

Jacques Dupin: The Word Engraved

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To read the poet Jacques Dupin, as Jean-Pierre Richard assures us in his preface to *L'Embrasure*, is already to become involved in an enterprise of violence. His language stresses increasingly a rupture of syntax, sound and rhetoric, a sort of loss and even degradation undergone in order to discover the integral wholeness of a world "poétiquement dicible et partageable." Negativity, opacity, contraction on one hand, imaginative dissemination, resurgence, and rebirth on the other: even in the words, these contraries are met, since the "ligne de brisure" and that of "embrasure" yield the "dimension féconde d'un brasier". Here, says Richard, dislocation irrigates. The images are recognizable in the works of Dupin, and their melodramatic aspect contrasts strikingly with the understatement of the texts as a whole: this too we would expect in the complexities of his very contemporary writing.

Dupin's sensibility seems especially available to us in this moment of reading. The following pages deal neither with the earliest poems of *Cendrier du voyage* (1950) nor with the recent *Ballast* (1976) nor the play *L'Eboulement* (1977) but rather with the texts of the period stretching from the difficult upward path of *Gravir* with its occasional prose poems of remarkable density — whose reply is the tautness of the self-examining *Moraines*, inserted in *Embrasure* (1969) — on through the ruptured *Onglée*. If the sparser language of the present makes us look back with regret at the tense but profound prose poems of the past, the rightness of the evolution may be perceptible.

The texts discussed are representative of what we might call a metapoetic: the reflection of poetry upon itself. Dupin's intensity of language would ideally illuminate not only his own endeavor but, with it, our response.

A Language Built in its Breaking

Migrations incessantes des mots jusqu'au dernier à travers l'écriture, tentative pour rendre un seul instant visible à leur crête celui qui disparaît déjà . . . quelque chose d'édifié et de rompu . . . (G, 74)¹

Writing as rupture: to begin the construction of an edifice by its destruction. "Commencer comme on déchire un drap, le drap dans les plis duquel on se regardait dormir." (G, 76) The distance from an earlier attitude is clearly marked. When the hero-poet in Breton's "Vigilance" sets fire to the sheets in which his double sleeps, it is with an intention toward (and a belief in) an eventual wholeness ("je tiens le fil"). To the "champs magnétiques" of the surrealists there succeed Dupin's "champs fragmentaires," those partial fields or those songs ("chants") of the fragment, although the alchemical resonance of transmutation by fire still pervades the poetic scene. Here the act, while more violent, has no overtone, no implication beyond the revolutionary gesture directed from the beginning against a formerly passive if visionary state.

The last two quotations are taken from a long series of texts, *Moraines* devoted to reflections on writing. *Les Brisants* (1958) and *Saccades* (1962) inscribe themselves in the former line — although the term "Brisants" suggests, by extension, "Brisées," or traces left or inscribed, and "Gravir" suggests the gravest task of the poet, that of climbing, and at the same time, of engraving ("graver") — thus, to engrave the word at a level ever higher or deeper, to give it weight and rise.² *L'Embrasure* (1969) stands in relation to that task as an interstice carved, or set, into the mountain — when it is not simply *found*. In either sense, it remains a trace.

In *Gravir*, "Les Lichens" marks the way along that upward path:

Te gravir et, t'ayant gravie — quand la lumière ne prend plus appui sur les mots, et croule et dévale — te gravir encore.³ (G, 70)

This passage is built on convergence and suppression, for the word on which one leans is also, by a minor transformation, the mountain climbed: mot/mont — "te gravir" . . .

Thus the path traveled by the poet toward the line of rupture is named, with signposts or titles (in *L'Embrasure*) themselves inscribed to indicate the road: *Moraines* can literally be seen as the signs of glacier rock, by transfer, in correspondance with the circuses dug out by the glacial force, "arènes" or "embrasures", the latter term implying also, by the phonetic suggestion (embraser) → "embrasure", the *burning* of the word, opposite process from the icy advance of nature. Punctuation on the page of the mountain:

Pour la distribution de nouveaux signes, au-delà, sans la piste d'un texte ou le sillage d'une voix gelée. Le Jeu découvre et recouvre leurs traces ponctuelles. Leurs ombres transparentes se multiplient, se croisent, délimitent une aire, — arène, échiquier, page blanche —, que leur absence physique illumine. (E, 72)

So the "arène" is the replacement of Mallarmé's page as the ground staked out for conflict, dangerous space set apart where the game of poetry is played out.

The thrust toward a gravity of language become serious, toward the inscription made profound, extends to a meditation of the weight of all signs; like objects emptied of what they contained, or stripped of their exterior vestments: "La lampe éteinte est-elle plus légère?" (G,67) and elsewhere: "Plus lourde d'être nue". Although the rhythm of the first quotation is reminiscent of Eluard's interrogation: "La jarre peut-elle être plus belle que l'eau?", the sense is noticeably of a different sort and does not separate form from content.

The tension, insofar as all relations in this poetry can be said to be examples of tension, voltage, or stress — between the break and the breaking, the split and the split-apart, the crevice and the trace — forms the canvas stretched out of the poem and of its self-examining. Investigation and confession probing deep into the texture of the work, with a cutting motion fatal to the substance of the word, inexorable incision. The two currents of break and trace are joined, the latter made possible only by a destruction of the surface against which it is made: a moving sleep or a wakefulness shattering its support ("qui pulvérise ce qui la supporte", E,61) inflicting, necessarily, the "fissures de son règne." Matter and form are thus inescapably undone.

"Le Présent d'une nuit" (G,41) further exemplifies this metatextual concern, to which it supplies a specific parallel:

Ce roc assailli d'étoiles, aux crevasses duquel la lèpre, avant l'éloge, avait progressé sans mesure, allait-il se soumettre à la paresseuse cadence de la source des morts? Le bal était défait, les danseurs transparents. Le sang coula, l'herbe devint profonde. A l'aube, en grand secret, les lèvres des amants heurtèrent une rosée illimitée.

"Ce roc assailli. . .": the harsh entry into the image suggests the mountains climbed, the morains or signs left by the glacier irreversibly marking the canvas ("toile") on which the text is deeply drawn, or signed (here, de-signed), engraved and yet standing in relief ("saillit"). Paradoxically — since its crests must be read against those crevices, one echoing the other:

“crêtes/crevasses.” As the morain disrupts the mountain profile by an irregular addition, so the flaking away of the circuses, as by a malady, makes an irregular subtraction and destruction, an incursion in the already assailed. Now, by the transfer of one letter, the lips of the poet speaking (La lèpre/la lèvres/les lèvres des amants) attack the ground of the text, for the leprosy or the peeling of the rock is the phonetic neighbor (“la lèpre”) of the lips (“les lèvres”) only implied here. The incisive gravity of the poetic word leaves a deliberate wound: of the page, of the canvas, or here, of “l’herbe”. That this incision serves as the central source for the text, is proved on the level of the images by the flowing blood (as in the expression: “l’encre coula” which here becomes: “le sang coula.”) Thus the engraving is serious, its depth is prepared: “l’herbe devint profonde.”

The wound at the center of the text is fertile, positive in its imprint, so that the “gravir” implies an upward movement always to be seen alongside the destructive work on which it is paradoxically dependent. For the color of the blood suggests, by a verbal and aural transfer, the rose of dawn (“rosée illimitée”, where the liquid of the dew combines with the red color of the rose — “une rose est” — indefinitely). The red of the lips (of the dancers, of the lovers whom they figure) echoes in its turn the transformation “lèpre”/“lèvres”, so that writing as rupture is also a conscious erotic act, self-signaling. Following that line in its ambiguous trace, the measure of the dance (“mesure”) and its meter (“soumettre/mettre”) refer to the writer working out his gesture in a cadence, whose downward fall suggests the term “défait.”

In fact, this text, like the others which resemble it, undoes itself in its making. For the consciousness of time (“nuit”, “présent”, “heure”) and its phonetic reminder “heurtèrent” which stresses it doubly is never absent from this space unceasingly destroyed. In such a setting, the “nuit” of the title can also be read as on the side of danger signifying the harm (“nuire”/“nuit”) done by the “heures” or the “heurts” (as in the “saccades”) to the place and to the moment of the text.

Finally, the gesture will force a silence, when the dancers lose their power of speech (“lèvres . . .-tèrent” (=“taire”) so that the *excess of writing* (“le mouvement excessif”, E,61) declared here to be without measure or unlimited, can plunge again toward its suicide, which is also the source of its strength, and its guarantee of a profound passage.

An Act Voided and Renewed

Paroles, alluvions régressives . . . (E,19)

The series *Moraines*, devoted to the investigation of writing, commences with an interrogation: "Ecrire, est-ce . . .?" The image of an eye wide-open dominates the first poem, together with its opposite — our own invisibility inflicted on us by our words — and leads into the other poems, sight and text inevitably interwoven.

The investigation thus turns about a vision first crazed ("cet oeil effaré", "sa pupille envenimée") and then reversed; for the writer at the center of seeing is denied by his seeing itself: "Comme si j'étais condamné à voir en marchant. En parlant. A voir ce dont je parle et à parler justement parce que je ne vois pas. Donc à donner à voir ce que je ne vois pas, ce qu'il m'est interdit de voir." To see is almost always to read in this universe of metatext. The trap of the wood marked out and yet devoid of name functions as a gigantic book, empty of an inside and therefore — in a paradox sustaining the work as a whole — imprisoning the writer who breathes in only the air of his own limitless labyrinth. Like a prison always readied, the reader's open eye meeting that of the poet or of the text. The only element constant here is distance: the writer is separated from his seeing as from the object aimed at by his words, which he is said to desire and yet he is incorporated in that distance. From his encounter with the object in a sudden lifting or *forcing* of that prohibition, a space surges forth like the violent opening of a seed, murderous to the shell. "Un espace jaillit . . ." Thus the writer is the murderer of his object which is his subject and his love, a slaughterer also of himself, but with his text, and in all innocence:

visage lié à la répétition d'un meutre (EG,203)

The seeing and the writing and reading are all the instruments of our future suicide caused by our blind and perfect aim, this faultless vision of a distance drastically denied in one moment, as the bullet leaves the gun, (the latter absent here because unneeded, "nul fusil"). The words cling to objects and we to those words; the labyrinth reconstructs itself thereby fatally:

Dans les galeries de ce terrier aérien, la bête insensée que nous sommes, meurt de s'unir à la bête future que nous enfermons, et que nous poursuivons et que nous ajustons, dehors, aveuglément, avec une arme sans défaut qui ne peut abattre que nous. (E,81)

But the one word resounding in these texts appears, thundered

forth, as an affirmative answer to a question not posed: “le ou longtemps réprimé comme si son retard devait augmenter la charge, accroître l’ampleur de l’explosion et rendre irréversiblement le départ. Il tonne. Arbitraire déflagration . . .”(E,63) Sounding even in the imperceptible interval of our freedom, this response which is consumation indicates only a hopeless overthrowing and a plunder, whose only prey is emptiness:

Car l’écriture ne nous rend rien. La consumation même est imparfaite. (E,63)

Poem after poem reveals this rhythm of an action carried out, declared, and subsequently negated, as poetry, in all its “puissance d’annulation”, is said to deepen our lack and our torment which aroused it. The poet, no longer asking that it be acclaimed victorious, but only that its descent to the abyss be in measure with his own, walks forward with a certain step to his own destruction, that “perte entière, d’un pied sûr”. If he claims birth from the knot of events, “le noeud dont je naissais”, he claims it equally, by phonetic implication, from the beginning of negation: “le (ne) dont je naissais”. Compare the similar occurrences of the negative force conveyed in the ambiguity: “Le noeud d’asphyxie formelle” (G,19) and “Etranglé dans chaque noeud de mon poème” (G,28). That ambiguous expression is the central knot — the not — of a text inscribed in the form of affirmation and denial:

J’ai cru rejoindre par instants une réalité plus profonde comme un fleuve la mer, occuper un lieu . . . J’ai cru traverser vivant, les yeux ouverts, le noeud dont je naissais . . . Je l’ai cru. (E,64)

But the answer, following directly on that last statement of the formal triad, is marked by the violence of its expression: “Le battement de l’abîme scandait abusivement l’offrande de rosée au soleil, dehors, sur chaque ronce.”

It is only in the renewal of the abyss, in the accentuation of its rhythm repeated here and throughout the work, whether expressed or felt, that the power of this poetry lies, denying its own transcendence, as words abuse us, in a “chaîne discontinuée de ce qu’ils projettent et de ce qu’ils retiennent” (E,95) which somehow leads to a reality other than the one we had thought we were pursuing.

Interval, Gap

. . . la migration artérielle des signes. Nouveaux venus, sortis de

l'angle obscur d'une force lacunaire . . .

In place of the constant or unbroken images of an earlier imagination, those of this poetry nearer to us show a gap at their center: the broken wall, the torn leaf, the fissured language, the breach in being mark the place of our texts. The light breaking over contemporary poetry ("le brisant", shattering what it touches) itself is intermittent, as is the object it reveals: Dupin's "livre intermittent" (G,78) (situated in the same field as Char's "fruit intermittent") may be the only one we find readable. Its "traces ponctuelles" (E,72), puncturing to make clear, respond to ours, as the interruption of the sign or of its tracks — "les brisées" — reflects our own discontinuous trace.

"L'écart qui nous recommence" (EG,204): this inconstancy is fruitful, even if it bears only intermittent fruit. The profundity of the product is nevertheless dependent on that interval, the breach in which our being is renewed and then absorbed. (E,48) The expression "battement" (as in "le battement de ma phrase"), frequently recurring, betrays exactly this coming and going, this impulse responding to the divergent rays of the wounded light thrown upon it:

Malgré l'étoile fraîchement meurtrie qui bifurque
— c'est sa seule cruauté le battement de ma phrase qui s'obscurcit et
se dénoue — (E,53)

"La Nuit grandissante", title of the series from which the above quotation is taken, is an examination of this intervalent light in its pulsations, its breaking, and its "bifurcated passion", split apart on the anvil of the poem's making. The light is itself the mountain against which the text is engraved, the murderous slope ("cette anfractuosité mortelle", E,54) where a harsh breathing is exposed in its difficulty: the "souffle infiniment ouvert/ à la faveur du bond qui nous disloque" (E,54). When the word is dislocated, set awry by the poet's own confession, this axis of reversal in the real, is a most powerful "dislocation qui féconde" (EP,456). If at moments a verbal opacity is seen as opening to the light, at other moments it opens only on a word laden with shadow ("chargé d'ombre"). In all cases, the alternation shadow/shadow, light/shadow or shadow/light serves as the source of the word, which relies on difference and, as bellows to its unequal intensity, this "soufflerie de l'intervalle."

Mobilité du poème qui ne cesse d'entrecroiser les fils tendus et d'en déchirer le tissage pour ouvrir le corps à un afflux d'obscurité (E,456)

In contrary correspondence with “La Nuit grandissante”, Dupin’s essay or prose poem “Le Soleil substitué” in the last issue of the deliberately ephemeral *L’Éphémère* (No 20), from which the above quotation is taken, examines not an intermittent nocturnal light but the radiation from an invisible or absent text, the missing *texte* yielding the present image of a *tête* — although it is only the circle of the sun sunk behind a blackboard, as if behind a horizon on which there remain the several traces of other texts. The movement begins with an effacement, as a “cloudy” cloth gliding over a blackboard’s necessary obscurity — cloudy also with the mist-white chalk of a text already erased, a nocturnal or perhaps unclear inscription (“les signes de la nuit”): “What remains for the hand to touch?” demands the poet . . .

There remain, precisely, these other pages — “hors du tableau”, outside the space of darkness and therefore beyond the board and the canvas, which might open at any moment, “matérialité déchirée.” Fear is all-pervading: of the “transparent harvests winnowed by the iron”, this *fer* at the same time a *faire*, instrument of the text and of the poem’s making. Fear that it might be made within us and yet, suddenly, not within us, fear of our opening onto a non-sense:

nous sommes le non-lieu et le non-objet d’une gravitation de signes insensés.

. . .

Nous sommes le non-lieu et le non-objet de leur élan destructeur, le champ dévasté de leur conjonction et de leur divergence. Gisement à ciel ouvert. (EP,452)

The sun or the text replacing it, in the intervalence of its illumination, detaches itself, ponderously, from us; and in so doing, displaces the threshold of what can be read or grasped (“le seuil de la lisibilité”, EP,455). *Seuil/soleil* or *texte/tête*: the echos are themselves displacements, phonetic slidings, the resounding breach by which the poem is made and from which it takes its sparse matter. But finally, in the process of decapitation — that recurrent slaughter of the object — the sun remains as metaphor for the sun, resplendent replacement, present denial of the text which stood at its head, distantly affirmed: “Il s’avance au devant du texte comme sa pierre d’achoppement de rupture, et la brèche où se rafraîchit le rayon d’une tête absente” (EP,458).

The movement ends on the word with which *Moraines* began: “Ecrire”. But in this case there is no opening of the question (“écrire, est-ce?”) but rather a response, violent as the text is

violent, mirror of the murderous interval: "notre sang pour tain de ce miroir: *écrire*" (EP,459).

So the fissures of writing and the break in the word imply the constant menace to the wall on which the text is written, as if on a board of darkness. Set askew as if in anguish, this "tableau gémissant sur son axe" projects its anguish while permitting the rays both diurnal or nocturnal, the savage process to traverse it, endlessly.

Or again, the text is read as if it were to be transposed to the other side of a mirror, for the reflection only of the impulse and the interval: "Je suis le moment d'oubli qui fonde la mémoire . . . Chaque brûlure est un passage" (G,19). For the emptiness doubled, or its reflection, is writing still.

Sign, Trace

la traversée qui nous scande,
la trajectoire qui nous mesure (EG,190)

For a passage to be formed, a difference must be marked. Jutting out against a neutral surface, a line or instant suffices in its totality, psychological or formal, found by accident or hollowed out on purpose: it is this line which redeems our reading, absolving it and, by extension, our lives — "une ligne qui nous absout." The word stands out by a cutting edge, harshness set against the silence at its margins:

Ton voeu qui répugne à l'aisance d'une trame appauvrie,
Balance entre deux morts.
Les marges se resserrent autour de ton lingot aride . . . (G,24)

Among the procedures for marking a difference, three in particular hold our interest: each relies on an ambiguous or incantatory foundation and a certain distinguishing complexity of a vision briefly expressed and fragmentary in appearance, perhaps best described as "l'inintelligible fragment,/Que ne trahit que sa couleur imprécatore" (G,58). By the particular hue or tone of its working or its saying, the specific trace protrudes formally at the surface, transcending the need for intelligibility, passage to an instant perception, inexplicable except in its own terms.

The perspective according to which these poems can best be seen requires an accumulated effort on the part of the reader to attain a sensitivity able to correspond with that of the poet. Its peculiar character depends partly on a process of marking, closely tied to that of the dislocation, the setting awry already discussed.

In the simplest cases for demonstration, stress is laid on the small as a path to the large:

Par une brèche dans le mur,
La rosée d'une seule branche
Me rendra tout l'espace vivant. . . (G,56)

Yet the self-negating context of this passage removes it from the domain of the cliché, for it is preceded by a metatextual reflection, which profits from the phonic similarity between chant and champ, song and field: "Le chant qui est à soi-même sa faux" (G,48).

As the smoke of a fisherman's fire breaks "an absolute horizon", so the protrusions are remarked in spite of their insertion into a continuous background — but they must be pointed to: two examples will suffice to indicate the possible dimension of difference. At the end of a poem describing "Le Paysage" (G,45), directly following on an incomplete sentence, interrupted to force the attention on this moment, the poet asks: "Par quelle aberration de perspective suis-je encore attentif à la persévérance d'un chardon sur le talus d'en face?" Each detail magnified puts into play a greater scope of levels and measures, as if the differences formerly grasped in high relief were now to have been moved to a field of bas-relief — differences in "sunk relief" . . . However, had Dupin not singled out this change of perspective as an aberration, we might not have seen it as such.

Finally, in the series "La Proximité du murmure", where we find also one of the statements we refer to as "reversed" ("Plus lourde d'être nue", already quoted), we are able to read, in another text, the suppression of the subject writing as the bareness of the text itself, thrown against the extraordinary shadow of excess, confers life on the entire background of prior neutrality:

j'ai négligé son dénuement
elle se tient un peu plus haut
ombre démesurée d'une roue de charrette sur le mur lourdement
vivant (E,28)

Mirror, Vanitas, Violence: Dehors

C'est la peau du dehors qui se retourne et nous absorbe. (D,9)

How do we refer to a book as outside, when we are already within it, included in its being during our reflection? The epigraph, related to the title, *Dehors*, already implies a question of

ambiguous reading: for the poem turning inside out, drawing us out or in, has the vitality of respiration and the infinitely flexible form of a Moebius strip. More than the earlier works of Dupin, some of those in the volume *Dehors* serve as a mirroring device for the observer's gaze. I will briefly refer to the separate poems or groups of poems — some of which have been discussed before — as they appear within the volume so as to respect the form given them, attempting nonetheless to show their juncture. Each text can be considered, in spite of its internal division, as a poem unto itself and will be referred to as such.

The first title, "La Ligne de rupture", shows a division as in a mirror image whose doubling is formally triumphant over the solitude of the "je" or the "nous" speaking here. Could the narrator himself speak outside his text? An unlikely hypothesis, doubled by another: that the "Dehors" is an imperative "Out!" hurled against the reader, whose own self is thus banished from any identification with the speaker; in that case, the rupture is a grave one, and the "line" a perilous high wire for the one who would prefer not to intrude. The sparseness of the image is to be noticed in any case, for it continues throughout and signals the figurative danger connected with reading and the subtlety of the distinctions we must make. Later the line is metamorphosed into a simple shoelace, or the scratch of a single nail only, a streak or a trace: *ligne, lacet, onglée, trait*, as if minimality were of the essence in the expression.

The majority of the poems in this volume commence with violence in act or thought: successively, we encounter evocations of collapse ("La Ligne de rupture"), of effacement ("Le Soleil substitué"), descriptions of oppression and torture, complete with anvil and pincers and acid heated to the boiling point ("Sang"), of trepanation ("L'Onglée"), of bleeding and expectoration ("Chapurlat"). A "meticulous" disaster ("Trait pour trait") is followed by examples of betrayal, of expulsion, dissolution and withering ("Un récit") and again of disaster ("Ou meurtres"). A so-called "maceration of signs" ("Pour cassure de fond") leads finally to a pure and violent "glissade" as well as a scene of a piercing and spurting, in the poem dedicated to the painter Malevitch. Three characteristics are sensed in the entire volume, whose parts are introduced in an emphatic manner: reflection, an urge toward minimality, and violence. Clearly, the intensity of the whole is made of the relation of these to each other: the very thinness of the scratch compressing such action as there is into

the smallest of possible spaces and by reflection, doubling it and even magnifying it. The action is completely textual and the violence self-reflective and self-intensifying, so that the compression and minimality are felt to the point of suffocation. Both the aspect of violence and the minimality are sensed in the titles: rupture, blood, murder, as gathered into a nail scratch, for a climax; the impulse of the reader afflicted with such a contemplation may well be directed toward an escape: *Dehors*. Nevertheless this series of negative images, all concerned with the act of writing alone, is reflected on and, as mirror images *change the sign*, reversing the signal, is finally transformed from negative to positive in the result (for this is, after all, a major volume of poetry); yet the reader may well feel excluded by the surface of deliberately "minimal interest" and oppressed by the violence in such an apparently small space as that in which it is constantly reflected and contained.

The difficulty of a reader not only reading but writing in turn upon this minimal and suffocating surface of reflection is not to be underestimated. In fact, such a text seems to refuse commentary completely, as if the reader were in fact banished from the surface, by turns smooth and harshly catastrophic. Neither the commentary nor the text itself can be judged by criteria of expansion (as for instance one might hope to expand the range of interpretation and communication of a subject or a text on which one writes, which one might explicate or unfold) or by criteria of profundity. This text and this modest commentary have chosen to remain on the surface or even outside, and to be only reflected within the deeper, like a twentieth-century version of the *vanitas* or reflection upon the ephemeral nature of all things, a contemporary version of Caravaggio, for example, whose Saint Jerome contemplates a skull and a book — for the observer is also a reader as in de La Tour's famous Madeleine by her mirror with her candle, skull and book, and as in the many still-life renderings of skull, candle and mirror. To be sure, for a book we have only the text itself, for a flame and a mirror only the different lightings of our own scene, and for the eternity against which this scene is to be considered a *vanitas*, only whatever may appear in our reflection itself. So much for our beginning. Dupin is himself a leading art critic, the major commentator of the works of Miró in particular, so it is to be hoped that this initial reflection is not perceived as misplaced or misdirected.

dans l'espace retourné comme une glace vide véridique (D,15)

Traces of a subtle version of mirror writing are everywhere along the “line of rupture”, as in the inverse formations:

La traversée qui nous scande, la trajectoire qui nous mesure

...

nous, la mesure de la traversée, la scansion de la trajectoire (D,140)

Here the traversal and the trajectory, the scansion and measure, are all the self-contained references to the writing as it reflects upon itself, like twin hostages to the desire of the poet in which he appears to include us:

nous ne nous trompons pas écrivain, n'écrivant que les ôtages jumeaux dont l'intervalle est un masque (D,11)

Even in the phonetic structure, the mirroring is evident, more probably a reflex than a conscious system: “la lame” (D,20). The images themselves are often established in systematic balance of opposites: the red of blood against the gleaming white of linen, announced by the thin blade of a guillotine itself whetted like a razor, working to separate reflection from reflection:

au couperet de toute balance les éclats du linge et le sang contradictoire (D,10)

As the initial image of the skin outside recurs, it now covers the volcano, containing the fire, which is at once courted for its unity, “indivision” after the initial scattering of signs, and feared, in all the possible terror of writing. The text apparently breaks open under the force of the future, for its monstrous surface, activated by a few single gunshots and simple words, now stretches to the point of explosion. The volcano erupts, leaving the victim or the poet with a bloodied mouth walking upon white ashes barely illuminated by the ocean’s retreat. The sombre beach of the page reminds us here not only of Mallarmé, not only of Artaud’s great poetic text in prose, “L’Enclume des forces” but also of the more positive explosion in Breton’s poem beginning “On me dit que là-bas les plages sont noires/De la lave allée à la mer”. This poem ends in expansion, with the image of the sea’s flowering apple-tree: “tout le pommier en fleur de la mer”.

The entire text has played through the structure of window and emptiness to catch its prey, each of us, as we write, or desire to write. This “glace vide véridique” is repeated or mirrored in “la vitre est le vide”. Even the weakness of our language matches the “unfinished heart” to which the cold of many suns, as Dupin sees that cold, responds perfectly. Here again the oppositions are set

in play: everything about this text, which we re-read, as it were, standing here at the threshold of the volume, shows an uncertainty of project. Against the hostilities so clearly marked, our *discordance* and in wandering, our eyes wrinkle, from too great an effort at reading, perhaps, and the terror and fascination of illegibility color the text in its entirety.

The denseness of Dupin's poetic prose and the quality of radiation from its energetic source set it apart from the calmer and less intense meditations of many other contemporary poets, although "Le Soleil substitué" stands in correspondence with Ponge's "Le Soleil mis-en-abyme" and "Sang" has traces of Apollinaire's "cou coupé," its violent crimson and its oblique cast. But in this "soufflerie de l'intervalle", the separation is described with a gravity befitting the double hostage from the initial text and the doubled sun in the present one, as the sun is itself a double of the fire and the blood at the outset:

Mais la ligne de partage est acérée, ligne double, esclave et maîtresse,
relief et gravure.

We are, reader and poet, the ones sacrificed here, in the mirror, the border of which the "ligne de partage" has already demarcated:

notre sang pour tain de ce miroir: *écrire*. (D,100)

The title, "Sang," includes all the images of blood, fire, sun, and sacrifice within itself, as the sign forces itself upon us. That *signe* is itself a double of the *sang*, as a table streaming with blood (D,39) first indicates clearly; once the connection is established, the reading functions in the manner of a double signpost, seen forwards and backward: if the table is for writing and the blood is a telling trace of sacrifice, when in the next line the wall "transcribes the exasperation", we are guided or then tempted to read even that image as a perpendicular writing table, again covered or literally splattered with the crimson traces of violence. In similar fashion the horse's hoof ("fer") wounds the ground just as the poet's "faire" marks the page, while the structure of the lines is once more that of a reflecting mirror:

Du soc le courbement, la plongée —
ou son pas, son cheval abattu,
quelques bleuets, la violence
de l'heure par le fer blessée
tandis qu'au fond du labour s'égoutte

le sang supplicié,
l'heure de la mort, bleuet . . . (D,40)

Even the knife opening a "plaie lisible" fits into the scheme: the opened book like a readable wound, as if Mallarmé were in fact the author of the dust-covered volume on the lower shelf, dangerous for its appeal, and whose presence haunts the text of *Dehors*. That book remains at the center, at once a deliberate support and silent witness, a source all the more powerful for its anonymity.

"Un récit," with "Trait pour trait", forms the center of this book, figuratively and concretely — as *Moraines* forms the center of *L'Embrasure*. Each text in this volume inscribes itself into this net of relationships, violent and "letteral" as well: "Chapurlat" ends with a knife's carnal inscription and with the resulting blood splashed deliberately against a wall, echoing the images of readable wound and the bleeding sign found on the table. For a table turned on its side would become a wall, as was pointed out before, and both surfaces reiterate the form of a page, as in that crimson-edged volume which was, at least in part, Mallarmé's book. The odd poem called "Le Lacet" begins with a "limpid" fault or defect in a "double récit", the lip uttering it described variously as narrowed or glittering, like a streak of air; the tongue impaled is nevertheless said to be capable of excavating, and the paper betrays, even as it captures, the line of the narration. (That the poet should so often use a doubled description befits the obsession with a mirrored and duplicating surface.) Like a deforming mirror at a fair, the paper thickens what was originally paper-sharp, razor-thin, dangerously precise. In this text at least one term is plainly suppressed, "au lieu de . . .", so we sense the disjunction of an unfinished line, as in reaction against the thickening referred to by the preceding line:

Trahison de la ligne qui s'épaissit au lieu de fondre sur sa lèvre (D,71)

The implicit echo of *livre* in *lèvre* extends the menace also to the written as well as the spoken word. Subsequently the streak of air which is line at its purest — like the line of Miró or of the painter Malevitch who ends this volume — becomes a burning *lace* with the power to link or tie up, in both positive and negative senses, since it joins but may stifle, and has the coveted simplicity and the ferocity of a nail-scratch, that "onglée" which seems omnipresent. Such violence of the simple sharpens poetic perception; thus the blue wheel of a car is seen as all the bluer for being discolored.

The violence lasts: for, in particular, the plunging seabird at the conclusion of the text, whose dive is first inscribed alone, represents pure incision, creating a scission between lives as between lines:

quand plonge
 l'oiseau de mer, le vérificateur
 des marées
 il plonge
 dans ce qui s'écrit . . .
 dans le schiste et le roncier,
 la bataille, le récit, un champ frappé
 de déshérence
 rien qui ne nous sépare mieux
 et brûle plus clair
 il plonge, j'écris (D,77)

Then the cruel and separating trace, juxtaposed with writing itself as with natural elements: water, fire, air, operates a sharp verbal reduction, compared again to a knife-blade whetted and sharply pointed downwards for action and for writing, the two now closely identified:

étant ici venue pour trahir
 n'étant qu'une lame d'air
 dans l'air
 affilée

The "lacet" itself, like a slicing string, will reappear in a different guise in "Pour cassure de fond", where what we might call its negative virtue — that is, its fragility, its delicacy of line — will illuminate as only a risk can light a certain path or way of being. Just so, the "herbe de parole fraîchement risquée" leads to the poet's vow:

je suivrai ce fil à condition
 qu'il casse
 qu'il éclaire le nom détruit

The destroyed name can also be read as the "non détruit," the mirror image of what is destroyed, so that the "macération de signes" with which this text began sends us back to the other signs in their simple inscription, like the narrowest of scratches:

Une encoche dans le buis seule signe (D,131)

(and, directly preceding this, the "sentence lacérée", which prepares the solitude and the violence of the inscription, the

minimal sign with the maximum affective power, signaling only its own inscribing).

These examples are taken from the sparse-versed and appropriately entitled collection *Ou meurtres*, where the margin appears to have eliminated all the writing superfluous to the central core, and the poetry of the wound appears at its most exacerbated:

Meurtre non savoir un effet de surface et de soufre (D,120)

We can scarcely help, I think, re-reading the “soufre” as “souffre”, the expression of suffering stifled and hereby rendered more intense. Needless to say, this re-reading and the ones following it here are in part determined by the context of the title: murders indeed abound. On the opposing page from the “Meurtre non savoir”, as in a mirror, we read of extraction as from a tomb, where the burned land and the written land are set up themselves in opposition, where the lead word “Extraire” in its strength is echoed or again mirrored by the “terre. . . terre”, leading to the final isolated term “écrite” in an odd four-line recession from the tomb toward the writing of what is to be a great and sober text, even a somber one (“grand texte assombrissant”), in which the life of the letter will presumably be lost. The missing word, were we to open an inquiry on the subject, might well be the “trait”, as what is first extracted in the exchange of letters and inscription: “trait pour trait.”

The following poem evolves from an explicitly murderous motion by a simple negative sliding down the page, toward a tomb only implicit:

Meurtre mouvement dans notre sommeil il suffit qu'un simple fût
d'herbe glisse (D,122)

This little murder can be seen to mirror the more dramatic extraction from the tomb which is writing, and then to lead directly to a meditation on mirror, book, tomb, and fall or cadence:

Poncer la pierre nue de ma tombe jusqu'à ouvrir ton miroir tout livre
qui se referme tombe dans le gouffre . . . (D,129)

The first “tombe” or tomb leads to the second hidden tomb by way of the open mirror: yet the open leads to the closed as mirror gives way to book or text and the echo is tenebral like a blackened mirror of sound and sight: “tombe . . . tombe.” Echoing within the walls of this tomb are the mirror images of “terre . . . terre”,

the earth of burial re-read now as an indication of silence: “taire . . . taire.” The manner in which the transformation from homonym to homonym in all these texts is brought about relates to the nature of the opposition itself: mirror and tomb, earth and silence figure each other, as if forever.

The central work, “*Trait pour trait*”, seems to respond to the text “*Moraines*” in *L’Embrasure*, perhaps playing for Dupin the role that “*Un coup de dés*” played for Mallarmé: the meditation is typographically arresting, its highly charged vocabulary casting light and conferring intensity upon the other texts surrounding it. A trace resembling in some way that of Miró, as we have said: Dupin describes the artists’ trace and paper in a way appropriate to his own art, since the graphic language “*n’est pas celui du trait choisissant son support, mais celui de l’espace de la feuille prenant appui sur le trait pour se révéler*” (PS,142). Signs as Miró or Dupin understand them must change to live ones: they must be tested for their vitality upon the sheet, as in a guerilla warfare, confronted with “*le pouvoir corrosif du vide, et contraint[s] pour le surmonter d’inventer de nouvelles formes*” (PS,141). Here the title is once more clarified, as it relates to the art of writing: “*Le dehors et le rapport*”, these being the agents of scriptural transformation, even rebirth.

In “*Trait pour trait*”, the opening lines:

L’exception qu’ici
en ce non-lieu m’aime

— ou le lieu d’une dérive
d’un désastre méticuleux (D,81)

reminds us instantly of Mallarmé’s “*rien n’aura eu lieu que le lieu*” and his “*désastre obscur*.” The narrow cutting edge, “*l’affilé de tout tranchant*”, is directed against the self, while the text is erected and mortally pierced by the poet, possibly for the benefit of the light occupying the “*lower corner*”, or is that a signature seen as luminous? Now the streak is traced in reverse, and the exterior clarity (“*notre grande clarté du dehors*”) is discerned through the clusters and knots of language: it occupies the final position on the page, as does the light in the preceding poem and the multiple-sensed word “*relation*” in the following major poem, these key words separated from the body of the poem itself and occupying the privileged final position, connecting each poem with the next. Just as the exterior clarity was set in balance against the interior obscurity, so now in this center of the central

text of “*Trait pour trait*”, to be sure, but also a half-pun on line portrait (por-trait) — we are allowed to watch at last the *Cygne* emerging from the *signe*. From an intense black color arises the Swan’s beginning as a flock of birds are freed, the empty eye of reader or observer is suddenly observed to be soiled with signs, and the wing cuts through

les fils enchevêtrés de sa fuyante relation (D,85)

Later the tenuous quality of the thread will be valued precisely for the fragility of the relationship it abolishes; later this *Cygne* will revert to its *signe*, and the narrator will claim to detest both the white source of the sign, as it is related to the margin of the page, and the black point toward which it moves.

“*Trait pour trait*” ends, appropriately, with a juxtaposition of an abstract absolute and of the most minute and specific twigs, in a contrast as striking as the white against the black, and finally with a dangerous “slipping” of signs and a truncation of objects, of an undetermined extent, as the text remains unfinished:

quand le fût s’incline et qu’un trait de scie . . . (D,93)

This open and constellary text of a trace — said to be rebellious — precedes, like a scattering of verbal flashes, the dense texture of “*Un récit*”, the other major work within the volume.

The initial “*je*” of this tale we might read as the voice of the text: the configuration is displaced above like smoke, as in the constellation of the poem just discussed. But after this speaking text is dissolved, a third-person pronoun emerges, like a narrator (“*il*”, thus seen from outside, from *Dehors*). “*He*” bends over his notebooks, from the earliest to the most recent; feverishly annotating, he writes and destroys, mirrors and undoes, asking more or probably forcing the question as to his endeavor, if it can be so called, “*un récit*?” An impersonal “*on*” is a step further in distance from the “*il*”, as that was from the initial “*je*.” This narrator, still more “*outside*”, now hears the stars increasing and a passerby walk away (two rather mysterious details), while suddenly an exterior glimpse — rare in Dupin — refers back to the writing itself:

— et le cri des

corneilles alentour imitant le chant éraillé d’une plume sur de lourds
feuilletts de schiste . . . (D,98)

Again and again the question is raised: what are we reading and writing? Is this in fact a tale? or a “real description”? The

question: “un récit?” will have no answer, except oblique; one book appears, already referred to, unknown, dusty on the last shelf, untouched and troubling. Unreadable, intense, attractive to the poet who flees any contact or then is exiled from his language. The tale is problematic like the murderous margin, so we are reading

un livre prédateur, dont la proximité me hante et me repousse, en
entretenant une exaltation trouble, dévastatrice . . . (D,100)

Between the white sheets of the book as bed, yet another murder has been committed and is being committed still, its violence recalling its own birth pangs, and, by extension and implication, those of the reader to the reading (“souffre . . .”). The book holds an all-powerful sway over the poet and the reader, classifying them into their exile from its shores, reading them out. And yet it makes deep demands on the poet, who must respond and yet apparently fears these primitive and deep-seated problems, who must nevertheless disinter the text from the poisonous dust and clotted blood invading its margins, its empty spots and its burned slopes, its mask and its makeup.

The traces of red and black, like characters on a Greek vase, dance the gigue while a supposed hanged man swings — but as the reader is pulled into the oscillation, far from the danger shown to be illusory, the rhythm of the deadly dance is communicated to the text and to its effect. Our hesitation is increased by the return of the volume, whose “enigmatic” dust is removed in part by the trembling fingers of the unknown reader. Repeatedly the reader is sent away, the narrator is expelled from the text after his sacrifice and his deception marked in successive fragments:

il me chasse

. . .

l’aveugle-aveuglante paroi se fend

. . .

miroir-abîme d’une narration déjouée, miroir du simulacre
(D,101-102)

Since the vital textual violence is dependent on his own energy, the poet continues fathering and slaughtering his text, which is said to leap in his body in preparation for its birth; we might place in relation to this text the four lines of another in which the sea gives unity to the whole and fertility, as if it were indeed the mother (“mer/mère”):

Sans la mer

la sentence lacérée la semence (D,130)

This is the other side of the scribe's sacrifice, whether the ritual uses table, wall, or page. And yet the conclusion is "ta fin", ours also perhaps, as the poet addresses another, the end too of the "je" of the text. But even the end is a false one, seen in a mirror like a glass darkly and endlessly:

Ce serait ta fin, ce récit, ce soupçon

. . .

Il n'y a pas de fin, tout peut reprendre, s'écrire, s'enchaîner: le cri, le calme, le dehors . . . (D,112)

And the title is taken up again, as the skin of the exterior absorbs the text and sends us back to the initial *jeu* of game and self on which Dupin's book opens: "C'est la peau du dehors qui se retourne et nous absorbe". This organic metaphor of reading is crucial as it is complex, touching on the concept of the passage itself.

The final text on Malevitch resumes all the preceding texts: it begins with death and violence: purity, slanted as it is on the diagonal of the page, as the images of Malevitch are often placed, those images to which the slashes separating the phrases are parallel signs:

Fatal/comme en un glissement pur violent/premier visage diagone
(D, 139)

The tricolor system is familiar to us in the artist, red, white and black, and presents also the major colors of metaphysical poetry, as it too works blood against absence or purity, somber white against the brilliant red and black. The sign is that too: now the swan, whether white or black, is played by the black cross cutting, slashing, like the reverse image of the swan's wing, across the white page, for an occasional deadly and bloody end in the smallest streak.

Derrida and Mallarmé haunt this text too, with its dispersion and the concern for a bare writing, this inscription conducting also to a rupture by the simplest trace of a hyphen, the "scripteur" jolted into the action of inscribing by the most minimal act. The page becomes a window but the spectacle it presents is far from calm: "un exercice donne à traverser la faille/d'une trépanation". The violent intravention of the knife/swan is felt even here. To that the "laughter" or *rictus* of the perverted cross (we remember how many of Malevitch's black or

white crosses slash diagonally across the page) answers, by a wild meditation on death.

Here at the conclusion: "Ainsi je suis dehors" the long struggle toward the outer realm is complete. The disaster having come about, inevitably, slices knife-like with an obliqueness to which we are accustomed, but to which we should not be resigned, lest the violence of the effect be lost. The colors play again and again one against the other, and the setting of an abyss initiates future struggles, as far as the eye and mind can reach, endlessly mirroring slash and scission, duplicity and violence in the narrowest of spaces:

le gouffre

. . .

le conflit encore

qui se projette blanc et noir/ou inversement blanc sur blanc

With his incomplete expression remaining open on the page and upon everything else, the text concludes by a turn, inwardly perfected and outwardly of an endless projection: *Dehors*.

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FOOTNOTES

1. All references taken from the following volumes:

Gravir, Gallimard, 1963 (G)

L'Embrasure, précède de Gravir, coll. *Poésie/Gallimard*, 1971 (EG)

L'Embrasure, Gallimard, 1969 (E)

L'Ephémère nos. 19-20, Ed. Maeght, 1972 (EP)

Dehors, Gallimard, 1975 (D)

Jacques Dupin, ed. Georges Raillard, Pierre Seghers, 1974 (PS)

2. This task corresponds in some sense to the *Recherche de la base et du sommet* of René Char, and to his *Retour amont*, as well as to André du Bouchet's series of meditations on the ascent of the mountain, and to Jacques Garelli's *Lieux précaires* (Mercure de France, 1972), although each of these volumes is inscribed differently.
3. For Jacques Garelli also, it is a matter of verbal support: *Prendre appui* . . .
4. Compare Dupin's "L'Urne", a poem seen as an ardent place for the verbal sacrifice, the setting for an "inerte bûcher lucide", where the mouth speaking in poetic fervor or furor opens the passage:

Mais la bouche à la fin, la bouche pleine de terre

Et de fureur,

Se souvient que c'est elle qui brûle

Et guide les berceaux sur le fleuve. (E,45)