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# The quest according to Julien Gracq : a study of the search for the beyond in Gracq's three novels and his play *Le roi pêcheur*

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Mary Joanne Johnson Wolter for the Master of Arts in Foreign Languages: French presented October 21, 1991.

Title: The Quest According to Julien Gracq: A Study of the Search for the Beyond in Gracq's Three Novels and his Play Le Roi Pêcheur.

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Julien Gracq's quest for the "au-delà" is similar in many ways to the Surrealists' attempts to get in touch with the Beyond and to find that mythical and ideal point where binary oppositions are no longer contradictory but complementary. However, he differs greatly from the Surrealists in that his writing is anything but "automatic".

Whereas he acknowledges being influenced by the Surrealists' ideas and by the works of certain authors, notably Goethe, Wagner, and Edgar Allen Poe, his works are a unique and carefully constructed web of style techniques, double-entendres, intertextual references, poetic devices, and a deliberate blurring of the dividing line between clear and obscure.

This thesis will attempt to show, through analyses of Gracq's themes, of his style, and of his use of symbols, the deliberate and closely thought-out nature of his writing and the development of his personal vision of man's quest for meaning, from his first novel, Au Château d'Argol, to his more involved novels, Un beau ténébreux and Le Rivage des Syrtes. and in his only theater work, Le Roi-Pêcheur.

Chapter I will examine his background and connections with the Surrealists (especially André Breton) and the other authors who greatly influenced his works.

Chapter II will analyze aspects of Gracq's style which show his deliberate and careful choice and use of words as instruments to draw the reader into the quest.

Chapter III will examine some of Gracq's carefully thought out symbols, showing their connections with the alchemical symbolism of colors, with mythology, and with the ideas of Gaston Bachelard as to the importance of water in the imagination and the subconscious.

Chapter IV will explore the great themes of temptation,

of waiting, and of the quest for spirituality evident in these four works and attempt to resume the unique character of Julien Gracq's quest and of his writing.

THE QUEST ACCORDING TO JULIEN GRACQ:  
A STUDY OF THE SEARCH FOR THE  
BEYOND IN GRACQ'S THREE  
NOVELS AND HIS PLAY  
LE ROI PECHEUR

by  
MARY JOANNE JOHNSON WOLTER

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requirements for the degree of

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TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES:

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## CHAPTER I

### JULIEN GRACQ THE WRITER

#### INTRODUCTION

The works of Julien Gracq defy categorization. Although one can trace in them influences of surrealism, of romanticism, of Poe, of the Gothic novel, of Wagnerian opera, they remain something different, something unique, just as their author remains to this day an individualist, a loner, a man who follows his own path.

Born in 1910, Julien Gracq began writing between the two world wars, at a time when the surrealists were experimenting with ways to reach "l'au-delà", that which lies beyond normal human experience. Gracq's works show that he shared their fascination with this "au-delà". His first work, Au Château d'Argol (1939), portrays the struggles of a young man, Albert, to reconcile his romantic nature and his spirituality with his logic and his desire for knowledge. He thinks he has found the answer in the Hegelian system, only to find that his emotions, i.e., the irrational and the subconscious, win out in the end. Un beau ténébreux (1945) is the story of Goethe's Faust retold. A young man of English-French parentage, Allan, has made a suicide pact with a beautiful woman, Dolores. He decides to spend his last months at a seaside resort hotel in

Brittany, where the aura of death and mystery which surrounds him attracts several of the other hotel guests, as a light attracts moths to their self-immolation. These questing souls, Christel, Gérard, and Henri, are tempted to follow him to wherever it is he is going, to find out about the mystery. Only a very few of the more down-to-earth hotel guests, such as Irène, recognize the danger in him and are frankly repelled, or, as in the case of Jacques, are so innocent and naive that they remain untouched by Allan's aura. After these first two novels, Gracq tried his hand at other sorts of writing: poems (Liberté Grande, 1946), an essay on the "founder" of Surrealism, his friend André Breton (André Breton, 1948), a play which specifically deals with the Quest as seen in the Grail Legend (Le Roi Pêcheur, 1948), and a pamphlet on his theory of literature and writing (La Littérature à L'Estomac, 1950) before writing his masterpiece novel, Le Rivage des Syrtes, (1951) for which he received, but refused to accept, the Prix Goncourt, the French equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize for Literature. Since then, he has continued to produce a steady variety of literary works, but no more novels: a translation of the German Kleist's Penthesilée (1954), two shorter works which he calls  récits: Un Balcon en Forêt (1958) and Les Eaux Etroites (1976), a book of collected short stories (nouvelles), La Presqu'île (1970), three works of literary criticism and reflections: Lettrines (1967), Lettrines 2 (1974), and En lisant En Ecrivant (1980),

La Forme D'Une Ville (1985), and his most recent work, which deals with Rome, Autour Des Sept Collines (1988). This paper will consider his play, Le Roi Pêcheur, and his three novels: Au Château d'Argol, Un Beau Ténébreux, and Le Rivage Des Syrtes. This last, his masterpiece novel, concerns two mythical countries which have theoretically been at war for three hundred years, but actually have had no contact during that time, each keeping to itself on opposite sides of the Sea of Syrtes. What happens when people on both sides give in to the temptation to stir up this dormant war and these sleepy countries where nothing ever happens is the idea behind the novel, but the actual narration deals mostly with the awful attraction exerted by the unknown other side on a young nobleman, Aldo. The magnetism of that which is beyond the allowed limits is what Aldo expresses in his desire "To be closer. Not to remain cut off. To consume myself in that light. To touch ..." (O.S. 190).

Ce que je voulais n'avait de nom dans aucune langue. Etre plus près. Ne pas rester séparé. Me consumer à cette lumière. Toucher. (R.S. 212)

Julien Gracq understands well modern man's instinctive yearning for something which is beyond himself, beyond the limits of everyday existence. Equally, he is in search of himself and that which constitutes for him his "center", his authentic and essential being, which resides, not in his conscious, but in his unconscious mind, his "heart". And finally, he yearns to know the mystery of his own existence,

of his origins and of his death. And, as he finds himself existing here, on this planet, what is his correct relationship with the nurturing elements of earth and water and air? How can he, as a "human plant", best get in touch and commune with the planet which sustains his life?

In all these spiritual quests, modern man is hampered, according to Gracq, by the rationalist and scientific climate of thinking in the world since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by habits of looking at the world from the viewpoint of logic and reason, which have effected a "coupure pratiquée par la Raison entre l'homme et l'univers" and a "fossé creusé entre le rêve et la réalité" (Grossman 45). Man's "normal" perceptions are actually colored by learned logic and acquired reason; therefore he needs a change of perspective, a new point of view, to see things from an oblique angle, in order to discern the magic hidden under the most "banal" of views. (This idea of change of perspective which suddenly reveals new insights is explored with particular frequency in Un beau ténébreux, 79-80, 99, 102, 109, 114, 118.) Man in his spiritual quest needs to see with the fresh eyes of the very young child, without interference from acquired logic, with "ce regard non prévenu, ce privilège naïf du regard vierge, si prompt à la découverte" (B.T. 150) which is given to us only once, the first time we see something new, before we have learned to know it, before it has become familiar and therefore banal. But how is one to

maintain this privileged point of view, this revealing perspective on things?

Poetic language, according to Gracq, has the power to show us the world from this fresh point of view:

...la poésie ne se propose jamais rien tant, par la rupture de toutes les associations habituelles au moyen de l'image, que de provoquer artificiellement cet état naissant en essayant de nous faire voir chaque objet dans une lumière de création du monde et comme pour la première fois. (A.B. 141)

And poetic language can exist equally as well in a prose format as in a traditional poem.

Est poésie tout ce qui "bouleverse", tout ce qui "ravit", du poème exaltant au "fait-glissade" et au "fait-précipice", en passant par la méthode "paranoïque-critique" et la grande hystérie -- irrémédiablement prose au contraire tout ce qui fait qu'on "y est" toujours. (A.B. 123)

The task of the writer-poet, then, is to act as a catalyst, to enable men to get in touch with their world, in all its depths, and with themselves, in all their depths.

Il ya un "tout ou rien" lancinant auquel il (le poète) n'échappera pas: a-t-il été, ne fût-ce qu'une brève minute, "un dieu pour eux", pénétré, ne fût-ce qu'une fois, au coeur de la place, a-t-il provoqué cette sensation insolite, en effet, de "vent autour des tempes" où le coeur hésite, les a-t-il suspendus, un instant irrespirable, à ce quite (sic) de l'éternité? (Litt. in Préf. 13)

Julien Gracq writes in prose, but it is indeed a poetic prose, and the solemn beauty of his style is perhaps the most immediately attractive element in his works--that which intrigues the reader and draws him into them as the flame

draws the moth and as the Tängri drew Aldo in Rivage des Syrtes.

CONNECTIONS WITH SURREALISM, WITH GERMAN ROMANTICISM,  
WITH THE GOTHIC NOVEL AND EDGAR ALLAN POE,  
AND WITH THE BIBLE

Connections With Surrealism

In this poetic style and in the theories outlined above, we can see links with Surrealism, with German Romanticism, and with Edgar Allan Poe, whom Gracq names as the first of those authors whose works charmed his childhood and adolescence (Lett. 42-43).

It is clear that Gracq admired certain aspects of Surrealism and that he considered André Breton a questing hero of the purest sort (Grossman 17, A.B. 206). In his introduction to Au Château d'Argol, he speaks of Surrealism as "une école littéraire qui fut la seule...à apporter dans la période d'après-guerre autre chose que l'espoir d'un renouvellement--à raviver les délices épuisées du paradis toujours enfantin des explorateurs." (C.A. 7). And in Lettrines, he speaks of André Breton as "le plus grand de ses confesseurs (de la poésie) à notre époque, sans nul doute" (Lett. 65). However, as Simone Grossman points out,

Gracq n'a jamais vraiment appartenu au mouvement surréaliste, mais ... a préféré rester en marge par rapport à l'activité publique de Breton. Gracq n'a d'ailleurs cessé de se tenir à l'écart de la vie littéraire parisienne et d'affirmer son indépendance vis-à-vis...des "écoles" artistiques. (Grossman 7)

A loner by nature, Gracq did not like the collective literary activity of the Surrealists and their rejection of the novel (which he considers can be equally as poetic as the poem, as already mentioned), and he especially did not like their political involvement (Grossman 19, 21). Rather, he found himself in accord with certain of their ideas, notably the quest for the point where opposites become one, complementary rather than contrary. He also liked their evangelical fervor, the electrifying excitement which sent them out into the highways and byways to share their "new religion", their vision of how man can get in touch with the world and with himself (Grossman 46-47). Gracq calls the Surrealist movement the "souffle le plus évangélique...qui ait jamais traversé la poésie française" (A.B. 17). The evangelical and renewing power of Surrealism, for Gracq, lay in its upsetting the old order of the literary critics with works which appeal directly to the readers' hearts, by-passing their logical and critical faculties (Grossman 28-29). But it was essentially André Breton himself who attracted Gracq to the Surrealists, because in him Gracq saw the synthesis of all the elements which make up his own personal inspiration and theory, his "hantise": 1) the romantic desire for union and communion with the world as in the "âge d'or" before man became alienated from his roots and his sources, when he lived in harmony with his environment, 2) the Grail-like quest for the beyond and for



that ideal point where opposites are no longer in conflict but in harmony. As Simone Grossman says,

L'admiration que Gracq porte à Breton...s'attache à l'exemplarité de sa démarche, comme étant celle d'un homme qui a entendu user pleinement de sa liberté...Breton apparaît à Gracq comme un chevalier du Graal, dans sa tentative absolue d'extension des limites susceptibles d'amoindrir les pouvoirs de l'homme. (Grossman 16-17)

Therefore, Gracq's connections with Surrealism were based on certain coincidences in their theories and in his own and on his friendship with and admiration for André Breton. He differs from them in his conception of how to reach the "au-delà", the beyond. His writing, in my opinion, bears no trace of the semi-coherent "automatic" writing of the Surrealists, sprung directly from their subconscious in a semi-somnambulant state. Gracq's writing is indeed dream-like, and his characters live, he says in a "rêve éveillé" (Lett. 36), but a close analysis of his texts shows an extremely careful choice of words and juxtaposition of images, which maximize the dream-like effect but could hardly have been accidental or automatic, as I will try to show in Chapter II.

### Connections With German Romanticism

German Romanticism, in particular Goethe's Faust and Elective Affinities, and Wagner's Parsifal, appear and reappear in Gracq's works. As I have noted above, Un beau ténébreux is in many ways a re-telling of Faust, with Allan in the role of Faust and Dolorès as Mephistopheles, Cristal as

Gretchen (Marguerite), and Gérard as her brother (Amossy 158-161). Au Château d'Argol can also be considered as a version of the same story, with Herminien this time as the tempter Mephistopheles, (Albert's dark side), Albert as Faust, Heide as Gretchen/Marguerite (Peyronie 28). Even Le Rivage des Syrtes bears something of the same stamp, with Vanessa playing Mephistopheles to Aldo's Faust. As Schaber says, "Goethe stresses the tragedy of the scholar whose emotional life is not fulfilled and who quests after limitless knowledge, only to find himself frustrated by mortal limitations" (in *Master Plots*, 2022). Does not this description aptly fit Allan, Albert, Aldo? Do not even their names echo the German "alle", the English "all", the desire to know all? The connection is actually clearly made in Au Château d'Argol: Herminien calls Albert "docteur Faustus" because of his "esprit sans cesse trop tiré vers les hauteurs, trop porté à planer dans des espaces enivrants et confus" (C.A. 41-42), and Albert calls Herminien his "âme damnée" (C.A. 182), his dark side, his damned double, which he kills in the end. The connection is more subtle in Un beau ténébreux, but it is clear nonetheless. Gérard dreams of going to see the opera Faust with Christel and Allan, and it is the secondary character of the brother who figures most importantly in this dream (B.T. 134-135). In trying to save Christel from Allan, Gérard plays the same role as Gretchen's brother trying to save her from Faust. Allan himself tells a version of Faust to Christel (B.T. 209-210).

As for the Elective Affinities, they are specifically mentioned (B.T. 113) and in the introduction to Le Roi Pêcheur, Gracq explains clearly why he uses and reuses aspects of Goethe's tales:

Il y a des chefs-d'oeuvre qui fertilisent leur matière, en font un carrefour magique, une étoile de routes sans cesse foisonnante de nouveaux chemins (le Faust de Goethe appartient à un monde de nébuleuses, grosses à l'infini de planètes nouvelles). (R.P. 14)

Faust is what Gracq calls "an open story", i.e., one that is rife with endless possibilities of new versions, like the medieval myths and unlike the "mythes fermés" of the Greeks which always ended with the tragic hero up against the implacable stone wall of the capricious will of the gods. Gracq considers the medieval myths (Tristan, the Arthurian legends, the Grail legends) open ended because they show man, not hemmed in and limited by the arbitrary and fickle humors of the gods, but on "un itinéraire de victoire" of a limitless quest with "une aspiration terrestre et presque nietzschéenne à la surhumanité" (R.P. 10-12). Faust, according to Gracq, is also such a tale, as are Wagner's versions of these same medieval myths (R.P. 14).

Wagner, says Gracq, is "un magicien noir" (R.P. 14), whose works Lohengrin and Parsifal also appear and reappear throughout the first three of Gracq's works here considered. In Au Château d'Argol, Albert visits Herminien's room and finds there a Dürer painting which shows Parsifal touching Amfortas' side with the lance while Gurnemanz and Kundry look

on. Le Roi Pêcheur is Gracq's re-telling of the Parsifal story, and most of his characters, as well as the setting, Montsalvat, are taken directly from the Wagnerian version, and not from the original Chrétien de Troyes version. Lohengrin is the Wagnerian work which appears, directly and elusively, in Un beau ténébreux, directly when Gérard connects it with Faust in his dream (B.T. 135), and later, when he muses about it as he ponders the significance of the date he has seen on Allan's desk: "le 8 octobre" (B.T. 157-159). More elusively, as Françoise Calin has shown (Calin, "Maëlstrom" 217), Christel's question in her letter to Gérard, "Qui est Allan?" (B.T. 168) echoes Elsa's question "Qui est Lohengrin?", which precedes the scene directions quoted by Gérard, "Lohengrin embrasse tendrement Elsa et s'approchant de la fenêtre lui montre le jardin en fleurs." (B.T. 158). This scene finds a subtle parallel in Allan's actions the night of his suicide, when he kisses Christel on the forehead and leads her to the window to contemplate the garden (B.T. 214). Lohengrin constitutes one of the leitmotivs of Un beau ténébreux and also of Le Rivage des Syrtes, where references are made in passing to Lohengrin's swan boat (R.S. 144).

In Goethe and in Wagner, Gracq saw the elements of German Romanticism which appealed to him: dark forests, mysterious castles, enigmatic heroes, nostalgia for the "âge d'or" before the Age of Reason, when belief in the powers of the subconscious and in things awesome and mysterious held sway,

and the fascinated and insatiable quest for the superhuman, for the beyond, for all knowledge, "la quête passionnée d'un trésor idéal" (R.P. 12).

### Connections with the Gothic Novel and with Edgar Allen Poe

Gracq's first mention of the role which Edgar Allan Poe and the Gothic novel have played in his life and work is found in the "Avis au lecteur" of Au Château d'Argol when he speaks of the "puissantes merveilles des Mystères d'Udolphe, du château d'Otrante, et de la maison Usher", invoking their aid and declaring that in this work he is purposely thanking their authors for the magical pleasure they have always given him:

Puissent ici être mobilisées les puissantes merveilles des Mystères d'Udolphe, du château d'Otrante, et de la maison Usher pour communiquer à ces faibles syllabes un peu de la force d'envoûtement qu'ont gardée leurs chaînes, leurs fantômes, et leurs cercueils: l'auteur ne fera que leur rendre un hommage à dessein explicite pour l'enchantement qu'elles ont toujours inépuisablement versé sur lui. (C.A. 11)

This enchantment of the Gothic novel is evident in the settings Gracq chose for the four works here considered. The Château d'Argol, the Admiralty and the Aldobrandi palace in Le Rivage des Syrtes, and Montsalvat in Le Roi Pêcheur are all ghostly, musty, and moldy semi-deserted castles of the type found in the Gothic novel, and Argol and Montsalvat are also of the Sleeping Beauty type, surrounded by dense forest (R.P. 14). Small wonder that Gracq prefers Ussé, the original Sleeping Beauty castle of Perrault's fairy tale, to all the

other Loire châteaux (Lett. 238)! The Admiralty and the Aldobrandi palace almost float, ghost-like, on the sea which partially surrounds them (R.S. 130,84,140). In Un beau ténébreux, the setting is a busy resort hotel which becomes empty and deserted as autumn, the "arrière-saison" approaches, and the group of friends, "La Bande", goes on a picnic to the ruined castle of Roscaër, which is everything a Gothic castle should be. In each of these settings, there is one particular room which seems to hold a great secret, a key to the story, to unlock its meaning: Herminien's room in Au Château d'Argol, Allan's room in Un beau ténébreux, the map room in Le Rivage des Syrtes, and the inner room which holds the Grail in Le Roi Pêcheur. These rooms echo the Gothic novel's vault, the dungeon, the secret room in the wall or the attic, where a corpse or a madman is sealed up, the source of the terror and the answer to the mystery of the castle. In addition, the vaguely felt menace and the magnetic attraction in the atmosphere of the Gothic novel perfectly suit Gracq's ends in creating stories which show both the dangerous pitfalls and the overwhelming fascination of the Quest.

The enchantment of Poe's works for Gracq lies, he says, in "l'accord d'une sensibilité et d'une forme exquise, irréductiblement originale" (Lett. 25), a description which in my opinion applies equally well to his own works, as I will try to show in Chapter Two. This Poe-etic style, the perfect agreement of sense and form, is, as mentioned above, perhaps

the most immediately attractive element of Gracq's writings. But it is not the only element which Gracq has borrowed from Poe.

Ruth Amosy has shown convincingly that Allan in Un beau ténébreux is in many ways Poe's double. His name is Poe's middle name, as Poe's William Wilson had the same name as his double and alter-ego. He, like Poe, is of parents involved with the theater, who are dead. Poe, as presented to French readers since the late 19th century by his translator and critic, Charles Baudelaire, led a life which showed "quelque chose de ténébreux et de brillant à la fois" (Baudelaire, quoted in Amosy 125), an exact description of Allan's life, which exudes an aura both brilliant and shadowy in its fascination (Amosy 123-125). Several of Poe's works are directly mentioned in this novel: Ulalume (B.T. 20), The Oval Portrait (B.T. 80), The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (B.T. 152), and The Mask of the Red Death (B.T. 203). His A Descent into the Maelstrom is alluded to indirectly, in Gregory's letter to Gérard (B.T. 74), in Henri's dream (B.T. 119), and in Gérard's description of excitement and passion (B.T. 144). This powerful symbol of the downward/upward spiral is explored in Chapter III. Although the works of Poe are not specifically mentioned or alluded to in Gracq's other works here studied, it seems possible to consider the Tängri, the volcano on the other side of the Sea of Syrtes which so

fascinates Aldo, as another maelstrom, an upward spiral this time, in its conical shape (R.S. 150-151, 216).

One of Poe's techniques which Gracq uses is the creation of a vague and mysterious atmosphere, under the guise of an objective narration made in the first person "I", in the form of a journal (B.T.) or looking back on a past experience (R.S.). The juxtaposition of objectively stated facts and chillingly subjective feelings creates this atmosphere.

The impression made by Poes's tales and poems on the imagination of a twelve-year-old boy (Lett. 42) remained with him throughout his working life. "Poe", he writes in Les Eaux Etroites, 1976, "ne va plus guère me quitter, tout au long de cette excursion" (E.E. 16). Settings, scenes, symbols, style, and general atmosphere of "étrangeté angoissante" and of "clair-obscur", these are the connections with the works of Edgar Allan Poe which remain in the works of Julien Gracq.

### Connections with Christianity and the Bible

Although Gracq professes himself to be anti-Christian, (R.P. 11, Grossman 21) it often seems that his objection to Christianity lies more in the dogmatic, and therefore limited, interpretations which various churches have put upon the story told in the gospels rather than in its essential message. For that message has the same basic theme as his own works, i.e., man's quest for God, that which is at once beyond and within him. And Gracq refers over and over again to passages from the four gospels, either obliquely, incorporating certain



well-known phrases or ideas into his own sentences, such as "Allan est venu ici apporter l'épée" (B.T. 169), referring to Christ's words, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34), or directly, as when Gérard muses on the touching and mysterious period between Christ's resurrection and ascension (B.T. 145-146). Gracq is obviously aware of the enormously powerful effect on his readers wielded by familiar biblical words and scenes used in a different context. Ruth Amossy contends that Gracq's purpose in using them was to lend an aura of veracity and authenticity to his works, to convince his readers of their seriousness and meaningfulness (Amossy 66-67). It is hardly possible, she says, that they are simply the result of "une reminiscence involontaire" (Amossy 65), the result of Gracq's childhood training in religion. Since the premise of this thesis is that Gracq's works are all carefully constructed and thought out, Amossy's statements appear in perfect agreement. Yet there may be another reason for Gracq's deliberate decision to use gospel texts. In trying to describe for his readers the hero's quest for depth of meaning and communion with himself, his world, and humankind, and in trying to draw them into this quest as they read, why not make use of a hero's quest with which they are already deeply familiar? Why not make use of words and scenes whose mystery and power have inspired many heroes over many centuries on their own personal quests?

## THE QUEST

Gracq is convinced of the mystery which underlies the existence of the world and man's existence. Yet this mystery seems always elusive, even though, as he says, it is there, within reach, "à portée de la main" (R.P. 12).

Gracq was fascinated with the inaccessible and with destiny. His works show a preoccupation with the desire to know about this Beyond, the temptation to risk all in order to reach the unreachable and the emotions experienced by the human spirit when contemplating the waiting period necessary before this moment of knowing can occur.

Traditional human philosophy and religion hold that death is the door which leads to the Beyond, to another plane of existence, to a greater knowing. In some respects, life may be viewed as a waiting period (l'attente) for death. What interested Gracq was the temptation (la tentation) involved in this waiting (la tentation dans l'attente), the temptation to speed things up, to skip the waiting period and to cast oneself into the abyss in a supreme exercise of human will, grasping in one's own hand the fruit of knowledge, self-destruction in exchange for greater knowing. His characters put themselves and others "in harm's way", casting prudence to the winds in supreme acts of willfulness (Allan in Un Beau Ténébreux, Herminien in Au Château d'Argol) or as if impelled by a fascinated temptation which they seem powerless to resist (Gérard, Henri, Christel, in Un beau ténébreux, Albert and

Heide in Au Château d'Argol, Aldo in Le Rivage des Syrtes). The tension produced by this temptation (la tension de la tentation) and by the paradoxical instinct for self-preservation/desire for self-destruction is a theme which recurs throughout Gracq's work.

In the foreword ("avant-propos") to Le Roi Pêcheur, Gracq speaks of this temptation as he sees it in the Medieval myths which he so admires as "histoires ouvertes":

Les mythes du Moyen Age ne sont pas des mythes tragiques, mais des histoires "ouvertes" -- ils parlent non pas de punitions gratuites, mais de tentations permanentes et récompensées (Tristan: la tentation de l'amour absolu--Perceval: la tentation de la possession divine ici-bas) vus sous un certain angle, ils sont un outil forgé pour briser idéalement certaines limites. Ils racontent...les étapes d'un itinéraire de victoire...La conquête du Graal représente...une aspiration terrestre et presque nietzshéenne à la surhumanité... (R.P. 10-12, my underlining)

The medieval myths speak of temptations which are "permanent and rewarded": Tristan and Isolde find a love which survives the death of their bodies, Parsifal finds the Grail and becomes the new Grail-King. To Gracq, these are good temptations, temptations which lead people to look beyond the normal limits of their daily existence ("briser idéalement certaines limites") for something greater, for something superhuman, for that "trésor idéal qui, si obstinément qu'il se dérobe nous est toujours représenté comme à portée de la main" (R.P. 12). This "quête passionnée d'un trésor idéal" is the heart of Gracq's novels, the leitmotiv which runs through all of them, and which is specifically dealt with in Le Roi

Pêcheur. Embedded in this leitmotiv are Gracq's great themes of magnetic fascination and the search for the center, that elusive point where opposites are one and where man meets the divine (R.P. 15). We need new myths, new versions of these quest stories, says Gracq, to counter-act the stultifying and spiritually paralyzing effects of modern society, to lubricate its dried-out machinery:

...le besoin lancinant qu'éprouve notre époque de remagnétiser la vie, d'y faire sourdre de nouveau, après le succès d'une longue entreprise de dessèchement, un lubrifiant indispensable pour les frottements multipliés d'une machinerie sociale que sa complexité menace à chaque instant de bloquer, - et qui tend à devenir de plus en plus paralysante. (R.P. 8-9, my underlining)

In this he is in full agreement with the noted mythologist, Joseph Campbell, who wrote his The Hero with a Thousand Faces about the same time that Gracq wrote Le Roi Pêcheur. There is, says Campbell, "an old story that is still good, and that is the story of the spiritual quest...The world is different today from what it was fifty years ago. But the inward life of man is exactly the same." (Campbell, Power, 139). Our need for spirituality has not changed, but our world is no longer that of knights errant and of deep forests. So we may have trouble relating to the old myths; we may not see how they apply to our own search for meaning. It is therefore the task of the writer--poet, novelist, or playwright--to retell these old essential truths in modern dress, in terms which modern people can understand. This, I believe, is Julien Gracq's quest.

## CHAPTER II

### GRACQ'S STYLE

#### LONG SENTENCES

Gracq's style is dream-like, reflecting the "rêve éveillé" in which he says his characters live (Lett. 36). Long, involved sentences, cut in two by parenthetical asides set off by dashes, keep the reader in a state of waiting -- like Gracq's characters -- waiting to find out how the sentence will end! Because the sentences are so involved, the reader is forced to re-read each one several times in order to understand it fully. This repetition slows down the understanding process and heightens the reader's tension and impatience. One feels intensely that desire to know, now, (which is one of Gracq's themes), while reading his words, as well as the temptation (another of his themes) to skip over these parenthetical asides and read only the "main" or "essential" parts. And yet, if one does so, a great deal of the knowledge and the enjoyment to be gained by reading Gracq will be lost. The very format of the story forces one to participate in the tension and the temptation of the waiting. Gracq's technique here is very like that of Edgar Allen Poe, whose writing Gracq considered enchanting (C.A. 11; Lett, 24). In the "Avis Au Lecteur" which prefaces Au Château d'Argol, he

speaks of "les puissantes merveilles...de la maison Usher" and of "l'enchantement qu'elles ont toujours inépuisablement versé sur lui (Gracq)" (C.A. 11). With this clue in mind, compare the following paragraph-sentence from The Fall of the House of Usher and a similar sentence from Le Rivage des Syrtes:

Here again I paused abruptly, and now with a feeling of wild amazement -- for there could be no doubt whatever that, in this instance, I did actually hear (although from what direction it proceeded I found it impossible to say) a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound -- the exact counterpart of what my fancy had already conjured up for the dragon's unnatural shriek as described by the romancer. (Poe 265)

Not only does Poe interrupt his main sentence with an aside set off by dashes, but he interrupts the aside also, with another aside in parentheses! The effect, which Poe considers of primary importance in his philosophy of composition (Poe 550), is to draw out the tension and anxiety in the reader almost to the shrieking point, until the word "shriek" at the end of this long sentence fills his mind and echoes his own desire.

In Le Rivage des Syrtes, Chapter Nine, "Une Croisière", there is a curious passage where an older Aldo speaks from a future perspective, in what is apparently a flash-back but seems also to betray the author's thoughts as he wrote during and just after the war years. Aldo muses on the part he played in the fateful events of that night, acting, he says, as a sort of embodiment of the public will, one of those star-

crossed beings whose actions are no longer dictated by their volition only but by that of the entire country:

Le regard qui traverse ces silhouettes se perd dans une profondeur où l'on craint de lire; la fascination qu'elles exercent tient au soupçon qui nous vient que la communication privilégiée--fût-ce pour le pire--qui leur a été consentie les a haussés, pour quelques secondes qu'il valait la peine d'être, à une instance suprême de la vie: nous dansons comme un bouchon sur un océan de vagues folles qui à chaque instant nous dépassent, mais un instant du monde dans la pleine lumière de la conscience a abouti à eux--un instant en eux l'angoisse éteinte du possible a fait la nuit--le monde orageux de millions de charges éparses s'est déchargé en eux dans un immense éclair--leur univers, refluant de toutes parts sur eux autour d'un passage où nous imaginons que la sécurité profonde se mêle inextricablement à l'angoisse, a été une seconde celui de la balle dans le canon de fusil. (R.S. 201)

This incredibly long sentence is given its weight and importance by its exceptional length and by almost every one of the other devices Gracq uses to call our attention to certain lines: several asides set off by dashes, certain words in italics, the use of certain key words which appear again and again in his works ("fascination", "profondeur", "vagues", "une instance/un instant", "orageux", "éclair", "angoisse") as well as the normal setting-off devices of punctuation, the comma, semi-colon, and colon. It is easy to get lost in the complexity of this sentence, and many re-readings are required to truly understand it, but there is no problem with the final line and the final image: "la balle dans le canon de fusil". This is literally the "punch line", which almost takes one's breath away with its impact: the

image of these "figures of destiny" being impelled forward by fate, by society, by the course of events, with the speed and destruction of a bullet. Like Poe's sentence, which draws out the readers' nerves to the shrieking point, Gracq's sentence draws out the readers attention and feeling of malaise, piling image upon image, until suddenly he comes to the point with the clarity and conciseness of the crack of a rifle shot.

#### ITALICIZED WORDS

Periodically, as in this example, Gracq's sentences are punctuated by one or more words in italics, which not only stress the importance of those words, but also stresses the reader, awaking frissons of apprehension or of vaguely felt mystery. For instance, the two words marked by italics in the above paragraph, *être* and *abouti*, when put together mean, "to be at an end", "to have come to an end", which is exactly what happens to the old country of Orsenna that night. On the preceding page, the italicized words are "se fondre"... "se délivrer du mal"... "l'arme du crime"... "âmes damnées". The pair "se fondre"/"se délivrer du mal" is a sly parody of the biblical text, "He who loses his life ...will save it", applied to these tragic heroes, these "figures d'ombre", since "se fondre" means to fade away, merge into, i.e., to lose one's identity for the public, while "se délivrer du mal" echoes the Lord's Prayer, "Deliver us from evil", but transforms it into "they deliver themselves from evil". These



figures are also society's "damned souls", its scapegoats, and its "crime weapon", which introduces the image of the speeding bullet seen in the sentence quoted above. From these examples, it seems that Gracq uses his italicized words to form leitmotifs in each chapter which resume in a few words some of the essential ideas therein. To further test this idea, let us examine one of the patterns formed by the italicized words in the last chapter of Le Rivage des Syrtes. The first italicized words (R.S. 279) are those of the oracle, of the "prophecy" which the rumors are circulating: "la mort dans la flamme qui viendra sur l'eau". The following italics mark the words "premier rôle", "mettre en scène", and "augurale" (R.S. 280-281), all having to do with the theater and the theatrical role of the oracle. The theater theme reappears with "coulissier" (R.S. 289), here with the old meaning of one who works behind the scenes, and with "entrée en scène" (R.S. 315) and culminates with the final words of the book (which are not in italics), "je croyais marcher au milieu...d'un théâtre vide--mais...un pas à la fin comblait l'attente de cette nuit vide, et je savais pour quoi désormais le décor était planté." (R.S. 322). The underlying idea one perceives from this sequence of theatrical terms is that Aldo was playing a role, but as a puppet does, without knowing the script, since it is not until the very end that he knows "what the stage was set for" (O.S. 292). The italicized words, therefore, provide one of the leitmotifs in the light of which

one can consider, not only the final chapter, but also the whole book, as the fifth italicized passage of this chapter says, "ré-con-si-dé-rer la situation à la lueur d'un fait nouveau" (R.S. 282).

Besides these immediately noticeable stylistic devices, Gracq makes full use of every word, choosing each one carefully to fit with his overall plan. A close analysis using the method outlined by Roland Barthes reveals clearly how carefully Gracq structures his sentences, how purposefully he chooses and combines his words in order to maximize their poetic (and "Poe-etic") effect.

ANALYSIS IN THE BARTHIAN STYLE OF  
"LE BAIN", CHAPTER 5, AU CHATEAU D'ARGOL

One of Gracq's particularly unsettling techniques is his juxtapositions of beautiful and ugly images. The beautiful metaphors are so lovely that one wants to relax and lose oneself in them, to float peacefully on the current of pretty words, uncritically admiring the marvelous scenes painted. But Gracq does not want his readers to relax; he wants them to actively participate in the "rêve éveillé", dreaming, yes, but awake, and to keep them in this state, he constantly inserts words which sting, which jab, which shock.

A good example of this in the fifth chapter of Au Château d'Argol, "Le Bain", and a Barthian-style analysis of the first paragraph (which is a page and a half long) points out his method:

(1) Un matin, où (2) une brume légère qui stagnait sous les arbres (3) annonçait les ardeurs d'une journée torride, (4) ils allèrent se baigner dans le golfe dont on voyait du château scintiller les étendues liquides et éternellement vides. (5) Une puissante voiture les emporta par des chemins cahotants. Un brouillard translucide et doux pesait sur tout ce paysage dont le caractère était apparu la première fois à Albert comme si intensément dramatique. (6) Dans l'air entier circulait une fraîcheur salée et cinglante, accourue des gouffres de la mer, et chargée d'une odeur plus enivrante que celle de la terre après la pluie: (7) il semblait que chaque parcelle de la peau en épuisât simultanément les profondes délices, (8) et, si l'on fermait les yeux, le corps prenait d'un coup pour les sens la forme d'une outre entièrement close de chaudes ténèbres, (9) dont eût été perçue partout en même temps la paroi vivante et merveilleuse, au contact d'une fraîcheur non plus accidentelle, mais tellurique, et qui semblait irradiée par tous les pores de la planète autant que par le soleil son insupportable chaleur. (10) Le vent claquant de la mer fouettait le visage en longues vagues lisses, arrachait au sable mouillé une poussière étincelante -- (11) et de grands oiseaux de mer aux longues ailes, par leur vol saccadé et leurs brusques arrêts, semblaient indiquer son flux et son reflux pareils à ceux de la mer sur des plages aériennes et invisibles où, les ailes étendues et immobiles, ils semblaient par instants s'échouer comme les blanches méduses. (12) La grève mouillée était mangée par de longs bancs de brumes blanches que la mer plate, et qui réfléchissait les rayons presque horizontaux du soleil, éclairait par dessous d'un poudroiement lumineux, (13) et les écharpes lisses du brouillard se distinguaient à peine pour l'oeil surpris des flaques d'eau et des étendues unies du sable humide -- (14) comme si l'oeil enchanté, au matin de la création, eût pu voir se dérouler le mystère naïf de la séparation des éléments.

(15) Ils se dévêtirent parmi les tombes. (C.A. 87-88)

(1) "un matin"--besides setting the episode at a certain time of day, the words "one morning" conjure up for us all sorts of associations: the freshness of a new day, the

possibility of new beginnings, the beauty of the sun's early-morning rays, the general aura of AWAKENING.

(2) "une brume légère qui stagnait sous les arbres" -- the juxtaposition of the words "brume/stagnait" produces at once a pleasant and unpleasant sensation. A "light mist" does not usually "stagnate". WATER stagnates when prevented from flowing freely and develops signs of decay. The idea of the tiny droplets of water dispersed in the air STAGNATING like a pool of fetid water introduces the evil/good paradox in this chapter and recalls Bachelard's comments on the stagnant waters of Poe's poetry. They symbolize death, he says, "a sleep from which no one wishes to wake" (Bachelard 65).

(3) "annonçait les ardeurs d'une journée torride" -- two words, "ardeurs" and "torride", connote the heat of fire and burning, with the added connotation of ardor, i.e., desire, energy, life, vitality, vigor. The day of burning heat mirrors the burning desire of the three characters to live life to the fullest and introduces the fire element.

(4) "ils allèrent se baigner dans le golfe dont on voyait du château scintiller les étendues liquides et éternellement vides." -- there are two expressions in French for going swimming: "se baigner", which literally means "to bathe oneself", and "faire de la natation" or "nager" which simply means to perform the action of swimming. The choice of "se baigner" and the title of this chapter, "Le Bain", include the idea of going swimming to escape the heat of the day AND

the idea of washing oneself, getting clean, purification. Immersion in water is a sort of death and re-birth, death of the old and sullied, re-birth of the new and cleansed, as in baptism.

-- "scintiller" the morning light reflected off the water sparkles and scintillates like a star

-- "les étendues liquides et éternellement vides" -- (the liquid and eternally empty expanses) a rather grandiose way of describing the ocean, but one which adds nuances to the picture Gracq is painting for us. "Eternally empty"? In actuality, the ocean is anything but. Rather, it is a teeming medium of life, the mother of all life on earth. Does the word empty refer more to the "eyes of the beholder", reflecting the state of mind of the three inhabitants of the Château, who look out look out upon it stretching away to the horizon, towards infinity, hoping, but failing, to see something of what lies beyond its "empty stretches"?

(5) "Un brouillard translucide et doux pesait sur tout ce paysage dont le caractère était apparu la première fois à Albert comme si intensément dramatique"

-- the mist is mentioned again, this time with more of an idea of "fog", yet a TRANSLUCENT fog, one which allows SOME vision of what lies beyond it. This fog is characterized as "doux", gentle or sweet, and yet it WEIGHS (pesait) on the scene. It is this ambiguity, this half-vision of weighty

things which gave the "intensely dramatic character" to this scene when Albert viewed it for the first time.

(6) "Dans l'air entier circulait une fraîcheur salée et cinglante, accourue des gouffres de la mer, et chargée d'une odeur plus enivrante que celle de la terre après la pluie:" -- the freshness of the air is described as "salée", a word which could be translated as "salty" (literally), "heady" or "exciting", as in "une conversation salée", or even "salacious", (pungent and spicy). It is also described as "cinglante, i.e., "biting" or "scathing". This word, together with the word "gouffres" (chasms or abysses) give the basically normal description of the sea air as fresh, salty, and invigorating a slightly pejorative tinge. The idea of headiness is reiterated in the word "enivrante" (intoxicating). So the picture as a whole makes us feel the invigorating freshness of the sea air, but colors our feeling with a hint of anxiety, of danger, of risk. Since the deep waters also symbolize the subconscious, the dangerous obstacles which the hero must encounter in his quest are also evoked in this careful choice of words.

(7) "il semblait que chaque parcelle de la peau en épuisât simultanément les profondes délices,"-- the word "délices" brings with it connotations of Eden, of Paradise, of Eldorado (Petit Robert), as well as that of transporting joy. The description of these "délices" as "profondes" adds new dimensions: depth and intensity. of course. but also of

obscurity, one of Gracq's most-used themes, as well as that of distancing and of estrangement.

(8) "et, si l'on fermait les yeux, le corps prenait d'un coup pour les sens d'une outre entièrement close de chaudes ténèbres," -- The body seems to take on the aspect of "une outre", a word rich in meanings. Literally, it is a wineskin, but its origin is the Latin "uter", from which we get "uterus", and the word is used with the womb connotation in French literature. In addition, as an adjective, "outre" means "beyond" (from the Latin "ultra"), another preoccupation seen constantly in Gracq's works. Once again, in his skillful choice of words, Gracq brings into a single sentence various themes of his work. The wineskin/body is entirely "close" (closed), a word whose synonym "enceinte" includes as one of its meanings "pregnant". By filling it with "chaudes ténèbres" (warm or hot shadows), Gracq suggests at one and the same time the warm darkness of the womb, the heat theme already seen, and the theme of shadows and obscurity.

(9) "dont eût été perçue partout en même temps la paroi vivante et merveilleuse, au contact d'une fraîcheur non plus accidentelle, mais tellurique, et qui semblait irradiée par tous les pores de la planète autant que par le soleil son insupportable chaleur." -- The body/wineskin/womb is pierced all over by the freshness, which is no longer occasional or fortuitous, but telluric, intrinsic to the earth, radiating from its center through its "pores" (recalling the skin

metaphor again), just as the sun radiates its unbearable heat. The earth radiates its freshness through the holes in its skin, its pores and sends them into the body/wineskin/womb through its pores. Thus the body is an echo of the earth, set in opposition to the sun, which radiates also from its center, but heat, as opposed to freshness, unbearable, as opposed to invigorating or exciting ("fraîcheur salée et cinglante", in (6) above). So now we have the oppositions "earth/body/freshness/invigorating/exciting" versus "sun/heat/unbearable". In this sentence, Gracq portrays his vision of human "plants", rooted in the earth and in perfect communion with it.

(10) "Le vent claquant de la mer fouettait le visage en longues vagues lisses, arrachait au sable mouillé une poussière étincelante" -- Another element is added to the description of the morning: the wind from the sea, which is "claquant" (exhausting) with the idea of banging or beating. This idea is echoed in the verb "fouettait" (whipped), while the idea of exhaustion recalls the verb "épuisât" in (7) above. Once again, 'one has the sense of viewing a battle between opposing forces: the earth's and the body's freshness versus the exhausting wind and unbearable heat. However, the wind whips the face with "longues vagues lisses" (long smooth waves), a beautiful metaphor which recalls the gentle ebb and flow of ocean waves on the beach! The next moment, the metaphor turns violent again, as the wind tears off or pulls



out ("arrachait") a sparkling dust from the wet sand, while the "sparkling dust" ("poussière étincelante) returns us just as quickly to the beautiful metaphor. This constant juxtaposition of beautiful and violent images is one of the techniques Gracq uses to keep us, his readers, in a constant state of anxiety, never knowing what to expect, which is exactly the state in which exist his characters, and which is, perhaps, a far truer reflection of life than the traditional, one-sided point of view of an all-knowing author which we have come to expect in novels.

(11)"--et de grands oiseaux de mer aux longues ailes, par leur vol saccadé et leurs brusques arrêts, semblaient indiquer son flux et son reflux pareils à ceux de la mer sur des plages aériennes et invisibles où, les ailes étendues et immobiles, ils semblaient par instants s'échouer comme les blanches méduses." The beautiful metaphor continues in one of the loveliest of passages in Au Château d'Argol. Seabirds -- and one can imagine great albatrosses and gulls -- spread long immobile wings and ride the wind in an ebb and flow which mirrors the action of the waves on the shore below, but on invisible, aerial beaches. But even in this peaceful scene come moments of disquiet, when the birds seem to run aground, or beach themselves (s'échouer), like white jellyfish. The jellyfish in themselves are not an especially pleasing image, but it is their French name which truly inserts the element of disquiet: "méduse", Medusa, she of the serpent-hair, whose

look turned men to stone. Why choose this word for the image of the beached birds? Why not "like white boats", or "like white shells", to complete the peaceful image? It is precisely because Gracq does not want us to be lulled by his poetry into a state of peaceful harmony. He wishes to keep us on edge, on the edge, which is where one should live, where all of his characters live. On the edge between the earth and the sea, on the edge between the air and the water, on the edge between life and death, in a constant state of tension and risk. The Medusa image reappears in all four works, with both its immobilizing connotation and with its other aspect, i.e., that of the hand that causes the wound also being able to heal it (Campbell, Masks, 229, 505, R.P. 99, 103, B.T. 144, R.S. 108).

(12) "La grève mouillée était mangée par de longs bancs de brumes blanches que la mer plate, et qui réfléchissait les rayons presque horizontaux du soleil, éclairait par dessous d'un poudrolement lumineux..." "La grève", synonym for "plage" or "rivage", (beach, shore), is a favorite image of Gracq, especially in his masterwork, Le Rivage des Syrtes.. It symbolizes the edge, where the difficult equilibrium must be constantly maintained. The use of the word "grève" here, rather than the more usual "plage" brings to mind numerous unpleasant associations, as the word also means "strike" (as in, workers' strike, hunger strike), and the former place of execution in Paris, where the guillotine was set up during the

Revolution, was called "Place de Grève". These are immediately followed by another unsettling metaphor, "était mangée" (was eaten). The beach was eaten...by what? By long layers of white mist, which is lit with a luminous dust by the almost horizontal rays of the sun reflecting off the calm sea, a return to the calm and beautiful. However, the horizontality of the rays, of the sea, of the banks of fog, introduces a symbolism which is taken up again in the following paragraph, that of horizontality vs. verticality, the horizontality representing sleep & death versus the upward surge of awakening, life, and spirituality represented by verticality (Chevalier, "Verticalité" ).

(13) "et les écharpes lisses du brouillard se distinguaient à peine pour l'oeil surpris des flaques d'eau et des étendues unies du sable humide" The "smooth waves of the wind" from (10) above are echoed in the "smooth scarves of fog" in this sentence, which are barely distinguishable to the eye from the pools of water lying on the unbroken stretches of wet sand. The predominant impression is one of flat, white, luminous emptiness, where the outlines of phenomena, their edges, are blurred and it is impossible to tell where the limits are, those limits along which one must walk with such careful balance, if one wants to maintain the status quo (like Marino in Le Rivage des Syrtes), but which one must go past if one wants to pursue the quest for that which is beyond. It is a morning in which to make mistakes, to veer to one side or

the other, because of the veil of mist and fog which obscures everything, most especially, just where the limits are. In this sentence we see Gracq's themes of clear/obscure and of broken or blurred limits.

(14) "--comme si l'oeil enchanté, au matin de la création, eût pu voir se dérouler le mystère naïf de la séparation des éléments." The "surprised eye" of (13) becomes "the enchanted eye", introducing the element of magic and myth, which is followed by the elements of mystery and miracle, in the references to the story of the first morning of creation in Genesis, where the spirit of God moved over the primeval waters and separated the air from them, creating the essential edge where humans spend their lives, needing both elements to survive, but being unable to live solely in either without the sustenance of the other. In this passage, we also see Gracq's theme of perspective, of angle of vision, of "ce regard non prévenu...vierge" (B.T. 150) which allows us to see "dans une lumière de création du monde et comme pour la première fois" (A.B. 141) mentioned in Chapter One.

(15) "Ils se dévêtirent parmi les tombes." A cemetery placed just beside the sea figures largely in both Au Château d'Argol and in Le Rivage des Syrtes. These tombs, amongst which they get undressed, are particularly significant, as one of them carries the name, "Heide", as if she were destined to lie there, which in fact she is. This element of prescience or foreshadowing of doom interests Gracq. As he says in

Lettrines, the two passages of Shakespeare which always especially move him are very secondary scenes in which presentiment of doom is either conspicuously present or absent: Duncan's comment on Macbeth's castle, where he will be assassinated, "This castle has a pleasant seat, the air Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself Unto our gentle senses", (Act I, Scene VI) and Hamlet's monologue before the duel in the fifth act, "...If it be now, t'is not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come:" (Act V, Scene II). Nothing, says Gracq, other than presentiment or lack of it has ever interested him in theater. ("Pourquoi ces deux passages? L'un, je pense, parce qu'il pressent, l'autre, parce qu'il ne pressent pas. Rien d'autre ne m'a jamais intéressé au théâtre, ou presque." Lett. 137)

The insistence on cemeteries right by the beach, on the edge between the sea and the land, underscores the life/death duality, the idea that by going past the edge, into the sea, i.e., into the depths of the subconscious, a death results, death of the old personality, of the old consciousness, which is transformed by the quest.

This is a crucial chapter in Gracq's first novel. In this beautifully descriptive opening paragraph are found all four of Bachelard's basic elements: air, water, earth, and fire, not clearly separated, but in harmony and in relationships where the distinctions between them are blurred. "Brume" and "brouillard" are water suspended in air. The

earth and the sea water join together on the "grève mouillée", where it is impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins. The earth is also in the air, in the "poussière étincelante" of sand whipped up by the air (wind). The burning of the sun's fire is in the air, making it "torride", in the bodies and minds of the characters, in the sparkling sand (earth) and mist (water) suspended in the air, and in the sparkling expanses of the sea. In casting themselves into the sea and swimming as far as they can go, the characters try to become one with the water and with each other, "Au-delà de la vie et de la mort...dans la convergence d'une dévorante communion" (C.A. 93). In his style, in the careful juxtaposition and blending of earth-words, water-words, air-words, light-and-fire-words, Gracq has produced an image of the Surrealists' dream, the point where opposites are in complementary harmony, beyond life and death, in the "convergence of a devouring communion", and yet he never leaves out the element of danger, the risk involved in seeking this devouring unity, just as the wet shingle was eaten by the mist in the opening paragraph.

#### STYLISTIC DEVICES

##### Oxymorons

In keeping with Gracq's idea of opposites being complementary rather than in conflict, he uses a large number of oxymorons. What is the reader to make of expressions such

as "obscurs éclairs" (B.T. 64), "tristes joies" (B.T. 86), "vieillesse trop verte" (R.S. 133)? The combination of words which are literal opposites either neutralizes their opposition and describes something which is neither, something in between, or it attempts to describe something more difficult, something that is at once both: clear and obscure, sad and joyful, old but also green with youth. This marriage of opposites tries to present the whole of reality, just as the marriage of a man and a woman is an entity beyond each of the two individuals, which includes them both, both male and female. As Cirlot, quoting Schneider, says, "Each form has its analogous counterpart...and total reality embraces both. A synthesis is the result of a thesis and an antitheses. And true reality resides only in the synthesis." (Cirlot 25). This total reality is what Gracq is attempting to describe.

### Double-entendres

Words with double meanings are a stylistic device well-suited to Gracq's style. One of his favorites is "vague", which is both "vague" and "wave" and appears perhaps more frequently than any other single word in his novels. For instance, in the first chapter of Le Rivage des Syrtes, it is used at least ten times: "mes vagues désirs" (10), "chaque vague à peine formée" (12), "une vague mystique" (13), "de vagues pâleurs", "le vague indécis" (17), "ces solitudes vagues" (18), "ce brouillard de terrain vague" (19), "quelque

vague relation mondaine", "un très vague arrière-plan" (20), "un bruit faible de vagues" (23). The constant reappearance of this word throughout Gracq's works inevitably leaves the reader with a "vague" feeling of imprecision, blurring, obscurity. Another common word is "vide" both as the adjective and verb "empty" and as the noun "void" or "lack". This word appears at least five times in the same chapter.

Deliberate plays on words are used occasionally with dramatic effect. The last sentence of Au Château d'Argol is a particularly good example of this: "...il sentit l'éclair glacé d'un couteau couler entre ses épaules comme une poignée de neige." (C.A. 182). The word "poignée" suggests "poignard", a synonym for "couteau", but allows him to keep the idea of icy coldness already suggested in "éclair glacé". Or, as in Un beau ténébreux, he deliberately connects the words "fabuleux...griffon" with fables "griffonnées", to draw a word picture of the born writer as a sort of fairy-tale beast who writes fables:

Livre étonnant, abruptement griffonné, je veux dire tracé de l'ongle négligent, fabuleux, du griffon, du monstre au coup de patte d'éclair qu'est l'écrivain-né. (B.T. 169)

### "Antiposed" (Misplaced) Adjectives

One cannot read Gracq for very long before being struck by his very frequent abnormal placement of the adjective before the noun. Several effects are produced by this poetic license: 1) a feeling of predestination 2) the quality is seen



as more important than the object 3) a feeling of strangeness and poeticity and 4) a tinge of English, for those who know it, which was perhaps deliberate on Gracq's part, a salute to Poe-etic style. Compare the order of words in the following passage with its English translation; no restructuring of the sentence is necessary:

"Dans cette pièce à première vue ravagée par un brutal et presque aveuglant flot de lumière..." (B.T. 150).

"In this room at first sight ravaged by a brutal and almost blinding flood of light..."

Whether deliberate or not, Gracq's sentences read more like English than those of most French writers. And the effect of strangeness and poeticity produced by misplacing the adjectives suits well his stated purpose of causing the reader to see things in a new light and from a fresh viewpoint (A.B. 141).

#### THE MISSING TEXT

There is one element, says Gracq in Lettrines, which is woefully absent from most literary criticism. Any attempt to study a writer's style and purpose must take into account what is not written, i.e., the plan for the book which the author had at each stage, which changed or was abandoned entirely as the work progressed. He calls this missing text "les fantômes de livres" and "un texte magique": magic, because knowing it

would allow the reader to unlock the meaning of the entire work.

Cet élément...ce sont les fantômes de livres successifs que l'imagination de l'auteur projetait à chaque moment en avant de sa plume, et qui changeaient, avec le gauchissement inévitable que le travail d'écrire imprime à chaque chapitre, tout comme une route sinueuse projette devant le voyageur...une série de perspectives différentes, parfois très inattendues.

A chaque tournant du livre, un autre livre, possible et même souvent probable, a été rejeté au néant...Pendant des pages, des chapitres entiers, c'est leur fantasme qui a tiré, halé l'écrivain, excité sa soif, fouetté son énergie--c'est dans leur lumière que des parties entières du livres, parfois, ont été écrites. (Lett. 30-31)

Toute oeuvre est un palimpseste--et si l'oeuvre est réussie, le texte effacé est un texte magique. (B.T. 80)

Unfortunately, only the writer can say for sure what these original designs were; the reader can only guess. Gracq enlightens us on only two of his works, Balcon en Forêt, and Le Rivage des Syrtes. This latter, he says, was to end in a naval battle, and the first eleven chapters were written with this in mind. Only in the last chapter did the author's perspective change. Since all of Gracq's novels seem unfinished from the traditional point of view, with the fate of most of the characters left unclear, the reader is free to imagine and invent the continuation of the stories, but he can only guess as to Gracq's intentions. And yet, says Gracq, such speculation is more worthwhile than studies of style such as this chapter!

Et laissez donc de spéculer sur la composition. Car si passer d'un être vivant à son squelette a un

sens, passer du squelette à l'être vivant n'en a rigouresusement aucun. (Lett. 32)

With apologies, then, to Gracq, I still find valuable a study of the devices he uses to produce his effects.

## CHAPTER III

### SYMBOLS IN GRACQ'S NOVELS

#### INTRODUCTION

We live in a world of binary oppositions, of contrasts and of opposing pairs. Night and day, light and darkness, sun and moon, male and female -- duality is, as Cirlot says, a basic quality of all natural processes, insofar as they comprise two opposite phases or aspects, which may be either simultaneous (right and left) or successive (night and day) (Cirlot 24). Indeed, Saussure's linguistic theories argue that we can only define something in terms of what it is not, i.e., in terms of its opposite. So we only know "hot" because it is not "cold", "wet" because it is not "dry", "evil" because it is not "good" (Saussure 118-119. 128-129). The first words of Genesis reflect this essential duality in myths found throughout the world: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...and separated the light from the darkness..." (Genesis 1:1 - 3). Cirlot, quoting Schneider, goes on to say that

the eternal duality of Nature means that no phenomenon can ever represent a complete reality, but only one half of a reality. Each form has its analogous counterpart: man/woman;...right/left and total reality embraces both. A synthesis is the result of a thesis and antithesis. And true reality resides only in the synthesis. (Cirlot 25)

This true reality, this synthesis, this joining of the complementary two halves in opposition, but in complementary opposition, is something we intuitively know to exist. In the depths of our being, we feel sure of the existence of this ideal unity, but we do not know where it exists, or how to find it. Does it exist only in the Beyond, out of the realm of ordinary perception, or does it exist only in the inner depths of the mind, in the unconscious? Gracq's characters are concerned with finding this ideal point where opposites no longer exist and where contrasting pairs join together in a complementary union. It is hardly surprising then, that Gracq makes use of numerous symbols, for, again according to Cirlot, "the essence of the symbol is its ability to express simultaneously the various aspects (thesis and antithesis) of the idea it represents." (Cirlot xxxi). The symbol is an intuitive joining of the opposites by the unconscious, which resolves for the consciousness the apparently unreconcilable differences between opposites, for the unconscious does not recognize these inherent distinctions, grasping rather the inherent unity behind (Cirlot xxxi). In the symbol, therefore, we have one place where the thesis and antithesis become a synthesis.

#### NAMES

Names are symbolic in many cultures. A study of the names Gracq chose for his characters and their meanings

according to The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names shows that this choice could not have been gratuitous.

First of all, the similarity in the names of the three "heroes", Albert (C.A.), Allan (B.T.), and Aldo (R.S.) is certainly not accidental. As mentioned previously, their names echo the German word "alle", underscoring their quest to know all (Albert and Aldo come from Old German). The name Albert, "noble and brilliant" suits perfectly Gracq's description of this character. Allan, "the handsome, cheerful, and harmonious one" not only fits this "beau ténébreux", but recalls Edgar Allan Poe, as Amossy has pointed out (Amossy, 125). It is also ironic, as it does not describe the dark side, the "ténébreux" of Allan's personality. It is possible that Gracq meant also to suggest a link with Alain, the first of the Fisher Kings, the first "Roi Pêcheur" (Campbell, Masks, 536). Aldo, "old and wise" is also ironic, since he is seen as young and foolish by the "old and wise" characters in the book: Marino (R.S. 34,45-49) and Danielo (R.S. 304). Even Vanessa, who is also young, considers him a child (R.S. 80-81, 241). Her last name, which echoes his, "Aldobrandi" is equally ironic: "old and wise", but also "a firebrand", hot-headed and menacing!

The names of the secondary characters are just as obviously chosen for their aptness or their irony, especially in Un beau ténébreux. The reader is first introduced to Gérard ("strong and brave") through whose diary the major part

of the story is told. He is the only one of the group to see clearly the magnetic attraction of what Allan represents without being overcome by it. Fascinated and intrigued though he is, he still has the strength to consciously turn away from that path. At the Masked Ball, he interprets Allan's and Dolorès's costumes of suicidal lovers and tells Allan: "Vous irez seul maintenant, Allan. Où vous allez,--vous le savez--je ne peux ni ne veux vous suivre." (B.T. 206-207). He is powerfully attracted by the beauty of Dolorès ("sorrows"), even loves her, but he lets her go without trying to follow: "Je ne puis rien sur vous...Mais je me souviendrai de vous comme je vous aime." (B.T. 212).

The next character introduced is Christel (both "crystal" and "little Christian"), the romantic young girl who wears white and a gold cross around her neck at all times, and who yearns to live a life of "mountaintop experiences" and to find a love stronger than death. Next is Jacques, the handsome and naïve young poet. Jacques, "the supplanter", is popularly considered Christel's "beau" until he is himself supplanted by the "beau ténébreux", Allan. He does indeed take over Henri's place in Irène's affections at a later date, but his name is basically ironic. Gracq, however, never missing an opportunity to insert intertextual references and symbolic meanings, has Jacques fall asleep the night of Allan's suicide and awake feeling he has deserted his leader, like the apostle James (Jacques) in the Garden of Gethsemane:

"J'ai dormi!" pensa-t-il bizarrement, le coeur serré, comme s'il eût déserté quelque veille héroïque,--laissé passer l'heure, enchanté comme par la torpeur triste du jardin des Oliviers. (B.T. 243)

The little group becomes larger with the arrival of the newlyweds Henri and Irène. Irène ("Peace") is a strong woman, down-to-earth and unimaginative, who detests Allan, sensing the danger he represents, not only to her marital happiness with Henri, but also to the life of her former schoolmate, Christel. As, in Gérard's words, "le parti de la résistance" (B.T. 131), she takes steps to combat Allan's influence, by becoming pregnant and by writing to Christel's mother of her daughter's dangerous love for Allan. She and Jacques find solace together, in their shared inability to comprehend and follow Allan's dangerous path. Henri ("ruler of the home") is another ironic name, for Henri is, according to Gérard, a natural follower ("satellite"), "fait pour graviter dans le sillage d'une femme péremptoire" (BT. 59). Henri is a dreamer who appears more in his two highly symbolical dreams than elsewhere in the text. He is a fascinated follower of Allan, but, as Jacques plays the role of the apostle James, Henri plays that of the apostle Peter. The night of Allan's suicide, he runs away from the hotel, unable to face what he senses Allan is about to do.

Henri and Irène are unique in that they are the only characters in this novel (other than Allan) given a last name: Maurevert. There are several possible interpretations of this



last name: phonetic (mot-revers, maux-revers, mort-vers) and visual: Maurevert, i.e., dream. "Mot-revers" has little significance but leads to the interesting observation that the names Henri and Irène are almost anagrams (Ir-ene, Hen-ri. "Maux-revers", the opposite or the reversal of evils, would seem apt if applied to Irène's efforts. "Mort-vers", i.e., death towards, could apply to Henri's fascinated following in Allan's wake and to his final faint ("la petite mort").

The Englishman, Gregory, Allan's former schoolmate, is described by Gérard as "ce prophète biblique, ce familier des fantômes" (B.T. 35). Gregory means, appropriately, "the vigilant and watchful one". He gives evidence of his watchfulness in his insightful memories of Allan's boyhood, relayed to Gérard in a prophetic letter. Gregory is the first to foresee danger and death in Allan's precipitous arrival at the Hotel des Vagues, the first to see Allan's life as a descent into the maelstrom (B.T. 74-75). The choice of "Gregory" for his name can have been no accident on Gracq's part.

The final characters to appear are the "beau ténébreux" Allan, the symbolism of whose name has already been discussed, and his suicide partner, Dolorès, whose name, "sorrows", is self-evident. She has perhaps lived with sorrows--nothing is mentioned of her previous life and her motives for suicide, other than that she sees death as a

secret society and believes in some sort of life after (B.T. 211-212). She certainly causes Gérard sorrow and Christel, too, who would love to take her place next to Allan.

These examples show clearly that Gracq carefully uses the symbolism of names to give additional depth and multiple meanings to his characters and their roles. Marino ("the sailor"), Fabrizio ("the little apprentice"), Danielo --he who walks knowingly into the lion's den, Vanessa, the pretty butterfly, "emblem of the soul and of unconscious attraction towards the light" (Cirlot 35) in Le Rivage des Syrtes, Heide ("the noble one") and Herminien ("the warrior") in Au Château d'Argol, -- none of these names is without significance. They are like an undercurrent hidden in the text, just as there is a leitmotiv running through a musical score (B.T. 108).

#### COLORS

Colors are among the oldest and most commonly used symbols in any human culture. Psychologists report that we subconsciously connect certain colors with certain emotions, whatever values our culture places on those colors. It would be odd therefore if an author like Julien Gracq, who is interested in what lies beyond our conscious ideas, did not make use of colors as symbols in his works. One's first impression, however, in reading his novels is of the relative lack of colorful description. Black, white, and gray, two opposites and their synthesis, are the most often used colors.

Black is used in association with darkness, night, obscurity, depth, somberness, shadows, and death. White, or "pale" is, in contrast, light, day, clarity, ascension, illumination, brilliance, purity, and spirit. Gray, often used to describe "Gracquan" weather, is associated with one of his favorite words: "vague". It stands for the spiritual state of seeking, not seeing clearly but only blurred outlines, groping, sensing and feeling vaguely, but not clearly knowing. Occasional splashes of bright color light up this black and white background, most often red, the color of blood, passion, and fire. Next most often used is yellow or gold, yellow being associated with the light of intuition or with the departure point, as seen below. Blue, when used, is often either faded and washed out to the point of being almost white or is so dark as to be inky and almost black. Green is used only rarely, usually when speaking of plants.

In Le Rivage des Syrtes, Gracq seems to make use of the alchemical symbolism of colors, that is, a symbol of spiritual evolution through the descending series yellow-green-blue-black and the ascending series black-white-red-gold. As Cirlot explains it,

The three main phases of the 'Great Work' (a symbol of spiritual evolution) were (1) prime matter (corresponding to black), (2) mercury (white) and (3) sulphur (red), culminating in the production of the 'stone' (gold). Black pertains to the state of fermentation, putrefaction, occultation and penitence; white to that of illumination, ascension, revelation and pardon; red to that of suffering, sublimation and love. And gold is the state of glory. So that the series black-white-

red-gold, denotes the path of spiritual ascension. The opposite or descending series can be seen in the scale beginning with yellow (that is, gold in the negative sense of the point of departure or emanation rather than the point of arrival), blue (or heaven), green (nature, or immediate natural life), black (that is, in the sense of the neoplatonic "fall"). (Cirilot 55-56)

The descending series yellow-blue-green-black appears in Le Rivage des Syrtes as signposts for Aldo, telling him that he is at "the point of departure" and that he is on the way towards that which he yearns for. In the first pages of this novel, there is a striking lack of detailed physical description. More than five pages have been read before the first color appears, a yellow envelope, and two more pages elapse before this, or any other color, is mentioned again. The yellow is repeated in a different form, bronze, followed two pages later by a mention of green and of blue. These three colors are rarely mentioned in the book, and when they are, it is at the beginning of a journey, a physical journey which also is pointing the way and leading somehow to a more interior or spiritual journey. In these beginning pages of the book, Aldo sees these colors as he begins his journey to his new post, that of official observer for the ruling oligarchy at one of its farthest outposts, the "Admiralty" or naval station on the coast of the Syrtes Sea, facing the ennemy country of Farghestan on the opposing shore. But Aldo instinctively feels that there is more to his journey than appears on the surface. After noticing the signal colors of

yellow, green, and blue in items along the way, he has the impression of beginning a journey to a promised land of revelation, yet of what he is not sure:

Quelque chose m'était promis, quelque chose m'était dévoilé; j'entrais sans éclaircissement aucun dans une intimité presque angoissante, j'attendais le matin, offert déjà de tous mes yeux aveugles, comme on s'avance les yeux bandés vers le lieu de la révélation. (R.S. 18)

Like a man advancing blindfolded and without light, hesitatingly, towards that journey's end which he senses dimly but cannot perceive, Aldo advances into a deserted plain where everything is gray, shadowy, misty, dull, and vague. After the infrequent use of colors in the first pages, the word "gray" or "grayish" is used four times in just over one page, as well as words which suggest this color, such as "fog", "mist", "dull", "phantoms", and "vague". Gray continues to be the predominant color until the end of the chapter and the end of this first journey, the arrival at the Admiralty. Then, a "rayon jaune" cuts through the fog, reinforced as a signal by the crowing of a cock (R.S. 21), before everything becomes black.

In the second chapter, Aldo sits on the sea wall, watching the yellow sunset on the sparkling blue of the sea and waiting for a signal:

Je rivais mes yeux à cette mer vide, où chaque vague, en glissant sans bruit comme une langue, semblait s'obstiner à creuser encore l'absence de toute trace, dans le geste toujours inachevé de l'effacement pur. J'attendais, sans me le dire, un signal qui puiserait dans cette attente démesurée la confirmation d'un prodige. Je rêvais d'une

voile naissant du vide de la mer. Je cherchais un nom à cette voile désirée. (R.S. 36)

Then, one night, as he sits in the blackness and looks at the white Admiralty and the white light of the moon on the sea, he sees the signal, the shadowy outline of a boat in the pools of moonlight (R.S. 41).

In chapter three, everything is gray again, until Aldo revives his memories of Vanessa Aldobrandi and the colorful gardens where he met her, the Selvaggi Gardens of Orsenna. Suddenly, the description is full of yellow and white, with blue and green suggested by the names of the plants. He remembers the feeling of those gardens, the enchantment of the Beyond: "Il était là, chaque fois comme pour moi seul ravivé dans son incandescence--dans un au-delà instantané..." (R.S. 50).

The colors yellow, blue and green reappear in the fourth chapter when Aldo sets out alone on a visit to the nearby ruined town of Sagra, where he finds the ghostly ship seen earlier in the moonlight and its very Farghestani-looking caretaker. His route towards Sagra is strewn with yellows and blues of reeds and dying grass, and he feels "une vibration intime de bonheur et de légèreté", that feeling of the "au-delà":

Il était fin et commencement. Au delà de ces étendues de joncs lugubres s'étendaient les sables du désert, plus stériles encore; et au delà--pareils à la mort qu'on traverse--derrière une brume de mirage étincelant les cimes auxquelles je ne pouvais plus refuser un nom...un magnétisme

secret m'orientait par rapport à la bonne direction. (R.S. 69).

The combination of these colors, with the addition of red, occurs one more time, when Aldo visits Marino's cabin on the Redoubtable before setting out on his fateful journey across the Sea of Syrtes. Once more, he is at the beginning of a journey, the journey which he hopes will show him what is beyond, will satisfy his desire "to be closer, not to remain cut off,... to touch." (O.S. 190).

Apart from these "signal" occasions, the colors in the book are predominantly black, gray, white, with occasional flashes of red and gold, i.e., the ascending series of colors symbolizing spiritual evolution. The flashes of red indicate to Aldo that he is getting closer to that which he seeks: the red line marking on the map the limit beyond which patrols must not go (R.S. 210); the red flower in Piero Aldobrandi's hand, his red scarf, the flames of the burning city: "Sa lumière se levait sur un au-delà sans un nom de vie lointaine, faisait en moi comme une aube sombre et promise." (R.S. 107-108). Each time he sees red, his heart beats faster, and he feels that irresistible pull towards the Beyond. But when he finally does approach the other side, he finds

a black void, rising at a verticality which overhung our heads so that we had to lean back to see, pasted against the sky like an obscene and greedy leech, there emerged from this foam of nothingness, a kind of emblem of the end of time, a bluish horn of a milky and faintly effulgent substance which seemed to float, motionless and forever alien, final, like a strange concretion of the air itself...it suggested the sickening and

soft fall of nightmares in which the world collapses and the shriek above us of a mouth inexhaustibly open never reaches our ears.  
(O.S.194)

He finds only black and bluish-white. He does not find the golden treasure which he is seeking. He urges the ship even nearer, certain "the last veil would fall" (O.S. 194), desperately wanting "another minute in which centuries pass, to see and to touch one's longing...to dissolve in that dazzling onset, to be consumed in that light rising out of the sea." (O.S. 195). But his ship is fired upon from the shore, and he finds, not the end of his quest, but the resumption of a dormant war.

From this point on in the book, all colors virtually disappear, except for very scattered occurrences of yellowish, black, and gray. The use of colors, therefore, is not objective description, but a reflexion of Aldo's state of mind. He sees in his surroundings only those colors which reflect his psychological state: yellow, blue, green, when he is starting on a journey, full of hope, feeling that he is on the right path; gray when he is confused and uncertain, black and white when he begins to focus his desire and see his path more clearly, and red at those moments of high excitement when he senses the dangerous possibility of actually going to the other side, to the "Beyond". But the book ends with Aldo back in the gray/black state, meaning that his quest is not finished, that he must keep on searching. Gracq leaves Aldo's and the reader's questions unanswered.



## THE MAELSTROM

Verticality as a symbol of spiritual evolution is particularly present in Gracq's first two novels. As Chevalier points out, the vertical stance is what differentiates a human being from an animal in much symbolic art, physically showing the cerebral and spiritual differences (Chevalier, "Verticalité"). However, although most symbolism stresses the ascending, or upwards, aspect of verticality, there is also the descending, downwards aspect. Both the ascending and descending are exploited in Au Château d'Argol and Un beau ténébreux, along with the symbolism of horizontality, signifying sleep or death.

We have already seen how Gracq uses the horizontal/vertical planes in the first paragraph of chapter five, Au Château d'Argol. He goes on to stress it in the next paragraph, in his description of Heide:

...dans l'horizontalité toute-puissante de ces bancs de brume, de ces vagues plates et lisses...elle surprît l'oeil tout à coup par le miracle de sa verticalité...Il semblait qu'elle marchât sur les eaux...Elle éleva ses bras, et soutint sans effort le ciel de ses mains comme une vivante cariatide. (C.A. 88-89)

Using a combination of italics and intertextual reference, Gracq draws the reader's attention to Heide's spirituality and the divine spark within her. Then all three of the characters throw themselves into their passionate swim towards infinity, towards the beckoning horizon. But their quest is horizontal,

on the surface of the water. They swim and swim, but seem to be getting nowhere. Suddenly, Heide changes direction, changes perspective, and plunges into the depths, vertically. She is seeking a deeper communion with the element, literally, and a deeper understanding of herself in her subconscious, metaphorically. But Herminien pulls her back, and they all return to shore, where they lie exhausted, horizontally, on the beach, as if dead.

The first chapter of this novel also stresses the horizontal/vertical symbolism. As Albert approaches the castle, he is struck by its vertical rise above him. From the tower, he surveys the horizontal stretches of the surrounding forest and the nearby sea, which, as noted in chapter five, seem to him so "dramatic". The forest is equated with the sea: "gouffre vert", "cette mer verte" (C.A. 30), and the castle with a ship upon it: "un vaisseau magique au-dessus des vagues profondes de la forêt" (C.A. 32). These flat stretches reveal nothing, and yet they are vaguely menacing: "A regarder cette mer verte on ressentait un obscur malaise." The "étendues liquides et éternellement vides" of Chapter 5 only appear empty, in reality hiding the teeming life below the surface. Just so, these empty stretches of the "green sea", the forest, seem to Albert to be hiding the life within them: "Il semblait bizarrement à Albert que cette forêt dût être animée..." (C.A. 31-32). Since the forest and the sea are well-known symbols of the subconscious in modern

(Cirlot 112,364-365), Albert is sensing vaguely the myriad of urges and impulses which people his subconscious and the danger inherent in exploring them. As long as he looks at the horizontal plane they are hidden, but any attempt to descend the vertical plane is at once revealing and terrifying. Au Château d'Argol is the story of Albert's descent along this vertical plane and his encounters with the dangers below the surface. As Peyronie says, "l'élévation qu'il (the castle) représente ne suffira pas, il faudra descendre, passer par l'océan et par la forêt." (Peyronie, 41-42).

Joseph Campbell says that the hero's quest in the myths of all the world's cultures involves a journey beyond the normal limits of society -- into the water, into the forest, into the desert, or to the top of a mountain -- "into a depth or into a distance or up to a height" (Campbell, Power, 129), and that all of these symbolize the journey into oneself (the subconscious) and beyond oneself (transformation of consciousness through spiritual revelation) (Campbell, Power, 123-163). This is the same quest of which Gracq writes, and these journeys are vertical (into a depth, up to a height) or horizontal (into a distance). The Argol trio's mad swim beyond the point where they can safely turn back and Aldo's mad patrol beyond the authorized limits on the sea are examples of the horizontal. Heide's plunge into the depths and Allan's dive into the water (B.T. 55-56) are examples of the vertical. The vertical and the horizontal meet in the

symbol of the maelstrom, where the horizontal circles become progressively smaller or larger, either in a descending or an ascending spiral.

The word "maelstrom", used several times in Un beau ténébreux, immediately recalls Poe's A Descent Into the Maelstrom, the story of a Norwegian fisherman whose boat is sucked down into an enormous downward spiral of water. Although his brother, hanging tightly onto the boat, is lost in the depths, the narrator is miraculously tossed up again to the surface after throwing himself into the water. After voluntarily descending into the spiral, he is able to re-ascend. In spite of his terror, he notices its incredible beauty and feels "the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself" and "a wish to explore its depths." (Poe 147). When he returns to shore, he is completely changed, like "a traveler from the spirit-land" (Poe 154), for he has made that journey beyond ordinary existence which Campbell calls the hero's quest, and has returned to tell about it.

Gracq obviously had this story in mind when he introduced the word "maelstrom" in Gregory's letter to Gérard (B.T. 74) and repeats it in Henri's description of his dream (B.T. 119). In another passage (B.T. 103), Allan speaks of the fascination of candle flames: "--cette douce mort tremblée de la flamme si pure à son extrême pointe, ce pas de vis vertigineux enfoncé dans le noir". Gérard speaks of Allan, gambling madly, as "noyé dans un vertige où la vitesse même eût prêté à ses

gestes cette...lenteur," (B.T. 126) and later, of the "...centre de la trombe, la succion universelle de cette pointe, où une immobilité médusante naît de l'excès même de la vitesse." (B.T. 144). All of these references to the dizzying speed and suction of the spiral, ("pas de vis", "trombe") which has a still point at its center refer to a tornado or maelstrom, and all are a symbol for the heady fascination of the quest, which magnetically draws the seeker on, towards the vanishing point, whether it is in the depths, in the heights, or in the distance. This center point, where all planes and axes meet, is, according to Cirlot, "the supreme principle of the universe...Aristotle's 'unmoved mover' and Dante's 'L'Amore che muove il sole a l'altre stelle'...God...the Creator...the infinite being" (Cirlot 40-41):

In all symbols expressive of the mystic Centre, the intention is to reveal to Man the meaning of the primordial 'paradisaal state' and to teach him to identify himself with the supreme principle of the universe. (Cirlot, 40)

And the spiral itself, says Cirlot, "may be regarded as...intended to induce a state of ecstasy and to enable man to escape from the material world and to enter the beyond, through the 'hole' symbolized by the mystic Centre." (Cirlot 306). A symbol intended to "enable man to ...enter the beyond" is exactly suited to Gracq's stories of the quest for the beyond. His various characters see this maelstrom in different ways: Henri and Gérard see a point on the horizon, the tip of a horizontal maelstrom, where the waving lines of

grass and the plowed furrows of the fields converge (B.T. 119, 132). This is the point which Gregory has given up trying to find. (B.T. 73) and Allan is still seeking, the point "d'ou tout se decouvrir" (B.T. 81). True to form, Allan wants to force the earth to reveal its mysterious center, "comme on force une femme", to possess the planet (B.T. 82). Christel, like Poe's fisherman, sees a vertical wall of water, in front of which a tremendous suction empties the room and through which she can catch glimpses of the Promised Land:

Enfin une vague se forma...une splendide montagne liquide. Devant elle, la salle se vidait sous une succion formidable..au milieu d'un sifflement d'eaux aspirées. (B.T. 98)

All these spirals are either horizontal or descending. But there is one more "maelstrom", an upward cone this time, in Le Rivage des Syrtes. The magnetic attraction for Aldo is indeed in the form of an upward spiral: the Tängri, that white cone on the horizon when seen from a distance, whose point emits smoke, also in the form of a cone ("une corne") (R.S. 208, 216).

An irresistible force which sucks one in, dizzying speed surrounding a center of peace, through which one can enter the unknown world beyond, these are the images aroused in the mind's eye by the word "maelstrom", a symbol which unites the horizontality of sleep and death with the verticality of spiritual ascension and of descent into the depths of being.

## WATER

Of all Gracq's symbols, water is undoubtedly the most omnipresent. The settings for all four works are beside bodies of water: the sea for the three novels, the Fisher King's lake in Le Roi Pêcheur. Water is a symbol of the subconscious; water is the life-giving element without which man cannot live; water washes clean and dissolves other elements, returning them to their original state as part of the great waters on the face of the earth, before creation separated them. Water therefore unites. Water, in the form of streams and rivers, flows irresistably to the sea, evoking Gracq's often-mentioned "voyage sans retour de la révélation" (B.T. 80). Water is necessary for birth and for life, yet prolonged immersion in water causes death. Gracq is able to use all of these various aspects of water in his expression of the quest for the Beyond.

The importance of the various water images in chapter five of Au Château d'Argol has already been discussed in this thesis. The three swimmers come to the water's edge, i.e., that of their subconscious, cast themselves in and attempt to swim beyond the point of no return. They are seeking "une dévorante communion" (93), not only with their own depths and with each other, but with the original element itself, reunion with "la mer/la mère", a return to the "âge d'or" when men were in harmony with their world (Rousseau 12, Grossman 36).

Et ils plongeaient plus avant dans les lames avec un enthousiasme sacré...dans le plaisir de l'absolue découverte, au prix d'une mort commune...Au-delà de la vie et de la mort...ils sondèrent les ténèbres de leurs coeurs... (C.A. 92-93)

They feel their flesh and their muscles "dissolve" and become one with the element (C.A. 90). Gérard mentions this same idea as he watches Allan dive:

J'aime cet instant où l'homme se présente à la mer...un rassemblement de sa force, de son humanité devant l'élément...j'ai senti que l'eau l'appelait -et cette chute, cette dissolution que l'eau verticale le pénétrait d'une volupté si intense que malgré lui ses yeux se fermèrent tout à fait... (B.T. 55-56)

Gérard himself is aware of the hypnotic appeal of reunion with this element. He speaks of "le grand rêve obsédant de s'étendre dans l'eau..." and quotes Eluard's line "Dormir dans la mer", changing it to "Dormir dans la mort." (B.T. 57). Swimming is a balancing act between two elements necessary for life, water and air. As long as the swimmer remains on the surface, keeping the tension just right against the downward pull of the water, he can live in both at once. But there is always the dangerous desire to let go, not to struggle, to sink downwards and reunite oneself in death with this great mother element.

Aldo hears the same call of the sea, which prompts him to request transfer to "le rivage des Syrtes". There he spends hours watching the water and the waves, waiting for a sign. For him, the water is symbolic of his journey, and the object



of his quest lies beyond the sea, as Perceval's Grail lies beyond the forest lake in Le Roi Pêcheur.

Both Bachelard and Rousseau mention the fluidity of poetic language, which has the power to show us the world from a new perspective (Bachelard 187, Rousseau 12,18). But Bachelard truly finds a valuable key to the importance of water in Gracq's works in the following paragraph:

Matter that does not provide the opportunity for a psychological ambivalence cannot find a poetic double which allows endless transpositions. For the material element to engage the whole soul, there must be a dual participation of desire and fear, a participation of good and evil, a peaceful participation of black and white...

...By grouping images and dissolving substances, water helps the imagination in its task of de-objectifying and assimilating. It also contributes a type of syntax, a continual linking up and gentle movement of images that frees a reverie bound to objects. (Bachelard 11-12)

This duality, this "manichaeism of reverie" (12), as Bachelard calls it, is exactly what one sees throughout Gracq's works. Desire for and fear of death and of life; desire for and fear of the unknown, the Beyond; temptations and events that are both good and evil; a black fortress which is crystalline white underneath -- such are the "poetic doubles" which appear in "endless transpositions" in Gracq's works. Water helps the imagination, conditioned by three centuries of logic and science, to "de-objectify" and re-subjectify, to "free a reverie bound to objects." All of these ideas of Bachelard fit perfectly with Gracq's stated purpose of freeing his readers' minds from the tyranny of Reason and allowing them to

see the world from a fresh point of view, as seen in Chapter I of this thesis.

## CHAPTER IV

### THEMES

#### THE TENSION AND THE TEMPTATION OF WAITING (LA TENSION ET LA TENTATION DE L'ATTENTE)

A major element in all four of Gracq's works here under consideration is waiting. Albert waits for Herminien and Heide to arrive in Au Château d'Argol, and when they arrive, all three of them seem to do very little other than to wait and see what will happen between them. The entire group of vacationers at the Hôtel des Vagues in Kérantec waits for Allan to appear, and when he does, they wait expectantly for whatever it is that he is going to do, which they sense vaguely but don't understand (Un beau ténébreux). Aldo, in Le Rivage des Syrtes, waits for something to happen to break the monotony of the purposeless guarding of Orsenna's seacoast. Amfortas and his entire entourage in Le Roi Pêcheur wait for the coming of the Pure. And in all of them, a great tension is produced by this waiting (la tension de l'attente), an anxiety-producing tension which is scarcely bearable but is necessary to keep them alert. All waiting includes an element of anxiety because of the element of the unknown. Yet waiting is also a source of very great pleasure, in anticipation of expected gratification of desire, in the multiplicity of

possibilities lying within the unknown, and in the very real knowledge that the actuality of the pleasure anticipated may not live up to the pleasure imagined. As long as all that lies in the future, the mind is free to imagine whatever possibility it likes and to enjoy it over and over again in anticipation. The waiting is as good as or better than the actual event. Gracq speaks specifically of this joy of anticipation, that scarcely bearable excitement of the child in the days before a holiday, in Le Rivage des Syrtes. It is Christmas Day when Aldo and his crew set out on their fateful patrol:

Fabrizio se frotta les mains en inspectant le ciel d'un oeil oblique, avec le mouvement de tête célèbre de Marino. Il y avait dans ses manières une espèce de jubilation contenue, un peu anormale, comme on en voit aux très jeunes enfants à la veille d'une fête attendue. (R.S. 186, my underlining)

Yet, throughout that waiting period there is another kind of anxiety, produced not by the unknown, but by the temptation to know, now, what the future holds. The imperative now in "know" is the original temptation of mankind, the temptation of Eve. From the very beginning, Man has wanted all knowledge now and yet known that sometimes that knowledge would give him no pleasure now, although it might in its proper time, or that the knowledge now might kill the future pleasure and would certainly kill the pleasure inherent in waiting. There is more joy in a pleasant surprise than in what one already knows or expects.

In French the two words, "tension" (la tension) and "waiting" (l'attente) are linked together phonetically by the word "temptation" (la tentation = l'a-tent-ation, la ten-ta-tion), a play on words which Gracq exploits in these three novels. A further phonetic link exists between "la tension" and "l'attention", i.e., "attention! danger!" In all three novels, the final scene is death, the stab in the back for Herminien in Au Château d'Argol, death of his country and his dreams for Aldo in Le Rivage des Syrtes, and suicide for Allan in Un beau ténébreux. All of life is in fact a waiting for this final event, and Allan, in particular, succumbs to the temptation to precipitate the arrival of this event. Waiting is an art, says Hélène Cixous, a creative capacity to live which is not obliged to precipitate itself, "a wait that is capable of taking pleasure in each instant, that does not jump over instants by saying, I cannot wait until the end..." (Conley 160). Like Cixous, Gracq understands the human desire for instant gratification, for cutting short the waiting period, for knowing now. Aldo, in Le Rivage des Syrtes, says,

il me semblait sentir en moi qu'un désir montait, d'une fixité terrible, pour écouter encore ces journées rapides: le désir que les jours de la fin se lèvent et que monte l'heure du dernier combat douteux... (R.S. 160)

For, more than the death itself, the temptation for Gracq's characters is the desire to know what lies beyond the death event, the struggle to find out about the other side, the "opposing shore", as Le Rivage des Syrtes is translated into

English, the "au-delà", the Beyond, with which the Surrealists yearned to make contact. Cixous speaks of the necessity for creative waiting in another play on words: "attendre" (to wait) = "hâte tendre" (tender haste), "the insistence on the wait which is tender, which is not violent...and not impatient." (Conley, 160). Gracq recognizes this same idea and explores in his novels what happens when the wait is not tender, when it is impatient and when men try to precipitate the waited event, when they succumb to the temptation of the waiting in order to avoid the tension of the waiting.

Everyone is born with a desire for that which surpasses the visible world, and from this desire have come the world's great religious ideas, as well as innumerable works of art and literature. Equally born into people is a desire to preserve life and a counter desire to self-destruct. Most humans spend their lives balanced between the Life-wish and the Death-wish.

In Gracq's Un beau ténébreux, the choice between these two sides and the tension produced by waiting and wanting to find out about the beyond is studied in particular depth. Each of the characters at the Hôtel des Vagues is confronted with the choice between Life and Death through the unsettling effect of Allan's personality in their midst. Some of them, such as Irène, their feet planted firmly on the earth, immediately reject the beckoning of Death and the tantalizing possibility of knowing which they sense calling to them through Allan. Others, like Gérard, recognize the danger and

yet find themselves fascinated and drawn, almost against their will, like moths toward a flame. Each of the members of Allan's "group", -- Christel, Gérard, Henri, and Allan --, faces this temptation under a different aspect, and these aspects each have a biblical counterpart, which was certainly deliberate intertextuality on Gracq's part. Throughout these three novels, he makes frequent references to biblical stories or aspects of the Judeo-Christian religion, but from his own point of view, often parodied or twisted.

For Christel, a romantic and impressionable young girl who was forever altered at age 13 by the melodramatic opera "La Tosca", the temptation is her desire to live always "on the mountaintop", to remain always in those great moments of life which are full of passion, exaltation, and meaning, like the one in which she saw the comet (B.T. 31). Boring, dull, everyday life is what she would like to escape, the instants she would like to "jump over", as Cixous says. Her desire is to be above all those moments of boredom:

Combien je donnerais pour flotter endormie, au-dessus des espaces d'ennui qu'on traverse à vivre, tous ces moments où la pensée ne vous quitte jamais qu'on pourrait être ailleurs. (B.T. 29)

"Mountaintop experiences", the "highs" of life, are indeed pleasurable and exhilarating, but are in great part so because of their contrast with the "lows". It is a question of Saussure's binary oppositions again. We have the concept of "high" because it is not "low", we can experience the "high"

only by knowing about the "low". A steady diet of highs, then, would undoubtedly pall and exhaust the human spirit every bit as much as a steady experience of lows. But Christel is too young to know this, and she senses in Allan something deliciously exciting, perhaps because it is illicit, which is calling to her:

Il y a un doigt sur lui, autour de lui une lumière qui fait tout pâlir. Je veux savoir ce qui à travers lui me fait signe. (B.T. 168)

She adores the idea of love beyond the grave, of lovers whose love never changes, dims, or grows old because they die together at its height. Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde, all the great romantic couples of literature, the hero and heroine of "La Tosca", all epitomize for her "a song of triumph of love beyond even the coup de grâce" ("un chant de triomphe de l'amour au-delà même du coup de grâce...") (B.T. 28). What would be unbearable for her would be the patient daily waiting throughout a normal life span, the determined love of two persons for each other through the ups and the downs of everyday life. The biblical parallel for Christel's temptation is that of Saint Peter, who refused to accept the idea of his hero dying in torture, found himself lying to escape the possibility of torture for himself, and wanted to stay always on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 16:22-23, 26:69-75, 17:4). Christel echoes this escapist view, which wants to hold on to the great moments of life and views death



romantically as a tool to freeze the unrolling film of life in those intense frames.

Nor is she immune to that earliest of human temptations which so fascinates Gracq, the desire to know, now, the temptation of Eve. She describes to Gérard a dream in which she saw death as a great wave through which she could glimpse the bright stars of the Promised Land:

Et la vague s'enflait à mesure,...Ma peur se fondait dans une joie délirante, un espoir sans bornes. A mesure que cette vague...s'avançait, la confiance, la sécurité sans limites dont j'étais revêtue la perçaient, la dissolvaient: elle paraissaient devenir étrangement transparente--derrière elle, au coeur de l'eau, les étoiles brillaient aussi paisibles, aussi douces que sur les déserts de l'Egypte avant la terre promise.  
(B.T. 98)

The temptation to pierce that veil, to break through that wave. to see the promised land, that which lies beyond, is as strong in Christel as in Gracq's other characters.

Gérard well understands this temptation, because he has felt it himself, but he sees right through her romantic delusions and believes that laziness and lack of courage are their source. Older and wiser, Gérard has understood that life is a balancing act, and especially the creative life, which seeks to maintain itself on the edge, to push itself to the limits, which not only produces a great deal of tension, but absolutely requires it. How can a high-wire artist keep his balance on a lax wire (B.T., 159)?

Je fis remarquer à Christel que ce dédain superbe pouvait bien n'être que paresse et manque de courage. Ce n'est qu'à condition de maintenir

haute la tension de la vie qu'on peut atteindre comme une récompense ces minutes d'exception, ces chances de miracle, ces coups de théâtre auxquels elle ne cessait de penser, je le devinais, depuis plusieurs minutes. (B.T. 29)

As an author, Gérard knows that the quality of his work depends on his striving, like the moth, for the star, while at the same time "keeping his feet on the ground", i.e., remaining in contact with his world. Gérard is however tempted by the unattainable, by that which is just beyond his grasp. He describes it by relating his experiences during the war, when he was held prisoner in a camp near a small town in Germany called Hoyerswerda. This small, insignificant town took on all the allure of the Promised Land to his eyes, for the very reason that it was inaccessible, that it was just visible on the horizon, but was as far away as the moon as far as he was concerned. Its attraction for him was that of the star for the moth, of all that is forbidden and denied.

Autour de nous s'étendait, partout inaccessible et pourtant offerte, la terre merveilleuse, la terre promise. Tôt levé, chaque matin, j'allais contempler...le détour mystérieux de la route dont jamais ne s'ouvriraient pour moi les bouleversants méandres...derrière la corne d'un boqueteau s'étendait à l'horizon de l'est Hoyerswerda, la Ville mystérieuse, la Ville interdite...Vers elle fuyaient avec mystère les sillons des champs de pommes de terre -- parfois, d'un autre angle du camp, avec surprise on la voyait se lever comme un mirage au-dessus de la fumée...Toujours assise à l'horizon,...appelant vraiment les désirs en caravane...Sans doute combien indigne du crédit infini que je lui faisais, ...mais, tenace comme un parfum, irritant comme une citadelle inviolée, traîne derrière ses syllabes rauques le goût d'une femme au'on n'a pas eue, qu'on n'aura jamais. (B.T. 133-134, my underlining)

These memories come more and more frequently to Gérard's mind in the days he spends in Allan's company, just as his fondest memories flash before the eyes of a drowning man ("comme on dit que font les souvenirs chers à l'esprit de celui qui va se noyer", B.T. 133-134). As Gérard wonders why Allan's company produces this effect, he begins to understand. He had already seen in Allan a destructive force and the temptation to self-destruct:

une tentation, une épreuve--au sein du petit groupe le signe de ralliement de tout ce qui tend à se défaire, à se détruire, à trouer pour une flambée brève,...le réseau trop restreint des chances raisonnables que la vie autorise. (B.T. 130)

Now, Gérard recognizes the temptation which Allan incarnates for him, the temptation to try to grasp Paradise Lost, to find that which is beyond the limitations of the human spirit. Gérard's is the oldest temptation of humanity, that of Eve, that of Faust (of whom he dreams, B.T. 134). Like Aldo and Vanessa in "Le Rivage des Syrtes", he is fascinated by the "other side", "the opposing shore", of which he can occasionally catch vague glimpses, but which is just beyond his reach, and which he senses is dangerous and not necessarily good for him.

But like the old sea captain Marino, he also realizes the necessity of maintaining an equilibrium, precarious and easily destroyed:

Sans doute la préservation de cette vie tient-elle au fond à un effort infiniment patient, tâtonnant,...afin de suivre le chemin difficile de la persévérance dans l'être...Alain à mes côtés

m'incite sans cesse à ce petit geste irréfléchi qui sépare la vie de la mort, le raisonnable de l'incalculable... (B.T. 160)

Marino says the same thing to Aldo, and sees him as the weight which will upset the balance (R.S. 47). However, unlike Gérard, Marino maintains this equilibrium by denying the existence of anything "beyond", of any life eternal other than the giving back of one's body to the soil of one's country (R.S. 267,269). Gérard recognizes the existence of an "au-delà" and actively desires it, but in the end he decides to wait for it to appear at its proper time, to "maintain high the tension of life" which is inevitably part of the wait, but which also gives it tone.

The temptation which attracts Henri is power. The dream which constantly haunts him is clearly a dream of power with obvious parallels to Christ's temptation by the devil on a high mountain:

Il y a pour moi quelque chose d'écrasant, d'emportant, à me sentir là, seul, à guetter cette ville de cette cime invisible, comme un aigle planeur, comme un dieu, comme ravi par le démon sur la crête de la montagne... (B.T. 120)

He feels like an eagle, a powerful bird of prey, lying in wait for his victims from high above. He feels like a god, with power over the men in that city far below. And he feels "ravi par le démon", obviously a reference to Christ's temptation when the devil took him to a high mountain and offered him all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for his soul (Matthew 4:8-9). Henri's dreams of power undoubtedly reflect his

subconscious recognition of his weakness and natural tendency to follow any strong leader. As noted previously, he is the one who runs away the night of Allan's suicide, unable to face his leader's voluntary departure. Appropriately, he dreams again, this time of abandoning a besieged castle just before the last battle (B.T. 233). But in doing so, he loses his chance of entering "the forbidden kingdom", because as he leaves, "le cercle magique se referma à jamais sur le royaume interdit" (B.T. 233).

The temptation for the three "heroes", Albert, Allan, and Aldo, is the desire for revelation, but there is a difference in their attitudes. Albert simply wants unlimited knowledge, but his quest leads him to harm those around him. Heide kills herself after he abuses her, and Albert himself kills Herminien, thinking to kill his darker self. Aldo simply wants contact with that which is beyond him, even if he loses himself in the process, wants "to consume myself in that light", and his rather innocent quest is used by those around him to stir up two sleeping countries and create a war. Allan's desire is much more prideful. He wants at once to see and touch before believing, like Saint Thomas (B.T. 82-83), and he wants to control his own destiny, including the length of his own life. One can choose death, he says (B.T. 105), and he does so. It is not until the very end that he realizes the harmful effect this choice has had on those around him:

il n'est pas bon de laisser la mort se promener  
trop longtemps à visage découvert sur la

terre...Elle émeut, elle éveille la mort, encore endormie au fond des autres... (B.T. 252)

The question of waiting and of temptation is one of the major themes of Le Roi Pêcheur. The refrain, "Espérance dans le Sauveur!" marks the beginning and end of this play, but this hopeful waiting is, as Amfortas says, "l'espoir indéfiniment reculé" (R.P. 50). The castle and its inhabitants live by this hopeful waiting, but when the Pure does appear, and the end of the wait seems at hand, each person is forced to consider what his life will be like without this "raison d'être". If Amfortas is healed and the Grail and castle returned to full splendor, what further purpose in life will there be? Amfortas fully realizes that he will lose his identity in the healing of his wound:

Ma blessure est mon lien avec les autres hommes, avec Montsalvage. Quelquefois il me semble que je n'existe que par elle, que c'est elle qui me rend visible. La vie tourne ici comme d'elle-même autour du bain d'Amfortas, des baumes d'Amfortas, de la souffrance d'Amfortas, des prières pour Amfortas--Amfortas guéri me déroute...Guéri, j'ai presque peur de disparaître, de devenir invisible, comme une méduse qu'on replonge dans l'eau. (R.P. 49-50)

For him, then, the temptation is to prolong the waiting, to keep the status quo, which has given a meaning to his existence and to that of those who serve him. To that end, he makes brutally clear to Perceval what a life without waiting entails:

Tu seras seul -- à jamais! Le Graal dévaste!...La où tu entres finit l'espoir et commence la possession. Tu verras comme elle accable. La

terre sera pour toi pleine comme un oeuf -- chaque chose à sa place -- et plus une place à y changer.  
(R.P. 140-141)

Perceval realizes that becoming the new Grail King will destroy the quest which has been the joy and guiding star of his life. He will have nothing left to seek or to accomplish. Possession of the Grail kills hope, relaxes all the tension involved in the hopeful waiting, relaxes that high wire along which the seeker walks, to the point where he can no longer maintain his balance and falls.

It is this loss of tension which has caused Orsenna to become somnolent and lifeless in Le Rivage des Syrtes:

c'était comme si tout l'effort séculaire d'Orsenna, toutes les images qu'elle s'était complu à donner de la vie, eussent visé à une chute de tension presque effrayante...comme un vêtement de plus en plus profonde inconscience, au travers duquel nul contact ne le réveillait plus...(qui)la laissait vacillante sur un vide... (R.S. 161)

#### THE POINT OF THE QUEST

The point of the Quest, then, is to keep on hoping, to keep on searching, to keep on desiring. Achieving the Quest, satisfying desire, leaves one without a point in life--that elusive, vanishing point on the horizon which seems always attainable but is, and must be, unattainable. For it is not the end of the Quest but its guiding star, constantly leading onward. It is, as Gracq says, within reach, "à portée de la main", but to take it in one's hand is to kill it, to replace hope with actuality, an actuality which may disappoint. To

take it in one's hands is, literally, a dead end, as seen in the "dead" ends of Au Château d'Argol and Un beau ténébreux. Heide kills herself after being taken forcibly by both Herminien and Albert, and Albert kills Herminien, his demonic other self, leaving himself alone and without a star to guide, as he cannot live with or without Herminien (C.A. 168). Allan kills himself, in order to "seize the Grail", to commune fully with the unknowable, to know, now. Only Le Roi Pêcheur and Le Rivage des Syrtes are open-ended, like the medieval myths Gracq admires. In them, the hero sees the object of his desire but does not try to seize it.

Perceval refuses to ask the necessary question and become the new Grail King, because in so doing, he would kill hope and put an end to his quest. By refusing, he keeps alive not only his hope, but also that of the Grail knights, and he keeps Kundry alive, literally, as she knows she will die when the Grail regains its full brilliance in the hands of the Pure. Even though she desperately desires this, the object of her quest and the cause of her death, Perceval forces her to keep on living, to keep hoping for the arrival of another Pure, in short, to continue her quest. Amfortas also chooses to continue waiting, living in pain with his wound, which gives a meaning to his existence.

Aldo ardently desires "To be closer. Not to remain cut off." from the Beyond, his Grail, symbolized in his mind by the Tängri, but that is all he wants. He does not want to



occupy Farghestan and possess the Tängri; he wants only "To consume myself in that light." (O.S. 190). His horrified reaction when he finds out how he has been used by Vanessa and his superiors for venal political ends, to stir up the dormant war between Farghestan and his own sleeping country, shows that he had no desire to possess his Grail. Rather, his desire (like Kundry's) was to be consumed by it. Le Rivage des Syrtes is, of the four, the most open-ended. Its ending is ambiguous in the extreme. At first reading, it would appear that Aldo has met the same fate as Herminien, as the wording is so similar. Like Herminien, he hears stealthy steps behind him which catch up with him, and then, "knew what the stage was set for" (O.S. 292). The word "knew" would seem to suggest death, i.e., the moment of knowing. Yet this impression is belied by that strange passage in chapter nine wherein Aldo appears to be commenting, (or perhaps it is Gracq himself) in the present tense, as he is writing the story, his feelings on that eventful patrol, and Orsenna's fate after the end of the book is hinted:

Quand le souvenir me ramène--en soulevant pour un moment le voile de cauchemar qui monte pour moi du rougeoiement de ma patrie détruite--à cette veille où tant de choses ont tenu en suspens...Encore aujourd'hui, lorsque je cherche dans ma détestable histoire, à défaut d'une justification que tout me refuse, au moins un prétexte à ennoblir un malheur exemplaire... (R.S. 200)

The words "souvenir me ramène", "Encore aujourd'hui", "ma détestable histoire" indicate an Aldo who is very much alive,

older and wiser. Is he a prisoner or a survivor of the renewed war, who has lived to see "ma patrie détruite"? Aldo's fate is not clear, but it seems probable that he lived to see the destruction of his country, which in fact awoke it to a sort of new life. What of his own quest? Was he in fact consumed by his Grail, burned, but fulfilled, as Kundry wished to be? Gracq leaves the question open, and yet we have a hint that this is what he himself would choose. In the Avant-Propos to Le Roi Pêcheur, he makes his preference clear: "...je tiens tout de même à dire que c'est Kundry qui porte mes couleurs." (R.P. 17). And Kundry's impassioned cry makes her desire clear:

Je sais que la vue du Graal se paie. Je sais que lorsqu'il brillera ici, je n'y vivrai plus. Mais même à ce prix, entends-tu, je le désire! Même au prix de la souffrance, -- même au prix de la mort! Qu'il me détruise, mais que je le voie -- mais que ma soif s'apaise! (R.P. 111)

To see, to touch, to be closer, not to remain cut off, to consume oneself in that light -- Aldo's words sum up his quest, Kundry's quest, Gracq's quest.

What is important then, is movement towards the "trésor idéal" rather than immobility and acceptance of the status quo. Waiting and anticipating is good, as it keeps life's tension high, and lack of tension leads to indifference and somnolent inertia. Temptations are good, for they are the dangerous pitfalls which one must go through in order to know oneself and get closer to that which is beyond. Going beyond

beyond the limits as accepted by society is good, for how can there be a quest within the limitations of what is already known and understood? Above all, believing that there is something beyond those limits, that there is a point out there where all things come together, and that one can ultimately reach it if one keeps on searching, is good, for it gives a point to life which reason and logic can never supply. This, I believe, is the Quest, as Gracq sees it.

In attempting to communicate this view to his readers, he has made use of many different literary devices, some appealing directly to the readers' subconscious (symbols, colors, dream-like style), others making deliberate use of the readers' store of learned knowledge (intertextuality, references to historic and religious figures). But at all times, the writing is careful and far from "automatic"-- as Calin says, "very self-conscious" ("très consciente d'elle-même") and rather traditional as to structure (Calin, "Pages Liminaires" 343). It is more the content and the overall effect of his works which sets him apart and intrigues his readers. Like the heroes of his novels and play, he follows his own road, influenced only by his vision of the beyond, by the "prescience of the glories beyond" of which Poe speaks (573) and the endless quest to find them. Poe, put it this way in "The Poetic Principle":

He who shall simply sing, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and sounds, and odours, and colours, and sentiments, which greet him in

common with all mankind -- he, I say, has yet failed to prove his divine title. There is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain. We have a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of Man. It is at once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us -- but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone. And thus when by Poetry...we find ourselves melted into tears--we weep then--not...through excess of pleasure, but through a certain, petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp now, wholly, here on earth, at once and forever, those divine and rapturous joys, of which through the poem, or through the music, we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses. (Poe 573)

Through their poetic myths, Poe and Gracq both attempt to show "the desire of the moth for the star", "the ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond", and our "petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp now, wholly, here on earth those divine and rapturous joys of which through the poem...we attain to but brief...glimpses." Through his writing, Gracq searches for the ultimate point of his quest. His works continue to serve as a guide to the direction of that quest, a "road-map" to those readers who are searching for answers to the essential questions about their life here on the earth and about that which lies beyond it. Although some may not agree fully with his ideas, in each generation there are new readers who recognize the depth of his thought and the validity of much that he has to tell us.

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APPENDIX A

BIOGRAPHICAL AND LITERARY DATA ON JULIEN GRACQ

(Courtesy of José Corti Publishers, Paris)



- 1910: Born July 27 as Louis Poirier, in Saint-Florent-le-Vieil. Attended a private nursery school and entered public elementary school in October, 1916.
- 1921: Entered the Clemenceau Lycée in Nantes, as a boarding student, which did not suit him. Remained in Nantes until 1928, passing two baccalauréat exams with "mention très bien", i.e., excellent marks. During this period, he discovered the joys of literature, in particular, the Romantics.
- 1928: Entered College Preparatory course at the Henri-IV Lycée and discovered Gide, Valéry, Claudel, Cocteau, and Giraudoux.
- 1930: Was sixth on the list of those accepted to the Ecole Normale Supérieure, where he studied Geography.
- 1931: Stayed in Budapest July and August of this year with a friend, Henri Queffélec. In September, spent a week at this friend's home in Brest. Discovered the charms of Finistère.
- 1934: Received his Agrégation in History and Geography.
- 1935: Military Service.
- 1935-36: Professor in Nantes. Joined the Communist Party.
- 1937: During the summer and autumn, wrote Au Château d'Argol.
- 1937-39: Professor in Quimper. At the beginning of 1938,

N.R.F. Editions refused to publish Au Château d'Argol. José Corti Publishers printed it in January, 1939. It was at this point that Louis Poirier adopted the pseudonym Julien Gracq. In May of that year, Gracq met André Breton in Nantes. At the end of the same month, Gracq left the Communist Party after the announcement of the Soviet-Nazi Pact. He was mobilized as a lieutenant in the 137th Infantry Division.

1939-41: Gracq served in the military in Barbonville, in the Boulonnais region and in Flanders. He was a prisoner in Silesia from June 2, 1940 to February 1941, and acquired a serious pulmonary infection. He was repatriated to Marseille.

1942-46: Professor of Geography at the University of Caen, Gracq spent long hours walking in the area. He began a thesis, but soon became bored with it. This was a period of intense literary activity and production for him.

1945: Publication of Un beau ténébreux.

1946: Publication of Liberté grande.

1947: Gracq acquired a post at the Claude-Bernard lycée in Paris.

1948 Publication of André Breton. Quelques aspects de l'écrivain. Le Roi Pêcheur was staged in April and May and published in May of this year. The play was not well received by the critics.

- 1950: Publication of la Littérature à l'estomac.
- 1951: Le Rivage des Syrtes came out in September. In December, it was awarded the Prix Goncourt, which Gracq refused to accept.
- 1952: Publication of Prose pour l'Etrangère.
- 1958: Publication of Un balcon en forêt.
- 1961: Publication of Préférences, which grouped together texts written between 1946 and 1960.
- 1970: Publication of la Presqu'île, which includes la Route, la Presqu'île, and Le Roi Cophetua. Gracq retired June 29, 1970.
- 1972: Publication of l'Herne, devoted to Julien Gracq.
- 1976: Les Eaux étroites came out in October.
- 1980: Publication of En lisant en écrivant, lecture notes.
- 1985: Publication of la Forme d'une ville.
- 1988: Publication of Autour des sept collines.
- 1989: The first volume of Julien Gracq's Oeuvres complètes published by Bibliothèque de la Pléiade.

**APPENDIX B**

**ABBREVIATIONS USED FOR GRACQ'S WORKS  
IN THIS THESIS**

- A.B. André Breton. Quelques aspects de l'écrivain.
- B.T. Un beau ténébreux.
- C.A. Au Château d'Argol.
- E.E. Les Eaux étroites.
- Lett. Lettrines.
- Litt. La Littérature à l'estomac.
- O.S. The Opposing Shore.
- Préf. Préférences.
- R.P. Le Roi Pêcheur.
- R.S. Le Rivage des Syrtes.