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Georges Poulet understands the act of reading to be a confluence of minds, or better, an identification of a passive consciousness with that of an active storyteller. This strange unification begins with the transmutation of words on a page into mental objects, of which the reader's mind is the vessel. The act of reading, for Poulet, catalyzes a disappearance of objectivity, a fading of the world of which the reader is objectively a part, and a consequent submersion into complete subjectivity; a subjectivity guided by fiction: "For the book is no longer a material reality. It has become a series of words, of images, of ideas which in their turn begin to exist", and this new existence takes shape within the reader's mind. The "number of significations" which take their place in the mind are still objects, but objects *of* thought for which existence is dependent on the mind which entertains them.

This is the quality of the book which lends itself to greater interest for Poulet than other works of art, such as sculpture, which do not proffer, in their objective rigidity, any means to alleviate the distance between the subjectivity of the observer, and the objectivity of the observed. The literary object warmly gives itself up in order so that the reader may attend to it in the most intimate arena: the mind. But, "in order to exist as mental objects, they [the words of a page, presumably] must relinquish their exis-

tence as real objects" (Poulet 1969, 1321). What objective existence might Poulet be speaking of? It appears as though he is referring to the "contortions of...printer's ink" (Beckett, 119), as Beckett would have it, which rank amongst the objects of the world in their place on bleached parchment. In a sense, this is indeed what Poulet refers to. He has, of course, explained to us the apparent disappearance of the book during a reading of it: "It is still there", he assures us, "and at the same time it is there no longer, it is nowhere" (Poulet 1321). But this is unsatisfying: the words of the page cannot have completely given their existence up; no one would claim that kind of power for the human gaze.

Poulet seems then to be speaking of the existence of words as they somehow 'objectively' refer; as they exist in some standardized "language of reality", whose use is that of social utility, not of creation in the sense of fiction. In this sense, Poulet speaks of the "transmutation through language of reality into a fictional equivalent" (Poulet 1322). It would be to go well beyond what Poulet has given us here to say that he is indicating some wholesale change in the references of every word in the language as they are applied to fiction. But he does seem to be indicating that *language itself* loses its objectivity, its ability to be clearly summarized, explained, re-formed. Perhaps there is a more than facile connection to work of the Dionysian, who "smashes [the framework of Apollonian knowledge], jumbles it up and ironically reassembles it" (Nietzsche 883), in an illustration of the artist's freedom from the 'neediness' of reason and his reliance on the sheer powers of intuition.

In fact, this seems to be a wholly proper reference. Nietzsche writes of artistic creation that it is the expression of an intuition which is beyond the capacity of human understanding to explain. Intuition is, according to Nietzsche, the furthest extent of human reconciliation with the 'objective' world, which is forever outside our comprehension; irreparably separate and distant from the subjectivity in which we are helplessly entrenched. Poulet, as if supporting Nietzsche's claim by addressing the reception of art, speaks of reading as a kind of intuition of the author's consciousness, and more, he speaks of the metamorphoses of the words of a book into the objects of a mind as that quality of reading by virtue of which "the opposition between the subject and its objects has been considerably attenuated" (Poulet 1322). In reading, Poulet feels that the world presented to him in fiction is thus "not radically opposed to the *me* who thinks it", because the objects presented have made their home in the reader, so to speak, and are not rigidly outside the reader's subjective grasp. Nietzsche might take aversion to Poulet's desire for shelter, but the likeness between the Dionysian intuition and Poulet's language of fiction seem helpful: the lan-

guage of fiction takes the 'pretense' of the language of reality, we might say.

Essentially, Poulet's assertion that mental objects must give up their objectivity is unclear. What objectivity? Which aspect of the book is he addressing, the words on the page? If we are to take it seriously, however, the best sense in which to take it is in the sense of language as a whole, it seems. Language must lose its objective apparel (the Nietzschean 'pretense' if we may); that sense that it normally describes the world as it actually is; the sense of clarity with which we use it to describe, propositionally, for example, the occurrences and phenomena around us. In the reading of fiction, language recognizes itself to be wholly subjective. The obscurity of poetry and much prose is a testament to this. Blanchot explains "Only the nonliterary book is presented as a stoutly woven web of determined significations, as an entity made up of real affirmations: before it is read by anyone, the nonliterary book has been read by everyone" (Blanchot 95). The work of fiction has no such "preliminary reading" (Ibid) as the nonliterary work. Poulet's language seems to suggest this approach to the difference between fiction and the (objective) language of reality.

For in the act of reading fiction, according to Poulet, we apprehend the consciousness of the author. This is afforded the reader through the complete subjectification of the objects of his thought; the attenuation of that "opposition" discussed earlier. The reader is thus enabled an identification with the author, whose thoughts are for the moment the reader's thoughts: "When I am absorbed in reading, a second self takes over, a self which thinks and feels for me" (Poulet 1324). Whereas in everyday life we are irreparably separated, as subject and object of thought normally are, from our human peers, in reading, the very consciousness, the very subjectivity of another, is made into the object of thought. It is because the thoughts of the author are, for Poulet, actually *being thought* by the reader, that a unification between two subjectivities is granted: "They are the thoughts of another, and yet it is I who am their subject" (Poulet 1322).

Of course this unification is one-sided. The author himself, the human consciousness who may or may not still inhabit the world in which we read, is absent. Poulet's understanding of reading as a comforting coincidence of the subject and the objects of his thought, unrealizable except in the act of reading, may imply a darker, more solitary existence for the author himself. Indeed Blanchot seems to have anticipated such an approach to reading, so inherently neglectful of the author's burden, when he says that reading is a "dance with an invisible partner in a separate space, a joyful, wild dance with the 'tomb'" (Blanchot 98). The author, as

a subject himself, must feel at all times in the act of writing that threatening severance of the subject from its surroundings that Poulet feels daily. One implication is that the author himself does not perceive his very own consciousness, in its essence, as Poulet seems to perceive it in the act of reading. Indeed, Sartre notes that author is always, in writing, attempting to propose a silence with which the author himself "has never been familiar with" (Sartre 1339). Sartre explains this 'silence' to be "subjective and anterior to language" (Sartre 1339). Perhaps it is this intent which Poulet apprehends, as for him the final result of reading is truly something ineffable: "When reading a literary work, there is a moment when it seems to me that the subject *present* in this work disengages itself from all that surrounds it, and stands alone" (Poulet 1332). He continues to say that "no structure can any longer define it; it is exposed in its ineffability and its fundamental indeterminacy" (Poulet 1333). The subject which presents itself in the reading of a book transcends the very work itself in the same way, it seems, that Sartre articulates.

This takeover of the reader's mind by the author's thoughts contrasts considerably with Sartre's notion of reading. Poulet says that "I [the reader] play a much more humble role [than that of the author], content to record passively all that is going in me" (Poulet 1325). Whatever remains of the reader's consciousness during the takeover of his mind by the author's thoughts, Poulet calls the "consciousness of the critic" (Poulet 1325). Sartre is not content to relegate the act of reading to pure passivity. He does agree that a 'literary object...exists only when in movement" (Sartre 1337), and this movement is granted by the contribution of the reader, but for Sartre reading itself is a creative process: "The reading is composed of a host of hypotheses, of dreams followed by awakenings, of hopes and deceptions" (Sartre 1337). This "directed creation" is "as new and original an act as the first invention [writing]" (Sartre 1339).

Poulet is sure, however, that it is the author who plays the active role in reading. Poulet's insistence on an "I" who reads and an "I" who is present in the work of an author is succinctly refuted in Barthes assertion that a "text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (Barthes 1968,1469). This destination is the reader alone. For Barthes reduces the author to a linguistic instance of self-reference, and nothing more: "the author is never more than the instance of writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance of saying *I*: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person'" (Barthes 1467). Poulet's psychologistic tendency is revealed in Barthes treatment of the 'Text', as well. No longer may we see the work of an author as inviting us into an experience of an essential subjectivity, ineffable, and woven into it. A text for Barthes, being a linguistic object, must be

seen as infinitely abundant in its possible readings and interpretations. Language acts not as a transparent surface which the author stands behind, but as an opaque barrier. Just as the spoken word may be misunderstood or misconstrued, so the text can not be seen as anything but a sentence that has outlived its speaker: "if the Text extends itself, it is a result of combinatory systematic...Hence, no vital 'respect' is due to the Text: it can be broken" (Barthes 1971, 1473). And if there is something ineffable which we perceive in a text it is not "the unnamable signified" (Barthes, 1472), but perhaps indicates instead that we have been searching for what is not there: an authoritative signified.

Finally, criticism, for Poulet, is a necessary, and necessarily fallible task. Not unlike a willful return from Enlightenment, or the vocation of a Biblical prophet, only of human consciousness, the critic must relate what cannot be articulated: "the [author's] thought is grasped not at its highest, but at its most obscure, at its cloudiest point, at the point at which it is reduced to being a mere self-awareness scarcely perceived by the being which entertains it" (Poulet 1330). Here, again, we see the likeness of Poulet's thought in this respect to Sartre. The author can only be 'scarcely aware' of the transcendent self which he wishes to offer up to examination. To be sure, the reader himself can only apprehend it, not comprehend it, like the Kantian sublime. Thus literary criticism will always fall short of its goal: to relate the Sartrean 'silence' of a work. All criticism becomes too analytical, too concerned with structure and technique, at the expense of the pre-lingual essence that reading the work itself achieves, or too mimetic, too obscure in its own emotion and passion to be understood theoretically and accurately. We are reminded that language must be wholly 'real' or wholly 'fictional' in its apparel for Poulet, though some critics seem to strike closer balances between the two.

The language of fiction in Poulet's *Phenomenology of Reading* is thus to be understood as a shedding of pretenses. His is a peculiar blend of Romanticism and Humanism, in which the goal of contemplation is no longer a communion between the subject and the divine, but a communion between subjects. In it, we are allowed to shake off the incongruity of our existence in a cold and indifferent world, infinitely distanced from us, and meet with our others in the world of the subject, where, as Blanchot says "nothing has any meaning yet, properly speaking, but to which, even so, everything that has a meaning returns to its origins" (Blanchot 96). Poulet's treatment of language may seem confused, though passionately, but it is surely moving. The language of reality, divested of the clothes of utility, allows us to say "farewell to what is" (Poulet 1322) so that we may share in the otherwise impenetrable world of the tempestuous artist.

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