction of Principle*

Caressed, in jest, by the whore Joan Toast, the "empty poet" (48) is filled with desire. And yet, this most pressing limit cannot "afford the man identity" (ibid.) because he remains completely open. Imagining, hence, every means of satisfying his lust, "he buzzed and burned the more" (ibid.), but still he fails to choose – to act, to speak, to return the caress (in jest or in earnest). Others, laughing, goad the poet-hero, who remains silent and unmoved. At length, he flees to his rooms, reflecting alone upon his non-being and confronting his reflected face: "Who art thou *now*, queer fellow? Hi, there is a twitch in thy blood, I see – a fidget in thy soul!" (51).

And yet, was this irresolution before Joan Toast and the strain of desire not simply the mark of innocence, which needed no further proof than his virginity? And was innocence itself not the premise and ground, in turn, of an attitude and a style of life? Wondering hence at the possible direction of innocence-*qua*-principle, Ebenezer is accosted by Joan Toast herself, who appears nude before him, like Diana before a dazzled Actaeon. The poet-hero, in turn, plays the role of both hunter and goddess: on one hand, he is completely transformed; on the other, his chastity no longer seems a possible choice among others, but becomes instead the emblem of his being. And so, the lust that prompted Ebenezer's new-found direction becomes an ideal love, and his entreaties drive Joan Toast from his bed. Alone once more, his innocence preserved, he reflects:

Did I, then, make a choice? Nay, for there was no *I* to make it! 'Twas the choice made *me*: a noble choice, to prize my love o'er my lust, and a noble choice bespeaks a noble chooser. What am I? What am I? *Virgin*, sir!...I shall regard my innocence as badge of my strength and proof of my calling. (60)

At the same time, the direction afforded by choice becomes the content of a mimetic art that reflects and supports the poet-hero's innocence. Having acquired at Cambridge a taste and talent for verse, "his fancy would not settle on stances and conceits" (40), and his compositions remained few and frivolous. Driven now by the weight of his decision, he pens "with little ado" (59) a paean to love and to life preserved and upheld by virtuous chastity.

Hence, Ebenezer Cooke finds direction: freed from restless curiosity, no longer the *stultus* "blown by the wind" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 131), he abides, instead, by the principle of innocence. And yet, this direction, this principle, its reflection through chastity, and its transparent expression all remain completely naïve. In the first place, the poet-hero accepts the validity and necessity of innocence without question or reflection. For Ebenezer, tormented by abyssal openness, the *ēthos* of innocence offers an opportune remedy – a ready-made choice and an easy movement of will. Second, innocence is inseparable from inexperience and ignorance: the naïf and the fool are two of a kind.<sup>4</sup> Third, virginity, for the poet-hero, does not represent real choice, but remains instead a convenient circumstance: like the heroes of the early Greek novel, he had practiced it all his life, and its preservation represents, simply, a *status quo*.<sup>5</sup> Fourth, set free from the person who wrote it, the work of art becomes sovereign object: no longer the transparent expression of an interior and a principle, its representations proliferate and change with every reiteration.<sup>6</sup>

But that is not all: to the extent that he preserves innocence at all costs – that his conduct is directed by naïve principle prior to experience and regardless of circumstance – innocence becomes more dangerous than the undirected openness that occasioned it.

The loss of his father's plantation and his birthright at Malden; the "plots, cabals, murders, and machinations" (92) of rebels, natives, priests, and slaves; the derision and deceit of planters and innkeepers; the swindles of corrupt lawyers; his betrayal of Joan Toast, who is ruined with opium, raped, and wracked with pox – the naïve direction and principle of innocence, or else its expression through chastity and art, lies behind them all.

Yet, the fear and danger of total openness – of the "black and vasty zephyrs of the Pit" (629) – still remain for the poet-hero. And so he defends his naïve *ēthos* while the world careens and crashes down around him. Confronted once more by lust, he resorts to a conceited and corrupt reason to account for the moment of passion and incredible desire: "this mystic yearning of the pure to join his ravished sister in impurity: was it not, in fact, self-ravishment, and hence a variety of love?" (267). Ruined in the corrupt courts by his ignorant presumption, he defends his case to his former tutor and mentor: "in experience thou'rt at least three times my age; but despite my innocence – nay, just *because* of't – I deem myself no less an authority than you on matters of Justice" (387). Thrown overboard on the voyage to Maryland and saved by chance, he ignores the naïve gamble that brought him to the ship's rail and regards his rescue, instead, as the "mystic affirmation of his calling, such as [that] once vouchsafed to the saints" (229). And when his obstinate attitude and his conduct are questioned, at every moment, by stranger and companion alike, Ebenezer outlines in response the ultimate wisdom of the poet: "like a god he sees the secret souls of things, the essence 'neath their forms, their priviest connections. Godlike he knows the springs of good and evil" (214–215).

*The Lesson of the Outside and the Other*

So Ebenezer defends principle against circumstance, choosing, in every instant, the otherworldly dream of innocence over the cruel, living world of experience. But here, at the final turn of his circular journey, in the space between distance and proximity, Ebenezer must confront the stark difference of the world. So, for instance, the dismal tide of history, with its pillages, deceits, murders, and greed, had always worked upon the naïve poet-hero like a "bad dream" (98) – an expression of the outside whose sundry figures, like a horde of the Other, were driven by a "strange and terrible energy" (99). The poet, on the other hand, could "enrich and ennoble" this discourse that came from elsewhere: as an expression of innocence-*qua*-principle, his work would rescue virtue from history by "bend[ing] nature to suit his fancy and paint[ing] men better or worse to suit his purpose" (74). Hence, Ebenezer plans the *Marylandiad* – an epic verse that would condemn vice and celebrate innocence, preserving it through the long, dark history of the world, both old and new.

But through the movement of the journey, the weight of the world – of circumstance and incredible experience – continually bears against naïve principle. Near death at Malden, his former birthright now lost and converted to a gambling den and brothel, Ebenezer recounts "the sum of his misfortunes" (462), and the *Marylandiad* appears "as foreign to him as...another man's work" (457). Recalling, too, the calamity, deception, and abuse that marked every moment of his journey, he reflects, "What price this laureateship! Here's naught but scoundrels and perverts, hovels and brothels, corruption and poltroonery! What glory, to be singer of such a sewer!" (ibid.). Recognizing, hence, the great dominion of the limit and its denial in the figure of innocence, he commits himself to the world and to the dark course of his own history,

replacing the naïve expression of the *Marylandiad* with the bitter satire of "The Sot-Weed Factor."

Hence, a will to satire, prompted by difference and distance, turns Ebenezer around to confront himself as the naïve hero of a doomed journey. And yet, neither circumstance alone, nor even the accumulated difference of principle and experience, can fully free the poet-hero from innocence or its naïve direction. Only the appearance and intercession of an Other will restore Ebenezer to openness while suggesting, at the same time, its possible direction in the relation of self to self. This Other, of course, is Henry Burlingame: the former tutor who once cultivated Ebenezer's "gay irresolution" (8) and whose attitude and conduct now offers the poet-hero a three-part lesson on identity, principle, and history. In the first place, Burlingame is an orphan; freed from any origin, moreover possessing a singular gift for dissimulation, he becomes innumerable others – Captain Peter Sayer, Timothy Mitchell, Nicholas Lowe, Monsieur Casteene, Colonel John Coode, Lord Baltimore – each feigned according to circumstance and the flux of history. Hence, Burlingame's first great lesson concerns the vagaries of identity: his dissimulations prove to the poet-hero that the "true and constant Burlingame lives only in [his] fancy, as doth the pointed order of the world" (330). Second, Burlingame's fluid being, his liquid values, his fidelity to papist and protestant, soldier and rebel, merchant and thief alike demonstrate the folly of principle held and preserved prior to experience: "right and wrong," he instructs Ebenezer, are "like windward and leeward, that vary with standpoint, latitude, circumstance, and time" (486). Third, Burlingame's shifting role in the unfolding destiny of Maryland proves that history is neither positive nor negative in

itself but rather resembles "waterholes...in the wilds of Africa: the most various beasts may drink there side by side with equal nourishment" (ibid.).

Beyond the specific content of these lessons (which is determined, in any case, by Ebenezer's particular folly), Burlingame demonstrates the value of the lesson itself over that of principle. On one hand, the lesson proves that principle is only ever provisional; on the other, the lesson assumes change, assumes risk, and so requires openness. And Burlingame's feigning owes precisely to such openness, which he lives as an abiding and boundless craving for the world: "everything we meet is a spring," he instructs the poet-hero; "the bigger the cup we bring to't, the more we fetch away, and the more springs we drink from, the bigger grows our cup" (123). Hence, if Burlingame opposes the merit of innocence-*qua*-principle, or else its expression through art or chastity, "'tis that such thinking robs the bank of human experience" (ibid.). But that is not all: if Burlingame's lust for the world and for experience begins with passion and desire – with limits opposed, precisely, to innocence – it is preserved, nonetheless, by a constant choice and an abiding *ēthos*: "I too once clung to my virginity," he reveals to Ebenezer, "yet anon I lost it, and so committed me to the world; 'twas then I vowed, since I was fallen from grace, I would worship the Serpent that betrayed me, and ere I died would know the taste of every fruit the garden grows!" (331).

For Ebenezer – and for all the world of *The Sot-Weed Factor* – Burlingame therefore plays the role of the Cynic: in his stark difference, he is the Other whose scandalous being constitutes a test and a challenge. In his radical acceptance of finitude – of hunger and death, passion and desire – he "brings to light, in their irreducible nakedness, those things which alone are indispensable for life" (Foucault, *Courage of the*

*Truth* 170) and so becomes a model and touchstone. Furthermore, like the Cynic, he is "the man who roams, who is not integrated into society, has no household, family, hearth, or country" (ibid. 171): he is a figure of change and risk who comes from elsewhere. For Ebenezer in particular, Burlingame is an "aggressive benefactor" (ibid. 279) whose goal is always *elegkhein* – "to reproach, to object, to question" (ibid. 82). Insofar as he reappears, in different guises, throughout the long journey of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, he represents, too, "the watchful eye, the gaze, the supervision of [a] friend who is at once a demanding guide and a witness" (ibid. 252). In this sense, Burlingame becomes the "real and virtual eye of the other" (ibid.) – real in those instances when he challenges Ebenezer, forcing him to account for himself; real, too, when he offers a lesson that overtakes a naïve principle; but also virtual according to the permanent possibility of his reappearance; and virtual according to his function as *basanos* or touchstone that is *prokheiron*, like an aid or recourse that is always near-at-hand.

#### *Openness Directed in the Relation to Self*

Owing to circumstance (to the weight of the world and the limit) and according to the intercession of a companion who is Other, the poet-hero once more becomes open, but now in relation to himself – to his attitude and conduct, to the promise of an aesthetic. As the circle of his long journey begins to close, bringing him closer to the point of departure, he reviews himself and assays himself. In the first place, he recognizes that "time *passes* for the living...and alters things. Only for the dead do circumstances never change" (606). Change, then, belongs to being, and its denial in the figure of innocence amounts to a denial of being and a denial of life. And so, the poet-hero risks change by questioning and testing the naïve principle at the root of his stasis: if he had once "sang

its praises from witless force of habit," he now found himself "dissociated emotionally from his panegyric; standing off, as it were, and listening critically" (628). Recognizing, in the moment of review, that his chastity and all it represented was preserved only at "staggering expense" (ibid.), Ebenezer disavows virginity, accepts the limits of desire, sickness, and death, and atones for past error by risking his life to lie, finally, with the ruined Joan Toast.

Thus, the moment of passion purges the poet-hero of naïve principle. Facing up to the world and to himself, he now confronts the limit that marks all life and that requires, in turn, a constant openness. And yet, if he recognizes that "nature has neither codes nor causes" – and so "to pennon one's lance with the riband of Purpose" was to "tilt with Manchegan windmills" (685) – he nevertheless cultivates a certain attitude and style of life. No longer in thrall to chastity, he realizes that "true virtue lieth not in innocence, but in full knowledge of the Devils subtile arts" (738), and he invites every experience. Recalling, moreover, the endless misfortune of the journey, he meets every new trial with a will to choose – to change and to act. Choice itself, which once worked upon the poet-hero like a "black breeze...[that] sighed from the Pit to ice his bones" (696), now becomes a simple, constant responsibility. And responsibility, in turn, appears like an "old, well-known opponent" (691) – a constant call to act, which he constantly answers.

In short, the poet-hero now lives the lesson once offered by his former tutor, which poses itself precisely against *stultitia* and aimless openness: "If you'd live in the world...you must dance to some other fellow's tune or call your own and try to make the whole world step to't" (330). To choose, after all, was to impose a will upon the world. But more important, Ebenezer learns that every movement of the will – every choice and

every act – must be challenged and assayed by the "critical listener in his soul" (628).

And so, the feigned history of the poet-hero becomes the lesson of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, which is composed of the sum of its incredible circumstances, of the real and virtual eye of the Other, and of the long, difficult progression of the journey.

### The Circular Journey of a Famous Puppet

#### *The Greatest Fable and its Reflection*

If Barth's *Sot-Weed Factor* offers a modern fable, in the strict sense outlined by Foucault and according to the feigned life and journey of its poet-hero, Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice* instead preserves and prolongs the journey of the greatest modern fable itself. After all, Carlo Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio*, already popular in Italy during its author's lifetime, remains one of the most widely translated (and, presumably, most widely read) works of all time.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, Collodi's *Pinocchio* resembles *Coelina, ou L'enfant du mystère* – "an absolute text," Foucault argues, "whose readership exactly corresponded to the total domain of possible readers" ("Language to Infinity" 97).<sup>8</sup> But where the goal of *Coelina* was "very simply to be read...to be nothing but the neutral element of pathos" (ibid.) – and where its language was hence defined by "the thinness and absolute seriousness of the story" (ibid.) – Collodi's *Pinocchio* instead calls attention to itself, from the moment of its appearance, as a work of language and as didactic object. In the first place, Collodi's writing is completely colored by its non-seriousness: strange and oneiric as the world it describes, it careens from description to dialogue and from the world of the work to the world of the reader whenever it addresses the latter to remark upon its own strangeness. Second, the didactic function of *Pinocchio* is pervasive – not lodged within the fable like an allegory, but all on the surface, repeated

over and again with every scene, every error, every promise, every misfortune. Third, unlike *Coelina* and the French novels of terror, the function of Collodi's work, according to its divided language and obvious morality, is not to "[erase] itself between the things it said and the person to whom it spoke" (ibid.), but rather to bear upon its reader as a *lesson*:

How many misfortunes have happened to me...and I deserved them! for I am an obstinate, passionate puppet...I am always bent upon having my own way, without listening to those who wish me well, and who have a thousand times more sense than I have!...but from this time forth, I am determined to change and to become orderly and obedient...For at last I have seen that disobedient boys come to no good and gain nothing. (99)

Confronted by the great dominion of the limit (by hunger and passion, fear and madness, sickness and death), Collodi's Pinocchio, in other words, must face himself and assay himself according to the permanent possibility of *error* and so the constant need for *correction*.

When the famous, wooden-headed hero of Collodi's original reappears over a century later in Coover's work, this lesson remains precisely the same. And yet, in the distance between the original fable and its reflected sequel, circumstances for Pinocchio have completely changed. When the puppet left the pages of the former, he had newly become a living boy; when he reappears in the latter, he is an old man, returning to Venice and his homeland to complete the circular journey of a long and distinguished life. And where Collodi's impetuous puppet had only begun to face himself and assay himself, Coover's Pinocchio can now reflect upon his life – upon his attitude and

"personal aesthetic" (228) – as the long, diligent cultivation of nothing less than "a work of art" (14). After all, the life of Coover's Pinocchio, in all its forms and phases – from wicked marionette, to Hollywood star, to revered scholar and professor emeritus – is completely renowned: he is "*il gran signore*" and "*galantuomo*," the great and honorable gentleman (47); his thought and works, all "classics of Western letters" (ibid.), are celebrated the world over, and he is the "universally beloved exemplar of industry, veracity, and civility" (ibid.). Moreover, having long "renounced vagabondage and rebellion and idle amusements" (36) according to the lessons of the Blue-Haired Fairy, he cultivates instead the dignity that represents "the innate good and craving of every moral being" (ibid.). In short, through an obedient and disciplined attitude crystallized over the course of a century, Pinocchio has become the living sign and emblem of Virtue itself.

And the return to Venice at the outset of the reflected sequel represents the "consummation" and fitting completion of this "virtuous life" (102) insofar as the scene might inspire the final chapter of the professor's last work and *magnum opus* – a "vast autobiographical tapestry" (14) outlining his lifelong devotion to "the loftiest of ideals" (92). Venice, that is, was "magical, dazzling...sensuous yet pure" (40), its sundry canals and waterways mirroring the city and its people, the whole composing a "remarkable vision" (ibid.) rooted in reflection and calling, at every moment, for contemplation. More important, Venice was home to all the professor's humanist heroes – to Francesco Petrarca, Giovanni Bellini, and Giorgione – and to the Renaissance itself, its "classical vision" (231), and all its greatest works. In this *Serenissima* – the most serene city – the revered professor seeks nothing less than "shadows of the divine perfection" (124): an

image and a metaphor adequate to his greatest work and so to the "unified whole his life has been" (14).

*A Feigning that Hollows Out*

And yet, as Petrarch himself had written, Venice was also "*orbis alter*" (*Epistolae Seniles* ix.1) – another world, set apart by its strangeness and absolute difference. If its architecture and frescos, its sculpture and paintings offered a glimpse of ideal beauty or else revealed an original truth, its endless labyrinths and immeasurable distances nevertheless obscured every origin and called the ideal itself into question. Mirrored everywhere, the city moreover became its own ironic double, its famous icons and images distorted and mocked by their reflection in its crisscross of malodourous and frozen canals. Venice, in other words, was filled with simulation and dissimulation: a "fake city built on fake pilings with its fake fronts and fake trompes l'oeil...a city of masks" (102).

In this place, the heedless and impetuous – the passionate who rush into things – are quickly confused and easily fooled. So Pinocchio, who began the journey to Venice on a whim – who is plagued, too, by doubt, hunger, and the countless ailments of old age – falls immediately into the hands of unscrupulous companions: a porter and a clerk who resemble none other than his old nemeses, *Il Gatto* and *La Volpe*, the former concealed by the carnival *bauta*, the latter by the mask of the plague doctor. If Pinocchio recognizes these omens of death and dissimulation, he nevertheless rushes in, following his anonymous guides according to their false promises, but also according to the limit that saps his strength, besets his reason, and weakens his will. Setting out with the porter into the frigid, desolate night, crossing countless empty squares and canals in search of

lodging, but also for food and warmth – for the simplest protection against common limits that now become more and more pressing – the celebrated *professore* wonders if he has been led astray:

He feels hollowed out...his limbs loosened by fatigue and deep foreboding. He fears now that [the] metaphor he has come all this distance to find is to be one not of encapsulation but of erasure, not of summation but of irony and absence. He has envisioned a circle, traveling its circumference as though enacting an oracle, but he now finds himself falling helplessly through the hole in its middle. (19)

When the porter and the professor arrive, finally, at a tavern, Pinocchio allows himself the warm, copious embrace of wine and grappa, ignoring the strange familiarity of the place and of its hosts, falling instead into reverie and dreaming of his unfinished masterpiece, its "individual words springing up and flowering now in his head like golden coins on a magic tree, all atinkle with their manifest profundity and poetry" (33). Drunk and dreaming, Pinocchio unwittingly relives a scene from his childhood: dining with the Fox and the Cat precisely here, at the *Gambero Rosso*, the inn of the Red Crawfish, where the naïve, impetuous puppet was first deceived and betrayed by the promise of a golden tree. And yet, he has forgotten everything: the treacherous companions who abandoned him at the inn; the night of the assassins; the fire, the blade, the rope; the advice of others – "*La strada è pericolosa*...it is dangerous out on the road!" (155) – in short, all of the misfortune and "awesome trials" (191) that composed, for the passionate puppet, a lesson on the limit and the permanent possibility of error.

And so, once more, Pinocchio is fooled, "whereupon a certain magic ensues" (38) and he arrives, alone and besotted, outside an empty *Gambero Rosso*. He has forgotten

why he is here or where he is going. Exposed by his foolishness, robbed of all but his life, he wanders through the frozen, bewildering streets in search of charity. Finding only locked buildings, insults, and abuse, he re-lives another scene from his puppet adventures: the infernal night in the "land of the dead" (Collodi 25) where the world first revealed its cruelty and where he first understood the looming nearness of sickness and death.

But that is not all: in this work, the reflected misfortunes pile up, one after another, like the past shifted and shuffled through the vagaries of a dream. So Pinocchio, frozen and covered in his own filth, is arrested by the *carabinieri* for vagrancy and disturbing the peace. Pleading his case and his innocence – just as he pleaded before the bearded ape who once persecuted him for the crime of being swindled – he is persecuted once more, insulted and abused by police who "[drop] him to watch him sprawl...[throw] snow in his face to listen to him splutter...[tossing] him from one to another in the glaring spotlights, shouting out vulgar jokes and proverbs about excreta and old age" (50). Wholly debased, his disgrace complete, he moreover discovers that he is returning to wood, his flesh – the mark and proof of his dignity, the reward of his virtue – peeling away at the joints to reveal the warped and rotting holm-oak beneath.

Of course, not every scene from Pinocchio's original adventure involved such pain and humiliation. Apart from all the misfortune, there were moments of friendship and kindness. And so, just as the puppet was once rescued from danger and indignity by Alidoro, mastiff of the *carabinieri*, so he is rescued once more and given shelter by his old friend in a disused gondola repair yard. And yet, Pinocchio remains in thrall to the limit – to his age and to all that passed in the terrible night: a "benumbed wayfarer,

swaddled in newspapers, blankets, and old rags like a wizened parody of the Christ child" (57). Huddled hence against the cold, the fantasy of a triumphant return to the homeland dissolved in the confusion and rapture of fever and sickness, he lapses into sleep, where he dreams the movie of his life – a scene of "artifice and desolation" (80), of feigning that hollows out: himself-as-puppet astride himself-as-donkey, alternating between the experience of each, walking past "painted backdrops representing the scenes of his childhood" (82), and remembering how much he has forgotten in the course of a century. And yet, the scenes are confused, made strange through the medium of their retelling (film) and the form of their reappearance (dream); the principles of dignity and virtue crystallized through a century of diligent cultivation are now lost in the confusion of an incredible experience: to wit, "the Passion of Pinocchio," who is judged once more by the bearded ape of his original adventure, rolled in flour, and nailed to a cross by his old school chums. He is a famous image stitched upon a famous image and encouraged, by the wooden cross itself, to "remember how it *felt* to be a piece of talking wood" (84): to be something incredible, something ignorant, something alive but not yet imbued with life – hence, not yet beset by the limit, until, finally, "a darkness is spreading everywhere like the darkness of unknowing" (86). The dream of the movie of his life is nothing less than "a dream of, a surrender to, oblivion" (87).

*Limit, Principle, Progression*

And yet, for Pinocchio, this incredible experience that hollows out, clearing the ground for a return to first lessons, lasts only in the fevered world of the dream. Beyond the renewed memory of "all the old childhood traumas" (42) or the confused images of his first adventure, Pinocchio remains the famous and revered scholar; the indignities

suffered upon his return to Venice were doubtless fated, he tells himself – perhaps, even, carried out by his "blue-haired preceptress" (113), that fountain and paragon of Virtue to whom his *magnum opus* is dedicated: "he *will* find that climactic metaphor, maybe in fact he has *already* found it!" (46). Hence, at the slightest hope of recovery and renewal – in the narrowest distance from the limit – the erstwhile puppet and professor forgets all that has befallen him, reviving instead the pursuit of knowledge and dignity according to the efforts of his "notorious will" (66) and manifested in "I-ness" as the "magical force of good character" (75).

And so, Pinocchio forgets the lessons of his earliest adventure despite the repetition, in the course of a single night, of its several tests and trials. Confronted by the limit, disabused in a moment of his cherished dignity, he fails to recognize the possibility of error – the error, precisely, of an aesthetic directed by principles of permanence, rigid as wood, that deny the fleeting, irreducible being of life itself. Rather, upon this cruel world of experience (and according to this refusal and closure of principle) he imposes his own myth – a life reduced to the half-remembered arguments of his famed oeuvre and so simply to the image of lasting fame itself.

Hence, in turn, Pinocchio's renewed impetuosity and passion: left, for a moment, in the Church of Saint Sebastian, he is accosted by a former student, who appears like an apparition of the Blue-Haired Fairy and whose beauty and forwardness work upon the passionate old professor like the specter of Diana upon a spellbound Actaeon. Burning with sickness and desire, he follows the alluring apparition into the street, abandoning Alidoro and all charity – ignoring, too, the advice of St. Sebastian's painted and marbled saints, who come alive, in Pinocchio's fevered delirium, to chastise his heedless passion –

only to succumb, once again, to the great dominion of the limit: when his ancient, wooden limbs yield to cold and exhaustion and he can pursue the apparition no further, he is thrust into a wastebasket by none other than Mangiafoco, descendent of the puppet-master of his first adventure. His humiliation again complete, the limit now extended to his very liberty, he recalls the old lesson once more: "a lifetime of virtue, of self-conquest...an heroic career of the most rigid discipline and soberest endeavor...is no protection against the wild whims of senectitude, extremity's giddy last-minute bravado" (130).

So the first cycle of the narrative, already a reflection of the original adventure, repeats itself once more: the imposition of principle and the renewal of naïve hope, the dissimulation of the scene and the reappearance of old foes, the renewed burden of the limit and the irruption of passion and desire – which Pinocchio projects back upon the famed image of himself, upon his lifework, and so revives the principles whose imposition begins the cycle anew. The entire narrative, in fact, oscillates as such between principle and the limit, the former undermined by the latter, the latter denied in the renewal of the former. Pinocchio, in other words, "is that proverbial impetuous fool, who, rushing in, gets, over and over again, trod upon" (161). However stark the limit (his crumbling body, his failing eyesight, his sickness and passion), however grave the trials or misfortune (his near drowning, the tyranny of the *carabinieri*, the machinations of *La Volpe*, *Il Gatto*, and his old school chum Eugenio), however miraculous his rescue (by Alidoro and Melampetta, by a troupe of *commedia dell'arte* puppets, by a kit of swirling pigeons), Pinocchio remains caught up in a kind of Eternal Return whose iterations stall the progressive movement of the journey.

But just as Nietzsche's figure describes an experience that turns the self around to face itself, so too this recurring cycle turns Pinocchio around, in the movement of conversion, to review himself (to assay his attitude and his conduct), but also to invite an experience and a *willed difference* that would restore progress and complete the journey's circle. And in this moment of review, Pinocchio finally accepts the error at the heart of his final adventure: his whole life was like the flesh, stretched over his wooden core, that concealed his impetuous puppet-being – a mask of knowledge and principle worn without reflection, which is also the mask of self-deception worn without recognition. For the first time since he was miraculously covered with living flesh, that is, Pinocchio faces up to "his lifelong yearning to hide himself from life's profuse terrors and confusions upon the bosom of the simple, the vast" (218) – that is, upon the principles of permanence that deny the limits of life.<sup>9</sup> Abandoning, thus, the naïve lifework whose completion first prompted the return to Venice and whose theme and content represented so many fascinating masks, so many opportunities for easy self-deception, Pinocchio recognizes the great dominion of error itself: "as always in all the days before yesterday, he was wrong" (258). According to the lesson of his first adventure, moreover, the limit that underlies the permanent possibility of error becomes the error that underlies the constant need for correction. Hence, Pinocchio's other great recognition in the moment of review: the pursuit of principle, coupled with the famed image of its pursuer, had amplified "that ancient bane" and lifelong fault – to wit, the professor's "woodenheaded resistance to well-meant advice" (243).

Here, at the end of his circular journey, Pinocchio finds not the crowning glory of virtue in the completion of his lifework but rather the consummation of life at the limit of

death, which the professor, converted to himself in a relation of humility and acceptance, is now prepared to meet. Whence the reappearance of the Blue-Haired Fairy, who played the role of the beautiful apparition, stirring the professor's passion and desire, moving him to folly and misfortune, but also imposing, once more, the lessons of the original adventure. Confronted by this incredible, otherworldly figure who had always pulled the strings of his puppet-being, Pinocchio imposes his own will: held aloft by a troupe of *Burattini*, singing their lewd, macabre songs of passion and death and "celebrating all the naughty truths of the world" (328), he is carried to the alter of the Fairy (who is all at once grotesque, hideous, and beautiful) to be granted two final wishes: that the living flesh, the reward of his earliest adventure, be stripped away, and that the obstinate, passionate puppet who remained behind be restored to life. Hence, in a doubled movement of life and death completely oriented to the limit he had long denied, Pinocchio lives the lesson learned in the moment of conversion – the lesson of his first fable, the lesson his final adventure.

#### The Death of a Limit and a Cynic Art of Life

Coover's work, like Barth's, is Cynical: on one hand, all of the interlocutors in *Pinocchio in Venice* combine to form a figure similar in character and function to Barth's Burlingame – that Other who demonstrates, through a style and mode of living, a radical finitude and the absolute "bareness of life" (Foucault, *Courage of the Truth* 173). What else is the drunken wrath of Gepetto, the blindness of Alidoro, the hunger of *La Volpe*, the passion and greed of Eugenio, or the madness and death of the *Burattini* but the proof, offered over and over again, of a limit that marks all life? In other words, these characters, through their very being, hold a mirror up to the decrepit and impetuous puppet so he

might recognize what alone is necessary to life, but also what, in his attitude and conduct, renounces and denies it. On the other hand, the oscillating cycle of the adventure and the hard-won progression that closes out its circular journey – that is, the narrative content as a whole – can be read as a Cynic lesson. The review, skepticism, and questioning that underlie and compose the relation of self to self must all be *willed*; at the same time, the movement of the will (which is to say, its direction and objects) must also be subject to this same skepticism.<sup>10</sup> If it is true (as the Stoics held) that the self is the only thing that is willed freely and absolutely,<sup>11</sup> it is also true (as the Cynics prove) that the movement of the will, even when oriented to the self, is always susceptible to error. Pinocchio, after all, wills a certain excellence, wills a life according to principles that are accepted everywhere and appear reasonable, and yet, this life is insufficient and these principles are so quickly corrupted and so easily upset. Hence, Coover's work illuminates not only the great dominion of error, but also the Cynic lesson whose "final aim" is to demonstrate that "the world will be able to get back to its truth, will be able to transfigure itself and become other...only at the price of a change, a complete alteration...in the relation one has to self" (ibid. 315).

Barthelme's *Dead Father*, like Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice*, is Cynical, too, and it demonstrates – albeit in a completely different modality – this same lesson on the dominion of error and the necessity of a willed change. Like *Snow White* or the works of Roussel or Robbe-Grillet, the arbitrary discourse of *The Dead Father* offers an image of language itself. And yet, a thicker narrative line runs through the panoply of its random speech to describe an incredible journey: a band of workers, led by Thomas and Julie, drag the hulking, living carcass of the Dead Father from the city, through the strange and

hostile countryside, to a "great hole in the ground" (174) where bulldozers will rid the world of a terrible imposition. The Dead Father, after all, represents an archetype.<sup>12</sup> He imposes a certain pattern on the life of the city (whose citizens are all his children), permitting one experience while forbidding and closing off another according to the whim of authority. The Dead Father is therefore like the law that lives by virtue of its application. And yet, he is dead and his judgement beyond appeal, like a law written in stone and inherited generation after generation: "dead, but still with us, still with us, but dead. No one can remember when he was not here in our city" (3–4).

In the course of the journey, the Dead Father therefore remains an obstinate burden, loathe to leave his ancient fiefdom, constantly breaking free to wreak havoc on the countryside and to rage against the prospect of difference. The Dead Father, in other words, desires only the renewal of the Same and the order of a status quo, which he alone imposes on the world: "I am the Father. All lines my lines. All figure and all ground mine, out of my head" (19). And so, it falls to Thomas (unlikely hero, murderous son), to Julie and Emma (possible mothers, anti-fathers), and to the band of workers to *will a difference*: to act, to choose – to displace the false horizon of the archetype and so displace a limit that is non-immanent and non-necessary.<sup>13</sup> The journey of *The Dead Father*, in other words, moves toward the renewal of risk and change – of difference "in the form of an other world and an other life" (Foucault, *Courage of the Truth* 340). And by willing this difference, which clears the ground for a return (to the city and its new freedom, to a life laid bare), the children who bury the Dead Father demonstrate in turn the courage of the Cynic life, which is nothing less than the courage to throw off the false horizon and "the courage to be one's own creator" (ibid. 179).<sup>14</sup>

But that is not all: the journey represented by this narrative line, which runs through Barthelme's work without exhausting all of its content, is moreover mirrored at the level of its form. *The Dead Father*, that is, carries out and performs what it also demonstrates, shifting the process of conversion from the world of its characters (whose experience functions as lesson and example) to the world of the reader (who is turned around to experience firsthand the force of *not-knowing*). And in the interplay of its form and its content, *The Dead Father* illuminates, in turn, what allows the works of feigning to function as an art of life – that is, as equipment and aid or as "technical armature" in the self's relation to itself ("Subjectivity and Truth" 88).

#### *The Ironic Limit of Feigning*

"The writer," says Barthelme, "is one who, embarking upon a task, does not know what to do" (*Not Knowing* 11): the blank, white page, prior to the first black mark that fills its empty space, represents boundless possibility. Writing, on the other hand, "is a process of dealing with not-knowing, a forcing of what and how" (ibid. 12) – with every black mark, a winnowing of possibility and a burgeoning knowledge. And yet, when writing rises above a common, diffuse task to become a work of language and a work of art, it nevertheless fosters (for some small province of living) the same *not-knowing* that, as process, it sought to overcome. Of course, the question immediately arises, how does writing as such force a "what and how" (that is, impose a knowledge) even while the product of writing (that is, the work of art) encourages *not-knowing* and non-knowledge? The answer, of course, lies in the difference between process and product: the former overcomes *not-knowing* by imposing a horizon and a limit; the latter, set free from the

writer and the process of writing, offers up this same limit, this same horizon and knowledge, to the eyes of the world.

What does the world see? Of course, the work-become-object might be entirely serious, possessing "an exact functional efficiency" between its language and its "role of communication" (Foucault, "Language to Infinity" 97). But if, instead, the form of the work composes a mirror "wedged into the thickness of its discourse which might open the unlimited space of its own image" (ibid.), then its function becomes completely ironic. In the first movement of language, a knowledge and horizon appears, takes shape, and imposes itself upon the blank page of experience; the second movement, which reflects the first, turns this knowledge and horizon (this limit-as-closure) around to face itself, confronting itself with its own image and model, revealing to itself its absolute non-necessity. Such, after all, is the function, in all the works of feigning, of reduplication: of the repetition that is always absolutely stark – its status as simulation immediately clear, its function as dissimulation (even at the level of the phrase and its doubled proposition, which can serve no other purpose than ironic coupling and undoing) always so readily apparent.

In Barthelme's work, too, there is repetition at the level of the phrase and the proposition.<sup>15</sup> But the most profound ironies occur at the level of its form – or, more precisely, in the interplay of its several forms and the panoply of its non-narrative discourse. *The Dead Father* is filled with familiar genres: dialogues, speeches, myths, sermons, legal and technical discourse, guides and manuals, and the fable form itself. And yet, if these genres are recognizable as such, they are nevertheless filled with the most arbitrary language. The Dead Father, for instance, delivers a speech marked by all

the familiar signs and figures – an audience arranged in a half circle around the speaker, the speaker assuming "a speaking position, a kind of forwardly lean" (49), opening and closing remarks, applause and thanks. And yet, the speech is entirely absurd, its language completely random, without argument or purpose: "Quite extraordinary, said Emma, what did it mean? Thank you, said the Dead Father, it meant I made a speech" (51). In a different mode, the dialogue of the women, carried out at several points of the work, becomes a game whose parameters are the innumerable combinations of words into phrases and phrases into propositions, and whose only rule is the necessary absence of any connection between them: a game of the endless non-sequitur. Or again, Julie and Thomas are given *A Manual for Sons*, reproduced in full in the middle of the work, composed of all the didactic forms (the allegory and the moral tale, the gospel and the sermon, the guidebook and the conduct book), yet whose arbitrary content relates no moral, guides no conduct, and teaches no lesson.

And yet, the lesson of *The Dead Father*, offered to its reader through this interplay of form and content, remains clear enough: the limit of an order (of discourse, of experience) – which always appears "natural" and therefore necessary (or else as an aid to thought, rather than its greatest obstacle) – is only ever a forcing of *what* and *how*, a knowledge and a horizon that is always only conventional, always non-necessary. Barthelme's work, in other words, carries out a task similar to the passage from Borges that famously incited, for Foucault, the "laughter that shattered,"

breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between

the Same and the Other...[For,] the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own. (*Order of Things* xvi)

A stark, radical difference that confronts the self, turning it around to challenge the orders of its thought, clearing away all the old certainties through an ironic imposition: was this not precisely the role carried out, in antiquity, by the Cynic? After all, the Cynic revealed the bareness of life and what alone was necessary to it; in its nudity and suffering, the Cynic life constituted the "grimace of the true life" (*Courage of the Truth* 227) according to the open, scandalous disclosure of finitude, which condemned, by simple virtue of its necessity, every limit and horizon that was non-immanent, conventional, and non-necessary.

Through its narrative discourse, but also through the relation of its non-narrative content and its reduplicative form, Barthelme's work therefore illuminates what is common to all the works of feigning as an art of life: the circular movement that clears the ground for a return, encouraging an openness directed in the relation of self to self. On one hand, the reduplication of their language (of the phrase or the proposition, of the familiar orders of discourse) forms an ironic double that simulates and dissimulates. Through the mode of being of their discourse, in other words, the works of feigning undercut and hollow out. At the level of their narrative content, on the other hand, these same works demonstrate the work of conversion and the return to self: through the circular journey, through its interplay of Same and Other, but most of all, through characters who will a movement from distance to proximity, the works of feigning offer an *example*. And in this sense, they become like the *Hupomnēmata*, which function "as

books of life, as guides for conduct" (Foucault, "Self Writing" 209) insofar as their lesson and model becomes *prokheiron* or near at hand and bears, like a touchstone, upon the moment of review or upon some imagined experience.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For an ancient source of Apollo's epithets, see Pausanias i.3.3 (*Apollo Alexicacus*), vi.24.5 (*Apollo Acecius*), and viii.383.6 (*Apollo Epicurius*). For more recent commentary on Apollo's attributes and epithets and their sources, see, for example, Smith 230–232, Graves 55–57, and Carr 45–52.

<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Barth's work vivifies the condition that, for Roland Barthes, marks "the whole of Literature," which declares "*Larvatus prodeo*, As I walk forward, I point out my mask" (*Writing Degree Zero* 40).

<sup>3</sup> On the senses of *Bildung*, see Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 61n4.

<sup>4</sup> As Ebenezer's former tutor will ask, "What is the difference 'twixt *innocence* and *ignorance*, pray, save that the one is Latin and the other Greek?...In substance, they are the same: *innocence is ignorance*" (387).

<sup>5</sup> Ebenezer remains a virgin, moreover, precisely because "he was no person at all" (45). According to his complete openness and his irresolution, that is, "he could picture any kind of man taking a woman – the bold as well as the bashful, the clean green boy and the dottering gray lecher – and work out in his mind the speeches appropriate to each under any of several sorts of circumstances" (*ibid.*).

<sup>6</sup> On the lips of the poet and pimp John McEvoy, for example, the paean to love and innocence becomes an object of scorn:

"What is this? *And Phaedra sweet Hippolytus her Step-Son? Ye rhyme Endymion and Step-Son?*"

Ebenezer paid his critic no heed. "'Twill at least belie your charge that I write

doggerel," he said.

"*Endymion* and *Step-Son*," McEvoy repeated, making a face. "Belie't, ye say? Marry, sir, 'twill confirm it past question! Were I in your boots I'd pay my whore-money and consign letter, *Endymion*, *Step-Son*, and all to the fire." (63)

<sup>7</sup> "*Pinocchio* was instantly a great popular success, the fifth edition appearing in 1890, the year of Collodi's death; the first English translation, published in 1892, heralded innumerable versions world-wide...*Pinocchio* is one of the most translated books in the world" (Lawson 104). See also Phillips, "*Pinocchio*, available...in more than 220 translations worldwide, remains the most translated Italian book and, after the Bible, the most widely read" (235).

<sup>8</sup> Foucault, of course, refers only to French readers. *Coelina*, he notes, "sold 1.2 million copies from its publication in 1798 to the Restoration. This means that every person who knew how to read, and had read at least one book in his life, had read *Coelina*" ("Language to Infinity" 97).

<sup>9</sup> In this sense, *Pinocchio* is precisely like another of Coover's characters: the prince of *Briar Rose*, who, transfixed by the limit, realizes that "all life affirmations are grounded in willing self-delusion, masks, artifice, a blind eye cast toward the abyss" (45).

<sup>10</sup> The will, in other words, precedes and directs *logos*, turning it around upon the self and turning reason into a skepticism and questioning that nevertheless bears back upon the will, its direction, its objects.

<sup>11</sup> In the discussion of Seneca and *Stultitia*, Foucault concludes, "what object can one will absolutely, that is to say without relating it to anything else? It is the self. What

object can one always want, without having to change it over time or on different occasions? It is the self" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 133).

<sup>12</sup> Or rather, in Donald Antrim's words, an "archetype of archetypes" (ix).

<sup>13</sup> Though its definition and its etymology suggest that the *archetype* is synonymous with the *origin* – ἀρχή (*arkhē*), "a beginning, origin, first cause"; ἀρχέτυπος (*arkhētupos*) "first-moulded as a pattern or model" (Liddell and Scott) – and that it precedes every instance of its reduplication, the archetype in fact describes a recurring form *in retrospect*: it is a device of the Same and of the homogenous that is completely conventional (or rather, the archetype describes what has become conventional), which is to say, it describes something non-necessary that nevertheless poses as the natural and necessary.

<sup>14</sup> Foucault uses this phrase to describe Tillich's *Zynismus* or contemporary cynicism, which derives precisely from ancient Cynic courage in the relation to self; i.e., "[the Cynics'] courage is expressed not creatively but in their form of life. They courageously reject any solution which would deprive them of their freedom of rejecting whatever they want to reject" (Tillich 151). See also Foucault's discussion of the Cynicism that runs through history (including the modern cynicism of, among others, Nietzsche, Sade, Diderot, and Flaubert), *Courage of the Truth* 177–190.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, certain phrases (some prosaic, some unusual or rare) are repeated within and among the erratic dialogues of Julie and Emma. A partial list: "time to go," "hoping this will reach you at a favorable moment," "is that a threat?" "he's not bad-looking," "inclined to tarry for a bit," "pop one of these," "that's your opinion," "more

than I can bear," "haven't made up my mind," "you must have studied English," "how did that make you feel?" "did you know Lord Raglan?" "various circumstances requiring my attention," "I can make it hot for you," "wake up one night with a thumb / kiss / prick / puckle in your eye," etc.

## Conclusion

To restate things and to summarize: through the figure of feigning, as theme and method, I have illuminated the reappearance of Foucault's earliest concerns in his final research on the care of the self – to wit, an understanding of finitude as strict limit, the possible functions of art and writing, and the necessity of critique as a constant questioning and testing. In turn, these concerns are arranged, in the different phases of Foucault's thought, around the category of the subject – or rather, within the space between 1) its characteristic forms and their constraints and 2) the possibility that remains for other forms and for other experiences of the self. In the works of literary criticism (and in the literary references threaded throughout Foucault's early major work), this experience takes the form of dissolution: an experience of the outside that disrupts the origin, calling the status of the subject into question and confirming finitude not as the basis for its objectification in knowledge, but rather as the simple, strict limit that marks all life. Following Bataille especially (which also means following the Nietzschean and Heideggerian threads of Foucault's work), this radical finitude calls in turn for a radical openness, where knowing gives way to *not-knowing* and where experience is once more allowed "to lead where it would [without] some endpoint given in advance, to no harbor (but to a place of bewilderment, of nonsense)" (Bataille, *Inner Experience* 3).

However, if the early work, brought together as such through the figure of feigning, culminates in this call for openness, it also raises questions never addressed by Foucault prior to his turn from literature: what becomes of the subject of pure openness? Or rather, to shift the question somewhat, in this place of bewilderment and nonsense – of experience stretched to its furthest point and of possibility without aim or end – would

openness not collapse under the weight of its own totality, its meaning reduced in direct proportion to its fullness? As the goal of the early work, openness therefore threatens to undermine the critique that lies at the heart of Foucault's entire oeuvre. More specific to the project here, with Foucault's shift to genealogy in particular and the corresponding shift, in the objects of enquiry, from the being of language and literature to the history of sexuality and discipline, the aims of feigning as an art of simulation and dissimulation remain uncertain: what dangers are posed by dissolution and the total experience fostered by feigning? Or, in a more positive sense, what ethical potential remains for an art and a critique whose foundation is *not-knowing*?

With Foucault's turn to the Greeks in his last work, I argue, these problems find their solution when openness, in the form of a permanent testing and questioning, is given direction and a precise meaning in the relation of the self to itself. Here, once more, openness arises in response to finitude understood as a strict limit: if the self is "the only object that one can freely will" and that "one can will absolutely, that is to say, without relating it to anything else" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 133), the will nevertheless remains susceptible to passion and appearance, to forgetfulness and ignorance – in short, to the limit that fosters distance between the self in its frailty and ignorance and the self as the object and goal of *epimeleia heautou* or care of the self. The movement of conversion – of proximity to the self as a goal in itself – must therefore be guided at every moment by the "suspicion, possible accusation, moral reproach, and intellectual refutation which dispels illusion" (ibid. 297) – guided, that is, by a constant and critical openness in the relation of the self to itself. And so, from Foucault's last works, I arrange a different constellation of terms around the notion of feigning: 1)

*askēsis* or exercise and practice that composes a "formative test of the self" (ibid. 449), in the sense of *meletan* and *gumnazein*, 2) testing and questioning, in turn, as the slow, arduous work of self upon self whose goal is *paraskheuē* or equipment that is always *prokheiron* or near at hand, and 3) *sōzein* or salvation, which, like the self fully converted and proximate to itself, represents the "vigilant, continuous, and completed form of the relation to self closed in on itself" (ibid. 184–185).

A distance and a proximity: two opposing movements in the relation to self and two completely different experiences. But in each case, and in each phase of the argument here, feigning also describes a constant: the necessary role of an intermediary understood in the strict sense as that which comes between the subject and the object – or more precisely, between the self and the world as the twin loci of experience. In Foucault's early work, this role, of course, is played by literature as art and technique according to the specific form and effect of the works of Sade and Flaubert, of Roussel, of Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski, and of the *nouveau roman*. But literature-as-intermediary is not limited to these authors and this art that remains on the fringes of French culture. In fact, the same function is performed, in our language and our culture, by Coover, Barth, and Barthelme – that is, in the works of fabulation, which form an image of the self that is sovereign and separate from the self and that double this image and set each iteration against all the others by depriving every image of its origin. In this procession of the double – which is to say, in the movement of an immanent and ironic critique – the self as source and repository of desires, principles, and representations is simulated and dissimulated, detached from itself and annulled by itself.

With the second phase of feigning, on the other hand, the process of critique as *not-knowing* instead forms the first half of a circle where distance gives way to proximity in a progressive movement that leads the self back to itself. Hollowed out and divested of everything that composes a naïve or secret interiority<sup>1</sup> – facing up, moreover, to the limit that puts all knowledge into question – the self returns to itself and converts to itself by questioning and evaluating every principle, precept, and representation that could constitute the self. The works of feigning, in this sense, now represent techniques for evaluation and testing: a reconsideration of experience that evaluates the relation of the self to what is known and what was done, but also an invitation of experience (whether possible or incredible) that equips the self against its natural and necessary limits. Feigning, after all, is an art of repetition that, by virtue of its form, effects a review. But feigning is also the technique *par excellence* for inviting an experience whose circular form and incredible content compose nothing less than a fable, in the sense of an "exemplary fabulous" that functions as "lesson and example" (Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men" 173). Hence, the works of feigning resemble, on one hand, the early Greek novels of the first and second centuries in their "seriously didactic" dimension (Morgan 72) – that is, as models or examples of the work of conversion played out against the limit and against the dangers of life. On the other hand, feigning also resembles the *hupomnēmata* that serve as *basanos* or touchstone: "as books of life, as guides for conduct" and so, in short, an "equipment of helpful discourses" (Foucault, "Self Writing" 209–210). The subject, after all, remains fundamentally limited and always susceptible to passion and appearances; the movement and object of the will remains undirected and it cannot get outside of itself to direct itself: "no one is strong

enough by himself to rise above the waves," Seneca says, and so "he needs someone to give him a hand, someone to pull him to the shore" (*Epistles* LII.1–2, qtd. in Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 145n4) – hence the requirement of an art and technique that recalls the self back to itself and to the movement and goal of conversion.

And yet, the works of feigning offer something slightly different from either a model that should be emulated or recalled, in the manner of the Greek novel, or the *hupomnēmata* that offers a *basanos* or touchstone – something at once *more* and *less* than an aid posed against the limits of knowledge and memory: *less* because they do not represent an absolute principle that must be recalled regardless of circumstance (apart, of course, from the general precept of testing and questioning, which anyway replaces the need for principle with the need for correction and the lesson) and *more* because, rather than an aid to memory, the works of feigning offer armature for the movement and direction of the will. And they do so not only through their homiletic or didactic content, which serves as model or lesson, but also by virtue of their characteristic form: that is, according to the repetition, doubling, and reduplication that Foucault identifies with nothing less than the being of literature. After all, if the works of feigning are capable of an immanent critique, it is only through the repetition that turns each thing around to confront its own image and representation. The form of repetition therefore becomes the basis of testing and questioning – of the willed openness that bears against every principle or precept in the circular space of their reduplication. But repetition also maintains a two-part relation to the movement of conversion and the care of the self: on one hand, it represents all the "prescriptive figure[s]" of return that Foucault finds in the Greek and Roman texts of the first and second centuries (*Hermeneutics of the Subject*

250) – "*eph'heauton epistrephein, eis heauton anakhōrein, ad se recurrere, ad se redire, in se recedere, se reducere in tutum*" (ibid. 248): the self turns back to itself and returns to the safe harbor of the self, which constitutes an end or goal in itself. On the other hand, reduplication represents the special form of review and evaluation in this movement of return and therefore contributes to *sōzein* or salvation as the goal of *epimeleia heautou* or care of the self.

### Final Considerations

In this manner, I have pulled together all the neglected and recondite works of Foucault's early literary criticism, relating them to the critique that defines his entire oeuvre and deriving from them a method of interpretation, which I apply to works other than those discussed by Foucault. But I have also turned around the question normally posed in the secondary scholarship by picking up the thread and argument of the early work and maintaining its force and direction with reference to Foucault's turn to the Greeks. In this way, I have singled out certain themes and a particular direction from the last lectures (including an original focus on openness and the limit), which in fact offer an incredible range of possible readings and applications.<sup>2</sup> But in reading Foucault's early and final work as such – that is, by arguing for an art and a critique that bears upon the self, not only according to works that are important for Foucault but in literature specific to our time and our language – a few considerations remain regarding 1) the distance between the theory of feigning and the actual status of art and of avant-garde writing in particular, 2) an assumed ethic of reading and its relation to the will, 3) the originality of feigning, and 4) its future possibilities as method of interpretation and mode of critique.

#### 1. An Art of Life, the Life of Art

Following Foucault as closely as I have here always presents a certain risk given the radical and ambitious character of his argument in all the phases of his thought. From the death and disappearance of man to a history of *les modes d'assujettissement*, the object of critique remains nothing less than the form and legacy of the subject. And, of course, Foucault's discussion of literature or of art-as-technique occurs within the system of this thought and according to its rather grand philosophical goals: hence, the bold claims here, a propos the early work and the figure of feigning, that art might carry out the functions attributed to it – that it might compose and offer an incredible experience or that it simulates objects and lives through an ironic doubling that represents, in turn, an original mode of critique. On the other hand, regarding the last work in particular and all of this writing about a lost and forgotten moment between Platonism and Christianity – a moment no doubt connected to modern philosophy and spirituality but whose form now, to us, appears radical in its difference: once more, we tend to read this work through the lens of what this moment represents for a genealogy of the subject – according, that is, to an entire mode of life and to techniques, which are inseparable from it, that outline and manifest this difference. In this thought, art is like the Cynic Peregrinus, who sets himself on fire before the crowds at the Olympic games (Foucault, *Courage of the Truth* 254); art is like the death of Diogenes on the street for all to see (ibid. 253– 254): in its radical dimensions, in the absolute difference of its experience, art turns the self around, pitting it against itself and everything that composes it according to the game of necessity and non-necessity.

If art is capable of fostering or otherwise supporting this special form of critique, its scope and reach are nevertheless moderated by two conditions or provisos. First, like

the Cynicism (or the Stoicism or even the general precept of *epimeleia heautou*) that was only truly available to and practiced by few in the ancient world,<sup>3</sup> the reach of art remains limited, whatever its apparent potential or the apparent broadness of its appeal. After all, art is always to some extent "sacralized" by institutions (museums, galleries, or exhibitions on one hand, the university on the other) and its production, circulation, reception and so on are limited accordingly. The same, of course, is true of literature and of experimental writing in particular: "we know perfectly well," as Foucault once said, "that today so-called avant-garde literature is read only by university teachers and their students" ("Functions of Literature" 309). So, first proviso: the scope and reach of art and literature (and experimental writing especially) is limited in direct proportion to the size and composition of its audience. The works of Blanchot or Bataille or those of Coover, Barth, and Barthelme are of course well known in certain circles, but they will never enjoy the reach of something like *Coelina* (for the French) or *The Story of a Puppet* (for the rest of the world). Instead, like all special and rarefied art, they remain on the fringes of our culture.

But that is not all: if I have described this rarefied literature within the general economy, so to speak, of the care of the self – and if I have outlined its potential, following Foucault's last work, as *tekhnē tou biou* or as an art of life – its critique (at the level of both object and effect) is never wholesale. That is, if the works of feigning turn the self around to face itself, what the self sees in the moment of review is not the whole self, but rather some particular conduct or disposition or line of thought. This thought or conduct is shaped and conditioned, in turn, by all the circumstances of its appearance and its relation to other conduct and thought within a general mode of doing and being.

Hence, second proviso: the part of the self that, by virtue of the circular work, flashes out from the flux of real experience in a moment of recognition and reflection is local and doubtless somewhat minor – a small province of living, as I have called it in the argument here.

And yet, like the strange, public spectacle of Rameau's Nephew or like the Cynic beggar who lives completely in the open and "gives his own life as testimony to everyone" (Foucault, *Courage of the Truth* 254), this strange and rarefied art remains for all to see, or rather, for any who care to attend to its marvelous difference. Whatever the scope of its real or possible objects, whatever its limited reach, feigning still offers a special opportunity for reflection: an occasion not only for review and evaluation according to the interplay of its special form and content, but also an invitation of an otherwise impossible experience. And in this sense, feigning takes its place in the long tradition of art, from cynicism through romanticism through the avant-garde, whose force and validity no doubt depends on the sovereignty bestowed by its marginal status – upon its balancing on a line (a boundary, a threshold) where it once again "manages to face up to the world" but also to "scintillate outside it" (Foucault, *Swimmer between Two Words* 173).

## 2. Reading and Willing

If these provisos outline the real limits of avant-garde art and writing but also its real and actual potential, they also highlight a second consideration that pertains to the whole argument here – to wit, as a mode of critique in particular, feigning appears to require (or at any rate, to assume) a certain *ethic of reading*. Whether or not the work of art becomes an occasion for questioning and review (and whether or not it encourages in

succession a distance and proximity according to the phases of feigning) depends entirely on a movement of will that constitutes the reader as subject-object of the work. In other words, if a special mode of language bears upon the self-as-object, its function appears to first require an active, willed search for this aspect of the work carried out by the self-as-subject. This ethic of reading – this active seeking out of the self in the work by the self who reads – appears in turn to assume a movement of will that orders what it finds in art according to a relation worked out in advance: according, that is, to an apparent founding function.

Two things must be said about an ethic of reading as such and its implications for the theory of feigning: in the first place, the notion of an active willing brings up an old problem that Foucault in fact broaches in his first lectures and that lies between the phases of his work as between the two halves of this dissertation: "is it really reasonable," he asks, "to pick out the notion of will as central for an analysis of kinds of knowledge (*savoirs*) which tries to avoid reference to a founding subject? Is this not another way of once again reintroducing something like a sovereign subject?" (*Lectures on the Will to Know* 3). And while Foucault may not have addressed this problem in any substantive way in his subsequent lectures on the will to know, the response here is clear enough: the willing of the self cannot be foundational (in the sense of a founding subject that orders experience a priori according to the structure of its being) because willing, as process and function, always requires something that is *not-willing* – something outside of itself (a master, the Other, *tekhnē*) that determines its objects and direction. Once again, the will is hemmed in by limits, its movement led astray by passion and appearances or misdirected according to the forgetfulness and ignorance that alone are natural to the subject. If the

movement of the will toward the self, on the other hand, represents a movement against ignorance, this direction must nevertheless come from elsewhere, from outside of the self and outside of the will.

Second point: here, this role or function is of course performed by art-as-*tekhnē* and an art of the outside, which directs the will and bears upon the self only by virtue of the sovereignty guaranteed by its special, circular form. But this form, in turn, "works all by itself" and carries out the role outlined here by simple virtue of its circular being – that is, through the interplay of its reduplicative language and a certain homiletic or didactic content. In this way, the work of feigning resembles that ancient philosophical discourse whose function and effects "are due to its own materiality, as it were, to its own modeling, its own rhetoric" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 348). But there is a difference, too: according to this ancient analogue, the self places itself within this discourse and its "fictional situation" through an active movement of the will and the imagination that composes a test of self (ibid. 358). The argument here, on the other hand, requires only that the reader allow the work, through an experience of its duplications and its difference, to move the self and to direct the will as such. A propos an ethic of reading, then, feigning requires only a certain, rather passive disposition or attitude adopted toward the work: a simple attending to its form and its message – to the distance and proximity outlined by its circular journey.

What, then, is the result of this attention? In a word, an opportunity to turn toward the self – an opportunity that, once again, finds its analogue in late Antiquity, according to the simple precept of audition: "the soul that listens must keep watch on itself" (ibid. 351). Of course, reading is less passive than listening, but reading, like listening, must be

directed, and in this sense, it becomes like an exercise in thought whose object is similar to the Greek *meletan* or meditation whose object remains the self. Again, feigning, like the Stoic practice of listening, requires only an openness in relation to the circular work and to its lesson, which amplifies openness in turn and directs it back upon the self in a relation of care and attention.

### 3. The Originality of Feigning

And so, even in light of these considerations and provisos that have narrowed or clarified the scope and reach of feigning, we arrive at precisely the same conclusion: the circular work of language encourages openness, according to my reading of Foucault's early literary criticism, and directs it a propos the free evaluation, adoption, modification, and so on of attitude and *ēthos* according to the ancient analogue of *epimeleia heautou* or care of the self. But a further question or consideration remains regarding the originality of feigning with respect to both 1) its formal mechanisms or techniques and 2) its characteristic results.

In the first place, the identification of repetition, which is so central to my reading of Foucault and to the theory and application of feigning, clearly belongs to a tradition of literary criticism that is now well over a century old: that is, to formalism, which remains, in Foucault's words, "one of the strongest and at the same time one of the most varied currents" in criticism of art and literature since the end of the nineteenth century ("Structuralism and Post-Structuralism" 433). Whether we choose, as representative, the early Russian formalists or the American new critics or the European structuralists or post-structuralists does not matter because the mode of critique remains broadly the same: the work of art functions by virtue of its formal elements and must be described

and understood accordingly, that is, at the level of its language, which remains sovereign relative to its content or to the conditions of its appearance. Doubtless, the focus here on repetition as the formal mechanism that "has effects," so to speak, follows this same schema and this same broad mandate.

But there are specific consonances, too, between the argument here and certain authors whose work forms part of this tradition. The question for Barthes, for instance – in *Writing Degree Zero*, in his essays on Bataille or Robbe-Grillet – always concerns the sovereignty of language and the "density of the Word" (*Writing Degree Zero* 47), which in turn reveals the being of a literature that "began to regard itself as double: at once object and scrutiny of that object, utterance and utterance of that utterance, literature-object and metaliterature" ("Literature and Metalanguage" 99). Already in 1959, Barthes had begun to outline the repetition and doubling that constituted both the being of literature and an imminent critique. Or again, to choose another example from a different era: I have already mentioned Shklovsky, but the consonance between *ostranenie* or "making strange" and the functions attributed to avant-garde literature here bears repeating: does feigning (in its departure and separation from fiction in particular) not form "a 'vision' of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it" (Shklovsky 18)? And is the task set for it here not precisely "to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception" (ibid. 12) in order to form a special (that is, original and specifically literary) experience? In this sense, the mechanisms of feigning, which lie at the heart of my reading of Foucault's literary criticism, owe much to formalism – both generally (that is, at the level of their identification) and also a propos their apparent functions.

But that is not all: to claim openness as the characteristic result of feigning is to make, in fact, a somewhat mundane argument, or at least a very traditional one. A passage from the epilogue of C.S. Lewis's *Experiment in Criticism* (to choose a more or less random example outside the schema of formalism)<sup>4</sup> demonstrates precisely this banality:

The man who is contented to be only himself, and therefore less a self, is in prison. My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through the eyes of others. Reality, even seen through the eyes of many, is not enough. I will see what others have invented. Even the eyes of all humanity are not enough. I regret that the brutes cannot write books. Very gladly would I learn what face things present to a mouse or a bee; more gladly still would I perceive the olfactory world charged with all the information and emotion it carries for a dog. Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality. There are mass emotions which heal the wound; but they destroy the privilege. In them our separate selves are pooled and we sink back into sub-individuality. But in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see[s]. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do. (140–141)

Like Scholes, who argued for the foreignness of the work as the basis of a confrontation between the world and its future possibility, the ground of Lewis's entire argument is in fact formed by a *difference*, in the work of art, that opens up the self through its special (unique, incredible) experience.

What, then, remains original to feigning at the level of either its language and technique or its function and characteristic results?<sup>5</sup> Of course, for each example above, a specific difference is easily found according to the particulars of feigning – according, that is, to repetition as the proof of a strict limit and finitude, which calls in turn for openness and a constant questioning. The critique afforded by literature according to Barthes, on the other hand, restricts itself to questions of political economy and ideology, which moreover carry assumptions and involve objects, goals, and so on that are completely different from those of feigning as an art of life. In a different modality (though still concerning critique), Shklovsky outlines the form of literature responsible for *ostranenie* as a final, completed or self-enclosed effect that is moreover tied to a theory of artistic perception: the work, that is, "makes strange" as "an aesthetic end in itself" (12) – "to make the stone *stony*," as Shklovsky famously puts it (*ibid.*) – without regard to any further function, critical or otherwise.

At the level, too, of openness as the characteristic result of feigning, the departures are equally obvious: Lewis (like Scholes, again, and as representative of a certain banal or traditional literary criticism) often assumes or returns to some essential self as the source and locus of experience: "I become a thousand men and yet remain myself...it is still I who see[s]." Once more, this criticism is generally Platonic (or in the case of Lewis, both Platonic and Christian) and carries with it all the assumptions already outlined here: the soul or *psukhē* as deep interiority and seed-of-being remains hidden within the prison of the fallen body, awaiting its recovery through an art or technique that reveals the self (especially in the dimensions of its finitude) only to purge and deny it. If the form or the content of this art resembles that of feigning – or if, in fact, it remains *the*

*same art*, as in the case of Scholes and fabulation – its aim and effects are nevertheless completely different: rather than the revelation of a secret being, which poses as a permanent necessity, feigning illuminates instead the finitude that marks all life and that sets it apart from non-being and non-life. And rather than the mortal veil that hides and distorts what is enduring or necessary to being, finitude instead represents the necessity of a permanent lesson and a corresponding openness to change "that lasts as long as life" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 454).

Finally, everything that sets feigning apart from these other modes of criticism is in fact borne out in the argument here at the level of both its theory and its application: in the first place (at the level of theory), feigning outlines 1) the difference between a Kantian finitude that forms the basis of an idealism and an understanding of finitude as a strict limit, 2) the difference between a humanism like psychology or psychoanalysis, with all their naïve assumptions about a second, secret self, and *not-knowing* as a practice of total critique, and 3) the difference between *epistrophē* or *metanoia*, which reveal the soul only to deny the self, and *epimeleia heautou* or care and attention that works toward *sōzein* as the salvation of self. On the other hand, this same difference is played out at the level of application and in my readings of Coover, Barth, and Barthelme, which offer something beyond a naïve psychologism or appeals to a "human nature" oriented toward the recovery of self as the source of meaning. Feigning, that is, departs from the characteristic modes and findings of scholarship on the fabulists by casting finitude, in all these works, as a strict limit, by holding up the sovereignty of language as proof of this limit, and by reading repetition as the proof of sovereignty, but also the form of an incredible experience that fosters a complete openness to the "irreducible enigma the

world conceals" (Legros 111). And if these same works empty out the category of the subject according to the first phase of feigning, their circular journey also composes the first step back toward the self, which is willed freely as a goal in itself only within the space cleared out by critique: with every work, then, an oscillating movement from distance to proximity, from that which hollows out the self to that which constitutes the self.

#### 4. Past Connections, Future Possibilities

Once more, the figure of the Cynic expresses the difference offered by the works of feigning: "you will see how many eyes the Cynic possesses," Epictetus says, "so that...Argus was blind in comparison" (*Discourses* III.xxii.103; qtd. in Foucault, *Courage of the Truth* 311). As watchman, that is, the Cynic's attention is necessarily doubled, facing out on the world and the flux of experience while remaining focused, at the same time, on the self – not as the stable and abiding basis of this experience; nor as the constant against which it is measured, given meaning, and absorbed; but rather as its volatile and limited object.

And yet, the Cynic and this practice of the self "that lasts as long as life" only provide an analogue: no one, of course, really lives the Cynic or Stoic life, which anyway remains specific, in its form and objectives, to the culture of late Antiquity. But as analogue, the culture of the care of the self highlights precisely what is original to feigning, which begins with this emphasis on the limit and finitude and with the subject who is "badly formed, or rather deformed, vicious and in the grip of bad habits" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 129) – hence, the subject who is susceptible at

every moment to misdirection, like the *stultus* "blown by the wind" and open without purpose (ibid. 131).

If, on the other hand, the Cynic as scout and watchman remains turned to the self and always directed as such, the rest of the world remains undirected and distracted by passion and appearances, forgetfulness and ignorance. Doubtless, no one is capable of remaining indefinitely in this space of auto-critique or of maintaining a real and permanent vigilance in relation to the self. Hence, precisely, the role played by the work of feigning, whose circular adventure forms an occasion for the backward glance, for the moment of review, but also for an evaluation that addresses itself to the future by referring the question of possible knowledge – *What can I know?* – to the question of *ēthos* as a mode of being and doing: *What should I do?* But that is not all: if the work of feigning, like this ancient model of the Cynic as watchman and shrewd assayer, turns the self around to examine and evaluate itself, it does so only by virtue of its blatant and radical difference. Once again, the Cynic life models this dimension of feigning, insofar as the former is lived in the open as the "scandalous manifestation of the truth" (Foucault, *Courage of the Truth* 183), which is 1) the truth of the limit that marks all life and 2) the truth of a true openness in the relation of the self to the world and to itself.

But Cynicism as such provides something else relative to feigning – the opposite, in fact, of what sets the latter apart, as mode of critique in particular, from other art. As I have tried to point out at different places in the argument here, that is, feigning demonstrates a certain "filiation or at least continuity of the experience of the cynical form" (ibid. 179), which is simply to say that it composes part of a *tradition*. And if this

tradition begins with Cynicism, the latter must be understood, as Foucault points out in his last lectures, not as

a somewhat particular, odd, and ultimately forgotten figure in ancient philosophy, but an historical category which, in various forms and with diverse objectives, runs through the whole of Western history. There is a Cynicism which is an integral part of the history of Western thought, existence, and subjectivity. (ibid. 174)

Moreover, and by way of conclusion, by situating feigning within this tradition, we can begin to outline its future direction and application (as a method of interpretation) and its future possibilities as *tekhnē tou biou* and as mode of critique.

In the first place, the connection of Cynicism, satire, and literature from the nineteenth century onward is already very well known; Cynic art is even included in the entry on satire in the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature*, along with references to Diogenes and Lucian, Diderot, Nietzsche, and Heinrich Niehues-Pröbsting, who takes up the idea of historical Cynicism with reference to *Rameau's Nephew* in particular.<sup>6</sup> The latter work, in turn – which Foucault calls "a moment, a turning point in the history of reflection on Cynicism in the West" (ibid. 192) – outlines the connection of this general history of Cynicism-as-satire to the works of feigning. So, two threads or strands become apparent within this tradition: 1) a general impetus to satire and "the idea that art itself... must establish a relation to reality which is no longer one of ornamentation, or imitation, but one of laying bare" (ibid. 188), and 2) a more radical strand of art represented by Sade and Hölderlin, through Roussel or Stéphane Mallarmé, up to the works discussed by Foucault and the works of fabulation discussed here.

Doubtless, this art, too, aims to "lay bare," but it connects more closely to the extreme forms of Cynicism, which is everything connected to the violent disclosure of the truth – to "the violence of art," rather, "as the unrestrained irruption of the true" (ibid. 189) – in the form, once more, of finitude and critique: in the form taken by the double and a form that "lays bear" *in relation to self* and that always takes as its object precisely the self.

So the question again becomes, what possibility remains for a radical art as such? Where else (and when else) might this art reappear for us? As I have already outlined at the outset of the dissertation, the works of fabulation are selected for analysis here as a matter of simple convenience: more than any form of literature I am aware of, the works of Coover, Barth, and Barthelme prove that the central themes of Foucault's early criticism are not restricted to the *nouveau roman* or to the literature of Roussel, Klossowski, Blanchot, or Bataille. And again, at the level of argument, the notion of feigning itself demands some rigor – the rigor provided by a boundary, which is the limit traced by these three oeuvres that are more or less complete.

But there no doubt remain other contemporary works – other artistic and literary forms – that belong to the Cynic tradition and to its radical strand in particular. And others will doubtless appear down the road: as long as our culture maintains the basic form that has characterized it for all modernity (and that, in many dimensions, remains unchanged since antiquity), a Cynic art will have its place. In turn, feigning will remain valid as a method of interpretation whenever this art makes use of repetition in particular (whose forms, after all, are myriad as demonstrated by all the readings here), but also and more generally as a model for outlining the form and functions of an imminent critique.

This outline will form part of the work of feigning, and to the extent that it follows Foucault, it will compose, precisely, a test of thought: an *essay*, "which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes" (Foucault, *Use of Pleasure* 9). And in this sense, feigning will once more become *tekhnē tou biou*: a mode of critique and an art of life.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A soul imprisoned by the fallen body, for instance, or a second, secret self revealed through the mechanisms of repression and desire.

<sup>2</sup> After all, the lectures are presentations of pure research, composed of long, erudite readings of *Alcibiades* or the *Laches*, or of Seneca (as representative of the Stoics) or Epictetus (writing about the Cynics), and so on – all according to a very general research question regarding the genealogy of the modern subject. This question is posed, in turn, "on the basis of an anachronism" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 363) that locates versions of what will become modern religious, scientific, pedagogical, or otherwise social practices: in short, an outline of research that still awaits its direction outside of the history of sexuality from which Foucault had already turned at the end of the 1970s.

<sup>3</sup> Or rather, as Epictetus says of Socrates intervening in the lives of others, "the principle is given to all but few can hear" (Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 119). See also *Hermeneutics of the Subject* pp. 118–121 for Foucault's discussion of the universal-yet-rarefied status of care of the self in late Antiquity.

<sup>4</sup> More or less random, that is, because there are motivations for this choice: on one hand, Lewis's literary criticism strongly resembles that of Scholes, both for the choice of literature – that is, works of myth and fantasy that "[deal] with impossibles and preternaturals" (50) and so works connected, at least broadly, to fabulation – but also for the Platonism, lying just beneath its surface, that directs its argument. On the other hand, the work appeared in 1961 and is therefore contemporary with Foucault's first works of literary criticism.

<sup>5</sup> Beyond, of course, the original reading of Foucault and the use to which his work is put here according to the framework of feigning as method of interpretation and as mode of critique.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault also mentions Niehues-Pröbsting in reference to (and as scholarly support for) a historical Cynicism. See *Courage of the Truth* 192.

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