

A Source of Vexation

and a source of ventriloquism. And a source of violence. And a vanishing point. I shall put the so-called mystery aside for a moment and instead remind the reader of the desolate state in which these words deliver themselves. I should speak, for one thing, of French Crime, it being my primary public occupation during recent times, and how odd it would seem for the subject to go amiss in this present text. It is, after all, a French crime that I am presently unveiling, or that I am pausing the unveiling of in order to write these very words as well as those that surround them. It is as usual a Sunday morning that has left me with a moment in which to write at any length. My journal has been set aside, and I begin this covert work. In all the time that I have been concealing the larger French crime my public life (which is barely public in recent times) has become rather thoroughly occupied with the subject in general. I mean, of course, crime in the orthodox sense, especially that which leads to violent death. The case of Raymond and Marcel is not quite that sort of crime. Its deathly work took place more slowly, and in rather less immediately tangible ways. Marcel, as I have touched upon already and as I will describe in fitting detail in due course, came to retreat in illness to a death-bed as a result of his attempt to arrest time, or at very least to slow it down and arrest a course of events that would take place later *in* time. Raymond, as he perhaps deserved, died in what have come to be known as rather tragic and ambiguous circumstances. Marcel D., on the other had, appeared to reach a certain sort of serenity. He effected a 'delay' on a grand scale, one might say. Chess had a lot to do with this, of course, both the coded intricacies native to the game and in the simple fact of the player's submission to a nominal system, abstract and simulative of nothing. As well as letters and to a lesser extent pictures it is also chess amongst other games that connects a great many things that find their way into this desolate narrative. I can immediately think of and will later think further of the theories proposed by Aron (his 'elements', and the business of playing the game prophylactically. This kind of guarding in advance has already become a theme in my account, I notice), the problems set by Vladimir (along with the crosswords, of course), the rank cheating carried out by Raymond, not to mention Jonathan's investigation into the chess club murder. I do wonder how he will feel when he comes to read this account. He will be better placed than most to see the gaps that it fits into, as well as gaps within it. But when he receives my more usual journal (after I have departed, of course) he will see that even that has substantial gaps in it, sometimes of whole months where the transubstantiation of the stuff into fiction meant that the journals were so pre-consumed as to necessitate their destruction. This account, it should be stressed, is nothing of the sort. It is as far from fiction as it possible to be. It is not exactly fact either, nor is it conjecture. It is the the illustration and demonstration of a game and of a pattern. It is, as it were, an annotated diagram or an explanation of moves. I have it on good authority that Marcel D. was initially rather annoyed that his discovery of 'hypermodernism' meant that the theory would not be allowed to come to fruition in the pictorial realm, or whatever it is that he would describe it as. He gave up on making pictures, of course. The 'artistic' realm sounds a little vague for my liking. But at least the idea was allowed to live, albeit adopted by the game of chess. On the subject of adoption, I remember that one of those *Adelphi* people once left a rather controversial will insisting that her son should only qualify for his inheritance if he were to adopt a black child. Pure posthumous mischief, of course. The stipulation was contested. But hypermodernism took on quite another life on the chequered board, whilst Marcel had nominally ceased to be an artist. I suspect he rather liked this position in the end, just as he claimed to, which is not to say that he did not continue making certain works in secret. Some of those secret works are by now quite well known, evidently, but some remain secret. There is a lot to be said for Marcel. His *Pharmacy* was quite brilliant. The bleak vulgarity of the

image and the placement of the coloured additions are extremely funny, if nothing else. I firmly believe that it was the transference of hypermodernism that allowed him to live for so long. An enormous and crippling responsibility had been taken away from him; in fact one might say that life had been given to him. Cabanne called it a 'rather disconcerting serenity', but I am not so sure of that. I would say that he was a very lucky man who came to accept his luck. This is quite an achievement, to succeed in not being one of us dissatisfied beggars.

The Year of the Two Moons

Nineteen seventy-two was, for me and for my more official journaled legacy, a year of lunar doubling. Or rather, as in the case of Raymond and Marcel P., the sort of doubling that folds two things already very close into one another. Collapsing the north pole into the south, as it were – something I have wished to do on many occasions when observing the state of the places of people around me and have wished it to be crushed. But the lunar doubling of which I speak took place through a sacrificial destruction of paper. A full half a year of journals had to be destroyed at the alter of the novel that mutated, distorted and bettered them. Not that the novel was very well-received, of course, although I dare say that those same critics would have been forced to concede their inadequacy if they had read the journals that the novel replaced. They never will. Just as I had done in the late spring two years before there were words and thoughts that had no place surviving, and so they had to be vanished. This applied to journals as well as texts that were quite correctly, in retrospect, called *The Alibi* and *The Idiot Questioner*. I was both the idiot questioner and the idiot being questioned. The testimony of both bifurcated parties lies elsewhere, absent from this account. Bindings were ripped, pages were torn, and papers were finally burned in the garden. The sensation of weight cast aside was quite pleasant. The burning, *blazing* sun of the journal died away and in its dusk, its lunation of transference, *Two Moons* rose. The present text, this account now being written (and then read, questioned and then answering) is the double doubling of the earlier doubling. It is the equatorial point between the poles of one text's absence-by-destruction and the eclipse of two moons. I confess to and account for this for personal reasons, although I beg no indulgence, but the metaphor is quite plain to those with half a mind to notice such things.

It is unclear as to whether Raymond and Marcel came to an agreement that they were halves of the same person – organism, bibliorganism, word-body – or if they simply discovered and acknowledged that they were. I suspect the latter, and it seems fairly clear that they were unequal halves in terms of the dominance one held over the other. The older Raymond would have had quite a hold over his younger twin by six years, and his perverse charisma undoubtedly did its work. Marcel, I can say with certainty, made the greater sacrifice, submitting himself to death by language and time, or more correctly put, language in time. As I have mentioned, the objective of Marcel's long work was to slow down time, a preposterous notion that nonetheless worked for a certain period, approximately but not exactly a little more than five years. It might be said that it was its publication (paid for privately as in the case of Raymond's writings, which is undoubtedly no coincidence) that sapped the temporal power of the work. In any case the Arch-Duke Ferdinand was shot, and the world convulsed in a way that even the time-freezing spell of the text could not prevent. Now, I have made clear in the plainest of terms one fact that is itself a revelation: that Raymond compelled Marcel to write a text of such length and memorial paralysis that time would slow down in order for a war not to take place. This, my reading of the secret texts tell me, was their stated intention. However, more recent consideration leads me to make a further revised revelation: that the *failure* of the attempt was in fact the very objective of Raymond's imprisoning of his young admirer's mind and pen. There is no question at all in my mind that the first Balkan war would have led seamlessly to the destruction of Europe, and that the lost time of the vortex of Marcel's writing held back this entropy. I have come latterly to believe that Raymond simply wished to observe an increase in tension before this took place, and so rather than intending the great war *not* to happen was in fact making its declaration *all the more dramatic*. He had used Marcel to delay his pleasure, inflating a kind of verbal balloon to be punctured as if it were a prop on one of the stages he bought for his plays to be produced upon. As indeed it was, by a Sarejevan pistol shot on the public stage. I strongly suspect, although I cannot produce evidence for it, that Raymond had some hand in the young student Pricip's rejection by the so-called 'Black Hand', and all that led from this.

More to the point, and leaving behind matters so trivial as the great events of the outside world, the 'failure' of Marcel's writing was unquestionably an accelerating factor in his exhaustion. But, like a man conditioned by the laws of his jailers, he continued to write. It was his only habit. That kind of memory-performance is simply impossible to sustain, something even my own modest failures attest to.

My Premature Declaration

I gave some hint of all this, it will be noted, in my short volume on Raymond. Perhaps unfortunately for me, and fortunately for the maintenance of secrecy, I was as usual barely heard. What I wrote then (and I quote myself precisely at this point; another sad kind of doubling, which it should be noted is itself in reference to that most lined of language artefacts – *La Doublure*) was, firstly:

'The two were acquainted, though it is uncertain to what extent'

It is, I suppose, still uncertain, although I was even then, in nineteen sixty-six, concealing much. It was in publishing these words that my own life split into its two moons. The thought of writing one thing and concealing another was, for me, a generator of energy as is the splitting of the atom, the strike of lightning into a tree, and the split of the sea at Jutland's Scaw. On the subject of things maritime it is worth noting that the coffin travelling with the morbid mother of Raymond to India was laid with a pane of glass. I mention this in passing in the book, but the fact that this glass was meant to effect a purgatorial and decompositional 'delay' is naturally something that has wider implications in respect to the work of Marcel D.. I also noted the rate at which Raymond got through his shirt collars and I now remember, upon rereading my own words, that I had somewhere in my mind an image of the cricketer Ranjitsinghi periodically giving to his Irish staff unwanted motor cars. But later on I lay a slightly greater hint in the path of the reader on the subject of Raymond and Marcel, and do so via the generous (misguided, misinformed and naïve) words of Jean, a writer I admired but do not respect:

'It may have been only some resemblance, real or imagined, in feature, build and attire, but, within the context, the suggestion rather is that their *invalidism* was of the same kind, so one wonders if, at the time, Raymond Roussel also suffered from nervous asthma.'

I have added the italics now, of course. Their invalidism. In one sense Jean's notion that Raymond and Marcel were 'physically the same' strays very close indeed to the truth of the matter. He could not have known any of this truth, of course, and so (like his so-called surrealism) I credit him not with perception but with unknowing trespass.

As I read these words and remember their conception I am struck by the hamstrung nature of my prose. Every sentence hesitates and steadies itself, grasping at all too frequent commas like an infirm man at a bannister as he climbs the stairs to his next regretful and troubled night. I was in my mid-fifties, and only beginning to lose my vigour, and so I can only conclude that it was the live charged sensation of concealment, my words as conductor, that destabilised the text.

Neuter Discontinuous

Of Marcel D. and his siblings it should be said that their gently strange family came to a double ending. Firstly, none of them had children, and secondly (as it is well known) their Flaubertian father kept scrupulous accounts of all the money he gave to them in support of their work throughout their lives. These different sums of money (differing in the duration of the stipend, and therefore the total amount being greater in the case of the older children) were deducted from the division of his estate upon death. His bequest was both perfectly equal and perfectly unequal.

Normandy itself, the site of this bequest and of the young Raymond's burglary, is itself a kind of strange double to the south of England. The sleeve between them is not so wide, and the Norman brambled lanes and farms are very nearly Kentish in character although the people seem to be of a more Northern disposition. They are more northern in their local context despite being more southern than their English counterparts in respect to their global position. Kent and Normandy are counties and kingdoms of apples. Michael, the German poet, knew this despite living further to the East.

Very few people bother to remark Marcel's painting *Tu M'*, which would seem to be a kind of summarial doodle of his previous works. It arrived unfashionably, I suppose, in the midst of his rather more legendary provocations.

His *Unhappy Readymade* is charming and generous, and could not be better paid respect to than by its recipient's painting of it. His sister is seen by many as a gleaming mascot of the brothers, but there was a great deal more to her than that. She is the peacock feather in a display of flowers and grasses.

Marcel and Jacques also diverge, mirror, and produce repelled opposites. Marcel's abandonment of art, so-called, left the burden (like any matter or energy it cannot simply disappear) at the hands of his brother. One grew old whilst the other did not. One continued working whilst the other questioned the nature of work. They were split by the Atlantic ocean. This bifurcation is the equal and opposite reaction to the legacy of Hypermodernism and its own arrest and displacement.

The Year of the Two Moons

I have no doubt that it will be seen as hypocritical that I had resorted to a manipulation of form in the writing of *Two Moons*, and that it indicates a lack of 'real' language in the novel. But the novel is in two places at once, or rather represents two times of one place in simultaneous display. It is two times one place, if put mathematically. It is not desperate, quite the opposite – it implements a defensive method used offensively, crushing the truth in a pincer movement. Rather than being polar it is a planet sent into hyper-accelerated orbit, confused by a powerful magnet. The poles quickly alternate with each other. This is the point. This is a way in which a writer might destabilize his ability to write 'well' about something, to write with the objective of rendering something. The subject can never be rendered, as it moves, as some people are fond of saying, towards abstraction. The subject of *Two Moons*, my week in proximity to its tragedies, is too close and tragic to be the subject of an irrational act of mourning. This is why the monoscript journal had to be destroyed.

In respect to my earlier declaration that these words (those of the present account) are not fiction, and are a qualified sort of fact, I realize that for all my talk of doubling I am perhaps effecting a sort of tripling. The power of three is not a multiple I had anticipated encountering, although it makes perfect sense in one way. The word, its double, and the commentary thereon. This is in the very nature of thought, but it is not without its difficulties. The criterion of 'worthwhile' inclusion is quite irrelevant to my account as the words offer no depiction (a better word than 'rendering', I now concede). To depict and depick. To predict and deprick.

The Surface of the Threshold

The following words are drawn from notes I once made in response to a text written by a young gallerist of my acquaintance, and which were themselves written in response to an exhibition that was about to be taken down. I forget the precise context of both responses, although I seem to remember there being a photograph taken of a print of itself at its last place of exhibition. I believe that this process was perpetual, and that the photograph of which I speak was not the first stage of its iteration.

'1. The Surface of Things.

The empty theatre, the emptying theatre, the emptying of the theatre, the theatre desolate. *Locus Desolatus*.

The threshold between the stage and the seats, between the players and the played (the play).

The threshold between the stage and the text, the text and the reader; the *reader* of the play is the player, who plays to the played, who read the players, who before *playing* the play have ceased to read in place of playing.

Interface and surface; *subface*. The lesser face.'

This first section of notes end there. To the best of my recollection the gallerist's text had been on the subject of the threshold, and that it had led me to remember the story *Scene* written by Alain as a young man. I shall speak more of him, his compatriots, and the strange events of the evening of his film's London premiere later on. The notes continue:

'2. 'The centre is the threshold'

The centre is the threshold so it is being crossed/passed through all the time. But a threshold is both a mark (a kind of line) and a zone. (the zone is the width of the mark). The time spent crossing the line is the time spent *in* the threshold, and *at* the threshold.'

I think that the gallerist was referring to the words of Edmond, the Egyptian Jew, and that I attempted to pursue the aphorism further. I'm not sure how far I really got. Edmond does not play too prominent a role in this narrative, although I remain one his greatest admirers.

The notes end with the following:

'Are the gallery walls precisely this sort of threshold-zone, the six sides of the cube three sets of parentheses boxing everything within them?'

There is a missing comma, quite obviously. They were only notes after all, although I concede that I once hoped that they may have formed a genuine work of some kind or another. It would be very easy to simply declare them to be a work, and to include them in the *catalogue raisonnée* of all my writings, a catalogue that surely will never be read. A *reasoned* catalogue, of that for which there is little reason other than my own obstinence. The later works of Marcel, those manufactured (which is not quite the right word, although I hesitate to refer to them as having been 'made', or the vile 'created', or

'constructed'. 'proposed', perhaps, or 'assembled') in secret. Of these secret works the one that became most known was an exception to the threshold-zone I attempt to refer to in the notes, the display-room; the six sides of the cube; the three sets of parentheses. That work, the *Given*, the *Etant Donnée*, was an anti-space, an anti-threshold – it was nothing less than a cave, the most desolate place of all. A cave, the reader will not require a pardon for reading, is in Marcel's given case a cunt. 'Given case a cunt'. *Given Case a Cunt. Valise en conne.*

Another one of these secret works, one that did not become public, went further in this process of sucking space into tableaux. I will inevitably reveal this work when I have no choice but to do so, when it is required to describe something else, or when something else must be described by it. What kind of space, you may wonder, goes further back, further in, and is deeper or more desolate than a cave?

The 'Tongue Age'

Our 'culture', so called, is an offensive thing, offensive in its vulgarity, offensive in its insensitivity, and offensive in its disregard for those who state this with equanimity. It is also a temporary state, but a state that we are left stranded somewhere within. Stranded as if by annexation, and awaiting repatriation by a state that would rather have nothing more to do with us. There was a time before language, and there will surely be time after it. It remains to be seen whether language will be cut off abruptly (by the extermination of all speaking peoples), or whether speech will falter and die, with the roadside upon which it has died continuing to be for a time as its traveller's corpses first rot, and then vanish. I will not see that day, and it is unlikely that a reader will either. If there is a reader capable of reading the end of language and seeing it as such, then he is of an intellect far greater than can be imagined. As would be the listener who could hear the end of music.

I note in myself a perspiring fury when I consider that my words are of the plainest and clearest expression, but that they may be read as obscure, even deliberately so. They are not obscure in the least. I am writing something very close to the truth, very close indeed. After attempting such a thing for nearly all but the last fraction of a lifetime, and failing, even delighting in the results of failure, I can now write *nothing* but this that is nearly true.

I Object

I may, in the course of this account, become petrified and arrest even the bare narrative of the thing. I may find myself incapable, unwilling, or unamused (I will never be amused) in my attempt to depict, describe and declare, and will instead write myself, or simply 'write' as the practice should properly be understood. This is one such occasion. I feel far from the centripetal locus at present. I occupy the same physical place (a desk, before a window, with the smoke of a fire beyond it) but I grip my tools feebly. At my age one recognizes this state acutely. As a younger man I might have been at just such a distance from the declared object of study without knowing of the impediment, and might have written through it, perhaps succeeding in the attempt to write due to the impediment. An effort of blind desperation made possible by an ignorance of my limits. Such potency, of course, is no longer possible. Instead my words tend the grass on their grave. There is, however, a certain defiant satisfaction in this, as older readers will recognize – the earning of the right to be unapologetically course. I meant to write 'coarse', or course, and I have declined to conceal the error by means of demonstration. This reminds me of a pun made by Vincent, the *stéphanois* artist, on the English translation of 'race horse': '*cheval de course*, a horse of course!'. He made the pun to amuse his half-English daughters, I think.

The courses of a lute.

The causes of a loot.

The cause is awful lewd.

I Allude

to such matters in nominal digression, but they are nothing of the sort. I am scarcely in a position to waste my words, or reject any of what I write. It will all remain, like standing stones (a causeway) and the grass that grows around them, the moss that grows upon them, after many thousands of years.

I once knew a manufacturer of glass who would spend the summer walking the ridgeways of Wiltshire, amongst the standing stones and burial grounds. Crushed glass, crushed sands, fired dust, burnt into transparency. Panes from the kiln.