



Would I not [*pas*] be bound, going against usage, to say in the first place disparity?

Dissimilar and discontinuous, these writings nevertheless appear together [*paraissent ensemble*], bound as allies or in a book.

Doubtless they try to describe one and the same motion. Proceeding *in view* of a unique *oeuvre*—Maurice Blanchot's—they would attempt thus to draw near it, even if they have to give up getting there [*l'aborder*].

Doubtless too they are part of one and the same time: they were written and published, in their first versions, between 1975 and 1979.

They appear to have this in common as well: they all take their departure from a certain *situation*—in language and between languages, *in translation*. They also speak [*parlent*] about this, they incessantly recall it, perhaps they say nothing else. This results doubtless from reasons internal and specific to each text, but also from this other necessity: for a long time unavailable in France, with the exception of just one, "*Pace Not(s)*," they had to be published abroad, sometimes in French, sometimes in a bilingual edition, sometimes in translation.

Apparently, then, one and the same time. In that case the continuity of an experience and some principle of gathering together [*rassemblement*] are supposed. And in fact, over the course of these years, I had thought I would reread Maurice Blanchot's works of fiction. In truth I was discovering them. For [*par*] convenience let's still call them *fictions*. At times [*parfois*] they bear the mention of *récit*, elsewhere that of *novel*. Occasionally,

this sign of belonging [*appartenance*] does not appear or is effaced from one version to another, from one edition to another.

How are we to legitimize these names?

The question will incessantly come up again, under one form or another; I let it go here. It remains [*demeure*] inseparable from other motives [*motifs*] of this book. Motives rather than themes, *motives* in order to point in particular to what sets in motion, and first of all [*d'abord*] toward *citation*, which I sometimes hear in the sense that comes from the Latin. Incitation or solicitation, it calls for or gives rise to motion.

These motives lead back to places where, the criteria of decidability no longer being assured, a decision can finally begin to engage.

And the event can take place. More than one time. No more of just once. [*Plus d'une fois.*]

For a start, what is to be said here about these places?

On first approach [*d'abord*], they leave no chance to, and no right can be recognized therein of, some parti(cipa)tion [*partage*] between literature and philosophy. A proposition that does not ban, on the contrary, requires some new and rigorous distinctions, a complete redistribution of spaces (let this be said for those who would want to derive an advantage from the aforesaid proposition, all sorts of advantages and they are always the advantages of confusion).

If one was trying by anticipation to follow here a trajectory from the questions that have just cropped up, those of genre, gender, of the title or the law, of *récit* or novel, of simulacrum, of fiction or truth, of motion and citation, one could multiply the handoffs passing the baton. One example among others: the law *and* the law of genre, genre *and* *récit*, *récit and* citation (with or without coded mark, with or without quotation marks), citation *and* the “first time” of an event, event *and* the/her coming [*la venue*], the/her coming, the making-come (again citation) or the letting-come, the coming [*le venir*] and address (come, *viens*, *venez*), address and destination, destination, distance or approach, approach and appropriation—or pace [*pas*], or not [*pas*], and so on. Another such metonymic chain will associate the law of genre and of sexual difference, for example, and it is the trailblazing [*frayage*] of another *récit*. Another such chain will pass from the word “*pas*” to negativity, from negativity to dialectic, to denegation, still another such, and so on.

These fictions—let's keep this name—I thought I had already read them. Today, when, having studied then cited them at length, I dare to publish these essays, I am less sure about that than ever. Other works of Blanchot have been accompanying me for a long time, those that are situated, also improperly, in the domains of literary criticism or of philosophy. Not that I have become familiar with those works. At least I had been able to think, in the course of the years I am speaking about, that I had already recognized an essential motion of the thought there. But the fictions remained inaccessible to me, as though plunged in a fog out of which only some fascinating glimmers, and sometimes, but at irregular intervals, the light of an invisible lighthouse on the coast reached [*parvenaient*] me. I will not say that from now on these fictions have left this reserve, indeed on the contrary. But in their very dissimulation, in the distance of the inaccessible *as such*, because they open onto it in giving it names [*elles donnent sur lui en lui donnant des noms*], they presented themselves to me again. With a now inescapable force, the most discreet and then most provocative force, force of obsessive haunting and conviction, injunction of a truth without truth, always beyond the fascination that one speaks about regarding them. They do not exercise this fascination. They traverse it, describe it, give it to be thought rather than using or wielding it. But before speaking about a law of fascination, we should be attentive to a fascination *of the law*. The law always appears fascinating; one will have to ask oneself why the law can also be fascinated, which seems unimaginable or inconceivable, if not unthinkable.

Why disparity?

One always expects—this is the author's presumption at times—that preliminary pages have the value of forewarning, of foreword. In order to respect the genre, I shall content myself then with a warning. It will forestall without prohibiting [*previendra sans interdire*]: it would be better to hold these texts to be dissociable bodies, apart and disparate.

No one should expect in effect some organized, *theoretical* discourse on Blanchot's fictional *oeuvre* as a *whole* or *set* [ensemble]. Rather, some *situations* of speaking [*parole*] that are not theory or totality or set, a topology at times impracticable that would not be without relation, at least indirect and analogical, with some paradox or other in what is called *set theory*.

First, then, the voices that become entangled in this book do not carry a discourse, one sole discourse that in the final analysis may be of a theoretical nature. There are several discourses herein; none of them proposes conclusions in the form of theorems, whether those theorems fall under literary criticism, poetics, narratology, rhetoric, linguistics, semantics. And in the end, for the most part, the concern of this book would be neither hermeneutical nor philosophical. Will it be called foreign to every discipline?

No, for two reasons: (1) One of the questions that lets itself be heard most insistently, across this multiplicity of voices, concerns the law, in particular, the law that norms the theoretical, the thematic, or the thetic in order to constitute them, precisely, as disciplines, in order to find in them, rather, the condition of all teaching. How to recognize their frontiers, functioning and institutional effects? How to evaluate the competencies, the regime of statements, the specific rule, the proper authority? Is it possible to decide, indeed to submit to them in all rigor? Where does the line of parti(cipa)tion pass between the event of an inaugural statement, a citation, a paraphrase, a commentary, a translation, a reading, an interpretation? (2) All these texts were associated, for me, with an experience, an experiment, a testing, rather, of teaching. A counter-rule has, certainly, dictated them: how to write what does not let itself be reduced, from one part to the other [*de part en part*], to the injunctions of a didactic speaking, however liberal or free? But these texts explain themselves unceasingly, and perhaps by [*par*] that very thing have it out with the academic institution. In their turn they make of teaching a theme. A *theme* to be elaborated in the vicinity of what Blanchot says about this, for example, in "Thought and the Exigency of Discontinuity" (*Infinite Conversation*), but also a *position* to be interrogated or disturbed, for example, in the masculine figure of mastery [*dans la figure masculine de la maîtrise*]. For, what's more, while I was striving to withdraw this writing from the didactic norms, a limit essentially inaccessible, it turns out that simultaneously, in a parallel manner, I was teaching. In the course of different seminars in which certain wakes in reading could be followed, I was attempting an introduction to the *oeuvre* or the thought of Blanchot. It was always a matter of translation, in the most conventional sense and in other senses of this word; and these seminars took place sometimes in Paris, sometimes at Yale University. Between these two shorelines [*rivages*], as between two

tongues, the invisible parti(cipa)tion but also the abyss of an ocean. One of the seminars bore on the gift and time. "Given Time" was its title, and readings of Mauss, Benveniste, Heidegger, Baudelaire led up to a concluding analysis of *La folie du jour* [*The Madness of the Day*]. Another, distributed over three years, had for its title "The Thing": two series of readings apparently independent or parallel, one dedicated to Heidegger, the other, in succession, to Ponge (1975), Blanchot (1976), Freud (1977). Another still, "Of the Right to Literature / From Right to Literature" (1978), passed in particular through an interpretation of "Literature and the Right to Death." Another finally (1979) took pains to compare the two versions of *Thomas the Obscure*. The project that I still have to postpone was at first to recast and order one day in a single work all the notes of these seminars. What I am venturing today to publish resembles more the discontinuous score [*partition*] of heterogeneous writings. They would have in common at least that they are not able to let themselves be accredited [*habilités*] or rehabilitated by the teaching word.

Second. If they do not devote themselves, for the most part, to theory, these texts no more claim to delimit a *set*, the corpus of Blanchot's fictions. That not only stems from some paradoxical structures that would discredit in advance [*par avance*] the values of set and corpus. Such paradoxes doubtless harass this work. But they do not explain everything. There were also, of course, more contingent limits that I do not want to dissimulate. Perhaps all Blanchot's fictions are cited or evoked in one moment or another; I am not even sure about that. Certain of them, however, will have left a much more visible imprint than others, whether it be a matter in particular of the two versions of *L'arrêt de mort* [*Death Sentence*] or of the two publications of the same *récit* finally entitled *La folie du jour*. Even if my analyses are not yet up to, and far from, the measure of these two works [*oeuvres*], they leave the greater part of the others in the shadows [*dans la pénombre*]. Such disproportion betrays an immense injustice. Despite the rule of recurrences, however legitimate at times the *analogical* temptation may be, each fiction remains incommensurable, as does the event of each version for one "same" work.

Disproportion, then, and disparateness. Carried beyond what is asked about in a theoretical, continuous, and monological treatise, each of the texts gathered together here places itself on scene, if one can say that,

following the law of its dissemblance and always in a fictional mode. Each of them parti(cipates)tions itself otherwise. Whence its isolation, let's say rather its insularity. It does not communicate with the others except by the sea [*par la mer*]. Here ("Pace Not(s)"), two voices of which one, manifestly masculine, at times catches itself in the traps of the teaching or magisterial authority whereas the other, feminine on the whole, cites to appear the citation that calls her—and says *come, viens*. Elsewhere ("Living On"), triumph of life as triumph of death, a double procession advances itself—such a double file [*théorie*—in the concurrence of two superimposed discourses: at the bottom of the page a long, underlying band of writing accompanies the other. In the form of a Note to the translator, a "Journal de bord" (translated as "Border Lines") murmurs the dates and the deadlines below the principal discourse, naturally more audible and articulate. Here again ("Title to Be Specified"), an academic lecture finds itself entirely occupied with interrogating, playing, foiling, flaunting the titles or contracts that authorize an allocution of this genre. Elsewhere, in "The Law of Genre" precisely, another communication broaches [*aborde*] the question of genre in the course of a colloquium. It tries to treat it according to a mode that, in a fashion at once constrained and deliberate, catches itself in the nets of its very own performativity. Like the other texts, it ventured beyond the too well-received parti(cipa)tions between performative speech and constative speech, in those parts, in those waters off [*dans ces parages*] where a borderline sets itself trembling. It regularly undecides itself between the event of the citation, in advance divisible and iterable, and the desire of the/her coming itself, before all citation. But the event—encounter, decision, call, appeal, nomination, initial incision of a mark—can come to pass [*advenir*] only from the experience of the undecidable. Not the undecidable that is still part of the order of calculation, but the other, the one that no calculation would know how to anticipate. Without this experience, would there ever be the chance of a pace crossed [*d'un pas franchi*]? A call for the event (*come*)? A gift, a responsibility? Would there be a thing or cause other than causality? Wouldn't all this be booked in the program?

Parages/Waters/Parts: to this single word [*mot*] let us entrust what *situates*, very near or far, the double motion of approach and distance, often the same pace/not (*pas*), singularly divided, older and younger than

itself, always other, on the brink of the event, when it arrives *and* does not arrive, when it happens *and* does not happen, infinitely distant as the other shore [*rive*] approaches.

For the shore—let us hear the other—appears in disappearing from view. One part only of this book, its lowest note, is called “Journal de bord,” as if to keep the register of a sailing, but all the borders, edges, brinks, from one text to the other, are also shores [*rivages*], inaccessible shores or inhabitable shores. Not that it—landless landscape, opened onto the absence of the fatherland, seascape, space without territory, without reserved path, without locality¹—lacks these, but if it takes place, and *it must*, it will first have to open itself to thought of the earth [*terre*] as to blazing a path. Page after page, as you will verify, but I clearly realized this only after the fact [*après coup*], everything seemed [*paraît*] to wait here on the brink [*au bord*] and by the edge [*au bord*] of the sea, at times very near to losing itself there or letting itself be battered by it. If I had had to choose in this place an *exergue*, perhaps I would have cited this passage, the first lines of *Thomas the Obscure*:

Thomas sat down and looked at the sea. He remained motionless for a time, as if he had come there to follow the movements of the other swimmers and, although the fog prevented him from seeing very far, he stayed there, obstinately, his eyes fixed on the bodies floating with difficulty. Then, when a more powerful wave reached him, he went down onto the sloping sand and slipped among the currents, which quickly immersed him. [7/ *Thlo* 9]

Or that other, the incipit of *The One Who Was Standing Apart from Me*.

I sought, this time, to approach him. I mean I tried to make him understand that, if I was there, still I couldn't go any farther, and that I, in turn, had exhausted my resources. [1/ *CQN* 7]

And farther on:

I could recall, as an intoxicating navigation, the motion that had more than once driven me toward a goal, toward a land [*terre*] that I did not know and was not trying to reach, and I did not complain that in the end there was neither land nor goal, because, in the meantime, by this very motion, I had lost my memory of the land; I had lost it, but I had also gained the possibility of going forward at random, even though, in fact, consigned to this randomness, I had to renounce the hope of ever stopping [*arrêter*]. The consolation could have been to say to my-

self: You have renounced foreseeing, not the unforeseeable. But the consolation turned around like a barb: the unforeseeable was none other than the renouncement itself, as though each event, in order to reach me, in that region where we were navigating together, had demanded of me the promise that I would slip out of my story. [7/CQN18]

Parages/Waters/Parts again: this name seems to emerge alone, that is at least the appearance, in order to consign the economy of themes and sense, for example, the indecision between near and far, the casting off in the fog, in view of what arrives or not, what happens or not in the vicinity of the coast, the impossible and necessary cartography of a littoral, an incalculable topology, the phonomy of the ungovernable.

In truth the name is never alone. Each one of its syllables receives in an underwater wave the coming [*la venue*] of another vocable—which, imprinting on it a motion at times imperceptible, exchanges there as well its memory [*mémoire*]. And it is the souvenir of *words in* [*mots en*], as one says strangely in order to accentuate the beginning or end of a nomination: here the names in *pa, par, para, ra, rage, age*. With their value as signifiers, as one used to say not long ago. In the collusions of a glossary that never remains aleatory, syllables or entire words disturb the unconscious perhaps and the body proper of a title. The list and genealogy of these *other words* ought not to become established here—neither table nor chart [*tableau*]. The deduction would be long and would not know how to be closed. Apparently fortuitous, the occurrence of each vocable would come to cross [*croiser*], in these parts, in these waters, both chance and necessity: brief glimmer, abbreviation of a signature hardly sketched, immediately effaced, a name of which one no longer knows to whom it comes back, to what author or to what tongue, to one or the other.