

'Towards a New Literary Idiom. The Fiction and Criticism of Maurice Blanchot from 1941 to 1955'. By M.B.Holland, St John's. Thesis submitted for the Degree of D.Phil. in the University of Oxford, Trinity Term 1981.

This thesis has its starting-point in a recognition that, so far, Maurice Blanchot's work has been considered as posing its critic an impossible problem. In recognising this, however, it does not seek merely to provide advance justification for its own shortcomings. On the contrary, it sets out to demonstrate that the impossibility of accounting for Blanchot's work arises not simply because he is a 'difficult' author, but because his sole ambition has been to call into question the entire categoric framework of possibility in terms of which we seek to approach him.

The task it seeks to fulfil is thus to locate the gradually occurring break with traditional categories which is at the heart of Blanchot's work. On the basis of close attention to the variants between his finished works and the original texts which constitute them, it seeks to transform his work from the forbidding, self-sufficient universe it is generally taken to be, and, by replacing Blanchot in his period, to show how he brings about a gradually evolving transmutation of the forms and structures within which literature is traditionally contained.

The period it examines lies between the appearance of Thomas l'obscur in 1941 and that of L'Espace littéraire in 1955. More precisely, by detailed study of L'Arrêt de mort and of the development of his criticism from La Part du feu to L'Espace littéraire, it seeks to reveal how, in the domain of fiction and in that of criticism, Blanchot sets about subverting the very structure of language, preparing the way for the new literary idiom which is his today, and in which fiction and theory coexist in a single philosophical discourse of great originality.

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It has become commonplace to claim that writing about Maurice Blanchot poses the critic an impossible problem. As a result, not only has no adequate study of his work so far ever been attempted: there has also arisen a rather dubious consensus, fostered by friends and enemies alike, according to which what is most original in his thinking need not, and even ought not to be approached in a systematic fashion. Consequently, one of the most profound thinkers of the twentieth century, whose activity in the fields of politics, criticism and literature over the last fifty years has influenced each field and related it to the others in an equally original fashion, remains a perfect enigma for his times. It is undeniable that Blanchot himself must share the responsibility for this state of affairs. He has always steadfastly refused to become a public figure, and what is more, has never made the slightest effort to defend himself or his writing even against the most outrageous misrepresentations. He avowedly believes in the autonomy of the reader, even the 'bad' reader, of his works, and seems content to allow the undoubted influence which his thought has exerted in both the domain of fiction and that of philosophy, to be discernible solely in the work of those who, with varying respect, have responded to it.

In taking Blanchot as the subject of my research, I therefore found myself confronted with the task of having not only to analyse and interpret a copious and wide-ranging body of writing, but also, as a preliminary to that, of having as it were to establish the identity of the author I was seeking to examine. For in a manner unique in this period, Blanchot is known to his reader first and foremost in the guise attributed to him by those who so far have written about him. During his career, certain aspects of his thinking and his criticism have remained in the minds of his readers and come to form the profile by which he is identified.

Themes such as death, silence and nothingness; authors such as Kafka, Mallarmé and Lautréamont have paradoxically become the sole means of explaining an author who, in writing about them, was seeking in fact to extricate them from the simple domain of explanation altogether.

For the impossibility experienced by Blanchot's critic does not arise merely from the difficulty of what Blanchot has to say. It is primarily a response to something inherent in his very method, which annuls in advance every means by which his critic has traditionally sought to approach him. So far, this fact has not been recognised. As a consequence, by a process of what amounts to fascination, even the most clear-sighted and methodical approaches to Blanchot's work have been inexorably drawn to conclusions laid down by an unshakable yet erroneous assumption as to the nature and the identity of what they are talking about. In a manner whose significance as a cultural phenomenon ought seriously to be examined, French thinkers since 1945 have thrown a veritable sanitary cordon around Blanchot's work, simultaneously recognising its fundamental significance for the times yet only granting it any status in so far as it is seen as emanating from an author who is resolutely cut off from his times. So intense has his influence been that no established thinker has ever sought to contest it. On the other hand, its intensity has been mediated, rather in the manner of divine influence, by being surrounded by ritual and taboo. Consequently, Blanchot has come to constitute a blind-spot in the field of contemporary reflexion upon literature: deemed impossible because in his thought the entire categoric basis of the possible is called into question, he is the point where what is most original in theoretical analysis today comes unwittingly face to face with its own source.

In recognising this problem, I came to realise that it would be impossible to provide an adequate approach to Blanchot's work simply by explaining, interpreting or disputing what he had written. Nor was it possible to undertake an examination of one facet of his writing in terms of the other. In either case, I should have remained caught within a sys-

tem of reference which I had already recognised as unreliable. With the best will in the world, I should still have succumbed ultimately to one or other of the temptations to which everything so far written about Blanchot has seemed fatally drawn: either that of reducing his thought to terms which are alien to it, or, even worse, that of indulging in parody of his method in order to account for it. By having been both recognised as inaccessible to analysis and made the subject of analysis, Blanchot has so far induced, in the critical tradition which has sought to assimilate him, a form of analytical neurosis. To continue along the lines so far laid down by criticism in its approach to his work would thus merely have aggravated that condition, and, in keeping with the pattern it generally displays, rendered its cause even less accessible to analysis.

In the light of this, I resolved to base the research which has resulted in this thesis upon a positive alternative to simple theoretical analysis. Having recognised that the challenge presented by Blanchot's thought lay not in its content but in its form, I set about locating where precisely it breaks with the formal tradition within which it simultaneously evolves. The primary level of my approach consisted of examining all of Blanchot's writing, from the 1930s onwards, including the political writing whose existence, until recently, was not even acknowledged by his critics. In short, I sought to replace Blanchot in his period, and to consider his ideas and their complexity not primarily as a challenge to my own ability to confront them, but as a response to ideas of the time in which they were written. The second stage in this approach consisted of examining the finished works of criticism and fiction alongside the original versions of the texts which make them up, and noting down every variant to the finished works which this revealed. On the basis of this, I was then able to trace the pattern of the transformation which Blanchot has carried out in relation to literature, and transform his work from the forbidding, self-sufficient universe it is generally taken to be, into a gradually evolving transmutation of the forms and struct-

ures within which he sought to accommodate it.

I therefore begin my thesis by locating the origin of his career as a thinker in the political impasse in which he found himself in the later 1930s, as the rigorous logic with which he had consistently attacked the entire parliamentary system of France, began to turn, under pressure of events, against its own most cherished ideal: France itself. From here, I go on to trace the first stages of his activity as a novelist and as a critic, and reveal how, in each field, what he was attempting was so radical from the very outset, that it came increasingly to consist in a search for an adequate standpoint from which to pursue it. On the one hand, his entire ambition as a critic consisted in affirming the existence, within the work he was examining, of an ideal work, 'un livre supérieur', towards which it could be felt to be striving inadequately. On the other, from the very first lines of his first novel, he set about rendering existing forms of fiction unsuitable once and for all as a vehicle for the vision to which traditionally they seek to correspond.

Having identified these two standpoints, I then go on to claim that the writing which we associate today with the name of Blanchot, and which consists of fragments of fiction and fragments of theoretical writing with no clear links between them, is a new literary idiom which has evolved from the two separate standpoints which emerged as a result of Blanchot's initial encounter with literature. My claim is that the radical break brought about in the domains of fiction and criticism was so fundamental that it called into question even the traditional distinction between the two domains within which it occurred, and that his sole ambition, since that time, has been to evolve a single mode of discourse within which the excessive, exorbitant reality which neither literature, nor the theory of literature, could contain, might at last find expression.

As a contribution to understanding that evolution, and thus to appreciating the true nature of the idiom which is Blanchot's today, I take as the main focus of my argument

the period up to 1955, when L'Espace littéraire was published. The first part of the thesis is devoted to fiction, while the second part concerns criticism. In each, my purpose is to demonstrate, by close analysis, how Blanchot brings about irrevocable change in the field in which he is active. In the case of fiction, this consists of a detailed study of L'Arrêt de mort. In it, I seek to demonstrate how this apparently simple story is in fact a trap, set by its author not only for the reader, but primarily for the apparent first person subject who is narrating it. Simultaneously an allegory of events in the past and of the very process whereby they are narrated, the first part of L'Arrêt de mort places such a strain upon the single unified standpoint from which it is narrated that, ultimately, that standpoint becomes the seat of a dislocation during which, as he narrates, the Je of fiction is revealed as no longer in existence. On the basis of this dislocation, the second part of L'Arrêt de mort, followed by Au moment voulu and Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas gradually directs fiction beyond the sphere to which it is traditionally confined and opens it onto the sphere of reason itself.

The transformation thus effected in the domain of fiction can adequately be traced in a single work. In the case of Blanchot's criticism, however, I felt it necessary, in order to arrive at the same stage of analysis, to trace the transformations which occur from 1945 to 1955. I therefore begin with a close study of the method present in La Part du feu, showing how it is based unwaveringly upon an affirmation of the irreducibility of literature to non-literary terms. I first examine this affirmation in its confrontation with Sartre's call for commitment, and attempt to demonstrate how, in opposing Sartre, Blanchot seeks to evolve an alternative theory of commitment based upon respect for the true nature of literature. Though this is a failure, it does display a coherence which, on the other levels of analysis present in La Part du feu, is lacking. In the rest of my study, I attempt to show how the need constantly to affirm the irreducibility of literature to non-literary terms gradually drives Blanchot's argument into an impasse, as his

logic progressively undermines the very terms in which it seeks to express itself. At the end of the work, I claim, Blanchot's reasoning is reduced to an alternation between paradox and rhetoric as, in seeking to approach the true nature of its subject, it intermittently turns its inability to do so into a form of mimesis of what it cannot signify.

The next stage in my study consists of showing how, in the years following La Part du feu, Blanchot both drives his reasoning further into this impasse and ultimately discovers a way of emerging from it. In the 1950s, there occurs a turning-point in his criticism, analogous to that perceptible in his fiction several years earlier, and indeed rendered possible by the transformations begun in L'Arrêt de mort. It comes about as Blanchot realises that, in order to extricate theoretical analysis from the impasse into which its encounter with the irreducibility of literature has driven it, he must concentrate his attention not on the concepts it employs, but on the subject of theoretical discourse. There thus occurs, in the domain of criticism, the same dislocation of the standpoint from which it is conducted as that which occurs in fiction. In short, the aim of both Blanchot's criticism and his fiction gradually becomes the same: to transform the very structure of language in its relation to literature.

L'Espace littéraire is the first concerted attempt at carrying out this single task. By bringing together texts written in the previous years, it does not merely raise them onto a higher, more coherent level: it seeks to deploy an encompassing instance of the reality they are incapable of defining, and turn that incapacity into a reality affecting the very structure of the discourse employed by the texts it contains. It is thus not about literary space. It claims no less than to be literary space: a work whose ambition is to oblige analytical discourse to coexist with the reality it cannot approach, and thus to displace the standpoint from which it is conducted.

What occurs in L'Espace littéraire is merely a beginning. It serves above all to indicate the direction which has led Blanchot's thinking to where it is today. By analysing it,

and also L'Arrêt de mort, I hope that I shall have made possible further explorations of the true significance of Maurice Blanchot's thought.

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(Franciscae meae laudes)

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N.B. All quotations from L'Espace littéraire refer to the edition in the Gallimard collection 'Idées'.

INTRODUCTION

Maurice Blanchot poses his critic an almost impossible problem, which Jean Starobinski has summed up thus:

s'il existe assez peu d'études sur Maurice Blanchot ..., c'est parce que cette oeuvre, se dépassant constamment elle-même, nous laisse en-deça du point toujours plus éloigné où elle s'avance et n'offre aucune prise à une réflexion qui voudrait la prendre tout entière sous son regard et la considérer tranquillement du dehors¹.

There is simply no fixed point in his work which the critic may take as a starting-point for his own study. In the domain of fiction as in that of criticism, Blanchot adopted such an original position from the outset, that his entire output can be seen as having broken in advance with all of the norms and traditions by which we seek to assess it. It is not even possible to approach one aspect of his writing in terms of the other. His fiction and his criticism evolved on two completely independent planes. Each was a response to the same problem, yet this is precisely why each can only be read on its own terms. We have Blanchot's word that practice came before theory². However this simply serves to make the obvious less easy to ignore: Blanchot's relationship to literature is equivalent to a transformation of what literature is generally taken to be. It cannot be understood by existing standards because its sole significance lies in its break with such standards. It is thus essentially a critical one, provoking a crisis within the established sphere of literary theory and practice. Therefore, unless his critic enters into the spirit of what Blanchot is seeking to do, his task, as Starobinski points out, will be a futile one. He goes on in the same study to remark that 'l'échec d'une explication ... en dit long sur ce qu'une oeuvre a d'irréductible et d'exceptionnel'³. For too long,

however, this knowledge has served as an alibi allowing critics to evade the true problem posed by Blanchot's work. Its nature is undoubtedly to be irreducible to terms other than those in which it is couched. However, this irreducibility is not equivalent to splendid isolation. On the contrary, it is an active, positive process, which has its history, has had its setbacks and which, today, has attained the status of an original mode of discourse: a new literary idiom.

The task of Blanchot's critic, although not an easy one, would nevertheless now seem clear. His most recent work ⁴ is made up of sections of fiction and sections of theoretical argument. There is no alternation, nor any complementary illustrative link between these two levels of writing however. Rather, their coexistence within a single work constitutes the new idiom I have referred to, for the fictional passages deploy the space within which the argument of the theoretical passages can alone be of significance. Together, they provide that discontinuous analytical medium, what Blanchot terms la parole de fragment⁵, outside of which the problem of literature -- the problem it confronts and the problem it poses for reason -- remains utterly inaccessible. This new idiom cannot be understood, however, unless it is read from the same standpoint as that from which it speaks. Any attempt at approaching it by established canons, for example as 'a hybrid work ... by which M. Blanchot places himself squarely if obscurely in the tradition of the moraliste'⁶, may well be legitimate: it is nevertheless condemned to misread what Blanchot is saying. This is because the standpoint which governs Blanchot's fragmentary writing evolved gradually from the two unrelated standpoints which, as a novelist and as a critic, he occupied from the mid-1930s onwards. What we therefore encounter today is an idiom with its roots in a half-century of creation and reflection. As a consequence, we shall only truly comprehend what Blanchot is saying now if we go back and examine how he came to be saying it in the first place.

This is a vast task. It is all the more daunting for having scarcely even been begun, so that, at every turn, the

critic who sets himself the task finds that there is so much simply to be pointed out, so much to be revealed before he can even begin to interpret the significance of Blanchot's work. He finds himself in the strange position of having both to establish the true nature of his text and to analyse its significance: both the form and the content of his subject have as yet truly to be recognised for what they are. In the meanwhile, virtually everything that is said about it consequently remains inadequate. As a contribution to the task of identifying the standpoint from which Blanchot now reasons, I intend to examine the transformations which occurred in the separate domains of fiction and of literary criticism in his earlier writing. This will not be exhaustive. In the case of his fiction, in particular, it will consist solely of tracing how one work, L'Arrêt de mort, brings about an irrevocable transformation of narrative discourse. Nevertheless, I shall hope to indicate, by detailed analysis of this work and of two works of criticism, La Part du feu and L'Espace littéraire, the gradual emergence of a single literary standpoint, from which what was complex in each separate domain of writing can be confronted, in its complexity, from within a new and original mode of writing: most recently named 'l'écriture du désastre'. Before doing so, I shall look briefly at each of the domains from which this new idiom will eventually arise.

There can be no doubt that the problem posed by Maurice Blanchot's fiction is essentially a problem of readership. His criticism may be hard to fathom, but, given the nature of the discourse it is bound to employ, there is never any doubt as to how we should approach it initially. His fiction, on the contrary, is bound by no such convention. From the first few pages of his first novel, he plunges his reader into a bewildering labyrinth where, if he does not rapidly grasp what has happened to him, he will be condemned to wander endlessly. Starobinski, who until recently was the only critic ever to have examined Blanchot's fiction in detail⁷, recognises the importance of

that initial encounter:

à la lumière des livres ultérieurs, ... les premières lignes de Thomas l'obscur ne revêtent pas seulement une valeur inaugurale: elles ont un aspect emblématique, nous y reconnaissons le tracé anticipé de l'oeuvre en progrès, l'exposition à la fois littérale et figurée des thèmes que l'auteur ne cessera d'interroger⁸.

Indeed, Blanchot himself suggests the same thing in the opening pages of Le Pas au-delà when, in what is a rare biographical reference, he writes:

d'où vient cela, cette puissance d'arrachement, de destruction ou de changement, dans les premiers mots écrits face au ciel, dans la solitude du ciel, mots par eux-mêmes sans avenir et sans prétention: 'il -- la mer'?⁹.

In what he goes on to say, moreover, we gain an insight into what it is about this work which renders its opening lines so disorientating for the reader:

il est assurément satisfaisant (trop satisfaisant) de penser que, par le seul fait que quelque chose comme ces mots 'il -- la mer', avec l'exigence qui en résulte et d'où aussi ils résultent, s'écrit, s'inscrit quelque part la possibilité d'une transformation radicale, fût-ce pour un seul, c'est-à-dire de sa suppression comme existence personnelle. Possibilité: rien de plus¹⁰.

As the final words of this passage reveal, his later analysis of what he was originally attempting in Thomas l'obscur does not make it easier to understand that attempt. It does however focus attention upon the intention which is at the origin of the reader's problem. For, in writing Thomas l'obscur and all of the fiction which follows on from it, Blanchot was seeking one thing alone: the suppression of the individual conscious standpoint through fiction.

In other words, in narrating, Blanchot was attempting to adopt the point of view of someone who had ceased to be capable of vision, of someone who was in fact dead. In 1953, he began his study of Samuel Beckett with the words 'Qui parle dans les livres de Samuel Beckett?'¹¹, and we in turn must pay close attention to the narrative voice which emerges with increasing sureness as his own fiction progr-

esses. For his sole aim in writing fiction has been to rearrange the components of traditional narrative, until certain truths inherent in fiction but hitherto kept hidden beneath its surface, should at last be given voice. This rearrangement provides the entire substance of his novels and récits¹², so that to understand them is never primarily a matter of interpreting content, but of perceiving form. One or two indications will help to situate this project better.

The first is to be found in the first chapter of Thomas l'obscur, during which the protagonist, Thomas, is carried off by the sea and, instead of drowning, achieves a higher form of relationship with himself. The climax of this episode is recounted as follows:

il chercha à se glisser dans une région vague et pourtant infiniment précise, quelque chose comme un lieu sacré, à lui-même si bien approprié qu'il lui suffisait d'être là, pour être; c'était comme un creux imaginaire où il s'enfonçait parce qu'avant qu'il y fût, son empreinte y était déjà marquée. Il fit donc un dernier effort pour s'engager totalement. Cela fut facile, il ne rencontrait aucun obstacle, il se rejoignait, il se confondait avec soi en s'installant dans ce lieu où nul autre ne pouvait pénétrer (p. 12)¹³.

This episode is an unmistakable version of one to be found in André Malraux's La Condition humaine, when, after a visit from Tchen, during which the latter tells him he has just killed a man, Gisors turns to opium in order to escape the terrible solitude he feels:

de même que Kyo n'avait pas reconnu sa propre voix parce qu'il l'avait entendue avec la gorge, de même la conscience que lui, Gisors, prenait de lui-même, était sans doute irréductible à celle qu'il pouvait prendre d'un autre être, parce qu'elle n'était pas acquise par les mêmes moyens. Elle ne devait rien aux sens. Il se sentait pénétrer, avec sa conscience intruse, dans un domaine qui lui appartenait plus que tout autre, posséder avec angoisse une solitude où nul ne le rejoindrait jamais. Une seconde, il eut la sensation que c'était cela qui devait échapper à la mort ... Ses mains, qui préparaient une nouvelle boulette, tremblaient légèrement. Cette solitude totale, même l'amour qu'il avait pour Kyo ne l'en délivrerait pas. Mais s'il ne savait pas se fuir dans un autre être, il savait se délivrer: il y av-

ait l'opium¹⁴.

Each of these episodes concerns the relationship between what is most individual about the character involved, and what threatens it most powerfully: death. Both for Gisors and for Thomas, this moment of self-coincidence is experienced as surviving beyond death. For Malraux's character, however, the anxiety it continues to inspire in him is simply conjured artificially away. In Thomas's case, on the contrary, it is made into the mainspring of his experience. Gisors is not dead, and he uses death -- the thought of death then a surrogate form of death -- as a means of coming to terms with the solitude he feels in life. Thomas is dead, however, and what he discovers is that, in death, that 'solitude où nul ne le rejoindrait jamais', instead of being a final resting place for consciousness, reveals itself as a perpetual search for oneself. For whereas Gisor's reflections lead, in the story, to the oblivion of opium, Thomas's itinerary leads him back to what appears to be his starting-point: 'Finalement il dut revenir' (p. 12). This return to land and thus to life does not leave him the same as when he set out however. He can no longer see properly, and what is more, the little he can see would seem to consist of his own movements prior to his return to land:

à force d'épier, il découvrit un homme qui nageait très loin, à demi perdu sous l'horizon. A une pareille distance, le nageur lui échappait sans cesse. Il le voyait, ne le voyait plus et pourtant avait le sentiment de suivre toutes ses évolutions: non seulement de le percevoir toujours très bien, mais d'être rapproché de lui d'une manière tout à fait intime et comme il n'aurait pu l'être davantage par aucun autre contact (p. 13).

It is clear from his explicit quotation of an episode in Malraux's novel that Blanchot is seeking, in his novel, to adopt a different standpoint in relation to solitude and death. In short, to go beyond the point at which not only Malraux, but the entire novel-tradition within which he is writing, stops short. He is going to make his hero reveal that anguished adherence to the notion of self in the face of death is an error, and thus provide a more complex image

of 'la condition humaine'. He would appear to be doing so by making his hero into a fantastic rather than a realistic figure. This does not mean, however, that he is simply seeking to extend the domain of fiction as it is used by Malraux. As is made clear from the way the first chapter of Thomas l'obscur concludes, his novel is going to differ from Malraux's not only in content but in form:

il resta longtemps à regarder et à attendre.
Il y avait dans cette contemplation quelque chose de douloureux qui était comme la manifestation d'une liberté trop grande, d'une liberté obtenue par la rupture de tous les liens. Son visage se troubla et prit une expression inusitée (p. 13).

What was apparent on his return to land has now been made almost explicit: although he sets out as a traditional character of fiction, by the time he has returned to his point of departure he has ceased to be one. A character of fiction is inevitably made the focus of a point of view upon what is going on in a novel. As the quotation of an episode from La Condition humaine makes clear, the point of view which has been entrusted to Thomas is one which lies outside of the bounds of the traditional novel. The consequence of so entrusting him with it is therefore quite simply to destroy Thomas as a character of fiction. He has been asked, as an individual, to bear the burden of the encounter between the mind and the revelation that death signifies the mind's destruction. When Malraux places this burden upon Gisors, who of all the characters in the novel is the most lucid, he allows him the recourse of opium at the point where the thought of death becomes intolerable. Thomas, on the contrary, is expected to explore the full extent of this destruction while continuing to provide a point of view upon it. In short, Malraux's character provides a mirror of his author's mind: Blanchot's is asked to take over from it. At the end of the first chapter of the novel, Thomas is both watcher and watched. He has been endowed, as an individual, with a point of view which exceeds the possibilities of the individual mind. The experience which drove Malraux to fiction and Gisors to opium has been placed entirely on Thomas's shoulders: he is both a mind assailed by death and

a point of view upon that situation. Compared to the reader of Malraux's novel, therefore, the reader who adopts Thomas's point of view obtains a far more complex insight into the dilemma which is that of Gisors and his author, for Thomas is the seat of the dividing-line which, for Malraux, lies between him and his novel, and for Gisors, lies between him and opium. At the same time, however, Thomas, as a character, is condemned. The contemplation of which his point of view consists at the end of the first chapter is, it is said, 'comme la manifestation d'une liberté trop grande'. In other words, it exceeds his ability to accommodate it. It is 'une liberté obtenue par la rupture de tous le liens', that is, of every logical link between a third-person character and the self who seeks to relate to it either as writer or reader. Thus, the final sentence must be read quite literally: he can no longer have a face because he is no longer even a person. The following chapters will gradually see him emptied of substance until, by chapter V of the first version of the novel, he is reduced to 'un homme sous la forme de Il' (p. 26): a mere figure of speech, as is clear from the last words of chapter I: 'son visage ... prit une expression inusitée'.

A further aid to situating the change which occurs in this opening chapter is to be found in the work which, rather surprisingly, provides the title for Blanchot's novel: Jean Cocteau's Thomas l'imposteur. The way this novel ends is clearly the starting-point for Thomas l'obscur:

Guillaume volait, bondissait, dévalait comme un lièvre.

N'entendant pas de fusillade, il s'arrêta, se retourna, hors d'haleine.

Alors, il sentit un atroce coup de bâton sur la poitrine. Il tomba. Il devenait sourd, aveugle.

Une balle, se dit-il. Je suis perdu si je ne fais pas semblant d'être mort.

Mais en lui, la fiction et la réalité ne formaient qu'un.

Guillaume Thomas était mort¹⁵.

Of Blanchot's Thomas the same thing can be said as Guillaume Thomas says of himself: unable simply to pretend to be dead, because obliged simultaneously to remain conscious of the

fact, Thomas is indeed perdu. In him, fiction and reality are one: he is simultaneously a representation of unbearable experience and the seat of that experience itself. In Cocteau's novel, however, this state of affairs is presented, from a realistic standpoint, as something anomalous and even blameworthy. In Blanchot's, although at the very end we read that, for Thomas, it is 'comme si la honte eût commencé pour lui' (p. 137), before it reaches its end, unlike Cocteau's, that coincidence has been explored from every angle.

Thomas l'obscur is thus a novel whose protagonist is destroyed at the outset, and rendered incapable of supporting the vision with which he is endowed. Its entire progress thus consists of an attempt at creating a fictional standpoint from which that vision may be exercised, and the repeated demonstration that such a standpoint is impossible. This occurs originally in four stages. The first is that during which Thomas himself gradually exhausts the possibilities whereby he might remain both the subject and the object of the exorbitant vision which is his. This lasts from chapter I to chapter IV. The next consists of the emergence of Anne who, in her turn, attempts to adopt the point of view on Thomas which the latter, as Thomas, could not maintain. In the first version of the novel, her emergence occurs gradually in the course of an elaborate allegorical transition from one form of fiction to another beginning, as we have already seen: 'Au village, un homme habitait sous la forme de Il' (p. 26). In this section of the novel, its original standpoint is made the subject of fiction, so that the point of view governing the novel may be transferred from one protagonist to another. What is more, this new narrative standpoint is quite clearly presented as an alternative to that of fiction, for, in the allegory, the standpoint of the novelist is also present, in the form of the landlord who receives 'l'homme sous la forme de Il' and whose dark and solemn coat, 'qu'il boutonna jusqu'en haut du col', recalls the mode of dress adopted, after Ibsen, by the Symbolists. This section of allegory allows the two irreconcilable standpoints

originally centred in Thomas to be separated. Hence, the landlord's behaviour towards Thomas closely parallels the latter's behaviour in the opening part of the novel:

l'hôtelier ... alla ouvrir l'une des fenêtres et se pencha par la croisée un long moment. Le soleil brillait sur toute la campagne, et la route qui fuyait à travers la verdure était éclairée par une vapeur fumante d'où émergeaient dans une activité joyeuse des files de voyageurs ... L'hôtelier aurait aimé contempler longtemps ce spectacle, mais il fallait s'occuper de l'étranger. Il se retourna donc et, comme il pouvait s'y attendre, les yeux éblouis par le soleil, il le regarda maladroitement, avec des coups d'oeil effarouchés, cherchant à se faire une idée de sa personne qu'il ne réussissait à distinguer que durant de brefs instants (p. 27).

This passage is a condensed version of what occurs in the first chapter of the novel. The landlord first looks out of the window at streams of travellers, then turns back. This corresponds to Thomas's contemplation of the swimmers, his ordeal, and his return to land. In each case, the result is dazzlement. The landlord does not go through Thomas's ordeal however. Thomas was another swimmer: simultaneously watcher and watched. The landlord watches what are his natural counterparts: travellers. Thomas has by now become a traveller without a name, and the impossible vision he originally embodied has become that of the landlord. The stage is therefore set for a change of direction in the novel.

This occurs when the landlord dispenses a serving-girl to accompany the stranger to his room, and, removing his coat, absently searches for something which, however, ceases to interest him as soon as he begins to stare at the sun again. His rôle is over. He has a vague feeling that, soon, he will have to do something unpleasant. However, this premonition of the fate which has already been Thomas's is beyond his functional capacities. One task only remains for him: it is to orient the action of the story in its new direction. We have already seen that, in looking out of the window then turning back, he reproduces Thomas's actions in chapter I. The il se retourna of that episode parallels, in order to break with it, the cycle of Thomas's ordeal.

Once Thomas has gone, he turns round a second time:

il se retourna brusquement, en faisant presque un bond. Il se trouva en face d'une jeune fille qu'il contempla avec une satisfaction réfléchie et reconnaissante et qu'il aurait voulu, semblait-il, approcher par un mouvement plus vif encore. C'était une jeune fille habitant l'auberge, du nom d'Anne (p. 28).

This time, the novel has been placed upon an entirely new plane. The landlord's dazzled gaze gives rise to a contemplation in which he seeks almost to disappear, and the original standpoint of the novel, which has been revealed now as one corresponding to the eclipse of the individual who occupied it, has now been invested in a figure who is an archetypal cause of such eclipse: the ideal woman.

The next stage of the novel therefore consists of the gradual encounter between Anne and Thomas: between consciousness and the experience of its eclipse. Henceforth, what in Thomas was uncontainable -- the experience and a point of view upon it -- has now been rearranged so that the experience itself (Anne) has been made the point of view upon the original point of view (Thomas) now lost. She is henceforth the personification of the absence of himself which Thomas was unable to contemplate, as can be seen from the end of chapter IV of the first version, when, in a manner which recalls the appearance of Ysé in Claudel's Partage de midi, her encounter with Thomas is that between an object and its shadow (p. 38). The simple alternative she constitutes in the original narrative dilemma condemns her ultimately however. This is intentional. Thomas's experience consisted of ceasing to be himself, of becoming inseparable from the world, yet of having to retain his individual perspective upon that event. Consciousness, in him, sought to be consciousness of its own eclipse. By bringing in Anne, the novel shifts the centre of consciousness into the cause of the eclipse of Thomas's: Anne personifies the world as the ideal woman in relation to Thomas. What for Thomas was impossible, namely to maintain consciousness during the course of its eclipse, has been rendered possible for the novel. Its task is now to bring Thomas and Anne together, so that what could not be made to coexist in one

character, may coexist in the sphere of their communion as lovers.

This is impossible and tragically so. Instead of bringing her point of view and Thomas's gradually to coincide, Anne gradually succumbs to the same fate as Thomas did: she is no more capable than he is of sustaining the vision which is at the heart of the novel. Thomas may have had to reconcile two incompatible standpoints: his own and that of the world from which he was absent. However, this did not mean that the dilemma he embodied could be separated onto two fictional levels. In the complex situation which arises at the end of chapter I, there are not two but three elements present: Thomas, the world, and the need to reconcile them. That is the true extent of the vision which Thomas is unable to contain. His reduction to a figure of speech is not merely his demotion as a character of fiction. It is the emergence within fiction of the very need which gives rise to it in the first place, and which fiction, by its inexhaustible nature, disguises as solution when in fact it is the problem itself: namely language. Language is a mode of communication. It is also, however, what renders the existence of such a mode necessary. Language is what divides me from myself and provides the means whereby I may seek to recover my identity. Transposed to fiction, this means that the character of fiction in whom I seek a solution to the complexities of my existence, simultaneously exacerbates them as his existence gains substance. Thomas l'obscur and all of the fiction which follows on from it is an attempt at isolating that agent of disunion at work within the unifying processes of fiction, and in Thomas l'obscur, this entails the systematic destruction of the successive stages in the novel's attempt at so isolating it.

Anne therefore emerges into the sphere of the novel in order to be sacrificed. The perfect woman, she reveals the better, as she is destroyed, the impotence of image to succeed in communicating what simple narrative cannot. This is why, despite appearances, she cannot simply be seen as a poor imitation of Giraudoux's heroines. For Claude-Edmonde

Magny, Anne is merely the product of a 'préciosité' which has not had the courage of its convictions, 'une préciosité figée' which she terms 'le conchetto'. Hence, citing the pages in which Anne is presented, prior to her encounter with Thomas, as 'la seule femme qui ne fût pas coquette' yet who 'ne cessait d'être attentive à son image' (p. 32, first version), she claims:

il y a conchetto plus que préciosité, parce que l'antithèse, d'essentielle est devenue accidentelle: c'est par hasard que le geste qui trompe les autres se trouve en même temps éclairer Anne sur elle-même¹⁶.

Indeed, later in her argument she begins to object to what preciosity there is in Anne at all:

Anne, chez Maurice Blanchot, nous serait sans doute plus réelle si ce n'était pas perpétuellement pour la première fois qu'elle sourit, qu'elle se farde, ou si, lorsque la bouche de Thomas se pose sur ses lèvres, ce n'était pas elle-même qu'elle se trouvait embrasser¹⁷.

Yet everything which she objects to, from each of the angles she adopts, corresponds precisely to Anne's sole function in the novel: to present the essential as accidental, to be ideal rather than real so that the contradictory nature of what is ideal may become apparent. Blanchot repeatedly cites Giraudoux, in the 1940s, as an author in whom use of image and metaphor is at its most consummate¹⁸. In a way which is typical of him, however, he simultaneously takes Giraudoux's method to its logical conclusion, and, performing in his way the same task as Sartre¹⁹, reveals the flaw in the ideal standpoint as applied to literature.

Anne therefore perishes in the attempt at approaching Thomas. In the original version, however, she makes a desperate attempt at turning her failure into ultimate success. Hence, at the beginning of chapter XI, in what is clearly a parallel with the previous turning-point in the novel, she arrives at a town shortly before Thomas does. Like him after his experiences, she is a traveller. Unlike him, however, she is vaguely aware of a task which she must perform. Gradually, as her quest for contact with him becomes more and more obviously a failure, we read:

nulle expérience ne l'instruisait. Elle voy-

ait bien qu'elle échouait, et de cet échec elle ne tirait aucune conclusion, sinon celle-ci, incompréhensible et inébranlable, qu'elle aurait un jour raison de cet échec. Avec de telles pensées il était inévitable qu'elle commît des fautes. La nuit étant interminable, et la fatigue l'accablant, elle finit par ne plus sentir le lien qui l'unissait à lui, et elle agita dans sa tête des rêveries extravagantes, comme la pensée qu'elle n'était pas faite pour Thomas et que pour secouer celui-ci de son indifférence d'autres femmes seraient plus désignées qu'elle (p. 114).

Anne is yielding here, like the landlord before her, to the only half-conscious knowledge that her rôle must now be to bring about a fundamental change in the novel's direction, what is referred to as 'une rupture dont elle n'avait pas plus idée qu'elle ne savait quelque chose de sa prétendue union avec Thomas' (ibid.). Hence, just as the landlord, having been dazzled by the sun, turns to Anne as if he wished to become one with her, so Anne, overcome in her turn, but by the antithesis of the sun: darkness and icy cold, approaches 'la jeune femme qu'elle avait soudain choisie' (ibid.). This is Irène, whose relationship to the novel as it has developed so far is made clear in the following words:

on eût dit, au moment où elle se releva ..., qu'elle était prête à subir sans blessure les pires offenses et qu'elle avait acheté d'un seul coup par sa complaisance au sultan sa liberté complète (p. 115).

She is meant, in other words, to take the novel once and for all beyond the interminable narration to which Anne, like Scheherezade, is condemned in her quest for Thomas. She is intended, as her name implies²⁰, to constitute the standpoint of transcendent calm from which, in the midst of that unending succession of images to which Anne has now been reduced, Thomas may at last be approached. Hence it is said of her: 'le rimmel, le fard, la poudre l'enfermaient dans une accalmie étincelante' (p. 118). She is, in the midst of all of the possible women who might have attracted Thomas (we learn of 'son amie Suzanne' (p. 118)), the reflection and the transcendent viewpoint to which they

give rise. She is the height of womanhood and the anti-thesis of what is human; simultaneously without feeling and sensitive to an extreme degree. This is what equips her for her task: 'c'est avec cette sensibilité, avec cette insensibilité, qu'elle alla à la rencontre de Thomas' (p. 119).

She would thus appear to correspond to that third standpoint which neither Thomas nor Anne could adopt. For Thomas, the attempt gave rise to Anne who corresponded to him in his absence. Anne, by becoming that absence in its consummate form, has given rise to Irène for whom she is the absence of an absence. Things seem thus to have come full circle. That this is not the case, that the emergence of Irène has oriented the novel in yet another direction, is made clear by reference to Irène's lover, Li. Li is obviously Il in reverse. He corresponds therefore to the Thomas who might have been expected to emerge at the close of a full circle. Irene is not to be his however:

elle avait rendez-vous à cinq heures avec Li,
-- c'était avec l'amour: Li était bien trompé (p. 118).

The standpoint of Irene thus seeks to transcend individual passion and become the seat of passion itself. It thus appears at last to have accommodated the unbearable vision which has given rise to the novel, to have concentrated in one figure experience of passion and consciousness of that experience, to have reconciled at last the absolute contradiction that language is both a means and an obstacle to communication. Her rendez-vous with Thomas, for which she is accompanied by her lover Gabriel, thus takes the form of a revolution which gradually approaches the centre of the town (pp. 119-120). It is a failure however:

l'émeute fut vaincue. Il manqua au dernier moment l'intervention suprême de la rhétorique qui achève les révolutions (p. 120).

The reference could not be clearer: the standpoint of Irène is ultimately an ideal one; it cannot be accommodated by the language of the novel. In short, she is not the true subject of the vision with which she has been entrusted. Some other agency is still present behind what is going on.

This is made clear in a description of her lovers' experience of her:

chacun ... se croyait seul lié à Irène, mais en même temps, pourvu qu'il brûlât d'un feu assez fort, il retrouvait, sur cette Irène toujours effacée qui semblait transcrite dans la vie avec une encre sympathique, un détail nouveau écrit par une main inconnue: à celui qui l'aimait Irène finissait par paraître, au milieu des flammes noires de la passion, dans un désordre de mots à demi brouillés et détruits, un palimpseste lourd de sens et vide de sens (p. 118).

The 'main inconnue' to which she is subject, the ambivalent presence discernible ~~as~~ a palimpsest behind her, are the true standpoint of the novel, so that, after the failure of her revolution, she is condemned gradually to suffer the same fate as awaits Anne. First she is reduced to the rôle which is truly hers. As order is gradually restored, she is brought gradually back to the fold:

voici que, les vêtements en désordre, les bas défaits, sans rouge à lèvres, elle s'assimilait l'ordre d'une vraie société, toujours mal tenue. Elle allait enfin aimer la lecture ... Le samedi soir elle irait au cinéma. Justement c'était samedi et voici qu'elle arrivait devant une salle de spectacle. Irène entra, demanda sa place et fut introduite, fidèle, pour la première fois, au rendez-vous que lui avait fixé le destin et, d'ailleurs, Anne le matin même. Elle s'assit dans l'obscurité auprès de Thomas (p. 121).

Henceforth, she will be a reader: she will cease therefore to presume to govern the narration of Thomas's story. She can therefore at last encounter him, in the manner which is naturally hers, before a stream of images (the cinema) before which she is on the same footing as Thomas.

The rest of her rôle in the story consists of her disappearance as the dominant viewpoint upon what occurs. It occupies a considerable portion of the original novel. Finally, she is dislodged altogether from her timeless position. 'Le sentiment lugubre de la durée' takes hold of her, and she finally perishes (pp. 182-187), and, at the beginning of chapter XIII of the original, Anne resumes her role and eventually succumbs in her turn. This leads to the final stage in the attempt at containing the original vision

governing the novel: Thomas's monologue. After Anne's death, when the standpoint opposed to the original one which was Thomas's has finally been exhausted, it is as if the obstacle to the original undertaking has finally been removed and consciousness has at last encountered its own eclipse. In other words, Thomas is at last face to face with Thomas. Hence, the penultimate chapter of the novel begins:

lorsque Anne fut morte, Thomas ne quitta pas la chambre et il parut profondément affligé. ... Ce qu'il se dit, on pourrait croire que cela ne pouvait d'aucune manière se laisser lire, mais il prit soin de parler comme si ses pensées avaient eu une chance d'être entendues et il laissa de côté la vérité étrange à laquelle il semblait enchaîné (p. 99).

Thomas then goes on to narrate, in the first-person, his own version of everything which has occurred during the preceding chapters of the novel. As is made clear in the above passage, this is an illusion. He speaks 'comme si ses pensées avaient eu une chance d'être entendues', and, as what he recounts brings him gradually to his own position in the present, he finally becomes aware that he, in turn, is being watched, and thus being narrated: his Je is no more authentic than the Il in the guise of which he originally appeared. He recognises at last that another viewpoint is governing the novel: 'Je suis vu' (pp. 124, 125). It is that of 'un spectateur absurde qui me compulse, m'aime et m'attire puissamment dans son absurdité' (p. 127). In short that he is simply another figure, in which the desire of consciousness to become consciousness of its own eclipse is incarnated, and which it finally destroys. The final chapter of the novel thus sees Thomas once again 'sous la forme de Il', pursuing his role as a figure of fiction, but in the knowledge of the futility of his task, 'comme si la honte eût commencé pour lui' (p. 137).

The novel Thomas l'obscur thus originally resulted solely in the knowledge, based upon rigorous research and demonstration, that fiction is incapable of accommodating the vision which gives rise to it. Consciousness of self is also consciousness of loss of self: awareness of death and ner-

ception of the existence of others. The coexistence of these two modes of consciousness is impossible. It is also the basis of human existence. Consciousness has thus to admit consciousness of its eclipse (the existence of others) as both its supreme state and its most dreadful ordeal. Fiction, in Maurice Blanchot's hand, consists solely of an attempt to surmount this contradiction and come to terms with it. His entire career as a writer of fiction has consisted in seeking to turn the standpoint of narrative into the conscious expression of that moment of eclipse when, in my consciousness, I am no-one. Fiction, in his hands, is conducted from the standpoint of no-one, and the development of his fiction consists of the gradual elimination of everything in traditional fiction which stands in the way of that standpoint.

This can be more easily understood if we realise that, in his first two novels, he is consciously adopting a pattern of narrative based upon the Canciones entre el alma y el esposo of Saint John of the Cross. The strange title of his second novel is taken from the conclusion of the above work which reads as follows:

Que nadie lo miraba,
Aminadab tampoco parecía,
Y el cerco sosegaba,
Y la cabellería,
A vista de las aguas descendía²¹.

At this climax to the mystic's poem, the bride and her husband achieve union. No profane eye beholds it, nor does the demon Aminadab, who sought to prevent it, appear on the scene. Their idyll is thus perfect. This situation is taken by Blanchot and turned into a metaphor for fiction itself. The union of the bride and the husband corresponds to that moment of consciousness when it coincides with its own eclipse. However, he reinterprets the rôle of no-one and that of Aminadab. In the original poem, the lovers' bliss is an end in itself. The long siege is over, the horsemen may leave their posts. In the novel, however, this end is never perfect: the idyll has occurred, but in secret. Fiction serves to reconcile consciousness with itself, but it only does so outside of consciousness. Blanchot's

ambition is to turn the nadie lo miraba of the poem, the oblivion to which the union of the lovers gives rise, into the standpoint of fiction itself. In other words, to turn no-one from being a simple negative position into the positive state of consciousness when engaged in the writing and the reading of fiction. In this perspective, the existing structure of fiction is an obstacle to the fiction he is seeking to evolve. What has been obvious throughout Thomas l'obscur, namely that, whichever way it turns, fiction cannot accommodate the vision which gives rise to it, can now be understood fully. For, in Blanchot's interpretation of the words no-one saw it, Aminadab certainly does appear: Aminadab is fiction itself, the medium which simultaneously serves to communicate and to render inaccessible the union of consciousness and its eclipse. His second novel, Aminadab, thus complements Thomas l'obscur, by providing an allegorical description of what it was in that novel which prevented its vision from being realised. The idyll which provides the title for an early story²² is represented, in Aminadab by the couple at the window whom Thomas sees at the beginning of the novel' (pp. 8-9). The man has his head in a bandage, signifying the death of the self in consciousness of others, while the girl beckons to Thomas, before disappearing with the man into the house. The entire novel consists of Thomas's quest, throughout this house of fiction, for the girl who was with the wounded man, and of the revelation that it is an impossible one. Aminadab is thus the demonstration of what was experienced throughout Thomas l'obscur: namely that the language of fiction is both a means and an obstacle to communication. Sartre is only partly right when he describes Aminadab in terms of 'le fantastique considéré comme un langage'²³. On one level, the experiences of Thomas are a means of expressing what Blanchot has to say. The inverted logic of what he goes through is an image of the absurdity of experience. However, Blanchot is not out to provide an image of experience in general. The inversion he carries out in Aminadab is not a symmetrical one, because in turning the fantastic into the language of his novel, he is taking as his theme the fantastic nature

of language, the fact that, in fiction, language itself interferes with the communication of what it is intended to express.

After Thomas l'obscur and Aminadab, therefore, Blanchot concentrates his attention upon the last irreducible manifestation of Aminadab in fiction, once, as in his first novel, every other aspect of its presence has been reduced: namely the first person narrative standpoint. It is no accident that, in the first version of Thomas l'obscur, when Thomas is about to begin his monologue we read:

il laissa de côté, par une fourberie qui le faisait ressembler à un démon, le drame horrible auquel il semblait enchaîné (my italics).

His demonic behaviour is a direct reference to the demon Aminadab who threatens the union of the lovers in St John of the Cross. His sole ambition as a novelist will now be to break the hold of language upon experience, and he sets about it quite resolutely in the years which follow. First, he begins henceforth to write solely in the first person, the better to concentrate the full force of the vision which so inexorably destroyed first Thomas, then Anne and Irène, upon the Je of first person narrative. His Le Très-Haut is the first attempt at this. It is a highly complex piece of narrative, in which the narrator, Henri Sorge, recounts the events surrounding his recovery from an illness which led him to involvement in civil unrest. There are clearly two levels of event in what he recounts: one concerning his family, which is couched in obvious mythological terms, and one concerning himself as a writer, in which he appears under the guise of a series of allegorical figures, Iche (i.e. the self), Bouxx (i.e. Books) and his step-father (who represents the present of narrative he is occupying in Le Très-Haut). The presence of these two separate levels of narrative is intended to place a strain upon the simple process of recounting the past. One draws Sorge fatally towards the past, while the other is directed towards the present of his activity as a narrator. The result is the ultimate dislocation of the present standpoint of his narrative. This occurs at the very end of the novel, where his nurse shoots

him. This is in itself a strange end for a piece of first-person narrative, but not an unheard of one, as Camus's L'Etranger proves. What turns this end into something totally original, however, is that Sorce, who has been speaking, as the narrator, throughout the novel, cries out as he dies: 'Maintenant! C'est maintenant que je parle!' (p. 243).

This means that the true voice of the story can only be heard on the eclipse of the apparent voice. Sorce is the latest incarnation of Aminadab, and his entire undertaking as a narrator has been directed at eliminating himself so that at last, no-one may be revealed as the source of fiction. The novel is an impressive demonstration of what Blanchot is seeking to say. However, it cannot act upon the transformation which has occurred. It is undeniable that, at the end, its narrator is no-one. This is however the end. It is the work which was published simultaneously with Le Très-Haut in 1948, L'Arrêt de mort, which takes what is an end in Le Très-Haut and turns it into a beginning. For the first part of this work ends like Le Très-Haut. There is, however, a second part, and it is in there, then in what Blanchot has termed the triptych of récits it forms with Au moment voulu and Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas²⁴, that the demonic presence constituted by the Je of narrative is gradually eliminated. Blanchot achieves this by putting increasing strain upon the simple, unified perspective constituted by the Je of his récits. Jean Rousset has written that first person narrative can be understood in terms of 'la double question fondamentale: qui parle? de quoi, de qui est-il parlé? et celle qui en découle: quelle est la relation de l'un à l'autre'²⁵. In Blanchot's récits, the first two of these have the same answer: Je is speaking of Je, for they consist entirely, as I shall indicate in the following chapter, of allegories of their own processes. Consequently, the third question, which for Rousset, significantly, does not truly count, becomes the sole relevant one for Blanchot, since the relationship between the two Je of his fiction corresponds to the vision which gives rise to it. As the field of narrative present in his récits is gradually restricted to the gap separating Je from Je there emerges

a third 'party' to narrative, one whom both Tzvetan Todorov and A.A. Mendilow recognise in their way as present in all first-person narrative. Hence Todorov:

dans 'Il court', il y a 'Il', sujet de l'énoncé, et 'moi', sujet de l'énonciation. Dans 'Je cours', un sujet de l'énonciation énoncé s'intercale entre les deux, en prenant à chacun une partie de son contenu précédant mais sans les faire disparaître entièrement: il ne fait que les immerger. Car le 'il' et le 'moi' existent toujours: ce 'je' qui court n'est pas le même que celui qui énonce. 'Je' ne réduit pas deux à un mais de deux fait trois²⁶.

While Mendilow writes:

the reader of the autobiographical novel finds it ... more difficult to sink his own actual present into a fictive present. Nor can he sink his own personality into that of the narrator. Another person is felt to be interposed between the I of the novel and the reader's I²⁷.

It is this third party, this other person whom each of the above identifies but to whom they grant no status, that Blanchot is seeking to bring out in his fiction. This is the no-one whose vision corresponds, in his mind, to the reality of consciousness. Geoffrey Hartman has written that, in Thomas l'obscur, Blanchot was seeking 'to make the mind real rather than more conscious'²⁸, and this is precisely Blanchot's entire ambition as a novelist. Michel Butor describes the change from a third-person to a first-person narrative standpoint as 'un progrès dans le réalisme par l'introduction d'un point de vue'²⁹. In Blanchot's hands it is more than this however: by adopting a first-person narrative mode, Blanchot seeks no less, as the prière d'insérer to Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas reveals³⁰, than to make his récit the equivalent of the reality it seeks to express. The nature of that reality is glimpsed at by Mendilow, in order, however, to deny it any place in fiction:

a narrative in the first person and written throughout in the present tense would, if it were possible at all, appear so artificial as to make any identification impossible. It would obviously be limited to sensations and thoughts and exclude all action. It would also obtrude the act of writing itself, and by

specifying itself so closely in time would appear even more remote to the reader, for it would impress upon him constantly the fact and the act of communication³¹

It is indeed writing itself, the fact and the act of communication, which will henceforth constitute the sole subject of Blanchot's fiction. Butor and Rousset each see reference to the present alone as giving rise ultimately to the inner monologue. However, Mendilow is nearer to the reality Blanchot is seeking when he writes that such narrative 'would appear even more remote to the reader'. For, in paying exclusive narrative attention to the present, Blanchot is seeking to destroy the present and thus the subject, be he reader or narrator, who adopts the present of narrative in order to relate what is being narrated to himself. What narrative is seeking to achieve, in Blanchot's hands, is the communication of what exceeds absolutely the ability of an individual subject to comprehend it. It is what drives him to writing in search of comprehension. The revolution which Blanchot has carried out in fiction is to have turned writing into a mode upon which such comprehension may be possible.

In comparison with his fiction, as I have said, Blanchot's criticism is not initially so daunting. The revolution he also carries out within the field of critical discourse is just as original as that which occurs in his fiction. Nevertheless, as I have indicated, it occurs gradually, from within a clearly definable tradition. Unlike his fiction, what is more, his use of the theoretical mode leads him into some rather spectacular impasses. He is thus often far less sure of where he is going as a critic than is the case when he writes fiction. Consequently, his itinerary is simpler to follow. For, if the reader of Blanchot has a problem with his criticism, it is not so much one of inaccessibility as one of unacceptability. Georges Bataille has written that Blanchot turned to criticism virtually by accident, forced by circumstances in 1941 to confine his critical energies to the columns of a daily newspaper³². This is not

the case however. Though most of the texts in his first work of criticism, Faux pas, which appeared in 1943, do come from the Journal des Débats, one or two were first published in 1937, in the right-wing paper L'Insurgé which Blanchot and several others founded after the coming to power of the Front Populaire³³. It was in 1937 that Blanchot first turned to literary criticism, and, in his first ever critical text, significantly entitled 'De la révolution à la littérature', he makes clear in what spirit he has turned to it:

si ce qu'on appelle bassement la politique doit être sans pouvoir sur l'examen d'une oeuvre qui tire son existence d'autre chose que la politique, là s'arrêtent les prétentions à l'indépendance. La critique qui échappe par principe aux infiltrations indélégates de l'esprit de parti parce qu'il est le contraire de l'esprit critique ne peut pas échapper à une question qui lui est essentielle et qui la conduit à se demander si, dans un temps où la révolution est souhaitable, il n'y a pas quelques affinités à reconnaître entre la notion de révolution et les valeurs littéraires³⁴.

The behaviour of Irène in Thomas l'obscur now appears in its true light: as the ideal standpoint of literature, she is simultaneously the standpoint of revolution itself. Irène fails however, and this in turn throws light upon Blanchot's ambitions in becoming a critic. By 1937, as the content of his political articles reveals, his desire for a nationalist revolution to save France was becoming increasingly difficult to envisage, given circumstances on both the national and the international scenes. His political reasoning, at this time, thus finds its own logic driving it to envisage the destruction of France as the sole hope of saving her³⁵. His logic thus arrives at the conclusion that what is most ideal is simultaneously most imperfect. This position is manifestly an unbearable one for him, and there can be no doubt that his reaction to it is the source of both his fiction and his criticism. The emergence of the Blanchot we now know is deserving of careful study in its own right³⁶, for it opens up perspectives upon the entire political and philosophical climate of the inter-war

period. What is significant for our purposes, however, is the direction it initially gave to his criticism, for it is on the basis of this that all of the unacceptability of his thinking is founded.

The turn to criticism as a flight from the logical dilemma with which political events confronted him, consisted of the search through literature for the ideal perfection which lies at the heart of it. It is thus, as Alexandre Astruc pointed out when Faux pas appeared, a reactionary undertaking³⁷. In 'De la révolution à la littérature', Blanchot declares 'seule la perfection est infiniment révolutionnaire', and sets himself the task of searching for that perfection in the works of the past and of the present. This is the origin of what is most original, but also what has been seen as most exceptionable in his criticism. For his basic critical axiom is enunciated in Faux pas as follows: 'les livres ne valent que par le livre supérieur qu'ils nous conduisent à imaginer' (p. 220). Now on the one hand, this is undoubtedly a positive attribute to a critic's method, for it means that even an imperfect work will be read as if it were not so. Blanchot therefore never condemns even the slightest of efforts, so long as he can perceive, 'à côté du livre réel, un livre en projet sur lequel le jugement peut se porter'³⁸. In one of his Insurgé pieces, he remarks:

on ne se doute pas toujours de ce qu'il
y a de travail, de réflexion, de combina-
isons dans un récit fragile et maladroit³⁹,

While on another, he defines what he sees as the critic's rôle as follows:

le premier mouvement d'un critique est de voir
au centre de l'oeuvre qu'il juge un esprit pl-
ein de ruses et de ressources, sans faiblesses,
sans accidents. A la moindre création, il est
indispensable de prêter un créateur tout-puis-
sant⁴⁰.

On the other hand, however, it means that the critic effectively assumes the rôle of telling the writer what he ought to have written. Such an approach may save one writer from being condemned for his imperfections; it may just as well lead another to be praised for reasons which just were not his. For Malcolm Bowie, this is the case with Blan-

chot's reading of Michaux in Faux pas:

a central feature of /Michaux's work/ stubbornly refuses to be explained in Utopian terms. Seized by panic, it would seem, at finding a familiar frame of reference only partly applicable, Maurice Blanchot elegantly explained Voyage en Grande Garabagne and Au pays de la magie in terms of their very resistance to explanation. ... This is an admirable account of the possible power of a possible literary work. But as an account of the works in question it is an extravagant piece of whimsy⁴¹.

Bowie is quite accurate in his description of Blanchot's method, and undoubtedly justified in his rejection of it from his own standpoint and that of Michaux. Nevertheless, there is neither panic nor whim in Blanchot's approach, nor any facile use of paradox in his attention to the point at which the work resists explanation by a given schema. On the contrary, his approach corresponds to the identification of what he considers to be the heart of any literary work: as Bowie puts it, the possible literary work which, for Blanchot, can be read in what amounts to the palimpsest constituted by the existing work.

It is thus important to identify the very precise intention which inspires Blanchot's criticism from the beginning. Otherwise, its significance will be obscured by the legitimate reaction of refusal which its arbitrary nature initially provokes. It is made even more necessary in that, what is already an unacceptable way of behaving as critic gradually evolves into an approach which challenges the very heart of our assumptions about literature. In 'De la révolution à la littérature', Blanchot wrote:

l'homme de Sophocle, l'homme de Racine, l'homme de la littérature est magnifiquement indifférent aux aventures de l'espèce. En dehors des décadences et des rénovations il se transmet de chef-d'oeuvre en chef-d'oeuvre par une filiation personnelle et incorruptible.

Now at this stage in his assertion of the revolutionary nature of art, this higher man is indistinguishable from the traditional notion of a transcendent human principle. Nevertheless, in the following years, in a process which, as I have suggested, needs careful study, this traditional hum-

anist position turns into one from which absolute truth is asserted to be the antithesis of humanism, because it is incompatible with the notion of the individual. There can be little doubt that the writing of Thomas l'obscur helped in the emergence of this attitude. The result of its becoming the standpoint from which Blanchot conducted his criticism, was to alienate people even more. Again, the case of Michaux provides an illustration of this, for Blanchot's reading of the poet was and is almost universally condemned. This is because it reposes upon the claim that Michaux, of whom Blanchot has written 'peu d'auteurs me sont plus proches'⁴², writes from a standpoint which is of no relevance to Man. Raymond Bellour objects to this⁴³, as does a critic who generally has nothing but praise for Blanchot, Maurice Nadeau. Nadeau recognised what Blanchot was attempting in Faux pas, in which he discerns:

une certaine manière d'approcher les oeuvres,
d'y pénétrer et de les reconstruire à partir
de leur noyau original⁴⁴.

Nevertheless, when he came to analyse La Part du feu he had the following to say:

il est loin le temps où Maurice Blanchot,
d'habitude plus audacieux, se bornait à tr-
ouver 'étrange' et 'bizarre' le Voyage en
Grande Garabagne. 'La clef de cette étrange-
té, ajoutait-il, c'est qu'elle n'a pas de
sens pour nous, c'est que, littéralement,
elle ne rime à rien'. Dix ans ont passé de-
puis l'énoncé de jugements bien fragiles ...
Qui oserait affirmer aujourd'hui que cet uni-
vers est, comme l'assurait Blanchot, 'sans
référence au destin de l'homme'?⁴⁵.

This is a clear sign of the resistance which Blanchot's approach could not fail to meet. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that, ten years afterwards, Blanchot himself would have continued to make the affirmation he made in his earlier work, and to make it more lucidly. For it is on the basis of the claim that literature is a human activity in which the inhuman nature of the human condition is revealed and promoted, that all of Blanchot's criticism has developed. Moreover, it is only if this is recognised from the outset -- whether one agrees with it or not -- that any valid appreciation of Blanchot's thought may be arrived at.

The task is clearly a demanding one, for Blanchot does not merely adopt a standpoint in premises which, for most people, are unacceptable; instead of using persuasion (which might on the surface appear the more advisable, the more unacceptable a thinker's position) he proceeds consistently on the basis of arbitrary affirmation. Examining the work of Dante in 1942, he wrote: 'on imagine un esprit qui ne méditerait qu'en se réaffirmant sans cesse'⁴⁶, and this is first and foremost a description of the reality of his own practice. The consequence of this has been an unpredictable one however. For so consistently has Blanchot adopted the standpoint of affirmation that, in spite of the arbitrary nature of what he says, he has been listened to. Not as a critic however. The fundamental obstacle to an adequate understanding of Blanchot's thought comes from the fact that he has been read almost in the place of those about whom he writes: credited with something original to say, but something with significance only in relation to himself. A good illustration of this is to be found in the way a specialist in the writings of one author Blanchot studies reacts to his analyses. The author is Benjamin Constant, about whom Blanchot wrote in 1946⁴⁷, and the specialist is Pierre Delbouille. Delbouille divides the critics of Adolphe into two types, those who respect what he calls 'la littéralité du texte' (e.g. Alison Fairlie, Jean Hytier), and those who interpret the text more 'freely' (e.g. Georges Poulet, Maurice Blanchot and Tzvetan Todorov). He makes no secret of his preference for the former group, but at no time is the other group merely dismissed. On the contrary, he salutes some of their efforts as 'de remarquables exercices de l'esprit, dignes d'admiration pour elles-mêmes, et d'excellentes invitations à penser'⁴⁸. This brings us to the way he presents Blanchot's reading of Constant. Examining the similarities between Constant and Proust, he goes on:

c'est M. Maurice Blanchot qui a tenté le rapprochement entre nos deux écrivains au niveau le plus profond. Proust et Constant sont frères par la manière dont ils conçoivent l'absence⁴⁹.

He then formulates some reservations which are a clear indication of where it is that Blanchot becomes unacceptable:

M. Blanchot brode alors sur ce thème, essayant de montrer jusqu'où sont pareilles et à partir d'où se séparent les conceptions de Proust et de Constant en matière de relations humaines. Mais on est entraîné là bien vite à quitter le livre et son héros pour plonger dans la psychologie des écrivains⁵⁰.

Delbouille does not reject Blanchot's approach out of hand. It is presented as 'une invitation à penser'. Nevertheless, it is denied any objective validity, and this attitude, whether it consist of claiming that Blanchot's reasoning is speculative or of seeing his entire output as a personal meditation, has prevented him from being read as he ought to be.

Help in this dilemma comes to Blanchot from an unexpected quarter. Jean-Paul Sartre, who has contributed more than most to creating a false image of Blanchot, nevertheless has the following to say in his Saint Genet:

mode bien veule et qui convient parfaitement à notre facilité d'aujourd'hui, on prétend que le romancier se peint dans ses personnages et le critique dans ses critiques; si Blanchot nous parle de Mallarmé, on dira qu'il nous apprend plus sur lui-même que sur l'auteur dont il s'occupe. C'est le résidu de l'idéalisme bourgeois du XIXe siècle, ce subjectivisme niais qui a fait écrire tant de sottises (même à Proust) sur l'amour. Voyez où cela conduit: Blanchot, en Mallarmé, n'a vu que Blanchot; fort bien: alors, vous, en Blanchot ne voyez que vous-même. En ce cas, comment pouvez-vous savoir si Blanchot parle de Mallarmé ou de soi? C'est le cercle vicieux de tout scepticisme ... Bien sûr, le point de vue de Blanchot lui est personnel. ... Mais si l'objectivité, dans une certaine mesure, est déformée, elle est aussi bien révélée. Les passions, le tour d'esprit, la sensibilité de Blanchot l'inclinent à faire telle conjecture plutôt que telle autre; mais c'est Mallarmé seul qui vérifiera la conjecture de Blanchot.... Sans doute le critique peut 'forcer' Mallarmé, le tirer à soi; c'est justement la preuve qu'il peut aussi l'éclairer dans sa réalité objective. ... L'homme est objet pour l'homme; contre les banalités subjectivistes qui tentent partout de noyer le poisson, il faut restaurer la valeur de l'objectivité⁵¹.

This is a superb analysis of the misunderstanding surrounding Blanchot's writing, and one that is all the more striking coming from a thinker who cannot be said ever to have over-

come his own misreading of Blanchot. It understands that, in affirming what Mallarmé was saying, Blanchot is not closing but opening the way to a reading of the poet, by bringing into the discourse of critical analysis the force of affirmation which is the essence of literature, its objectivity. His entire career as a writer has consisted of this task of revelation Sartre speaks of. Moreover, he takes it further even than Sartre allows for in his analysis. For what emerges from Blanchot's revelation of the objectivity of human existence as it is to be found in literature, is that it is not the same as the objectivity of established logical reasoning. We have already seen that, in the way he uses fiction, Blanchot is seeking to give voice to the impersonal heart of experience. The sort of 'man' he is seeking to reveal in the process is not one whose existence can be understood in logical terms at all. The equivalent of this, in his criticism, is the affirmation to which Nadeau and others took such exception: namely that literature does not concern man as such. On each plane of his thinking, the same conviction is seeking to establish itself in a legitimate relationship to the logic which it nevertheless contests. The gradual development of these two planes of reasoning, and their convergence towards a point where they may at last coexist within a single discursive mode, constitutes, I believe, one of the most original intellectual undertakings of this century. As I said initially, the task of understanding it has scarcely begun. I propose to examine its two aspects in turn. I shall not give equal weight to each. The originality of each requires that it be approached in a different way from the other. Blanchot's fiction may be more difficult of access than his criticism: nevertheless, a single work, properly analysed, can reveal the originality of what its author is attempting. I shall therefore begin by examining in detail the work which provides a turning-point for Blanchot's fiction, L'Arrêt de mort. His criticism, though easier to understand, can only fully be appreciated for its originality if it is looked at over a long period. I shall therefore go on, in Part II, to examine how it develops during the decade following Faux pas, from 1945 to 1955.

Notes to Introduction

1. Jean Starobinski, 'Thomas l'obscur, chapitre premier', Critique, 229 (juin 1966), p. 498.
2. In a letter to Rainer Stillers, dated le 26 février 1974: 'D'une manière générale, dans mon propre cas, la pratique a précédé la théorie, du moins au début, alors que, plus tard, la relation est plus complexe'. Quoted in Rainer Stillers, Maurice Blanchot: 'Thomas l'obscur'. Erst- und Zweitfassung als Paradigmen des Gesamtwerks (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1979), p. 125. The complexity which Blanchot refers to is at the heart of his critic's problem.
3. Starobinski, p. 513.
4. Cf Le Pas au-delà (1973) and L'Ecriture du désastre (1980).
5. Cf 'Parole de fragment', in L'Entretien infini, pp. 451-458.
6. Jonathan Culler, 'Impersonal pronouns', TLS, 3762 (April 1974), p. 389.
7. Rainer Stillers, op. cit., is a recent welcome advance in this field.
8. Starobinski, p. 498.
9. Le Pas au-delà, p. 8
10. *ibid.*
11. Le Livre à venir, p. 308. This and subsequent references to the work are to the edition in the Gallimard collection 'Idées'.
12. Rather than seeking a satisfactory English translation for the term 'récit', I have preferred to use the original term.
13. Except where indicated, directly or by the context, all references are to the 1950 version of Thomas l'obscur.
14. André Malraux, La Condition humaine (Paris, 1933). The passage is to be found on p. 57 of the 'Livre de Poche' edition.
15. Jean Cocteau, Thomas l'imposteur (Paris, 1923), p. 174.
16. Claude-Edmonde Magny, Précieux Giraudoux (Paris, 1945), p. 44.
17. *ibid.*, p. 62.
18. Apart from the article entitled 'De Jean-Paul à Giraudoux' (1944), cf also 'L'Homme pressé' (1941), 'Paradoxes sur le roman' (1941), 'Contes et récits' (1942), 'Après "Les Liaisons dangereuses"' (1942) and 'Les chances du réalisme' (1942). All in the Journal des Débats.

19. 'M. Jean Giraudoux et la philosophie d'Aristote', in Situations I (Paris, 1947), pp.82-98.
20. Irène corresponds to the Greek word for calm. She was also, for the Greeks, one of the three Hours, or seasons of the year, and corresponded to winter. This is the significance of the state into which Anne falls before the emergence of Irène. A study could be made of the different seasons of the year represented by Thomas, Anne and Irène.
 The figure of Irène also draws its significance from its reference to the Irène who was Empress of the Orient from 780 to 790, then from 792-802. She was celebrated for her Orthodox faith and her worship of images.
 A final level of significance in the triangle formed by Anne, Irène and Thomas would seem, given the name Anne which is that of the Virgin Mary's mother, to point to an image of Thomas as a Christ-figure whose birth the novel is seeking to bring about. (Cf the chapter on L'Arrêt de mort)
21. Roughly translated, this passage reads: 'And no-one saw them / Nor did Aminadab appear / And the seige was now over / And all the horsemen / At the sight of the waters came down'. The final episode in Thomas l'obscur, where everyone plunges into the water, is a clear reference to this point of culmination in the poem.
22. L'Idylle, in Le Ressassement éternel (Paris 1952), pp. 9-97. This story was first published in 1947, and bears the date 1935.
23. 'Aminadab ou du fantastique considéré comme un langage', in Situations I (Paris, 1947), pp. 122-142.
24. This reference occurs in the 'prière d'insérer' to Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas:
 ce récit est peut-être le plus 'difficile'
 qu'ait écrit Blanchot. Pourtant, il est plus
 clair que ses récits précédents; tout ce qui
 s'y passe est réel (et hautement tragique).
Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas est le trois-
 ième panneau du triptyque dont L'Arrêt de
mort et Au Moment voulu formaient les deux
 premiers panneaux. Ils constituent trois ré-
 cits distincts, mais ils appartiennent cepen-
 dant à la même expérience.
25. Jean Rousset, Narcisse romancier (Paris, 1973), p. 15.
26. Tzvetan Todorov, Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme? 2. Poétique (Paris, 1968), pp. 65-66. This reference is to the separate publication of Todorov's contribution to the original work, in the Seuil collection 'Points'.
27. A.A.Mendilow, Time and the Novel (London, 1951), p. 107.
28. Geoffrey H. Hartman, 'Maurice Blanchot', in The Novel-ist as Philosopher, edited by John Cruickshank (Oxford, 1962), p. 149.
29. Michel Butor, Essais sur le roman (Paris, 1972), p. 75.

30. Quoted in note 24.
31. Mendilow, p. 107; my italics.
32. Georges Bataille, 'Maurice Blanchot...', in Gramma, 3-4 (printemps 1976), p. 218:
jeune encore, Maurice Blanchot collabora à l'éditorial du Journal des Débats. Après 1940 il renonça à cette collaboration, désormais soumise à la censure, et se contenta d'envoyer à son journal un feuilleton littéraire. Ce feuilleton fut l'origine, tout occasionnelle, de son oeuvre critique
33. Chapter XVI, 'Le monologue intérieur', and chapter XVII, 'Le temps et le roman' in Faux pas, originally appeared in L'Insurgé. Another text of particular interest from this period is a review of Sartre's La Nausée in Aux Ecoutes, significantly titled 'L'Ebauche d'un roman' (30 juillet 1938, p. 3).
34. 'De la révolution à la littérature', L'Insurgé, 13 janvier 1937, p. 3.
35. Cf for example 'Réquisitoire contre la France', 'Notre première ennemie, la France', or the highly ironic 'Blum, notre chance de salut'.
36. Care is sadly what Jeffrey Mehlman does not exercise in his article 'Blanchot at Combat. Of Literature and Terror' (Modern Language Notes, 95, 4 (May 1980), pp. 808-829. where, on the basis of a diary entry of Paul Léautaud's, he proceeds to implicate Blanchot in one of the most serious acts of collaboration committed by French intellectuals during the Occupation. The 'utter disagreement' which he attributes to Blanchot over his conclusions is hardly surprising.
37. Alexandre Astruc, 'A propos de Faux pas', Poésie 44, 19 (1944), pp. 88-92.
38. 'Paradoxes sur le roman', Journal des Débats, 30 décembre 1941, p. 3.
39. 'Le Magasin de travestis de G. Reyer', L'Insurgé, 17 février 1937, p. 5
40. 'Rêveuse bourgeoisie par Pierre Drieu la Rochelle', L'Insurgé, 5 mai 1937, p. 4.
41. M.M.Bowie, Henri Michaux (Oxford, 1973), pp. 68-69.
42. Letter to Raymond Bellour, quoted in L'Herne (Henri Michaux) (1966), p. 88.
43. Raymond Bellour, 'La mort du dernier écrivain', in L'Herne (Henri Michaux) (1966), pp. 74-79
44. Maurice Nadeau, 'Maurice Blanchot, romancier', Mercure de France, 1023 (novembre 1948), p. 504.
45. Maurice Nadeau, Littérature présente (Paris, 1952), n.341.
46. 'La révélation de Dante', Journal des Débats, 13 mai 1942, p. 3.

47. Cf 'Adolphe, ou le malheur des sentiments vrais', in La Part du feu, pp. 229-246.
48. Paul Delbouille, Genèse, structure et destin d''Adolphe' (Paris, 1971), p. 563.
49. *ibid.*, p. 511.
50. *ibid.*
51. Jean-Paul Sartre, Saint Genet, comédien et martyr (Paris, 1952), p. 622, note 1.

PART I. L'ARRET DE MORT

L'Arret de mort is the most misleading of the three récits which make up the triptych. At the same time, it is the easiest one to approach, precisely because it sets out so concertedly to mislead its reader. The trap which Pierre Madaule perceives in the work¹ is an obvious one and the work points to it constantly. It is made obvious, however, not so that the reader should avoid falling into it, but so that, as he falls, he should remain totally aware that it is a trap. The trap it sets is thus both obvious and irresistible, and this is the source of the story's effect.

There can be little doubt that, in writing L'Arrêt de mort (henceforth referred to as L'Arrêt), Blanchot was responding to a certain 'demand' on the part of the albeit limited public which, by 1948, had come to see the author of Thomas l'obscur and Faux pas as something of an enigma. At a time when, as Gracq pointed out², the biography of a writer was becoming increasingly good copy, Blanchot consistently declined to become a public persona. Rather, in L'Arrêt and in the short recit which appeared a year later, Un récit?³, he sought to exploit the exacerbated curiosity of his readers to fictional ends. The narrator of Le Très-Haut says to Bouxx 'je suis un piège pour vous'⁴. The trap he refers to is part of the fictional situation of that novel, and corresponds allegorically to the complex relationship between the written word (Bouxx = Books)⁵ and the inexpressible. In L'Arrêt the narrator is also a trap, but in the present of narrative and thus for the reader. Blanchot lures his reader into the story with a promise of confidences, only to reveal, once interest is aroused, that the 'Je' in relation to whom the reader seeks to understand what is told him is neither the author, nor even a realistic fictional subject at all, but a sign of someone or some-

thing quite unknown: the 'third person' both Mendilow and Todorov refer to in their way and who, as I hope to show, takes advantage of the reader's desire for confidences to emerge in his own right.

The work is divided into two parts, the second of which is longer than the first. In each, the narrator says he is attempting to relate the same series of events concerning him. In the first, by his own admission, he fails, while in the second, having taken what he calls 'des précautions' (p. 61), he succeeds. Strangely, this little work has nevertheless been read and discussed almost exclusively in terms of the first part, which recounts the dying, the return to life and the eventual second death of a young woman referred to simply as J. The second part, which claims to concern the same events but during which J. neither appears nor is even mentioned, has generally received only token mention. There is a simple reason for this: whereas it is necessary on one level to read the first part of L'Arrêt the 'wrong' way, that is, to fall into its trap and treat it as an autobiographical récit or at least as a coherent anecdote, the second part is totally incomprehensible unless read in the 'correct' manner, from the standpoint of a lucid acquiescence to the processes of the first. Otherwise, the events it recounts either break off suddenly for no reason, or remain so trivial and inconsequential that, in themselves, they cannot hold the interest of the reader. The lack of any concerted attempt on the part of those who have written about L'Arret to confront the second, and purportedly successful, part of the récit is thus a clear sign that so far, the trap set by the first part has simply not worked as it should have done. Many have fallen into it, but none has so far truly realised why.⁶ There is therefore a quite fundamental blockage in the processes whereby we have come to understand what Blanchot is seeking to achieve through fiction. It is thus urgent that a proper approach to the first part of L'Arrêt be worked out, and it is this that I shall seek to achieve in this chapter.

The first stage of this attempt must consist quite simply of establishing how it is that L'Arrêt draws its reader into its trap -- in other words, in which 'wrong' way the first part must be read. There are two aspects to this initial 'lure': first, the narrator places great emphasis upon the difficulties he has experienced so far in formulating what he has to say; second, he situates his experience at a moment of the recent past which would be highly charged with significance for the reader in 1948. Hence, from the very beginning of the récit the narrator appears first and foremost as a narrator:

ces événements me sont arrivés en 1938.
J'éprouve à en parler la plus grande gêne.
Plusieurs fois déjà j'ai tenté de leur
donner une forme écrite. Si j'ai écrit
des livres, c'est que j'ai espéré par des
livres mettre fin à tout cela. Si j'ai
écrit des romans, les romans sont nés au
moment où les mots ont commencé de reculer
devant la vérité. (...)

Cependant, je dois le rappeler, une
fois je réussis à donner une forme à ces
événements. C'était en 1940, pendant les
dernières semaines de juillet ou les premières
d'août. Dans le désœuvrement que
m'imposait la stupeur, j'écrivis cette
histoire (pp. 7-8).

What is more, the reference to 1940 suggests immediately to the reader -- and is meant to suggest -- that the narrator is none other than Maurice Blanchot the author of Thomas l'obscur. The reference to the difficulties he has experienced in expressing himself satisfactorily thus situate L'Arrêt in relation to its author in a way which suggests that he has finally resolved the problem which gave rise to Thomas l'obscur, and that L'Arrêt is therefore going to provide a definitive account of the author's experience. Added to this is the revelation of the terrible nature of what is to be recounted, so that the reader is given the impression that he is witness to a last desperate struggle against the unspeakable on its author's part:

à la vérité, /ce récit/ pourrait tenir en
dix mots. C'est ce qui le rend si effrayant.
Il y a dix mots que je puis dire. A
ces mots j'ai tenu tête pendant neuf années
(p. 8).

As soon as he begins to read, therefore, the reader's appetite is whetted. He is eager to know the secret, and sure that it is going to be revealed. His interest is maintained, moreover, by the second aspect of this initial 'lure', namely the story's use of dates. The opening line of the récit sets the tone: 'ces événements me sont arrivés en 1938', and this implicit reference to a period of growing international crisis is twice made explicit further on:

le jour fixé pour le premier traitement
...fut un des plus sinistres d'avant Munich (p. 25);

cependant, le médecin était revenu. Munich
aussi était arrivé (p. 29).

More important still, the present in which these events are being narrated turns out to be the true present of the work's composition: when the narrator claims 'à ces mots j'ai tenu tête pendant neuf années', since the events which gave rise to them occurred in 1938, he is, 'now', in 1947 -- the year in which a story published in 1948 was in all probability being written. Thus, when he continues:

ce matin qui est le 8 octobre (je viens de le constater à ma surprise) et qui, par conséquent, marque à peu près l'anniversaire de la première de ces journées, je suis presque sûr que les paroles, qui ne devraient pas être écrites, seront écrites. Depuis plusieurs mois, il me semble que j'y suis résolu (p. 8),

the reader is justified in feeling that he is scarcely in the domain of fiction at all, and that L'Arrêt is in fact a piece of direct confession. This is the first stage in the trap⁷.

It becomes clear almost immediately, however, that there is something odd about the apparent candour of the narrator. First of all, the relationship between himself and the dreadful secret he has to tell is not a simple one. The inexpressible with which he has been struggling over the years is not something inaccessible to language; his struggle does not consist of seeking to ward off silence. There are ten words he can say, and they constitute the secret. His task is thus not to win a victory for language over silence, but to bring about a victory of language over itself. For years he has been able to speak the ten words

which constitute his secret. His triumph -- the present narrative -- consists therefore of actually doing so. Therein lies the danger, and the source of his anxiety. Yet as a result language is at last going to become its own master, and the narrator capable as never before of self-expression. Why then does he fear those ten words so? If hitherto he has been too loquacious, while the present récit is going to distil his words down into the ten which correspond to the truth, one might expect that he would approach the task of narrating it with relief. Yet it is with foreboding that he undertakes his task, and this attitude casts a shadow over the apparently straightforward situation which the autobiographical tone of the récit otherwise creates.

A second element of strangeness lies in the narrator's use of dates. As we saw, they are used with great precision and this contributes to the simple impression given by the story. That being the case, there is something odd about the following passage:

à Paris, mon domicile officiellement était un hôtel de la rue d'O.. Je descendis là le lundi soir (j'ai réfléchi à cette date et maintenant j'en suis sûr) (p. 35).

As it stands, it is not out of keeping with a story in which precision is an important element. However, the Monday in question is not related to any precise context at all, so that the narrator's great concern over its accuracy cannot but appear excessive to the reader, leaving him puzzled as to its importance. Another precise reference to date compounds this impression:

la seule date dont je sois sûr est celle du 13 octobre, mercredi 13 octobre. Cela est d'ailleurs de peu d'importance (pp. 11-12).

If the only date which the narrator is sure about is of no importance anyway, the reader is justified in wondering what credence he should therefore attach to all of the others which seem so precisely to situate the story and its narrator.

As was the case with the ten-word secret, the dates in L'Arrêt clearly correspond to something less simple than is immediately apparent. In order to see what this is, we

must now go on to look more closely at the substance of the récit, at the precise nature of the events which the narrator is at such pains to recount.

The crux of the entire story of J. lies in the following lines:

Depuis le mois de septembre, je faisais
un séjour à Arcachon. J'y étais seul.
C'étaient les jours troubles de Munich.
Je savais qu'elle était aussi malade
qu'on peut l'être (p. 12).

Throughout the fatal illness from which J. suffers at this time, the narrator remains inexplicably absent from her side, and there is no doubt that the success of the first part of L'Arrêt (and thus of the entire récit) owes much to the powerful presence of the tragic in this situation, to the narrator's desperate attempt at comprehending what incomprehensible reason kept him from his lover's side at such a time. In this light, the precision with which he situates the events in question appears as a means of throwing into relief the central enigma in his behaviour, and revealing the true focus of his concern in the story, which he makes explicit at one stage in these terms:

aujourd'hui, j'essaie en vain de comprendre
pourquoi en ces jours je suis resté éloigné
de Paris où tout m'appelait. Cela est vrai,
la pensée de cette absence me cause un mal-
aise, mais surtout les raisons m'en échap-
pent. Si mystérieuses qu'ait été la suite
de ces événements, plus mystérieuse pour
moi est cette absence volontaire qui les a
rendus possibles (p. 26).

What concerns him in this récit are thus not the events it recounts, nor their consequences, but solely his own motives in behaving as he did. His ignorance in the present is absolute, and remains so throughout. All of the events he does recount are known to him from what others have told him:

je ne sais pas très bien comment passèrent
ces jours. A personne je n'ai posé beaucoup
de questions. Parler d'elle ne m'était guère
possible. Seul, le médecin, personnage sans
tact, souvent ridicule, stupéfié par les évé-
nements qu'il entrevit, me parla plus qu'il
n'aurait dû, et je l'ai interrogé. L'infirm-

ière aussi eut envie de confidences (pp. 33-34). It thus gradually becomes clear that he has in fact nothing at all to recount apart from his utter lack of awareness of what motivated him at the time. All of the facts about J.'s death are provided by those who were at her side, while he himself has no doubts as to what he did meanwhile. In short, the past is not the true subject of the récit at all: its details are simply rehearsed yet again in L'Arrêt so as to allow the narrator to turn his attention away from them once and for all towards his continuing ignorance of their significance.

Read on this level, L'Arrêt falls so far into the category of the anti-novel as defined by Sartre: it is 'le roman d'un roman qui ne se fait pas'⁸. The narrator is not in fact recounting the events themselves but the impossibility of narrating them; he has turned from what is incomprehensible in them to what is uncomprehending in him, so that his initial references to previous attempts at recounting his experience must now be taken for more than mere autobiographical indications or simple preliminaries to the récit proper: they constitute the true angle of approach being adopted in L'Arrêt, and reveal that the subject of the récit is its own recounting. This would seem to provide an explanation for what I have suggested were slight anomalies in the apparently autobiographical fabric of the récit. The unimportance of dates, however precise, can now be attributed to the narrator's decision to turn his attention upon himself, while the strange revelation that there are ten words that he can and yet cannot say, can now be seen as an indication of his intention to put an end to the postponement of their utterance, by putting an end to his use of simple narrative. Hence, when he says 'à présent, j'espère en finir bientôt' (pp. 7-8) or 'ce matin, ... je suis presque sûr que les paroles, qui ne devraient pas être écrites, seront écrites' (p. 8), this does not simply mean that he intends to cease thinking about the events themselves: first and foremost it means that he has decided to put an end to the narrative process whereby for so long he has sought to understand them.

This reading of the *récit* holds good throughout the first stage of what it recounts, when J. gradually sickens and then dies. Moreover, it would seem to point not only to a shift of focus from the events to the narrator's ignorance of their cause, but also to an attempt on his part to compensate for his inability to express the truth in the content of his *récit*, by reflecting it in its form. For up to the point of the narrator's arrival at J.'s side just after she has died, L'Arrêt displays considerable symmetry, in that its careful and detailed reconstruction of an event whose significance is declared from the outset to be inaccessible, seems to mirror the incomprehensible slowness with which the narrator goes to the side of his dying lover only to arrive a moment too late. Anti-fiction would thus appear not merely to be out to discredit fiction, but to turn it into a form of mimesis of the reality it is incapable of signifying narratively. However, at the point where *récit* and event appear to marry in this way we are still only half-way through the first part of the book. On the one hand, the narrator has produced a piece of aesthetically satisfying anti-fiction, capable of standing alone as an expression of its subject. On the other, however, not content with such symmetry it would seem, he goes on to recount what happened after his arrival at J.'s side. The consequences of this for the structure of the *récit* as it has so far emerged are disastrous. By proceeding to narrate the moment of greatest tragedy in the story, and which, for fiction conscious of its deficiencies, should have been the one moment to remain un-narrated, the narrator utterly destroys the mimetic effect which until that moment appeared as the sole virtue left to his *récit*. This brusque disruption of the form which L'Arrêt was coming to adopt clearly indicates that there is going to be more to the break with event and the concentration upon the present than first appeared. What emerges at this point in the *récit* is that, so far, the reader has been misled as to the narrator's intentions. This is an aspect of the trap set by the work. As the *récit* continues, we realise that we are engaged in something far less simple than mere anti-fiction, and if we

look closely at what occurs at this point of transition we may better see what it is.

Until he arrives at J.'s side, the narrator has appeared inexplicably unaware of the implications of his behaviour, and this unawareness, as we saw, is the source of his concern in the present and the reason for his narrative. When he arrives at her side, however, his feelings suddenly become very violent. They are provoked by his encounter with J.'s doctor, 'ce grand personnage vulgaire' (p. 36), who collars him at the door and begins to discuss her death. The narrator is at first understandably unreceptive, but then he is jerked into awareness:

de ses premières paroles je n'entendis rien jusqu'à celle-ci qui me réveilla par son affreuse vulgarité: 'C'est une délivrance pour ces pauvres êtres.' (ibid.).

The reason for his emotion is not, however, the callousness of the doctor as might have been expected: the way his narrative continues reveals that it arises for reasons of a far less noble sort:

il dit aussi: 'Quelle volonté!', parce qu'il y avait à peine une demi-heure, elle lui avait téléphoné elle-même, en s'emportant, pour le forcer à venir; cette dernière colère lui plaisait. Ainsi, elle l'avait fait appeler à temps, et non pas moi, elle lui avait parlé, et non pas à moi (ibid.).

It is clear from this that it is jealousy and not grief that inspires the narrator's irritation with the doctor, a jealousy which can only appear unjustified in the light of his previous unconcern, and the way he continues suggests that if callousness there be, it is he who is guilty of it:

à un certain moment de la nuit, elle avait dû se sentir vaincue, trop faible pour vivre jusqu'au matin où je la verrais, qu'elle avait alors demandé de l'aide à ce médecin pour durer encore un peu C'est ce que ce malheureux niais prenait pour de la colère, et sans doute lui avait-il cédé en venant, mais il était déjà trop tard: là où elle ne pouvait plus rien, il pouvait moins encore et sa seule assistance avait été pour coopérer à cette mort douce, tranquille, dont il parlait avec une répugnante intimité. A partir de ce moment, ma détresse commença (p. 37).

His sole aim seems to be to convince himself that he rather

than the doctor was in J.'s thoughts at the end, and his sole regret, that of not having been present at the end whereas the doctor was. This is clearly monstrous, and the distress which he claims to have begun to feel from that moment is not attributable to genuine grief, but to what amounts to an error in calculation on his part.

What occurs on the narrator's arrival at J.'s side can thus only disrupt quite fundamentally the narrative context which has established itself up to that point. The fact that the distress he then begins to feel must be read as the beginning of the sentiment which has led him since to seek relief in narrative, is not incompatible with the structure of the story as it has been perceptible so far. For fiction to conclude upon the emotion or the event which first gave rise to it is an aesthetically satisfying formal principle. However, when the grounds for that distress are revealed as totally different from those which the story has so far appeared to imply, there occurs a radical shift in fictional perspective, obliging the reader to revise entirely what he has understood so far. On the level of content, this is simple: the narrator's love for J. cannot be understood as a 'normal' sentiment resulting in noble feelings of grief over her loss. His love is, on the contrary, of a morbid, even pathological nature, and now that this is known, certain otherwise puzzling details of his narrative can be understood -- for example, the fact that he once urged her to commit suicide, and his reflexion that that is why she left him out of her will. As it is clear now from the following passage, his love for her consisted of wishing her dead:

je compris avec quelle amertume elle m'avait vu consentir à son suicide. Ce consentement, en effet peu justifiable, était même perfide, car, à y bien réfléchir, comme je l'ai fait depuis, il venait obscurément de cette pensée que jamais la maladie n'aurait raison d'elle. Elle luttait trop. Normalement, elle aurait dû être morte depuis longtemps. Mais, non seulement elle n'était pas morte, elle avait continué à vivre, à aimer, à rire, à courir par la ville comme quelqu'un que la maladie ne pouvait atteindre (p. 14).

On the formal level, however, the change is less easy to accommodate, for it coincides with an absolute volte-face on the part of the entire récit, as what has so far been a perfectly realistic series of events develops into something supernatural. For on his arrival at J.'s side, the narrator proceeds to call her back to life. L'Arrêt thus changes brusquely from a tragedy into a tale of mystery, 'une histoire extraordinaire'. Moreover, this change affects the narrative on all of its levels. We have seen already that it is from the moment of his arrival that the narrator begins to experience the feelings which are his as he narrates, while everything he felt prior to that lies beyond recall. We also learn that, in showing those feelings, the narrator succeeds in changing the entire setting of the action prior to his supernatural deed. Hence his irritation with the doctor quickly extends to the mourners around J.'s bed:

cette rencontre, auprès de son corps silencieux, de gens à tel point étrangers était ce qu'elle aurait jugé de plus insupportable. C'était quelque chose d'incongru qui aurait dû lui être épargné et qui me remonta à la gorge, de sorte que ma détresse devint de l'amertume et du dégoût (pp. 37-38).

Then, as he reflects bitterly upon his failure to arrive on time, and questions J.'s sister Louise as to why J. did not hold on, we read:

Louise n'avait pas beaucoup de tête ni beaucoup de coeur. Mais, tout à coup, elle dut lire sur mon visage quelque chose d'imminent qu'elle sut qu'elle n'avait pas le droit de voir, ni personne au monde, et en un instant elle les emmena tous (p. 39).

The moment at which his feelings become accessible to his memory of what occurred thus coincides with the disappearance from the scene of those who have, until his arrival, surrounded J., and among whom are to be found the people who have been his sole source of information about what occurred during his absence.

In addition to feeling, this point of transition in the récit also coincides with the first instances of reflexion

by the narrator then. His anguish and bitterness give rise to sudden insight and a desire to comprehend. As the doctor is talking to him, he recalls: 'cette lumière me traversa qu'à un certain moment de la nuit, elle avait dû se sentir vaincue'; and, as he tries vainly to see J. through the crowd of mourners, the story goes on: 'j'aurais voulu comprendre pourquoi ... elle n'avait pas trouvé ... la force de ne pas céder encore' (p. 38). In short, the moment of his arrival at J.'s side does not merely coincide with the revelation of the true nature of his love for her, and thus add a dimension to the tragic narrative which has emerged so far: by thus changing the 'direction' of his narrative, so that it no longer tends towards an event in the past but uses that event to **direct his reader's** attention onto the present state of his mind, the narrator begins another story all together.

Between the story of J.'s dying and the story of her revival by the narrator there thus occurs a break. As Louise ushers everyone else away and the narrator, driven by his feelings and his reflexions, goes to J.'s side and calls her back to life, the narrative axis of the récit swings from a 'downward' to an 'upward' direction. Since this occurs from the same standpoint, that of the narrator(whose standpoint the reader also adopts), the point of transition between the 'downward' narrative and the 'upward' one **effectively** dislocates the simple, realistic subject who until then had appeared to be the source of the récit. At the point of transition where the narrator in the past, from having been absent, unfeeling and unthinking reveals himself as present, subject to emotion and in search of an explanation, the narrator in the present reveals that the relationship in his mind between ignorance and anguish is the opposite of what first appeared: that in fact he is in search of ignorance, and that his anguish arises because of the obstacles to that search, which form the substance of his récit. The relationship between knowledge and ignorance is thus reversed at this point in the récit, and it is this which dislocates the narrative subject, turning the 'je' of the story to whom the reader relates into the site of the true action of the récit.

27

This is the result of the trap into which L'Arrêt lures its reader. By enlisting his interest and his emotions for what first appears as a tragically impossible search for meaning, the story then manipulates him insidiously until his emotions and his attention are focused away from a meaning lost in the past, towards a search for an impossible oblivion in the present. His mind is thus the seat of an excruciating conflict of narrative direction, and if we look at how the second stage of narrative develops this becomes clearer.

We learn from the narrator's exchange with the doctor that what he sought above all was communion in death with his lover, and it is this knowledge which reverses the narrative flow of the récit, revealing that what it seeks to narrate is not knowledge but ignorance, and that the anguish felt by the narrator is inspired by the obstacles to this aim. This is made explicit in his narration of what occurs when he is left alone with J.:

je me penchai sur elle, je l'appelai à haute voix, d'une voix forte, par son prénom; et aussitôt -- je puis le dire, il n'y eut pas une seconde d'intervalle -- une sorte de souf-
fle sortit de sa bouche encore serrée, un soupir qui peu à peu devint un léger, un faible cri; presque en même temps -- de cela aussi je suis sûr -- ses bras bougèrent, essayèrent de se lever (p. 40).

This passage is the beginning of the second stage in the récit, and thus, I have suggested, the beginning of a separate récit in that the narrative subject of this stage is different from that of what comes before it. A clear sign of this difference is to be found in the two intercalated comments by the narrator upon what he is saying: 'je puis le dire' and 'de cela aussi je suis sûr'. They are meant to signify quite clearly that at last, the narrator is sure of what he is recounting, whereas until then, his narrative was marked by repeated expressions of ignorance and doubt. Above all, however, they express certainty not of knowledge but of ignorance itself, as is made plain on two occasions:

si étrange que cela puisse paraître, je ne crois pas avoir donné, pendant toute cette

journée, une seule pensée distincte à l'événement par lequel J. se trouvait à nouveau capable de me parler et de rire avec moi. C'est qu'en ces instants je l'aimais tout à fait, et le reste n'était rien (pp. 42-43).

This point in the events of the story is clearly a climax on one level, yet on another it corresponds to a state of total oblivion. Had that oblivion marked the end of the récit -- as it does from the 'downward' point of view -- it would have not appeared extraordinary. However for the narrator of L'Arrêt it also constitutes a new point of departure: he is going to recount what happened after J.'s revival even though, as is made plain a second time, he has in fact nothing to recount:

de cette journée, je me rappelle peu de choses qu'il y aurait intérêt à rappeler (p. 44).

This second stage in the récit, which is in fact a second récit, will thus be narrated from the standpoint of the ignorance which, in the first stage, appeared as the obstacle to the récit. Moreover, its sole subject will be the gradual disappearance of that state of oblivion in the past, and the anguish which his knowledge of this causes him then and also now. This emphasis on his present state of mind is made explicit on three occasions after J.'s return to life. Indeed, as he recounts the moment of her revival, he refers to his knowledge of its impossibility:

elle était extrêmement gaie, et de la manière la plus naturelle Cette gaïté, maintenant que je vois tout ce qui eut lieu avant et après, est un souvenir qui suffirait à tuer un homme. Mais à ce moment, je la voyais gaie et j'étais gai, moi aussi (pp. 44-45).

Then on two further occasions, his narration of their idyll is given a tone of foreboding, first as she seems herself to know what the outcome of things is going to be:

un instant, elle me fixa avec une pénétration qui maintenant me fait frissonner (p. 48);

then as her condition again begins to worsen:

elle dit à l'infirmière: 'Non, pas de piqûre ce soir', et elle insista encore: 'Plus de piqûres.' Mot que j'ai à présent tout le loisir de me rappeler (p. 55).

The simple reason for this is, of course, that J. ultimately dies again. When she returned to life, the narrator tells us, she was 'presque guérie', and this presque turns out to be crucial as the idyll of the morning gradually degenerates into discord and J. slips back into the state which preceded her death. What is more, her decline follows the same pattern as before, and the narrator is aware of this at the time:

je me dis que la nuit dernière recommençait, d'où j'étais exclu, et qu'attirée par quelque chose de terrible, mais peut-être aussi de séduisant, de tentant, J. était en train de retourner d'elle-même dans ces dernières minutes où elle avait succombé à m'attendre (p. 50).

As the night wears on, the narrator says: 'vers deux ou trois heures, je me persuadai que le même malheur qu'hier risquait de se produire' (p. 53), and this is indeed the exact time at which Louise telephoned to tell him that her sister was dying the first time (p. 35), so that it soon becomes clear that the events recounted in this second piece of narrative are exactly the same as those recounted in the first -- with one difference: then, the narrator was absent from J.'s side and apparently unaware of the true nature of what was occurring, while now he is not only present at her side, he is aware of what is happening to her.

The second stage in the narrative does not therefore merely break with the first stage, by changing the direction of the récit's attention away from the past towards the present. In doing that, it encompasses the first stage by causing the events it contains to repeat themselves. That this is so is moreover made quite explicit by the récit at the point where J. finally dies again:

son pouls se dérégla, il frappa un coup violent, s'arrêta, puis se remit à battre lourdement pour s'arrêter à nouveau, cela plusieurs fois, enfin il devint extrêmement rapide et minuscule, et 's'éparpilla comme du sable' (pp. 59-60).

The last words of this second stage of narrative are in quotation marks because they are those pronounced by the

nurse to describe J.'s death the first time it occurs (p. 39), and this closing indication reinforces the impression given by the second stage of the narrative that its true concern is with the present state of its narrator's mind, and not with the event which lies at the origin of that state of mind. Indeed, in that the sole difference between the two stages of the narrative is constituted by the difference of awareness of what is going on on the narrator's part, the second stage, in which the narrator then is in possession of the knowledge which in the first stage is confined to the narrator now, would seem to have no other purpose than that of revealing the obsessive nature of the narrator's mind.

When the reader has reached the end of the first part of L'Arrêt, the only conclusion he can come to, it would seem, is that the entire story of J. cannot be taken on its face value, because it is before all else the morbid product of a grief-stricken imagination, and that the true subject of the story is the attempt by the individual who is the victim of that grief to rid himself once and for all of his obsessive fantasies by exposing them for what they are. Hence, the trap set by the récit, which consists of enlisting the reader's attention and sympathy for some past event, only to divert them towards understanding of the mind which seeks to recall it, is first and foremost a trap set by the narrator for himself. The récit, in other words, is an exercise in psychoanalysis performed by its narrator upon himself, in an attempt to rid himself of his obsessions. 'En finir', 'mettre fin à tout cela' can thus now be fully understood as expressions of a desire to be free of the narrative urge imposed by his obsessions, so that, when he concludes the first part of L'Arrêt by saying 'je n'ai aucun moyen d'en écrire davantage' (p. 60), he would seem at last to have achieved his goal. In this light, the récit so far emerges as just as aesthetically balanced a whole as it appeared up to the narrator's arrival at J.'s side: the shift from formal perfection to loss of formal control which marks the transition from one stage to the other, reflects perfectly the shift of focus of the

récit's content from a single event in the past, whose lost significance was compensated for by the formal perfection of its narration, to a repetitive event in the present, whose latent significance is rendered patent, and thus transcended, by being reflected in the repetition of the same story by the récit. Anti-fiction would thus appear to consist not merely in creating the novel of a novel which cannot be written (which is to retain the repetitive process it displays as a cause but not an effect of fiction): in L'Arrêt its purpose would appear to be to put an end to fiction once and for all by becoming a novel that cannot be written (and allowing repetition to affect it in its very substance). In short, for the narrator of L'Arrêt at least, relief from anguish can only come through the ruin of narrative, and at the end of the first part of L'Arrêt, we have been witness to a convincing demonstration of that fact.

It is not possible, however, to be satisfied with such an interpretation of the récit. It does correspond closely to what occurs in the first part. However it does not account for that aspect of the work which we looked at initially and which, indeed, is the initial theme of the récit itself: namely the writing of it. It is of course possible to interpret the narrator's extended references to his difficulties as a writer as constituting the true dilemma which the récit, by breaking free of narrative, seeks to resolve, and if we confine our attention to the first part of L'Arrêt this is perfectly possible. The problem arises because of the existence of the second part, which begins 'je continuerai cette histoire' (p. 61). This means that there has been yet another shift of narrative focus in the story. The first threw attention away from the past onto the present and from events to the mind obsessed by them. It was openly conducted from a standpoint of concern with the processes of writing. However, its conclusion seemed to signify that those processes were identical to the processes of obsessive memory so that, to free himself of them he had merely to destroy the processes of narrative. What the second part reveals is that the processes of writ-

ing and the processes of narrative are not the same in L'Arrêt. It obliges us to realise that if anti-fiction turns out in this récit not merely to be another form of fiction, but to mark the end of fiction, this is not merely so as to indicate the way towards psychological serenity: the break with fiction in L'Arrêt is a means of coming to grips directly with the problem of writing itself.

L'Arrêt is thus not about J.'s illness and death at all, nor even about the anguish such an event provokes in the bereaved lover: it is about what went on in the process of recounting these two aspects of the situation. There thus occurs a further shift in the narrative axis of the story at the end of the first part. In its first stage, narrative was focused simply on the past: its sole purpose seemed to be that of dispelling the narrator's ignorance of his motives in the past and thus calming the anguish to which that ignorance gave rise. In the second stage, which began when the narrator arrived at J.'s side, narrative changed direction, to focus upon the present-past: its purpose then became to relocate the source of anguish away from ignorance, which emerged as desirable, and within the obsessive representation of ignorance as something lost in the past. What the third shift does is to focus attention upon the present alone. The result of the reversal of narrative direction from a 'downward' to an 'upward' one was in itself to concentrate the récit upon the present from which it was being narrated. However, this was in order to free the present moment from the constraints of narrative altogether, by revealing that narrative was the substance of the narrator's obsession, and therefore the cause of his anguish. In short, the end of the first part of L'Arrêt appeared to leave the narrator reconciled in the present with the loss for which, hitherto, he had sought to compensate through recall of the past, and thus no longer in need of narrative.

The result of this third shift is to reveal that the true problem which gave rise to L'Arrêt and all of the

previous attempts at narrative to which the narrator refers, lies squarely within the present itself. This is the meaning of the final enigmatic statement in the first part of the story:

il faut que ceci soit entendu: je n'ai rien raconté d'extraordinaire ni même de surprenant. L'extraordinaire commence au moment où je m'arrête. Mais je ne suis plus maître d'en parler (p. 60).

These words are utterly incomprehensible in the terms of everything which precedes them. Not only do they refute the undeniably extraordinary nature of the events surrounding J.'s death (whether they be understood 'realistically' or 'psychologically'), they locate the extraordinary somewhere else: in the present, or, more precisely in the future of narrative -- as it were in the blank space which follows the end of the first part, and which corresponds to 'le moment où je m'arrête'.

The final axis of the récit thus turns out not to be present-present and to bring about a break between narrative time and real time. The present moment which emerges as the true focus of the first part of L'Arrêt reveals on the contrary that when the present of narrative coincides with the real present -- when fiction is reduced to the statement j'écris que j'écris -- this does not resolve the complex psychological situation constituted by narrative, but rather extends that complexity to the the domain of reality itself. Blanchot would thus seem to be seeking, in L'Arrêt, to confront directly the disparity between fiction and experience. His anti-fictional project can thus be seen not as an attempt to reinstate fiction in-a negative form, nor as an attempt to destroy fiction once and for all, but as an attempt at isolating in its purest form the fictional moment itself: the point in consciousness where memory and reminiscence seek to come to terms. This takes the form, at the end of the first part of L'Arrêt, of revealing that the present of narrative is absolutely disunified: that its significance overflows the limits of the means of expressing it. At this point, therefore, L'Arrêt is in the same position as that arrived at by

the end of Le Très-Haut, which was published simultaneously with it, where the narrator, who has been 'speaking' throughout the story and whose récit ends with his own death, cries out as he dies 'maintenant! C'est maintenant que je parle!'⁹. In Le Très-Haut, the true voice of the narrator -- the true narrative voice in the work -- can only be heard beyond the récit to which it gives rise. There, as at the end of the first part of L'Arrêt, the extraordinary emerges as something the story 'suspended rather than approached, something it as it were bore along on its crest and precipitated beyond the point at which its momentum ceased. In each case, moreover, the sole purpose of narrative is to focus upon this disparity between experience and its expression within the very mind which is seeking to attenuate it through narrative. In Le Très-Haut, however, this marks the end of the story. In L'Arrêt, on the contrary, there is a second stage to the story, and the way it begins, as I have suggested, indicates that Blanchot is seeking to give an additional dimension to his fiction, and one which will constitute a turning-point for his writing:

je continuerai cette histoire, mais, maintenant, je prendrai quelques précautions. Ces précautions ne sont pas faites pour jeter un voile sur la vérité. La vérité sera dite, tout ce qui s'est passé d'important sera dit. Mais tout ne s'est pas encore passé (p. 61).

The first sentence of this second part reveals clearly, as I have said, that the narrator's dilemma, which he has referred to repeatedly in the first part, has not been resolved by that first part as might first seem the case. The shift to a third narrative axis which the decision to continue narrating confirms reveals that his true dilemma lies not with the substance of what he has so far recounted, but with the fact that his memory of what occurred perpetually exceeds the bounds of his ability to recall it, leaving him, in the aftermath of narrative, with an irreducible supplement of memory which is simultaneously inexpressible and fundamental. It is in these terms that we must understand the final words of the ab-

ove passage: 'tout ne s'est pas encore passé'. They mean on a simple level that everything has not yet happened, and this is the narrator's justification for continuing with his story. They must also be read, however, as meaning that everything is not yet past. What is most fundamental to the narrator's experience is the supplementary moment which his récit has so far left unaccounted for. It has occurred, but beyond the confines of his récit, in a moment which, in terms of the time-scale of that récit, belongs to the future. If it has occurred, therefore, it has not done so in way corresponding to the expression 'cela s'est passé'. It has occurred but it has not come to pass, and this is the potentially inextricable dilemma with which the narrator is confronted as he begins the second part of L'Arrêt:

après une semaine de silence, j'ai vu clairement que si je me trompais dans l'expression de ce que je cherche à exprimer, non seulement il n'y aurait pas de fin, mais je serais heureux qu'il n'y en eût pas (p. 61).

In itself, this is no more than a conscious anti-fictional standpoint: the recognition that if fiction is now manifestly incapable of expressing experience, at least a form of relief from the desire for expression may be found in the indefinite demonstration of the inadequacies of fiction. However, we already know from the first part of L'Arrêt that the narrator believes that this time he will be done once and for all with his problem, and, as the beginning of the second part makes clear, by taking what he calls 'precautions' the narrator intends to avoid expressing himself the wrong way. He will go about this by taking as the sole subject of his récit from here on the very dilemma which lies at the origin of narrative. He will therefore seek to narrate the process of narrative itself, to force what occurs at each instance of narrative to come to pass within the sphere of narrative. Henceforth, this will be the only aim of his fiction, and the second part of L'Arrêt, followed by Au moment voulu and Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas, constitute the three stages in this process.

This being the case, the question must immediately arise as to why, if the entire story of J. is merely a mistake, so much importance is attached to it in L'Arrêt. If the true subject of the récit is narrative itself, why is the story of J. -- which is merely another inadequate attempt at circumscribing the inexpressible -- recounted in such a way as to have made it, for critics so far, the most memorable and significant aspect of L'Arrêt? This brings us back once again to the trap which Blanchot sets in this récit. For the story of J. is both highly charged with significance and quite insignificant, and this is the source of its effect. Initially, it constitutes a complete story, a tragic and moving account of something which is said once to have happened, with no significance other than that. Then it is revealed as the sign of a wider reality, anguish and obsession, so that the site of its significance changes entirely. At this stage, it is thus charged with significance in order that the reader's understanding of that significance may be manipulated by the récit, so as to force him to reinterpret the relationship between anguish and ignorance. It is thus emptied of significance and endowed with a significance of another form. This is the first stage in the trap. What the existence of the second part of the récit reveals is that there is a second stage. For just as the story of J. was charged with significance so that this might be reinterpreted, and therefore ultimately displays two conflicting significant axes, a 'downward' and an 'upward' one, so, when the narrator continues his récit and reveals that its true axis encompasses both of the others, it becomes clear that, in charging the story of J. with significance he was seeking to empty it of both of the possible interpretations it contained and thus extricate narrative once and for all from the sphere of significance itself. The 'truth' he is seeking to express in L'Arrêt will thus have nothing at all to do with the truth contained in the story of J.. Indeed, it will be nothing to do with the content of fiction as it is generally understood at all, since henceforth, the sole content of the

récit will be its form. The dual nature of the story of J. thus plays a part in what amounts to a revolution in the nature of fiction, and it is in this more complex light that we must now go back and examine it.

The first part of L'Arrêt plays its role in the overall project of the work by displaying three distinct faces. First and most obvious, it is a self-sufficient récit of a strange and moving kind: a tragedy which reveals itself as a pathological obsession. This is the level upon which I have approached it so far. There are two others however: on the first, certain elements in the recounting of J.'s death add an extra dimension to the story by suggesting that it has an allegorical function, that its particular coherence is simultaneously a sign of a more general truth. On the second, the entire story of J., including its allegorical significance, is itself an allegory of the failure which it constitutes for the narrator and which leads him to undertake the second part of the récit. The story thus has a 'downward' and an 'upward' allegorical significance, and this is the full significance of the trap it sets. On the 'downward' level, it is irresistible because of the moving nature of what is recounted, and obvious because it is simultaneously read as an allegory of something else. This simple trap is converted into a complex one by being made the subject of an 'upward' allegory which raises the récit onto a higher plane, that of the processes of narrative itself, causing all of the other meanings it has so far displayed to disappear and be replaced by self-depiction. By means of this highly original Aufhebung, the impossibility of fiction (its inability to express 'la vérité') is transformed from being a simple negative condition capable of indefinite repetition, into an original way of approaching 'la vérité'. The 'precautions' taken in the narrating of the second part of L'Arrêt will be directed at assuring that transformation, at rendering what was mere failure in the first part capable of signifying, by its very existence, the experience it cannot express.

The subject of the second part is thus the complex present standpoint which emerges at the end of the first part (and at the end of Le Très-Haut). This standpoint is allowed to come into being, the failure of the récit is allowed to occur, but to occur fictionally: as a moment in the 'upward' allegory of the fictional process constituted by the story of J.. Therefore, when the second part of L'Arrêt takes as its subject everything that occurs in the first, and seeks to provide an allegory of it, it has contained within the sphere of its 'content' that moment which perpetually exceeds its 'form', that moment of silence which lies in an unattainable future in relation to the present of narrative and which narrative can therefore never master. Consequently, the ultimate narrative axis of L'Arrêt, and of all of Blanchot's fiction subsequently, lies between silence and silence, as 'l'extraordinaire' seeks vainly, through narrative, to coincide with itself in an ultimate moment of silence. In order to trace how L'Arrêt brings about this impossible situation, we must go back and examine the story of J. in its 'downward' and its 'upward' allegorical significance.

The two levels of the story of J. which are related in a simple allegorical fashion are her illness and eventual death and the events surrounding the Munich conference of 1938. These links are made quite intentionally obvious. J.'s illness displays three aspects: the illness itself, the attempts at treating it and the failure of these attempts which leads to her death; and these three aspects are made to parallel the crisis in Europe during 1938, the attempts at resolving it which culminated in the Munich conference, and the ultimate failure of those attempts which led directly to war and, for France, to defeat and occupation. This is the significance of the references to her illness and to Munich which I have already quoted, the first of which reads as follows:

depuis le mois de septembre, je faisais un séjour à Arcachon. J'y étais seul. C'étaient les jours troubles de Munich. Je savais qu'elle était aussi malade qu'on peut l'être (p. 12).

J.'s doctor tells the narrator at the beginning of September that she has only three weeks to live, and a little later, we learn that it is at that moment that he decides upon a treatment for her:

quand je partis pour Arcachon, il était entendu qu'on appliquerait à J. un traitement nouveau, inventé par un physicien de Lyon, traitement encore très peu répandu, qui semblait excellent pour les malades peu malades, mais tuait presque sûrement les personnes gravement atteintes. C'est en vue de ce traitement que j'avais rencontré le médecin de J. (p. 20).

As we saw initially, the application of this treatment is made to parallel the attempts made prior to Munich, during September 1938, at resolving the international crisis:

le jour fixé pour la première piqûre du traitement (laquelle devait dans tous les cas provoquer une longue syncope) fut un des plus sinistres d'avant Munich (p. 25).

Moreover, this parallel is reinforced by being made to take in the narrator's presence in Arcachon:

les jours précédents, le gérant de l'hôtel m'annonçait chaque matin un départ, parfois deux. Mais il gardait de l'espoir, parce que depuis une semaine il avait à l'hôtel un homme politique considérable qui, lui, ne partait pas. Ce jour-là, l'homme politique fit demander sa voiture et partit; des dizaines d'autres partirent après lui. L'hôtel, très grand, était déjà un désert. Moi aussi, j'aurais dû partir, ne fût-ce que pour mon travail, mais je ne partis pas (pp. 25-26).

Significantly for the subsequent development of the allegory in L'Arrêt, the narrator's behaviour displays a certain exorbitance in relation to the parallel from the very outset. For the moment, however, the significance of his persistence in remaining in Arcachon remains hidden.

The treatment decided upon by the doctor proves difficult to apply. The day before it is due to begin, J. suffers a fit of suffocation which obliges the doctor to postpone it for a few days (p. 22). Then, an hour before it is again due to begin, the doctor decides to take his family to safety, drawing a crude parallel between J.'s condition and political events:

'Restez à l'abri derrière vos sacs de sable', lui avait déclaré le docteur au téléphone, faisant sottement allusion au sable de la défense passive (p. 27).

When Munich finally comes, it coincides with the doctor's decision to abandon his plans for treating J. altogether:

Cependant, le médecin était revenu. Munich aussi était arrivé. Comme raisonnablement elle ne pouvait plus sortir, le médecin allait la voir. Il lui dit qu'elle avait trop de courage, que le moment était venu de laisser ce courage de côté. Il n'était plus question de traitement. En partant, il appela dans l'escalier Louise, la soeur de J., et lui dit qu'il était inhumain de laisser sa soeur souffrir ainsi, qu'il n'y avait plus d'espoir et qu'il fallait en venir aux stupéfiants (p. 29).

The parallel here is clear to the point of obviousness: things have gone so far on the international scene that the only way of warding off danger is to ignore it. Such is a common interpretation of the Munich agreement, and the parallel between that agreement and 'un stupéfiant' is a telling one. As if to reinforce that parallel further, J.'s reaction to morphine is described in terms of a struggle:

pour J., la lutte prit une autre forme et devint encore plus difficile. Ce n'était plus un combat loyal, aux yeux ouverts, avec un adversaire qui admettait la volonté de combattre. Les piqûres la calmaient, mais elles essayaient aussi de rendre calme ce qui en elle ne pouvait être calmé, une affirmation violente, révoltée, contre une puissance qui ne la respectait pas (p. 30; my italics).

The effects of the morphine are to put J. into a coma. This frightens the doctor, who withdraws his prescription. However J. herself, angered at the suffering which she must now endure, demands the resumption of the injections, whereupon, we read:

les effets de la morphine furent, cette fois, tout autres. J. restait calme, ou un peu plus que calme, mais la torpeur n'était qu'apparente, le calme aussi n'était qu'apparent (p. 33).

J. is in other words now a match for the drug, it no longer takes her by surprise and, in a continuation of the mil-

itary metaphor, we read:

tout se passa comme si, une première fois trompée par l'hypocrisie du remède, elle se fût maintenant tenue sur ses gardes et, derrière les apparences du sommeil, dans les profondeurs du repos, eût affirmé une vigilance, une lucidité de regard qui ne laissait à son adversaire aucun espoir de l'atteindre à l'improviste (p. 33; my italics).

It is clear from all of these passages that L'Arrêt is a very precisely constructed roman à clef whose key is made intentionally easy to find. J.'s fate can be read as configuring the fate of France in the late 1930s. When we read that 'le médecin ... la tenait pour morte depuis 1936' (p. 14), the reference is clearly to Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland in that year, which was his first direct action against France. J.'s illness and France's decline are both incurable from then on, and the doctor's rather dubious role in her dying is a parallel with that played by politicians in the period leading up to Munich. The treatment he initially intends to use, and which was invented by a physician from Lyon, can be seen as the policy of negotiation and reliance upon the League of Nations which was pursued during the later IIIrd Republic by Edouard Herriot, the mayor of Lyon, and which Blanchot attacked so virulently during his career as a political journalist. (the fact that it is suitable for mild cases of the illness but fatal in serious cases fits in with this retrospective critique of Munich). The last-minute abandonment of the treatment and the decision to use drugs correspond to the sudden worsening of France's prospects in the months before Munich (Hitler annexed Austria in March 1938), and to the fall of the Blum government in April 1938 and its replacement by a Daladier government committed to replacing traditional pacifist policies by a policy of appeasement. Complementary to this, the doctor's absence, during which he was seeing to the safety of his family, and on which occasion he referred to 'le sable de la défense passive', can be interpreted as a comment upon the decision by the military chiefs at the time to adopt a resolutely defensive strategy in the face of Hitler's menaces.

The doctor's decision to use morphine thus represents the change of policy introduced by Daladier, and which led directly to the Munich agreement of September 1938. Furthermore, J.'s two separate reactions to the drug can be seen as a parallel to the two stages in France's attitude towards the agreement. Initially, it was greeted with unbounded relief and enthusiasm, and, on October 4th, ratified in the Assemblée by 537 votes to 75 (73 of whom were Communists). Hence when J. reacts to the morphine by going into what amounts to a coma, it is easy to see a parallel with what Jean-Pierre Azéma describes in the following manner:

pour l'heure, les Français étaient soulagés de n'être point en guerre et, en ce sens, Munich est bien un aboutissement: il clôt un après-guerre et couronne le pacifisme de la Der des der.

Sous bénéfice d'inventaire, la France à été -- face à Munich -- très munichoise. C'est à Paris qu'elle le manifesta avec le plus d'enthousiasme: Daladier y fut accueilli en héros; c'était la détente après la tension, les fleurs, les pleurs, les Marseillaises. ... La classe politique était presque au diapason: aux munichois de conviction s'ajoutaient les munichois d'occasion, y compris des têtes réputées bellicistes¹⁰.

The doctor's alarm at J.'s reaction and his change of mind regarding the treatment then correspond to the realisation, by the politicians responsible for Munich, that there was a danger in treating the agreement as a guarantee of France's safety. Immediately after signing the agreement, Hitler proceeded to commit further acts of bellicism which allowed few doubts as to his true intentions, so that the country's first reaction to Munich -- which, as Azéma says, was in fact merely the culmination of its earlier pacifism, and whose parallel, in J.'s story, is exactly the same as the 'syncope' which the treatment invented by the doctor from Lyon was supposed to produce -- soon appeared excessive to Daladier and others who, as Azéma also points out, were not 'des tenants de l'peasment' but 'des partisans du répit'¹¹. France therefore ceased to treat Munich as a solution to its problem after this initial period of enthusiasm, and, like J. the second time she accepts the mor-

phine, used her adherence to the agreement as a breathing-space during which to prepare her defences.

The narrator's precise use of dates can now also appear in its true light. I have already referred to the significance of 1936. The year of J.'s illness and dying is 1938 and the month is September. The three weeks which the doctor gives her to live towards the beginning of the month thus coincide with the crisis leading up to Munich. This came to a head on 21 September, when France and Britain began to put pressure on the Czechs, and on 22 September, when Chamberlain went to Bad Godesberg. Hence when J. dies, after what the narrator claims is five weeks (p. 36), this brings her story parallel with the period just after the Assemblée has ratified the Munich agreement, so that when the narrator says that, though only given three weeks at the beginning of the month, 'le 5 ou le 6 octobre elle se promena encore en voiture avec sa soeur le long des Champs-Élysées' (p. 12), this ceremonial behaviour while on the verge of death is a clear reference to France's apparent normality after Munich in the face of imminent catastrophe.

There is one striking, and rather disconcerting, aspect of this use of dates in L'Arrêt, which is visible in the last example I quoted: it is their frequent imprecision. J.'s drive down the Champs-Élysées took place 'le 5 ou le 6 octobre'; more important still, though on one level the course of her illness can be made to parallel the events surrounding Munich, this is only if 'le début de septembre', which, as we saw, is the moment in relation to which the three weeks she is given to survive, and the five weeks this finally turns out to be, are calculated, is understood not as the 1st, but as the 2nd or 3rd. In short, though the parallel between J.'s death and Munich is undeniably present, it displays a fundamental imprecision, which allows the allegory to function, but renders it slightly uncertain, as if something else were present in it which distorted the apparent framework of the story. Indeed, however unmistakable these allegorical references may be in the story, they do not allow a satisfactory reading of L'Arrêt.

It is moreover precisely because they are so unmistakable that the problem arises: the story just does not fit, as a whole, into the very precise allegorical framework it seems to be seeking to occupy. There are too many extraneous details. The allegory does turn the story of J. into a convincing illustration of what was tragic in Munich, and, given Blanchot's political commitment at the time, it is not difficult to read it as a remorseful meditation upon the helplessness with which he and others watched their great love, France, slide with the help of parliamentary politicians into annihilation. In return, this allegorical significance provides the first part of the story of J. with a coherence it otherwise lacks. In other words, the potential significance which any piece of fiction generates as it progresses, and realises by its close, is indeed generated and realised in this part of L'Arrêt. Yet at the same time it is realised only partially. Its realisation is in itself a coherent whole; it merely does not equal the sum of the parts in the récit so far. In short, L'Arrêt is not an allegory: it contains an allegory, and in order to read it properly we must determine the relationship of that allegory to all of those events surrounding J.'s death which do not belong to it.

The key to this wider problem lies with the narrator himself. For though he is involved in the events recounted, it is from afar. He is thus not truly a part of the positive allegorical significance of the story. When he arrives on the scene just after J.'s death, and proceeds to revive her, it would be consistent with the allegory as it has emerged up to then, to see this deed as an image of the attempt at reviving France made by Vichy. Blanchot did work briefly for a cultural organisation sponsored by the Vichy government¹², until he realised what this entailed¹³. It would be tempting, therefore, to see the resuscitation of J., followed, after a brief idyll, by a second version of what had already happened to her, as an allegory of the belief by certain members of the non-parliamentary nationalist Right, who had merely looked on as France declined,

that Pétain and l'Etat Français could revive the fallen nation, and of the revelation as time went by that this was simply consolidating France's defeat, and doing so, furthermore, by their own hand. It is noteworthy, however, that although this interpretation does allow the allegory present in L'Arrêt to maintain its coherence throughout the entire first part of the work, the second section, during which the narrator is present at J.'s side, is totally free of the references which so obviously give its allegorical significance to the first. This is because, by this stage in the story, the force of the allegory is beginning to wane, as the events recounted are directed towards an entirely different horizon of meaning, under the influence of a second level of allegory.

The point at which the Munich-allegory gives way to another level of allegory is the moment when the narrator arrives on the scene and, left alone with J., brings her back to life. The reason for this is clear. The narrator provides at all times the true focus of the récit: the narrative axis of true first-person fiction lies constantly between Je now and Je then. That being so, allegory and first-person narrative are not immediately compatible. What Butor calls the 'realism' of the first-person mode interferes with the necessary suspension of reference to reality which renders allegory capable of expressing what cannot be expressed otherwise. No matter how transparent and convincing the allegorical function of a story may be, its narration in the first person simultaneously reminds its reader that it is only allegory and, what is more serious, places within the field of the allegory an element (the narrator then) which cannot possibly have allegorical status because it is the overt source of the allegory now. Of course, this does not mean that it is impossible to write first-person allegory. It does mean, though, that certain precautions have to be taken if such an allegory is to work, and also, since it is rare to find complication sought for its own sake, that the author employing the first-person mode is probably doing so for a precise reason.

The most obvious one could well account for its use in L'Arrêt up to the point of the narrator's arrival, for it would consist in creating a self-conscious form of allegory by enclosing within the story an image en abyme of its own narrator. In that way, the effect of allegory, which is to render the complex simple and come to terms with the inexpressible, would be altered by having to co-exist with a constant reminder of its artificiality and ultimate inadequacy.' This is achieved in L'Arrêt when the narrator reveals that, in his absence in Arcachon, he is an actor both in the Munich crisis and in J.'s illness. This occurs in a passage already quoted:

le jour fixé pour la première piqûre du traitement ... fut un des plus sinistres d'avant Munich. Les jours précédents, le gérant de l'hôtel m'annonçait chaque matin un départ, parfois deux. Mais il gardait de l'espoir, parce que depuis une semaine il avait à l'hôtel un homme politique considérable qui, lui, ne partait pas. Ce jour-là, l'homme politique fit demander sa voiture et partit; des dizaines d'autres partirent après lui (pp. 25-26).

By revealing this, the narrator effectively contravenes the rules of the narrative mode he has adopted. Allegory depends for its effect upon maintaining a distance between the story bearing the allegorical significance and the events to which it refers. This distance is the source of such a story's significance. By allowing the two levels of allegory to coincide in the narrator, therefore, L'Arrêt includes within the field of allegory the moment where it is either not yet or no longer allegory: the point where the two levels converge in his own mind during the process of narration. The true subject of L'Arrêt is thus not the Munich-allegory, but the allegorical standpoint itself. This explains the existence in the story of so much detail that cannot be accounted for in terms of the Munich-allegory. Allegory is present in L'Arrêt in a complete form in order to reveal that, in the case of the truly inexpressible, even allegory is inadequate as a mode of expression. All it can achieve is to enclose the inexpressible within

its field, and in L'Arrêt it is located in the figure of the narrator. This is clear in the way the passage quoted above goes on:

moi aussi, j'aurais dû partir, ne fût-ce que pour mon travail, mais je ne partis pas. Aujourd'hui, j'essaie en vain de comprendre pourquoi en ces jours je suis resté éloigné de Paris où tout m'appelait. Cela est vrai, la pensée de cette absence me cause un malaise, mais surtout les raisons m'en échappent. Si mystérieuse qu'ait été la suite de ces événements, plus mystérieuse pour moi est cette absence volontaire qui les a rendus possibles (p. 26).

From the present tense in which this passage is narrated it is clear that the true focus of the story is not the events themselves but the anguish they cannot express. As I have already pointed out, the fact that he does not return to Paris introduces a certain exorbitance into the parallelism of the story's development and it is now possible to understand why. His distance from Paris, which is the site of both levels of action in the Munich-allegory, corresponds fictionally to his distance from the allegory itself, and his true anxiety arises not from his memory of J., nor from his memory of Munich, but from his inability to remember what is most essential in his memory.

L'Arrêt thus appear to constitute an allegory conscious of its deficiencies. By setting its narrator at a distance from the events it recounts while relating him to both of the levels upon which they are significant, it turns this inexplicable distance and his anxious ignorance of its cause into an image of the dilemma which gives rise to allegory. Such a traditionally anti-fictional device serves to enhance the effect of the allegory by allowing it to occur in the light of its own inadequacy. It thus constitutes what amounts to a tragic use of the genre, and, for part of its duration at least, L'Arrêt seems to intend the tragedy we have already seen in the story of J. to be augmented by its narrator's tragic inability to comprehend it.

Blanchot is not content with this augmented form of traditional allegory however. The difference between what

I have described so far and the true nature of L'Arrêt, is that the image en abyme of the narrator, whose distance from the events in the récit is the guarantee of their allegorical coherence, does not remain at a distance, but gradually approaches the site of the action as it approaches its dénouement. This could of course merely indicate a dynamic conception of the structure en abyme: the progress of the allegory with its increase in understanding would then be paralleled by a closing of the gap between the events and the image of the narrator; his arrival on the scene would coincide, in the past, with the conclusion of his narrative in the present, the former signifying the latter and thus replacing the logical satisfaction of which self-conscious allegory deprives its reader and its author, with the aesthetic satisfaction provided by a finished work of art. Such a use of the image en abyme would have been perfectly possible in L'Arrêt, and would, furthermore, have provided a telling image, at the close of this stage of the récit when the narrator contemplates J.'s dead body, of the true significance of the story: namely the gulf separating narrative from what is inexpressible in experience. Again, this would have made of L'Arrêt a perfect piece of anti-fiction. This is rendered impossible, however, by what occurs once the narrator arrives on the scene, and which I have already examined. For the récit so far to have worked as simple anti-fiction, the narrator's arrival on the scene should have coincided with the end of narrative. Since, on the contrary, narrative continues, the final image does not allow the story to stand as an aesthetic whole, but focuses narrative attention upon the flaw which lies at its heart. This means that the unstable nature of first-person allegory is not exploited in L'Arrêt merely to illustrate the inexpressible significance of the author's experience: the narrator's arrival at J.'s side signifies what has been latent throughout the events leading up to it, namely that his sole interest as a narrator lies in exploring the process of narrative itself. By including within the allegory an element totally incompatible with it, Blanchot is thus not seeking merely to comment upon allegory, but to discredit it.

Allegory is thus not merely criticised in L'Arrêt: it is superseded. The fact that, when the narrator arrives on the scene, the story goes on, is impossible in terms of the original allegory. His presence within the sphere is an illusion, a projection en abyme only compatible with that sphere if kept at a distance. The fact the story does go on after his arrival can therefore mean only one thing: it is allegory which is incompatible with the true sphere of the story's action. Hence, it is not the allegory which contains an image of its source. The allegory itself is merely an image within the broader sphere of action, whose poles lie, as we have already seen, in the anguished incomprehension which first gave rise to narrative and continues to inspire it in L'Arrêt.

This corresponds to our initial reading of this first part of L'Arrêt, where we identified a reversal in narrative 'direction' at the point where the narrator arrives at J.'s side, a change from a 'downward', tragic mode to an 'upward' psychological mode of action. We can now see that this reversal occurs as the 'downward' allegory gradually brings to the 'surface' of its action an extraneous element, whose arrival at that 'surface' reveals that it is not the surface we had assumed, and that the action of the récit is occurring on another level entirely. This again seems to indicate that, at this point, what amounts to another story is beginning, that L'Arrêt has so far consisted only in a preamble to the story it contains. This is reinforced, as I have already suggested, by the way in which Louise ushers everyone away and thereby effectively changes the scene upon which the events of the story are occurring. At this point in L'Arrêt, therefore, the entire story of J.'s death and the allegory of France's decline are left behind by the narrator as if they were of no significance. His declaration that the dates in his story are of no importance means that all of the precision with which J.'s dying and France's history are made to correspond to each other, were simply an exercise with no other significance than that of demonstrating its futility. Once again, the reader would be justified in finding this hard to accept. Indeed, now that

the intrinsically moving nature of the story of J. has been augmented by an allegorical significance equally as moving, he must find it even harder to understand why the most memorable aspect of the story is simultaneously the most insignificant.

The answer lies in the fact that, even when the Munich allegory is revealed as irrelevant to the narrator's true concerns, he goes on to recount what does concern him in terms of his relationship to J. Therefore, although the story of J. in its 'downward' allegorical significance has been superseded, J. herself remains present in what has emerged as the true sphere of narrative. In other words, the 'true' sphere of narrative which apparently supersedes the apparent, allegorical sphere remains somehow caught up in that allegorical sphere. The allegorical significance of J.'s dying is thus not confined to the events surrounding Munich: it somehow governs the recounting of those events too, it is simultaneously an allegory of fiction itself. J. is thus a pivot for narrative in L'Arrêt. In parallel to the reversal caused by the arrival of the narrator on the scene, her significance changes from a 'downward' to an 'upward' allegorical one. This being the case, we are now obliged to re-read the first stage in the story of J. from the beginning in a different way. This is made particularly simple by what I have already pointed to as the existence of so much detail in that part of the récit which cannot be accounted for in terms of the Munich-allegory. It is now clear that, far more precisely than as an allegory of Munich, the story of J. can be read as an allegory of the attempt at narrating experience, and one in which, unlike in the previous one, both the narrator's absence and his presence are compatible with its allegorical significance.

This plane of the allegory is far more comprehensive, and thus far more complex, than the other one. Its most disconcerting aspect is that all of the characters in it are projections of a single persona: the author. This does allow

the true significance of what until now have appeared as utterly enigmatic statements at last to emerge. Hence:

j'écirai librement, sûr que ce récit ne
concerne que moi (p. 8);

or, a little further on:

de ces événements il y a plusieurs témoins,
bien qu'un seul, mais le plus autorisé, ait
entrevu la vérité (p. 9),

can both now be better understood. Nevertheless, the significance of this plane of allegory cannot be a simple one, for if all of the characters are facets of the same person, we cannot be sure that the person addressing us directly is who we think he is. Indeed, the 'Je' who is narrating cannot possibly correspond to the realistic 'Je' normally associated with first-person narrative, because he is also a figure in his own allegory, so that if we persist in accepting Butor's claim that first-person narrative is a realistic mode, we must be prepared to accept that the reality of the self who narrates is going to be an unexpected one. This is apparent in another enigmatic statement on the part of the narrator, and one which we are still not in a position totally to comprehend:

de ces événements, je garde une preuve 'vivante'. Mais cette preuve, sans moi, ne peut rien prouver, et j'espère que de ma vie personne ne s'en approchera. Moi mort, elle ne représente que l'écorce d'une énigme (p. 10).

One thing at least is clear from these words: the narrator seeks above all to maintain what is most certain about his experience outside of the bounds of what can be determined in fact. Read in the light of the allegory of fiction which is present in L'Arrêt, this suggests that the narrator's intention in taking as the subject of his récit the very processes which are at work in it, is to place a barrier ('ma vie') between these processes and their object and thus defer the moment at which they encounter and inevitably deform it. He does this by making the story of J. an allegorical version of what Blanchot was attempting in Thomas l'obscur.

This is the significance of another passage which, so far, has only been partly comprehensible:

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une fois je réussis à donner forme à ces événements. C'était en 1940, pendant les dernières semaines de juillet ou les premières d'août. Dans le désœuvrement que m'imposait la stupeur, j'écrivis cette histoire (p. 8).

However, the way it goes on again reveals that if such references put the reader on the right track as regards the significance of L'Arrêt, it is far from clear where that track is going to lead him:

mais, quand elle fut écrite, je la relus. Aussitôt je détruisis le manuscrit. Il ne m'est même plus possible, aujourd'hui, de m'en rappeler l'étendue (ibid.).

Since Thomas l'obscur survived this re-reading, and was published, we must assume that it took place on a different plane from that which we would at first expect. We must therefore again conclude that the 'Je' who is speaking is not a realistic subject at all, but a 'voice' which in Thomas l'obscur remained stifled, or was at most imitated, with equal success, by Thomas and a dying cat: the voice of the subject of fiction itself. The narrative standpoint of L'Arrêt would thus appear to be the standpoint which, in Thomas l'obscur, remains always latent, and the search for which constitutes the entire action of the novel. Somehow, what for Thomas was an instantaneous gleam of conscious experience, absolutely impossible to situate in either time or space, and incompatible even with his existence as an individual rational being, has in L'Arrêt become the permanent standpoint of fiction. What from Thomas l'obscur appeared obvious yet inconceivable, namely that the standpoint engendered by the story lay somewhere beyond the story's bounds, has now become a reality and provides a standpoint from which to examine the processes which originally engendered it.

The way this occurs can be seen in the role played by J.'s friend A., who is clearly the Anne of Thomas l'obscur. She is first mentioned as 'Ia belle-soeur d'une danseuse assez renommée' who is the recipient of a small bequest in J.'s will (p. 14). This must be set against the fact that, as the narrator goes on to tell, J.'s will makes no mention

of him at all. This, he presumes, is because he encouraged her to commit suicide. Later on, when J. is near to death, she asks A. to write to the narrator, then thinks better of it. A. nevertheless contacts him, and it is this which finally makes him decide to return. On these two occasions, A. is associated with what is the most fundamental aspect of the relationship between the narrator and J.: death. More important still, however, the two occasions when she is mentioned in this way are in fact parallel versions of each other, and in turn point to the reality which is the true concern of the narrator on this level: the pattern of the action in Thomas l'obscur. The parallel between the two passages is difficult to perceive in the récit because of the distance which separates them. If they are placed side by side, however, it becomes plainer to see. The reference to J.'s will takes the following form:

quelque temps plus tôt, elle songea sérieusement à se donner la mort. Moi-même, un soir, je lui avais conseillé ce parti. Ce même soir, après m'avoir écouté, ne pouvant parler à cause de son peu de souffle, mais se tenant à table comme une personne bien portante, elle écrivit quelques lignes qu'elle voulut garder secrètes. Ces lignes, je finis par les obtenir d'elle et je les ai encore. Ce sont quelques mots de recommandation, par lesquels elle prie sa famille de simplifier le plus possible la cérémonie des obsèques et surtout interdit à qui que ce soit de venir jamais sur sa tombe; elle fait aussi un petit legs à l'une de ses amies, A., belle-soeur d'une danseuse assez renommée (pp. 13-14).

The exchange of letters between A. and the narrator is then recounted as follows:

A., son amie, m'écrivit. Les premières lignes sont sous sa dictée: d'après ces mots, elle allait presque bien; ne soyez pas inquiet, disait-elle, ne le soyez pas. Puis, un scrupule l'avait prise; n'ayant pas la force d'écrire, elle avait trouvé surprenant de se servir d'un tiers pour m'écrire, et elle avait prié son amie de renoncer à la lettre et même de l'oublier. Mais A. m'écrivait cela, elle me disait surtout que J. ne voulait pas interrompre mon repos, mais qu'on voyait bien qu'elle ne pensait qu'à ce retour, que tous les autres êtres l'irritaient, la blessaient de plus en plus,

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que bientôt elle ne supporterait plus aucune présence, moi étant absent. Je pense qu'elle m'annonçait par là qu'elle allait mourir. Cette fois, je décidai de rentrer à Paris (pp. 34-35).

In each of these passages, J. is incapacitated. In the first, unable to speak, she writes; in the second, unable to write, she asks someone else to write for her. In both cases, she is confronted by her death, and in both cases, she is seeking to exclude the narrator from any part in its occurrence: first by leaving him out of her will, second by pretending that there is nothing wrong with her. What is more, in both cases, she wishes her true motives to remain unknown to the narrator, yet in both cases, he finds them out: first by obtaining the will, second, because A., against J.'s wishes, writes to tell him what J. would not. Two important differences mark this parallel however; one concerns the status of A., the other, the behaviour of the narrator. In the episode of the will, A. plays a role in J.'s plans by being written about: the will says that A. will receive a bequest on J.'s death. In the episode of the letter, however, A. does her writing for J., then goes on to usurp J.'s role by writing to the narrator herself. Up to the point where she merely takes down what J. dictates to her, her role is parallel to the one she plays in J.'s will: in each case, J. uses her as a means of excluding the narrator from her death. When she goes on to write to the narrator, however, her role takes on a further dimension, for what she says to him is not merely J.'s original secret -- namely, that she did not want the narrator to be involved in her death --, but the truth behind that secret wish: that in fact J. did desire that he be at her side.

In the second episode, therefore, what occurs in the first is repeated with an added dimension to it, and this is apparent in the difference between the narrator's role in each case. Both times, he learns what J. wished to keep a secret. In the first, this is simply by procuring the will himself, while in the second it is thanks to A.'s intermediary. In addition, his knowledge of the secret in the case

of the will does not lead to any change in his behaviour in the past: it amounts simply to the point of contact between what occurred in the past and his standpoint in the present ('ces lignes, je finis par les obtenir d'elle, et je les ai encore'). In the case of the letter, however, his knowledge of J.'s secret leads him to decide at last to go to her side -- that is, to begin the movement which led him to where he is now. In short, A.'s rôle, the secret message concerning the narrator and the rôle of the narrator himself are all more complex in the case of the letter than in that of the will. Similarly, between one episode and the other J.'s role diminishes to nothing.

The two episodes are thus both parallel and not parallel. Rather, between them there occurs a change in narrative perspective which transforms the way in which the pattern perceptible in both of them is represented. That pattern, as I have already claimed, is the pattern of the action in Thomas l'obscur -- or rather, the pattern of what occurred in the writing, and occurs in the reading of Thomas l'obscur, and during which the entire sphere of the novel suffers distortion as it seeks to accommodate a point of view to which it gives rise, but which exceeds its bounds. L'Arrêt is simultaneously an allegory of Munich and an allegory of fiction itself, and, in its latter function, it takes as its object the process which, for Thomas l'obscur, could not be given objective status and which, moreover, undermined the entire objective plane of action in that novel. In so doing, as I have already claimed, it speaks in the 'voice' which Thomas l'obscur could only stifle. There is thus no room any longer for the original story of Thomas. His was the imperfect standpoint from which the dilemma in Thomas l'obscur was initially explored, and which, during the course of the novel itself, was replaced on three separate occasions: by Anne, by Irène and by the standpoint of fiction itself ('je suis vu'). It is this latter standpoint, which governed the action of Thomas l'obscur uninterruptedly yet was never manifest, that governs the narration of L'Arrêt, and which seeks to go over what occurred in Tho-

mas l'obscur from without, so as to account fully for what the novel itself could only partly express.

Hence, the three actors in the parallel episodes I have quoted, J., A., and the narrator, correspond allegorically to the conscious self ('Je'), whose anguish and 'sickness unto death' lead it to seek a solution in fiction; to the imaginary figure in whom the anguished consciousness seeks to arrest its loss of self; and to the imaginary 'self' which consciousness, apprehensive of death, projects and rejects as a figure of what death means for the self. This is of course a flat and literal interpretation of the significance of these characters, and cannot stand as an adequate version of what occurs in Thomas l'obscur. It is, however, a legitimate interpretation of what the first part of L'Arrêt reduces that novel to. It does so, however, not so as merely to encapsulate, as the content of its own story, the struggle between form and content which marked Thomas l'obscur. If it reduces the pattern of significance present in that novel to a simple, three-fold exchange, this is in order to explore more exactly the complexities it displayed.

This brings us back to the two parallel yet distinct episodes linking J., A., and the narrator. Each of them displays the pattern I have referred to: in each, J. (the conscious self) resorts to A. (the imaginary figure) so as to ward off the narrator (the thought of death). In each case, the narrator ultimately learns J.'s secret design: the thought of death triumphs in the end. One version of this pattern is a simple one however. The other is complex. In short, if L'Arrêt is seeking to represent as a fiction the processes which, in Thomas l'obscur give rise to fiction, that representation is not going to take a simple form. If L'Arrêt reduces the pattern of Thomas l'obscur to a simple exchange of papers, this exchange takes place, within the action of L'Arrêt on two distinct levels. On the first, the process is represented allegorically as a realistic one: J., unable to speak, writes down what should occur at her death and, by mentioning A., excludes the narrator. This corresponds to the actions of a writer who, unable to come

to terms with the thought of death, creates an image of someone other than himself, then places it between himself and that other self which he refuses to envisage: his dead self. Then, by rendering that image desirable (for a man, by making it a woman), he may forget what is fearful about the thought of death, put death out of his mind (this process is represented by J.'s wish to keep her will a secret from the narrator). Such an allegorical representation does correspond to a simple conception of Thomas l'obscur and its significance for its author. On the second, more complex, allegorical level, however, the perspective is altered. On the one hand, J.'s rôle is reduced to a minimum -- in other words, the author's relationship to his novel is not viewed in terms of a conscious decision to write: on the contrary, it is seen from the start as an involvement in the processes of writing, so that his decision, when it comes, consists of a decision to stop writing. On the other hand, A.'s role, from having been purely that of an image, takes over the initiative which in the other episode belonged to J.. This means that fiction is being seen, in this perspective, not as a distraction from the thought of death, but, since A. both repeats and interprets J.'s original message for the narrator, as a means of making contact and coming into communication with the thought of death. The element of secret remains. However, it has been dispelled at the point where J. sought to place it, to reveal an ambiguity (death is feared yet desired) which brings the thought of death closer, but without consciousness being aware of it, for A.'s message is a secret from J..

The second episode is thus a more complex representation of the processes present in Thomas l'obscur, corresponding to the point in the novel's action where Anne, from having been perceived from Thomas's standpoint, and thus from the standpoint of the writer and the reader whose initial perspective upon events is provided by Thomas, becomes in her turn the standpoint from which what is obscure in Thomas is approached. In both episodes, the same elements are present: in both, J.'s recourse to A. becomes known to the narrator. In the first, and simpler, episode, however, most

emphasis is placed upon the processes leading up to that point; the revelation itself is recounted simply as an act of the narrator's: 'ces lignes, je finis par les obtenir d'elle, et je les ai encore '. In the second, on the contrary, all but the preliminary stages of what occurs correspond to the processes whereby the revelation occurs. In other words, the same fictional processes are being recounted allegorically from two separate angles in L'Arrêt, and there is a reason for this. Each version of these processes contains the same elements, as we have seen, and they are the elements which constitute the action of Thomas l'obscur. The novel was a failure, however, as the narrator has let it be known. It was a failure because the 'voice' now at last audible in L'Arrêt is the voice which could only be imitated by it. Latent in its action there could be perceived at all times the standpoint which it projected but could not accommodate. That standpoint is the standpoint from which L'Arrêt is being narrated. That being so, Thomas l'obscur can no longer appear as a coherent whole. The standpoint it sought so vainly to accommodate effectively dislocated the novel so that it existed on two separate planes, that of Thomas (onto which the action led initially) and that of Anne (which displaced the original one in an attempt to discover the true identity of Thomas). All that gave the novel its unity was the persistence of the third-person narrative mode and its concentration upon the figure of Thomas. Yet, from the very beginning, Thomas was utterly divided. Each time the novel used the name 'Thomas' it was reviving the problem which the character Thomas was initially meant to solve. The emergence of Anne constituted an attempt at turning this divergence into a convergence, but this merely resulted in the destruction of Anne. The figure of Irène emerged as offering a perspective which could encompass this process of simultaneous divergence and convergence. However, the mode upon which the narrative was being conducted condemned her, in her turn, to suffer the dislocation suffered by Anne and displayed unremittingly by Thomas. In a last attempt at dominating things, Thomas proceeded to narrate the entire pro-

cess as it had occurred up to the death of J., claiming what amounted to a pyrrhic narrative victory over the failure of the novel up until then to express his significance: 'je me suis fait créateur contre l'acte de créer'¹⁴. He in his turn finally proved incapable of governing the perspective from which the novel was being narrated, and the work closed on a note of intentional defeat and shamefaced impotence.

What the two parallel versions of the action of Thomas l'obscur reveal, therefore, is that L'Arrêt is somehow going to accommodate the standpoint which dislocated that novel. The two different roles played by A. in the narrator's relationship to J. correspond to her fate as a character in Thomas l'obscur, where, called first to be a solution to the dilemma felt and represented by Thomas, she finds herself transformed into the seat of that dilemma. This transformation is an attempt at locating the dislocation present in the novel within one of its characters, so as to transcend it. The result is the dislocation of Anne herself, and the reference to her as 'la belle-soeur d'une danseuse assez renommée' would seem to be a cryptic reference to this. For the dancer is undoubtedly Anna Pavlova, who bears the same name as Anne. She was celebrated for her performance of the Dying Swan, Le Cygne Mourant, into whom she in effect transformed herself aesthetically, becoming her own belle-soeur. A. is therefore un cygne, or rather un signe mourant: the entire focal point of Thomas l'obscur reduced to a single letter, and divided between the two irreconcilable dimensions which Thomas l'obscur could not contain.

The aims of L'Arrêt in relation to that novel now appear quite simple. Since the novel did not contain the standpoint it engendered, and which corresponded to the divided self of its tacit narrator, by reducing that failed novel to a single character (in both senses of the term) and representing the divided self by two separate characters, J. and the narrator, L'Arrêt can provide the transcendent standpoint which in the novel was lacking. By separating the two irreconcilable dimensions in the novel into two distinct characters, fiction

would at last seem to have solved the problem it so dramatically revealed in Thomas l'obscur. This is how, on one level, the récit is meant to be seen. However, we must never forget that it is a trap: a trap for us and for its narrator -- in short, a trap for fiction in general. The intention to make the récit compensate for the insufficiencies of Thomas l'obscur is manifest. Equally manifest, however, is that L'Arrêt, in setting about its task, is doing so in precisely the way Thomas himself did in the penultimate chapter of the novel. By looking back at what has occurred, and treating himself as he was then as the same person as he is now, the narrator of L'Arrêt is falling into precisely the trap which was Thomas's: that of simplifying the narrative standpoint of the work, when, as has already been obvious, the entire problem arises from its irreducible complexity. Therefore, by representing, in the events he recounts in L'Arrêt, the irreconcilable aspects of the action of Thomas l'obscur, he may be clarifying what occurred in that novel. However, in representing himself in the past as the opposite of the conscious self (Je) by representing that self as J., yet speaking in the present as a conscious self (Je), he is simply laying himself open to the same fate as befell Thomas during his own first-person monologue, and without the excuse of ignorance which could be seen as Thomas's.

Yet this is precisely the aim -- the sole aim -- of the récit. We have already seen that its narrator is out to rid himself once and for all of the desire to narrate the past, so as to relocate the site of fiction within the present from which it emanates. In making the same mistake as Thomas, therefore, he is not simply behaving as a conventional anti-fictional subject, or turning Thomas's honte into an alternative narrative morality. It is no accident that, although A. represents something which the two other characters in L'Arrêt bear no relation to, because it proved incapable of expressing their relations, she has the same fictional status as the character who represents the conscious self, J.. This fact is premonitory of what L'Arrêt aims ultimately to achieve. For if A. is reduced to a signe mourant compared

to what she was in Thomas l'obscur, by referring to the conscious self, in relation to which the novel was conceived, as J., L'Arrêt is not only rising above third-person fiction: it is rising above the entire concept of person to which it corresponds. In short, L'Arrêt is not merely out to destroy the sphere of fiction, but to break out of the simple opposition between real and imaginary selves. By placing J. on the same footing as A., it is saying that the Je by which we express our identity is just as much a figment of an impossible desire, as are all of the ideal women whom Anne epitomised and finally destroyed. It is thus seeking to wrest fiction once and for all from the circuit of impossible desire to which it has so far remained confined, and a small episode which occurs during J.'s second decline is meant to indicate this.

It is the visit by another of her friends, 'une jeune femme originaire de Constantinople, en compagnie de qui elle avait passé plusieurs mois, mais qu'elle ne voyait plus guère' (p. 46). It is already clear that the friendship between J. and A. represents the fictional link between the self who composed Thomas l'obscur and the female figure in the novel. Similarly, J.'s friendship with this young woman is fictional in nature, for she is 'la Grecque moderne' of the Abbé Prévost's novel¹⁵. The episode is recounted as follows:

cette jeune femme avait dû apprendre qu'elle était très malade et elle venait poliment se renseigner. J'ignore ce que les autres lui raconterent, mais, pensant que J. était sur sa fin, elle leur répéta que c'était le moment où le danger de contagion était le plus grand et qu'il ne fallait pas entrer dans la chambre. Voilà peut-être la raison pour laquelle ils me laissèrent tranquille: je ne sais. Elle-même ne voulut pas entrer et passa la tête par l'entrebâillement de la porte, en faisant des signes et des grimaces. 'Qu'a-t-elle donc? me dit J. d'un air soudain irrité. Est-ce que je lui fais peur? Suis-je si laide?' La conduite de cette fille était d'autant plus ridicule qu'ayant la même maladie, elle était elle-même à deux doigts d'en finir (ibid.).

The narrator of Prévost's story is afraid that the strength of his passion will render suspect the veracity of what he has to recount: 'quelle fidélité attendra-t-on d'une Plume

conduite par l'amour?'¹⁶. What Blanchot's narrator is replying is, that a pen properly conducted by love, as he claims his to be ('à ce moment je l'aimais, et le reste n'était rien'), will not only affect the substance of what is recounted (Anne, Aïssé), but the mind which is narrating it. The 'plusieurs mois' which J. and her friend spent together correspond to the period during which, as he composed his work, Prévost sought to relate to each other the figure of Aïssé and the Je of first person narrative. The fact that, in L'Arrêt, Aïssé remains on the threshold of J.'s room, simply making signs in the direction of J. and the narrator while explaining to 'les autres' how dangerous J.'s condition is, reveals the change of perspective in relation to fiction which the action of L'Arrêt is seeking to bring about. For now it is not in Aïssé's company, but in that of the narrator, that J. is spending her time. The Je of narrative is thus henceforth no longer in control of narrative: as J.'s revival by the narrator reveals, it is now in the control of its own death. The Abbé Prévost's story, it is suggested, was partly aware of that, but remained at a distance from it. Hence, 'une Plume conduite par l'amour', it is concluded in L'Arrêt, should have led to a more serious subversion of truth: 'la conduite de cette fille était ... ridicule'. She herself was 'à deux doigts d'en finir'. As the narrator of L'Arrêt tells his reader at the outset, he intends to be finished once and for all. In representing the conscious self as J. in the story, he is indicating -- and with the aid of the Abbé Prévost, illustrating -- that the allegory of fiction which he is undertaking in order to be done with fiction, will ultimately deprive him of his own position as the narrator of L'Arrêt. In order to see how this occurs, we must now examine in detail how the story of J., as well as being an allegory of Munich, also constitutes an allegory of fiction itself.

To examine this level of allegory in detail would require lengthy study in itself, for, much more than in the case of the Munich allegory, the correspondance between allegory and its subject are very detailed. The broad out-

lines should however be enough to indicate how it proceeds. Apart from the narrator, J., and A., the action also contains a doctor, a nurse and J.'s sister Louise. There are also sundry mourners, among whom J.'s mother puts in a brief appearance. The doctor, who in the Munich allegory represented politicians, now stands for what may be termed the 'novelist': the organising intention behind a work of fiction. His treatment of J. is clearly a version of the way the suffering of the self is traditionally turned into fiction, and the initial developments in the first part of L'Arrêt are a reference to Thomas l'obscur:

quand je partis pour Arcachon, il était entendu qu'on appliquerait à J. un traitement nouveau, inventé par un physicien de Lyon. ... C'est en vue de ce traitement que j'avais rencontré le médecin de J.. ... Ce traitement me plaisait, je ne sais pourquoi. A J. il ne plaisait pas moins (pp. 20-21).

The understanding which, at this stage, links the doctor, the narrator and J. in their resolve to cure the latter corresponds to the beginning of Thomas l'obscur, which indeed brought to fiction 'un traitement nouveau'. The narrator's stay in the sea-side resort of Arcachon thus reflects Thomas's ordeal in the sea, during which all that is identifiable about him becomes hidden (Arcachon is also Arcachon). J.'s ordeal during his absence thus clearly follows the attempts made by Thomas, in the first chapters of the novel, at coming to terms as an individual Je with what has happened to him. J. and the narrator are thus the separation onto two distinct levels of what, in Thomas l'obscur, remained centred in one.

The pattern displayed by the behaviour of doctor, narrator and J. during the first section of this first part thus represents the ambition, and the failure, of the story of Thomas. The understanding between them at the beginning is obviously that J. will be allowed to die, but gradually, so that the narrator can time his arrival on the scene with the moment of her death. In other words, consciousness will be reconciled with the thought of death by having its anguish brought under control in fiction. The treatment which

the doctor proposes to apply -- 'chaque jour un piqué chez elle' -- corresponds to the attempt at containing experience within the chronological limits of traditional fiction: an injection every day also signifies that the experience of consciousness will be marked out (piqué) day by day in the events of the novel. The most striking aspect of this treatment is that it never gets under way. The doctor is represented as an unsophisticated fool, and his entire project held up to scorn. The treatment he proposes is a crude, kill-or-cure one which, at all events, will bring about 'une longue syncope' (p. 25). It openly entails handing over all initiative to the doctor; in other words, the anguished mind simply abandons itself to fiction. Of course, this is traditionally one of the advantages of fiction. When Blanchot points out elsewhere that, for Kafka, fiction consisted in 'le passage de Je à Il'¹⁷, he is evoking a process which can well be described as 'une longue syncope', and which, furthermore, is explicitly at work in the first stage of Thomas l'obscur¹⁸. By this stage, however, the process is being presented as rather a shady operation. The doctor persuades J. to sign a piece of paper before the treatment begins: 'pour le cas d'un accident' (p. 22), and it is not difficult to see this as the 'novelist' making sure of the 'author's' signature on his work in advance, even though, at the end of the 'treatment', the results do not really correspond to the experience they seek to represent.

What is more the doctor is presented as a charlatan. He has studied Paracelsus, 'il a la foi' and has in his study:

une admirable photographie du Saint-Suaire de Turin, photographie où il reconnaissait la superposition de deux images, celle du Christ, mais aussi celle de Véronique; et, en effet, derrière la figure du Christ, j'ai vu distinctement les traits d'un visage de femme extrêmement beau et même superbe, à cause d'une bizarre expression d'orgueil (p. 21).

This must be set alongside the fact that the treatment he proposes was invented by a doctor from Lyon. For on this level of allegory, this doctor corresponds to Maurice Scève,

the most prominent of the Lyon group of poets, whose art, like Paracelsus's medicine, was hermetic in nature. Scève claimed to have discovered the tomb of Petrarch's Laura, and this, set alongside the doctor's (and the narrator's) claim that they can see a woman's face behind that of Christ, is clearly being used, in L'Arrêt as a means of representing, and discrediting, the primary level of what was being attempted in Thomas l'obscur, in which the sufferings of the protagonist were meant to reveal a higher beauty which both caused and relieved that suffering¹⁹.

The description of the course taken by J.'s treatment thus parallels the traditional nature of the form taken by Thomas l'obscur in its attempt at finding an original mode of fiction. The satire of the doctor is therefore merely a reflection of the intentions present in the original novel, but unable to overcome its limitations. It is noteworthy that the narrator of L'Arrêt shares the doctor's vision of Saint Veronica, and indeed, although scornful of the doctor, he does add grudgingly:

pour en finir avec ce médecin, il n'était
pas sans qualités, ayant, me semble-t-il,
une sûreté de diagnostic très supérieure
à la moyenne (pp. 21-22).

We learn that, earlier, the narrator and he undertook some experiments together, inspired by Paracelsus's medicine. Clearly, therefore, the links between Thomas l'obscur and L'Arrêt are not those of simple rejection: if the doctor is merely 'un croyant', the narrator of L'Arrêt, it is suggested, is going to turn his wishes into reality. By satirising the doctor, he succeeds in focusing attention upon the discrepancies between his intentions and his results, for it is there that his own undertaking will be concentrated.

The contrast between intention and reality in Thomas l'obscur is very marked in what occurs just before the doctor's treatment is about to begin: J. experiences 'un point violent du côté du coeur' and suffers 'une crise de suffocation' (p. 22). This corresponds to Thomas's initial ordeal, during which he drowns (and thus suffocates), and also en-

counters Anne, with whom he is smitten. This affair of the heart results in a non-chronological progression towards a supreme instant of fulfilment, just as 'une piqûre par jour' is replaced by a single 'point ... du côté du coeur'. Novel-time is replaced by what might be termed image-time, and this disrupts the novel's progress absolutely, necessitating what the doctor refers to as 'des remèdes insignifiants', and which undoubtedly correspond to the rather crude allegorisation of the fictional processes in the chapter of Thomas l'obscur which concerns 'un homme sous la forme de Il',²⁰. When J. once again feels up to the treatment, even though the 'point du côté du coeur' remains, the problem this time comes from the doctor's side: he disappears, taking his family to safety. This represents the second stage in Thomas l'obscur, when the novel continues, but from the standpoint of Anne. Chronological time has thus been superseded by image-time, and this attempt to begin the 'piqûres' even though the 'point au coeur' remains, corresponds to the attempt by Blanchot in his novel to narrate Thomas's experience simultaneously from a third-person and a first-person standpoint. The doctor's disappearance and his concern for his family reflect the crisis this undertaking constitutes for the entire tradition of narrative fiction. Things are henceforth out of his hands, and, when he returns and advises J. that there is no hope for her, except in 'des stupéfiants', this corresponds to the emergence of Irène in Thomas l'obscur as a last attempt by the novel to provide a point of view upon what has occurred. The suggestion in L'Arrêt is that the figure of Irène, which corresponds to a position of transcendent calm from which the invasion of the chronological sphere by an uncontrollable series of images may be surveyed, corresponded in Thomas l'obscur to the ultimate blind-spot from which the mind, engaged in the processes of fiction, retains its individual control over the destructive experience it is undergoing. It is significant that the adjective stupéfié and the noun stupeur occur elsewhere in L'Arrêt in relation to writing or the allegory of writing. Hence the doctor is described as 'stupéfié par les événements qu'il entrevit' (pp. 33-34), while the narrator, ref-

erring to his own prior attempt, in 1940, at putting his experience into words, writes: 'dans le désœuvrement que m'imposait la stupeur, j'écrivis cette histoire' (p. 3). Hence, J.'s two successive reactions to morphine reflect the two stages in Irène's rôle in Thomas l'obscur: at first, she does provide a calm standpoint from which to view events. J. thus succumbs entirely to the morphine, and this worries the doctor, who feels that things are getting out of hand. In the terms of the novel, fiction is evolving into something akin to cinema. His attempt at depriving J. of morphine and her angry demand that he resume the treatment correspond to the second stage in Irène's rôle, when she is allowed to go on existing the better to make her succumb, in her turn, to the same fate as Anne. In other words, through its encounter with its blindspot, consciousness is now better able to envisage the path it must follow so as to be reconciled with the thought of death. J.'s lucid recourse to morphine the second time as she awaits the narrator's arrival corresponds to the rest of Thomas l'obscur up until Anne's death, after which, in Thomas's monologue, it appears initially as if, at last, Je can transcend and express what has been happening to it.

This brings us to the second stage in the story of J., which corresponds to the penultimate chapter of Thomas l'obscur, during which, 'en laissant de côté la vérité étrange à laquelle il semblait enchaîné' (p. 99), Thomas finally speaks. In the novel, the transition between Anne's death and Thomas's monologue occurs smoothly: it is only at the end that it emerges that Thomas's view of things is not in fact the true one. When the narrator arrives on the scene just after J.'s death and proceeds to revive her, we are given a version of Thomas's monologue: as he speaks her name (J.) a breath comes from her mouth, and this rather monstrous reanimation is meant to reveal that the Je being used by Thomas, as if at last the thought of death had become accessible to consciousness, is a false one. In the novel, this is revealed at the end, when it is too late. The purpose Blanchot is setting himself in L'Arrêt is to focus upon this moment of supercherie as it happens, for,

it is claimed in L'Arrêt, even though it is a supercherie, it does correspond to something which is real: although the narrator arrives on the scene too late for J.'s death, and although, once he has revived her, she gradually lapses back into exactly the same pattern of decline as previously occurred, at the moment at which he revives her they do communicate directly:

je me penchai sur elle, je l'appelai à haute voix, d'une voix forte, par son prénom; et aussitôt -- je puis le dire, il n'y eut pas une seconde d'intervalle -- une sorte de souf-
fle sortit de sa bouche encore serrée, un sou-
pir qui peu à peu devint un léger, un faible
cri; presque en même temps -- de cela aussi je
suis sûr -- ses bras bougèrent, essayèrent de
se lever (p. 40).

This is the significance of the two rare expressions of certainty contained in this passage. It is, as we saw, a certainty of oblivion. Within it, however, there is a reflection of the flaw in Thomas's monologue, and a sign that the narrator's revival of J. is going to be a failure. It is the slight time-lag between the emergence of sound from J.'s mouth, which occurs instantaneously, and the re-
turn of life to her limbs, which occurs 'presque en même temps'. In the terms of Thomas's monologue, this anticipates the ultimate lack of coincidence between the subject of his monologue (Je) and the narrative subject of Thomas l'obscur for whom, in the end, Thomas reverts to being Il. L'Arrêt therefore narrates the apparent coincidence between the sense of what occurs in Thomas l'obscur and the mind which seeks to comprehend it as a failure. Gradually, J. begins to go into a decline which repeats the pattern of the previous one, leaving the narrator helpless to arrest it. The narrator's certainty of the joyful oblivion he experienced at that moment is also certainty ('de cela aussi je suis sûr') of the imperfect form it is taking. His sole purpose, as consciousness of death, is to locate the cause of that imperfection.

There is more to this than a mere fiction of fiction however. What the second stage of the story of J. reveals is that neither third-person nor first-person fiction, as they are used in Thomas l'obscur, can reconcile conscious-

ness with the thought of death. Third-person fiction at least allowed a form of mediation between them: whence J.'s valour and the narrator's unhurried return to her side. Once, as in the case of Thomas l'obscur, this mediating function sought to transform itself into a mode of immediate contact, the problems began: as we saw, it was on his arrival at J.'s side that the narrator's distress began. In other words, fiction had as it were summoned him from the depths in which normally he was happy to remain, only to reveal, once he appeared, that there was no place for him. His anguish is simply that of consciousness of death deprived of even the imperfect means whereby it remained reconciled with consciousness itself. All it can do is behave as if that perfect reconciliation had occurred, until, inexorably, the truth once again asserts itself. It is at this point that the project constituted by L'Arrêt is most apparent. The narrator of the récit, in the present, finds himself in a state of anguish which corresponds to the irrevocable change in his status following Thomas l'obscur. Having been deprived of fiction as a means of remaining conscious, his sole recourse would appear to consist in repeatedly reviving J. (speaking as Je) and thus, for the duration of the fiction which resulted each time, regaining that lost idyll in which consciousness admitted the thought of death. This is the sense of a passage from the beginning of the second part of L'Arrêt which I have already quoted:

après une semaine de silence, j'ai vu clairement que si je me trompais dans l'expression de ce que je cherche à exprimer, non seulement il n'y aurait pas de fin, mais je serais heureux qu'il n'y en eût pas (p. 61).

The way this passage goes on, moreover, casts further light upon his situation:

même à présent, je ne suis pas sûr d'être plus libre que je l'étais au moment où je ne parlais pas. Il se peut que je me trompe entièrement. Il se peut que tous ces mots soient un rideau derrière lequel ce qui s'est joué ne cessera plus de se jouer. Le malheur est qu'ayant attendu tant d'années pendant lesquelles le silence, l'immobilité, la patience poussée jusqu'à l'inertie n'ont pas un seul jour cessé de me duper, il m'a fallu tout à coup ouvrir les yeux

et me laisser tenter par une pensée superbe
que j'essaie en vain de mettre à genoux (pp.
61-62).

His entire undertaking is an uncertain one, for the simple reason that, in order to break out of the situation into which he has been plunged in spite of himself, he has to use precisely the form (Je) which he has already revealed as an imperfect one. The 'à présent' in which he speaks, at the beginning of the second part, is, as we saw, the moment following the silence at the end of the first part when, according to the narrator, the extraordinary actually happened. It is now possible to see that moment of silence as corresponding to the thought of death which, since Thomas l'obscur, is excluded from the realm of fiction. The ambition of the narrator of L'Arrêt is to bring it back once again: in short, to succeed where the novel failed, by reconciling consciousness in the present with the thought of death. That is 'la pensée superbe que j'essaie en vain de mettre à genoux'. However, this must also be understood as 'la pensée superbe que je essaie en vain de mettre à genoux': in other words, as he is perfectly aware, by continuing to speak as Je in order to express what he has already demonstrated to be irreducible either to Il or Je, he is running the risk of becoming caught up in an endlessly repetitive process which will bring him no nearer to the truth. Nevertheless, as he said at the beginning: 'la vérité sera dite'. By using the form Je despite the fact that it has been superseded by what came before, the narrator is taking a calculated risk. If we look at precisely how, in the second part of the story of J., he exposes the fallacy of his own first-person position, we may better see what form this risk will take.

A key character in the critique of fiction contained in the story of J. is J.'s sister Louise. In her excellent thesis, Eleanor Sharp suggests that her initial, L., could well correspond to the pronoun Elle²¹. Regrettably, this insight does not lead Sharp any further. She does not see that Louise's role is part of the broader allegorical framework I have examined so far, and a crucial one at that, since

she is the only character whose name is given in full. Given the way the allegory of fiction is conducted in L'Ar-rêt, the fact that a full name continues to be used while everyone else has been reduced to an initial, suggests that her role places her somewhere outside of the particular archetypal pattern of fiction which has been extracted by L'Ar-rêt from the action of Thomas l'obscur. This is because she corresponds, in the narrator's allegory of Thomas l'obscur, to his knowledge that, in taking fiction as his object, he remains subject to fiction. Louise is simultaneously L. (Elle) and Louise: both an element in the narrator's allegory of fiction and a sign that, in his allegory, he continues to be involved with fiction.

Her rôle is thus both to facilitate his task and remind him that it is impossible. Like A., but far more consistently, Louise is an intermediary between J. and the narrator: as L., she is the third-person medium (Elle) which, in the narrator's analysis of what occurred in Thomas l'obscur, exercised an unbroken fascination upon the mind seeking thus to come to terms with the thought of death. Hence, at two key stages in J.'s decline, it is she who contacts the narrator: first, when the doctor decides that morphine is the only remaining option: 'Louise, pour qui écrire était toute une affaire, cependant m'écrivit cela' (p. 29); second, when J. is dying: 'au milieu de la nuit, vers deux ou trois heures, le téléphone me réveilla. "Venez, je vous en prie, J. se meurt". La voix était celle de Louise' (p. 35). The link between these two occasions is J.'s loss of consciousness, first through morphine, then through death. These two occasions correspond, in Thomas l'obscur, to the emergence of Irène and to the death of Anne (which brings about the eclipse of consciousness in relation to the novel). On both occasions, Louise acts as L.: the third-person mode which prevents the death of consciousness from becoming consciousness of death. Moreover, when the narrator arrives, this becomes even clearer. When he arrives, as we saw, he is taken to one side by the doctor, who attempts to give his version of events: this is the 'novelist' seeking to justify his own undertaking. The narrator's uncomprehending

anxiety corresponds to the failure of fiction to accommodate the thought of death, and all the narrator can think of is that J. called the doctor and not him: in the end, in other words, consciousness remained turned towards life in the world; at the last moment, its resolve failed it. This moment of anxiety on the narrator's part is also, however, the moment at which he begins for the first time to reflect. He cannot see J. because of the throng, and has to content himself with Louise, 'qui était ... la seule à me la rappeler vivante' (p. 38). This is another reference to the interference of the third-person mode in the attempt at achieving consciousness of death. However, as he talks to Louise, he comes to realise more clearly what has happened:

à Louise seule ... je pus dire quelque chose, ou bien me parla-t-elle la première: j'aurais voulu comprendre pourquoi, après avoir tant résisté pendant tant d'années interminables, elle n'avait pas trouvé, pour si peu de temps, la force de ne pas céder encore. Naïvement, j'appréciais ce temps à quelques minutes, et quelques minutes n'étaient rien. Mais ces quelques minutes avaient été pour elle plus qu'une vie, plus que cette éternité de vie dont on nous parle, et la sienne s'y était perdue. Ce que Louise en téléphonant m'avait dit: 'Elle se meurt', était vrai, d'une vérité à saisir au vol, elle se mourait, elle était presque morte, l'attente n'avait pas commencé à ce moment-là; à ce moment-là elle avait pris fin; ou plutôt la dernière attente avait duré à peu près le temps de la communication: au début, vivante et lucide, épiant tous les mouvements de Louise; vivante encore, mais déjà sans regard, sans un signe d'acquiescement au moment où 'elle se meurt'; et, à peine le téléphone raccroché, le pouls, dit l'infirmière, s'éparpilla comme du sable (pp. 38-39).

If this passage is set alongside the one in which the doctor tells the narrator that 'il y avait à peine une demi-heure, elle lui avait téléphoné elle-même ... pour le forcer à venir' (p. 36), the true pattern of J.'s death appears plainly. At precisely the moment when she was telephoning the doctor so as to gain time, Louise was telephoning the narrator to inform him that he was too late. Indeed, J.'s last moments corresponded to 'le temps de la communication' between Louise and the narrator. In short, between the at-

tempt by the conscious self at attaining the thought of death through fiction, and the realisation of that attempt, there is an irreducible disparity. Communication occurs, but the time taken by this communication, which is third-person narrative time (that of L./Elle), is not the same time as that taken by consciousness (J.) as it resorts to narrative.

Louise, as L., thus plays a part in the allegory of what occurs in Thomas l'obscur, by signifying the entire medium within which that undertaking is enclosed. She is also Louise, however, and thus a reminder, within the allegory of fiction, that it in its turn is employing that medium. The narrator is thus conscious of the duplicity of what he is doing. This conscious approach to anti-fiction is not an end in itself, however. Le Très-Haut ends from the point of view of a female character who, until that point, has been seen from the point of view of the narrator, while Thomas l'obscur ends with Thomas aware that he is under an unknown watchful eye. At the end of the first part of L'Arrêt, however, the continued reign of the third-person standpoint is not simply submitted to by the narrator. On the contrary, he uses the situation to his own advantage. For as his resolve to revive J. gradually forms, we read:

Louise n'avait pas beaucoup de tête, ni beaucoup de coeur. Mais, tout à coup, elle dut lire sur mon visage quelque chose d'imminent qu'elle sut qu'elle n'avait pas le droit de voir, ni personne au monde, et en un instant elle les emmena tous (p. 39).

In other words, if her presence as L. corresponds to what in traditional fiction is an obstacle for the narrator, her presence as Louise permits the narrator now to understand his original emergence in its relationship to third-person fiction: the first person mode which he adopted then and is using now is not a break with third-person fiction. It simply occurs during an eclipse of the latter's presence. On the one hand, the narrator is left alone with J. and, when he calls her back to life, there is no-one there to see it. However, as Louise's gesture in ushering the family away makes clear, this is only possible because third-person fiction (L.) takes the initiative. The idyll occurs.

Eventually, however, Aminadab will again appear. In representing third-person fiction as L. and also allowing Louise to permit the emergence of the standpoint from which that representation has taken place, the narrator reveals that this time he will not be the dupe of fiction. The next stage in his undertaking comes after he has revived J.

This stage corresponds allegorically to Thomas's monologue. More important still, however, it constitutes an attempt at avoiding the trap into which Thomas fell. Unlike the first stage in the story, therefore, its allegorical function is not significant so much for its content, as for its form. For the narrator is aware that, in order to allegorise Thomas's monologue, he is using exactly the same narrative mode as Thomas did. In other words, he sees reflected in the situation in which he and J. find themselves what is in fact an inverted image of his position in the present. At first, during the time of their idyll, the Je of narrative corresponds to the moi in the past: the same situation obtains as did before J. died. Gradually, however, as the idyll degenerates and J. begins to sicken and die again, this parallel comes increasingly under strain. For his allegory, which was able perfectly to account for all that occurred on the third-person narrative level, now finds that having to go on and allegorise the first-person level from which it simultaneously speaks is an impossible task. The result of this is increasing confusion on his part as to what is going on. For the more J. sickens, the more the first-person standpoint is revealed as an illusion. Consequently, his 'moi' in the past comes increasingly to correspond to something other than his Je in the present: in short, J. comes to be an allegory of the Je who is narrating, while 'moi' emerges gradually as the reflection of 'someone' in the present who so far has played no manifest role in the telling of the story.

This reversal is intentional on the narrator's part, and corresponds to his attempt to extricate himself once and for all from fiction. As their idyll degenerates, we read: 'J. ... sembla s'approcher d'une vérité au regard de

laquelle la mienne perdait tout intérêt' (p. 49). This 'vérité' takes the form of a hallucination. J. sees floating in the room what she calls '"une rose par excellence"' (ibid.). In the terms of the allegory, this overtly Mallarmean phenomenon (which Blanchot echoes in 'La littérature et le droit à la mort' when, slightly modifying Mallarmé's 'Je dis: une fleur!', he uses the expression 'Je dis: cette femme' to illustrate his claim that in naming, I possess but also destroy (cf La Part du feu p. 312)) indicates that the entire undertaking represented by Thomas's monologue is an ideal one. Thomas, speaking as if 'la vérité' could be expressed, succeeds merely in creating an ideal image, Anne, so that his break with fiction consists merely of the creating of an archetype of fiction -- as is clear from the words uttered by the doctor-novelist in his absence, on learning of J.'s hallucination: '"Ah! par exemple."' (p. 53).

The episode of the rose is a turning-point in the events surrounding J.'s second death, for after it has occurred, the nurse whispers to the narrator that, the previous night, the last words J. had uttered had been those concerning the rose. The narrator goes on:

ce récit me glaça. Je me dis que la nuit dernière recommençait, d'où j'étais exclu, et qu'attirée par quelque chose de terrible, mais peut-être aussi de séduisant, de tentant, J. était en train de retourner d'elle-même dans ces dernières minutes où elle avait succombé à m'attendre (p. 50).

The fact that on both occasions she has the same hallucination means that the monologue whereby Thomas sought to transcend the limitations of third-person fiction is taking exactly the same form as what it replaces. This occurs in Thomas l'obscur once Thomas has begun speaking solely in the present tense. This change of tense coincides with the arrival of night: 'Je suis triste, le soir vient' (p. 119), and in L'Arrêt this is represented when we read: 'on avait fait à J. une seule piqûre au début de la nuit' (p. 53). In the terms of the allegory, this single injection, which parallels 'le point au coeur' and the treatment of 'chaque jour une piqûre chez elle', corresponds to the single pres-

ent moment in which Thomas seeks to coincide, in his récit, with his own absence (night). From here on, the force of Thomas's récit begins to wane, and in L'Arrêt this takes the following form:

vers deux ou trois heures, je me persuadai que le même malheur qu'hier risquait de se produire. Il est vrai que J. ne se réveillait plus. L'infirmière aussi devait sommeiller. Devant le silence de cette nuit, écoutans cesse son peu de souffle, je me sentis extrêmement désespéré et misérable à cause même de ce prodige que j'avais fait. J'eus, alors, pour la première fois une pensée qui, par la suite, revint et finalement l'emporta (p. 53).

The time at which this occurs shows that it is indeed a repetition of J.'s first death. The 'peu de souffle' discernible from J. corresponds to Thomas's continuing monologue, so that by now, in the allegory provided by L'Arrêt, the true status of the narrator then is unmistakable: he is the inexpressible torment which seeks relief through fiction, and which, having destroyed one form in order to concentrate upon the other one, now discovers to its despair that even that one cannot serve the purpose.

Yet, at this moment, there occurs what is to be the solution to the dilemma, and what, consequently, must be seen as the inspiration for L'Arrêt itself: it is 'une pensée'. We are not told the content of the narrator's thoughts. But this is because there is none: the thought is nothing other than its emergence and its return. For what constitutes the project to which Le Très-Haut, then the triptych of récits begun by L'Arrêt correspond, is the attempt to bring into the present of consciousness the moment at which it is consciousness of its own eclipse (this is the 'C'est maintenant que je parle!' of the end of Le Très-Haut), then to return to that moment in fiction, so that the narrative axis of the récit will henceforth lie between oblivion and oblivion, mediated, as it always has been, by fiction: but by fiction taken as the object of fiction, so that its intrusive reality (Aminadab) is manipulated to become solely a medium, and not an obstacle. The thought which returned and finally prevailed is the standpoint from which L'Arrêt is being narrated, one which is somewhere beyond the existing sphere of

fiction entirely, because it has become entirely a thing of the past.

From here on, the 'upward' allegory in this first part of L'Arrêt is at its most complex, for it is gradually revealing to its reader, but above all to its narrator, that as it approaches its dénouement, something is going to happen which will totally disrupt the form being taken by narrative. The first sign of this is the way J. looks at the narrator after he has had his thought. This corresponds to the 'Je suis vu' of Thomas's monologue. It is therefore puzzling that, whereas in the monologue, it is Je (J.) who is seen, in the allegory, it is J. (Je) who looks. This means that the uncontainable vision of Thomas l'obscur, the 'spectateur absurde' who finally comes to dominate the narrative and to whom, in L'Arrêt, it is the narrator who corresponds, is no longer presented as occupying the dominant position in the allegory. This is the crux of the ruse being attempted in L'Arrêt, the point at which the trap is about to be sprung. For what the allegory of Thomas's monologue is revealing is that, though Thomas was seen, this was intentional: on the level of Thomas l'obscur, the intention present in the work consisted of rendering the traditional fictional figure, as Il and as Je, unfit for his task. Hence Thomas's shame. In that novel, and similarly in Le Très-Haut, that intention had no practical consequences. L'Arrêt is out to change that. It is going to eliminate its original narrator and replace him with another one. More precisely, that other one is already in control. Again as in Le Très-Haut, the apparent narrator is not the true narrator: the 'maintenant' to which the narrator refers from time to time is one in which the apparent narrator no longer exists. In that novel, however, the emergence of the true narrator marks the end of the novel. In L'Arrêt, there is a second stage to the story.

What occurs after the narrator has had his thought thus rapidly leads things to their dénouement. This occurs not because the narrator in the past is somehow ousted. The rest of the first part of L'Arrêt consists of the ousting of the narrator in the present by the story he is telling. The 'up-

ward' allegory of fiction culminates in his eclipse, and we must pay close attention to how this occurs. The first sign that all is not well with him in the present comes when, after J. has in effect provided the key to the allegory by pointing at him and saying to the nurse 'voyez donc la mort', he goes on:

je voudrais maintenant passer rapidement sur tout ce qui arriva. J'en ai dit plus que je n'aurais cru, mais je touche aussi au terme de ce que je peux dire. Quand elle eut affirmé de moi ce que j'ai rapporté, à partir de cet instant elle se conduisit sans rien d'extraordinaire, et la nuit se termina assez vite (p. 55).

His apparent control of this expeditious approach to what remains to be told is illusory however. Immediately after this, we learn that he arranged with the nurse to go back home for a while. However, it soon becomes apparent that this is a rationalisation of what is quite simply a gap in his memory of what occurred. A sign of this is the re-emergence of Louise at the point when, he claims, he returned:

je m'entendis avec l'infirmière pour me rendre à mon hôtel où je passai environ une heure, et quand je revins, Louise me dit qu'elle était toujours dans le même état, mais je vis tout de suite que cet état avait beaucoup changé (pp. 55-56).

Louise, during the first stage of allegory, provided the point of anchorage between the narrator and his allegory. She is simultaneously L., the figure representing the entire third-person mode, and Louise, the figure standing outside of the allegory and an accessory to the narrator's undertaking. Throughout the first part, therefore, the coherence of his narrative arises solely from her presence within it. Now, however, her version of things and his do not tally. She attempts to fulfil the role she occupied in the previous death, and tell the narrator that everything is going according to plan. He sees that this is not the case however, and, as things progress, Louise begins to panic, while the narrator becomes more and more confused, until it is no longer clear to him or to the reader whether this confusion arose then or has arisen now:

les rôles prirent une intensité si grave que,

les portes fermées, on les entendait en dehors de l'appartement. ... Louise m'exaspera beaucoup, car ce bruit lui faisait peur, et sa mère commençait aussi à se montrer et à faire des réflexions, si bien que je n'arrivais plus à savoir où j'en étais et que je commençais à haïr tout ce monde, ne ressentant plus de sentiments vrais, pas même pour J. en train de devenir ce corps cadavérique. Il se peut que j'aie mis ces personnes dehors ou que je sois sorti un moment (il y avait sur le palier de l'étage un fauteuil, et je me vois assis là, où le ronflement du coma me parvenait) (p. 57; my italics).

What was only hinted at in his claim to have gone away for an hour is here quite clear: he does not know where he is. His confusion in the past is merely a projection of his confusion in the present, for, although he does not realise it, he is no longer a party to what is going on. The apparently irrelevant detail that J.'s breathing could be heard in the corridor receives its true significance at the end of the above passage: as J. approaches her death, he is outside in the corridor. The certainty implied by je me vois is the key to his true position now. For although he persists in attributing to himself the role which he has always had hitherto, in spite of himself, he sees the true position in which he found himself, and which, in a clear reference to Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus, is that of the demon: of Aminadab. Hence, when he goes on, in a sudden access of certainty, to claim:

ce qui est sûr, c'est que dans la matinée, à un instant où je revins, je trouvais J. à nouveau éveillée mais se sentant très mal. 'Vous arrivez de bonne heure', me dit-elle (ibid.),

his confusion is paradoxically at its height. For just previously, he reports that 'l'infirmière ... pensait que le médecin viendrait dans la matinée' (p. 56). In short, the person he takes for himself for the rest of the first part of the récit is in fact the doctor. More precisely, since as a first-person narrator he is engaged, as his allegory has revealed, in just as futile an activity as the narrator of third-person fiction, he is indistinguishable from the doctor-novelist of the first part of the allegory. His ignorance of this fact is the crucial factor however. For what he goes on to do, in connivance with J., is to kill her him-

self. In his mind, he is doing so as death. In fact, he is doing so as the doctor: as death become narrator. In the last moments of the story, J. and the narrator are two versions of the same person: they are the allegorical representation of Thomas's submission to 'le spectateur absurde'. They are Je being silenced by Je.

In the events of the allegory, therefore, something happens which effectively renders its narrator non-existent. At the final moment in the content of the story, its form can no longer contain it. This is the significance of the quotation which serves to end the story: 'son pouls ... devint extrêmement rapide et minuscule, et "s'éparpilla comme du sable"' (pp. 59-60). They mean quite simply that the story is not recounted to the end by its first-person narrator, because at the end, what has been true throughout the entire first part of the récit can no longer be ignored: before it began, he had ceased to exist, replaced by a higher form of narrative consciousness, which is represented by the pact between the two forms of Je present in the story: J. and the narrator. In short, L'Arrêt is being recounted from a point somewhere beyond that occupied by the Je who is claiming to narrate it, one which has been as it were generated by the decision to make Je the agent of its own eclipse. That point is represented, in the allegory, by the figure of the nurse. The final gesture on the part of J. and the narrator turns fiction into what, in comparison with the way it has been represented in the first part, is a hybrid, hermaphrodite form. At first, fiction was represented by male figures while the subject of fiction was represented by female ones. Both were nevertheless projections of the same individual consciousness, driven to fiction by experience of its eclipse. By the end of the first part of L'Arrêt, this artificial distinction has been replaced by a single figure containing the ambiguity which the existence of the two others was meant to mediate. For the nurse is both a medical figure and a female: she thus belongs to the domain of the novelist and to that of his subject. In short, she incarnates the spectateur absurde whom fiction until now could not accommodate.

Fiction thus contains within its sphere a figure capable, unlike Thomas, Anne or Irène, of being the bearer of the vision which gives rise to fiction. At the end of Le Très-Haut it is his nurse who kills Sorge, and at one point in L'Arrêt, the narrator says of the nurse: 'je crois qu'elle s'appelait Dangerue ou d'un nom approchant' (p. 34). It is now clear²² that the true word to which this approximation corresponds is dangereux. The narrator's vague memory of it is in fact something else: a sort of alarm bell, sounding as he narrates, telling him something which he cannot hope to comprehend, namely that he no longer exists. He also notices 'une certaine connivence' between J. and the nurse (p. 45), and it is possible to go through the story, piecing together the discreet but decisive role played by her in L'Arrêt. By her intermediary, fiction as it began in the story is eclipsed once and for all. At the end of the first part, the narrator can do no more than mark time in the face of the inevitable. He has been utterly displaced: 'l'extraordinaire commence au moment où je m'arrête. Mais je ne suis plus maître d'en parler' (p. 60).

This brings us finally back to the story of J., which, independent of the function which it ultimately has, is, as we saw a moving one. Whether it be read as a realistic account of a woman's death, or as an allegory of France's decline, it has an intrinsic power to impress its reader, which makes him reluctant to relinquish its significance in favour of the one which undeniably supersedes it: namely that the story of J. is merely an allegory of fiction. However, he has in fact no need to, for what I have termed the 'downward' allegorical direction of the récit incorporates, even when it is read solely as an allegory of fiction, all three levels which we have seen present in it. This is probably the most original aspect of the récit. As I have sought to show, the story is simultaneously a 'downward' and an 'upward' allegory. In the 'downward' direction, however, it has one more plane of significance than in the 'upward' one,

where, as we saw, the sole allegorical significance concerns fiction itself. The result of the change in direction which occurs at the point where the narrator arrives on the scene, is, as I suggested, to turn the figure of J. into a pivot. For at that point, she simultaneously signifies the conscious self which fiction seeks to accommodate, and the first-person subject of fiction by which this accommodation is sought. She is thus effectively split in two, and her fate at that point in the story anticipates what will be that of the narrator at the end of the first part of L'Arrêt. For what occurs at the moment of his eclipse, when Aminadab the demon is finally banished, is that he is torn apart by the two opposing narrative directions at work in his story. For in the downward direction, his story emanates from his present standpoint and draws its significance from there. In the upward direction, however, that standpoint is superseded by its own allegory. These two situations coexist at the end of the story of J. J. is thus ultimately an image, in her position at the arrival of the narrator, of what he himself will be at the end of the story: a Je torn apart, or more precisely, crucified. The significance of the doctor's picture now becomes clear. Behind the face of Christ could be seen that of a woman. Similarly, in the past in relation to which the narrator has been torn in two directions, a woman, J., provides an image of his condition. Hence, when in the second part of L'Arrêt, the doctor says to the director of one of the publications for which the narrator wrote: 'X.? Mon pauvre monsieur, il faut faire une croix dessus' (p. 89), the allusion is obvious. Henceforth in the story, though continuing to narrate, the Je of narrative is constantly the site of the two conflicting narrative directions which ultimately destroyed him in the first part.

This brings us to the 'downward' allegory which, as well as one of third-person fiction is also, above all in its chronological details, an allegory of Munich. There is thus, initially at least, a very precise time-scale governing the events which are recounted. The originality of L'Arrêt is to have turned that time-scale, which corresponds to the

events surrounding the Munich crisis, into the time-scale of the destruction of traditional narrative as it occurs in L'Arrêt. For between the doctor and the narrator, then between the narrator and himself, there occurs a disagreement over the time-scale of J.'s death. Hence, on the narrator's return, there occurs the following exchange between the doctor and him:

je regardais ce grand personnage vulgaire qui me répétait d'une manière insensée: 'Je vous l'avais bien dit, trois semaines, trois semaines juste. -- Cela fait cinq semaines!' Je lui dis cela dans l'énervement que me causaient ses paroles, sans y prendre garde (pp. 36-37).

The doctor had forecast that she would only live for three weeks, as the narrator reported at the beginning:

au début de septembre, revenant d'un voyage, je m'étais arrêté à Paris et j'avais vu son médecin. Celui-ci lui donnait encore trois semaines de vie (p. 12).

The doctor is at least showing consistency. As much cannot be said of the narrator. After the event, he does defend what corresponds to the true time-scale of the events read as an allegory of Munich. However, at the beginning of the story we read:

après avoir vu son médecin, je lui avais dit: 'Il vous donne encore un mois' (p. 13).

This error is utterly incomprehensible, until it is placed in the context of the 'upward' allegory present in the story. For this difference with the doctor corresponds to the supplementary stage in narrative which Thomas's monologue consists of in relation to the preceding third-person narrative in the novel. The narrator's extra week corresponds to his intention to revive her after her death, and to her subsequent return to death. Most important of all, however, is the significance of the fifth week which corresponds to the true time-scale of the events. This is referred to at the beginning of the second part of L'Arrêt, where the narrator writes: 'Après une semaine de silence, j'ai vu clairement' (p. 61). In other words, the fifth week of the events of the first part occurs in the silence following the voluntary cessation of narrative to which it gives rise. It is 'l'extra-

ordinaire', which can only begin when the narrator ceases to narrate. The true time-scale of the death of J. thus makes it coincide with the 'death' of the Je who was originally narrating.

The full extent of the trap constituted by the first part of L'Arrêt can now be appreciated. For its operation is not merely the ingenious device of an author out to turn fiction against itself. The eclipse of the apparent narrator at the end of the first part is written into his project as a narrator from the very beginning. For if the story of J. is simultaneously a 'downward' and an 'upward' allegory, in which the figure of J. is torn by signifying two irreconcilable aspects of the self, it is because the reference to reality contained in the work, instead of providing an anchorage for the events in the story, is made to behave in the same way as the fiction which is made to refer to it. The destruction of self brought about by L'Arrêt is thus not the hypocritical act of a hidden self, the author, who is using fiction as a testing-ground for his own theories or experiences. It comes about quite simply because the standpoint adopted from the outset is that of the destroyed self who sought in vain to contain its experience in Thomas l'obscur. The difference between that novel and L'Arrêt is, as is clear from the allegory of Thomas's monologue, the decision to have done once and for all with the illusion of a real standpoint for narrative. For as long as the first person narrator is allowed to govern fiction, even the most systematic destruction of the forms taken by fiction will be contained, ultimately, by the encompassing reference to a real present which the Je of narrative continually makes. What Blanchot does in L'Arrêt is to direct his story powerfully towards a reality in relation to which the Je of the récit is openly composing his narrative, then turn that reality into an image of the entire process of narrative which is seeking to recall it.

There is thus no longer any reality in the story at all. Or, more precisely, the traditional reference to reality in fiction is turned into another level of fiction, so that the sole reality remaining is the reality of fiction itself. The

new narrative axis which emerges in the second part of the story thus lies between fiction and fiction. The trap laid in the story has brought about the utter destruction of the traditional sphere of narrative, yet has done somehow within the sphere of narrative. The narrator who speaks at the beginning of the second part is the narrator who set in motion a mechanism which renders it impossible for him to be speaking, since, in place of him, there is henceforth a pure dislocation: the 'crucifixion' of which J. was an image, in which the present of narrative is torn between a 'downward' direction which consolidates its position, and an 'upward' one which overflows and submerges it. Henceforth, if narrative continues, its sole subject -- the sole reality left within its scope -- is that moment of dislocation itself, which, as we saw in Thomas l'obscur, simultaneously constitutes the disappearance of the self and the inspiration which sends the self off in search of its lost unity. In continuing his narrative, therefore, the narrator is fully aware of the falseness of his position. After some preliminaries, he begins to narrate again, before breaking off to comment upon what he is doing:

j'habitais toujours l'hôtel de la rue d'O..
 ... Dans la chambre voisine demeurait une
 jeune femme ... Elle était mariée, avait
 deux enfants et, de plus, enseignait dans
 une institution libre de jeunes filles. Je
 ne sais comment elle menait ensemble toutes
 ces tâches. Peut-être cela était-il un roman.
 Je rapporte ces détails, qui ne m'intéressent
 pas, pour m'entraîner. Je cherche délibérément
 à me jeter un sort (pp. 66-67).

The content of his narrative is thus no longer important. As the reference to 'un roman' reveals, his fiction is not of the conventional type. This is because his sole purpose, henceforth, is to narrate as past, and thus in an allegory, the entire process which led him to where he is now. This is what he undertakes in two stages in the second part of L'Arrêt. The first consists of a meeting in the metro with a young woman whom he last saw ten years ago. After she has gone, he suddenly realises that, although he sees his neighbour, C(olette), almost every day, he has utterly forgotten

her, and it is only the chance meeting with this acquaintance that brings her to his mind (p. 71). We learn later that this woman's name is S(imone) D. (p. 83), and that her husband, Simon, is dead (p. 84). In other words, 'Simon D. est mort', which is another way of saying 'ce monde est mort', and that S(imone) D., as the surviving partner of this dead world, is the image of the world which, in the first part of L'Arrêt, served to dislocate the reality of the present from which the narrator sought to recall it. His realisation that his neighbour, C(olette), is nothing but 'un immense trou impersonnel, quoique animée, une sorte de lacune vivante, de laquelle eyle n'émergeait que difficilement' (p. 71) complements the allegory of S(imone) D. by representing the fate of the self who places an ideal woman (Anne, J. but also Laure²³) between himself and the world, when the world itself is revealed as unreal.

The second stage in this allegory, which concerns a woman called Nathalie, seeks to represent the situation which results from the one allegorised by C(olette) and S(imone) D.: the final instant of dislocation of the self, when the self is in the grips of another. The narrator's complicated pursuit of Nathalie, reminiscent of André Breton's Nadja, is nothing other than the pursuit by consciousness of that moment of communion which is the true standpoint of fiction, that Nous which is henceforth in the place of the Je of traditional fiction and has replaced it as the reality which fiction reveals. The gradual reduction of Nathalie to her initial letter, N., corresponds to the gradual approach, through fiction, towards that point at which only fiction itself remains.

The two récits which complete the triptych simply repeat, on a wider scale, the two stages present in the second part of L'Arrêt. The Judith ('Je dis') and the Claudia of Au moment voulu correspond to C(olette) and to S(imone) D., while the narrator's companion in Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas represents the impossible Nous to which the Je of narrative seeks vainly to yield. This may appear very simple. Between them, however, these three récits constitute an experiment of great originality, which will lead their author to a mode of writing in which their field and that of theoretical reason will coincide. It is to the latter that we must now turn.

Notes to Part I

1. Pierre Madaule, Une tâche sérieuse? (Paris, 1973). Cf also Frédéric Nef, 'Le piège', Gramma, 3-4 (printemps 1976), pp. 71-88. This text examines the trap set by Thomas l'obscur.
2. Julien Gracq, La Littérature à l'estomac (Paris, 1950). Cf in particular: 'dans ce vedettariat, la demande précède l'offre' (p. 65); 'l'écrivain d'aujourd'hui se doit de représenter ... une surface, avant même parfois d'avoir un talent' (p. 68).
3. 'Un récit?', Empédocle, 2 (mai 1949), pp. 13-22.
4. Le Très-Haut p. 84. Also en exergue.
5. In a letter to his Japanese translator, Blanchot makes the following remark about the name:

Oui Bouxx: moi aussi, j'interroge ce nom. Phonétiquement, c'est, en effet, Bouks, mais avec une consonne supplémentaire et comme superflue -- en surnombre (x) qui non seulement prolonge la dureté finale, mais la rend imprononçable (en ce sens, c'est un mot graphique). En français, un tel nom, un tel assemblage de consonnes ne me semblent pas exister, mais non plus à l'étranger. C'est donc un nom absolument étranger, et plutôt qu'un nom propre, un nom impropre: comme si l'anonymat était donné dans le nom même, masque qui transforme tout en masqué et que rien ne démasque.

(Letter dated le 4 septembre 1970, published in Exercices de la Patience, 2 (hiver 1981), p. 107).

Blanchot is clearly wrong to claim that such a name does not exist. Certain Basque names end in a double 'x' (e. g. Arrexx). There is also a famous racing-cyclist who proves him wrong. His dilemma, in the above passage, is that he is obliged to explain what the figure of Bouxx, who is clearly an allegorical figure corresponding to the writer's desire for the finished work, and thus the 'equivalent' of Books, makes clear by his existence in the novel -- that the problem of fiction lies outside of the domain of what is nameable or identifiable.
6. Bernard Noël sees the story as a version of the love-affair between Goerges Bataille and Laure (Colette Peignot), in Deux Lectures de Maurice Blanchot (Montpellier, 1973), p. 25. As I shall indicate later, he is not wrong. The conclusion he draws is however.
7. Cf Jean Pfeiffer, 'Maurice Blanchot. L'Arrêt de mort et le problème du récit', Cahiers du Chemin, 24 (avril 1975): 'L'Arrêt de mort rapporte apparemment une expérience de l'auteur lui-même', p. 197, note 1.
8. Jean-Paul Sartre, preface to Nathalie Sarraute, Portrait d'un inconnu (Paris, 1947). The reference is to page 7 of the 10-18 edition of the novel.

9. Le Très-Haut, p. 243.
10. Jean-Pierre Azéma, De Munich à la Libération (Paris, 1979), p. 18.
11. *ibid.*, p. 17.
12. Cf Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, Les Non-conformistes des années 30 (Paris, 1969):
 durant l'Occupation, il est pendant quelques mois, en zone Nord, Directeur littéraire de Jeune France, association culturelle subventionnée par le Secrétariat général à la Jeunesse de Vichy (p. 458).
 Blanchot himself makes an indirect reference to this undertaking when he writes, in 'Le silence des écrivains', one of the first texts he gave to the Journal des Débats:
 nous connaissons diverses entreprises d'hommes jeunes qui, dans le naufrage général, cherchent à sauver l'art en restaurant un public ou à sauver les artistes en faisant d'eux des éducateurs de la jeunesse (19 avril 1941, p. 3).
 It is clear from the context in which this said, however, that his own collaboration on such projects had by then ceased.
13. In a letter to Jeffrey Mehlman, dated le 26 novembre 1979, Blanchot wrote: 'je ne demeurerai que quelques semaines /à "Jeune France"/ (ayant vu, avec plusieurs amis, combien il était naïf de vouloir se servir de Vichy contre Vichy)'. Quoted in 'Blanchot at Combat. Of Literature and Terror', Modern Language Notes, 95, 4 (May 1980), p. 818, note 45.
14. Thomas l'obscur (nouvelle version), p. 129.
15. Abbé Prévost, Histoire d'une Grecque moderne (1740) (Paris, 1965).
 Cf Blanchot's article 'Le roman d'Aïssé', Journal des Débats, 24 février 1944, pp. 2-3.
16. Prévost, p. 3.
17. 'Kafka /à/ éprouvé la fécondité de la littérature ... du jour où il a senti que la littérature était ce passage du Ich au Er, du Je au Il' (La Part du feu, pp. 28-29).
18. 'juchés sur ses épaules, le mot Il et le mot Je commençaient leur carnage' (Thomas l'obscur (nouvelle version), p. 29).
19. Cf Georges Bataille, 'Le Coupable, fragments retrouvés sur Laure', in Laure, Ecrits, fragments, lettres, edited by Jérôme Peignot and le Collectif Change (Paris, 1978), pp. 347-366 in the 10-18 edition. Extracts from this are quoted by Jacques Derrida in 'Living On. Border Lines', in Deconstruction and Criticism, by Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman and J.

Hillis Miller (New York, 1979), pp. 75-176 (pp. 161-164).

20. Cf chapter V of the first version of Thomas l'obscur, which begins 'Au village un homme habitait sous la forme de Il'.
21. Eleanor Grant Sharp, 'The Failure of Art. Maurice Blanchot and the Dilemma of the French Novel'. (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1971), p. 107.
22. In his lengthy meditation from a starting-point in L'Arrêt de mort, 'Living On. Border Lines' (quoted in note 19), Jacques Derrida, referring to the nurse's name, Dangerue, remarks: '(a proper name that recalls to us our projected systematic reading of all the names or initials of proper names in Blanchot's stories)' (p. 120). There is a case for replying that a systematic reading of Blanchot's stories would render Derrida's project unnecessary.
23. In writing a story whose initial level of significance is made to parallel Scève's search for Laura, then turning it into one whose significance is that C(olette), who is a familiar of the narrator's, is irrevocably lost to his memory, there can be no doubt that Blanchot was criticising the attitude of his friend Georges Bataille in his virtual idolisation of the dead Laure (Colette Peignot).

PART II, CHAPTER 1: LA PART DU FEU

During the six years which elapsed between the publication of Faux pas and that of his second full-scale critical work, La Part du feu (henceforth referred to as La Part), Blanchot's critical method had been evolving, partly owing to the new opportunities available to him after the war. For now that he had become established as a critic, he was able to be more selective in what he examined, and, freed from the literary journalist's obligation to write about whatever happens to appear, he began publishing full-length articles in a variety of widely-read reviews, in which he developed and explored the themes and preoccupations which had emerged during his years on the Journal des Débats. It was from among these articles that the chapters which make up La Part were selected.

The most obvious difference between La Part and the work which precedes it is thus in the length of their chapters. We would be mistaken, however, to assume that La Part constitutes a consolidation of the ideas present in Faux pas, or any form of entrenchment on its author's part. Gaëtan Picon seems to take this view when, summing up Blanchot's development as a critic in 1956, after the appearance of L'Espace littéraire, he speaks of:

une conception générale de la littérature qui, latente dans les analyses de Faux pas (entravées par la circonstance même qui les suscite), se précise dans les études de La Part du feu où l'auteur décide lui-même de ses sujets sans référence à une actualité dans laquelle il ne trouve qu'assez rarement sa vraie pâture, pour s'approfondir dans L'Espace littéraire avec toute la liberté de l'abstraction¹.

However, though Picon has undeniably identified the movement which links the three works he mentions to each other, the way he interprets it is a serious oversimplification of what occurs during these years. Scope of argument is not necessarily a sign of increased certainty, and though

La Part concludes a period of writing while Faux pas appears in the full swing of the preceding one, it is the latter work which encapsulates 'une conception générale de la littérature', while the work which follows it, though evidently a sum of what precedes it and even, to a degree, the horizon in relation to which the articles it contains were conceived, conveys a message of uncertainty and unresolved contradiction out of which no general abstract doctrine can be drawn.

Picon's misreading of Blanchot's development, which epitomises the erroneous interpretations to which his criticism has given rise, rests upon an assumption that the relationship between the particular and the general displays the same characteristics in the field of literature as it does in other fields of significance. Yet in an earlier work, L'Ecrivain et son ombre, he quotes a passage from the 'prière d'insérer' of La Part which reveals quite clearly that it is precisely that analogy which Blanchot is seeking to contest in his approach to literature. It reads:

ces textes sont nés non pas de l'intérêt porté à certains livres, mais de la préoccupation profondément soucieuse que cause nécessairement à celui qui écrit et à celui qui lit ce fait étrange qu'il y ait des livres, et des lecteurs, et des écrivains. ... Comme les livres ne sont pas soustraits à l'histoire, cette préoccupation passe de préférence par des oeuvres qui sont nôtres aujourd'hui grâce à la faveur du temps, mais elle n'est pas elle-même historique, elle ne juge pas, elle ne critique pas, elle ne se soucie à proprement parler ni d'esthétique ni de culture².

It is clear from this that if Blanchot is concerned, in La Part, with a more 'general' literary problem, it is to his mind a problem which is located squarely within the field of the particular, since it arises solely because works of literature are written and then read. His concern with the question of literature itself cannot therefore simply be interpreted as a withdrawal from the arena of contemporary literary debate, since it corresponds to what for him lies at the heart of that debate. The standpoint he adopts in La Part must thus be seen as an attempt to confront and comprehend the 'actualité' which

is Picon's reference, and a glance at what he omits in compiling the work provides an indication of how he goes about this.

For Faux pas Blanchot selected a small number of the weekly articles he had written between 1938 and 1943, and grouped them under a series of headings. The principle behind this selection was perfectly clear. La Part contains twenty-four of the forty-three articles written between 1945 and 1949, but nothing in the internal organisation of the work provides any clue as to the intentions of its author in making such a selection³. It is therefore tempting to see the work as a collection into some token order of everything Blanchot considered worth preserving at the time. If we look at what he leaves out, however, things appear less simple. The nineteen texts in question can be grouped roughly under three headings: 1) seven from the brief period Blanchot spent on the newspaper Paysage Dimanche in 1945 (an eighth, on Malraux, is included in La Part); 2) seven relating to commissioned prefaces or to Lautréamont et Sade; 3) five with no obvious links between them at all. It is these five which hold the clue to the organisation of La Part. They are 'Autour du roman' (1945), 'L'Espoir d'André Malraux' (1946), 'L'Honneur des poètes' (1946), 'Grève désolée, obscur malaise' (1947) and 'Du merveilleux' (1947). All of them have one thing in common: they concern one or more individual works, and the studies of André Chamson ('Autour du roman') and of Malraux are of particular interest. The work by Chamson is his Le Puits des miracles (1945). Blanchot provides a detailed examination of the work and the way he does so makes it clear that both its subject and the way it treats it are an inspiration for Le Très-Haut which appeared three years later. Indeed, on the evidence of the two extracts from that novel which were published in 1945 and 1946⁴, and which do not bear the mark of the finished work, it may be claimed that Chamson's novel was a decisive influence upon Le Très-Haut. The detail of the relationship between the two novels is of less interest to us here, however, than the

fact that, despite its relevance to Blanchot's development as a writer, the text on Chamson is excluded from La Part, for its exclusion points to an explanation for all of the others: no matter how worthy an individual work, direct analysis of it is of no interest to Blanchot by 1949 (perhaps, it could be argued, because such analysis has turned out to be better pursued from within the domain of fiction).

Picon's version of Blanchot's critical tendency would thus seem at least to be partly accurate. If we turn to the article on Malraux, however, this rejection of direct analysis appears in its true light. Like 'Autour du roman', this text consists of a detailed analysis of one novel, L'Espoir. In the same year, Blanchot also wrote a short review of Gaëtan Picon's André Malraux for Paysage Dimanche and it is this text which is included in La Part. In the case of Malraux, therefore, direct and detailed analysis of the author's work takes second place to brief commentary upon another critic's view of that author, and this is the key to the whole of La Part. It shows that when Blanchot claims in his 'prière d'insérer' that literature itself has become his sole preoccupation, this cannot merely be described as a retreat into abstraction, since, in pointing away from particular works, he is pointing towards the very process whereby we generally approach them and which, to his mind, is a source of particular difficulties at the time he is writing. Unlike Faux pas, in other words, La Part is overwhelmingly concerned with the contemporary critic's dilemma, and it is only by reading it in this light that it will cease to be a collection of profound, sometimes influential but always ultimately exceptionable critical explorations, and emerge as a first stage in its author's research into the relationship between literature and thought.

In an uncollected article, 'La critique de Charles du Bos', Blanchot claims that du Bos 'a contribué à donner une valeur de création à l'activité critique', and that 'il a fait d'elle ce que d'autres ont fait de la poésie

et du roman, une expérience vitale, un moyen personnel de recherche et de découverte'⁵. A year later, in 'L'énigme de la critique', he repeats this assertion: 'Charles du Bos, ami de Valéry et de Gide, artistes toujours prêts à s'humilier en critiques, a non seulement élevé la critique au niveau de l'art, mais en a fait une entreprise de recherche spirituelle'⁶. Blanchot is not simply out to model himself on du Bos at this time. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that in the period leading up to La Part, he had become aware of a need to endow criticism with the same originality and the same autonomy as literature. This was not, however, merely a desire to formulate in general terms what was original in his own literary practice, and even less an attempt to annexe the domain of criticism to that of fiction. It arose from his recognition that criticism had begun to lose the innocence which for so long shielded it from the experience which gave rise to its object. Hitherto, 'contente d'appartenir à la littérature sans en éprouver les vertiges et les embarras'⁷, criticism had done no more than present and explain the great works of literature. Now, he claimed, it had begun to question that rôle and to realise that:

il y a peut-être dans toutes les formes de la littérature un mystère et que ce mystère, le moyen de le cerner, de le provoquer, de le circonvenir, ne consiste pas nécessairement à le faire disparaître: plutôt à le laisser tel qu'il est, familier et étrange, lointain et conciliant, facile et impossible, de toute manière irréductible⁸.

It had thus to set about redefining its entire relationship to literature. Unable any longer to be content with explaining, and thus explaining away, the mystery at the heart of literature, criticism had a choice between silence on the one hand, and providing an equivalent to that mystery on the other. It is the latter course that Blanchot chose to follow in the years after the war. However, in so seeking to make criticism a more adequate response to what is significant in literature, he immediately encountered a problem, and in 'L'Honneur des poètes', written in 1946, he formulates it in the following way:

la critique elle-même ne prétend-elle pas être un art et, quelques-uns l'affirment, une expérience créatrice? N'a-t-elle pas sa propre énigme à sauvegarder, son trou, son vide, sans lequel elle ne serait même pas un langage? Et pourtant il lui faut travailler contre l'obscurité de toute activité littéraire et de ce travail tirer la raison de sa propre obscurité, faire parler infiniment des oeuvres qui ne parlent pas et se rendre elle-même silencieuse, amener bizarrement au jour le secret interdit de tout art par un mouvement qui lui assure le repos de son secret⁹.

Hence, by being no more than an appendage to literary discourse, criticism betrayed it through lack of rigour. However, now that it has begun to make amends, the betrayal has simply taken another form: by becoming independent of literature and assuming the status of a discourse in its own right, criticism finds itself bound to set its own coherence above that of the works it examines. Indeed, this betrayal promises to be much graver than the one it replaces, and from 1945 onwards, Blanchot is acutely concerned by what he sees as a contemporary dilemma. The modern critic encounters an unresolvable conflict of interests from the moment he begins to exercise his craft, and, as the scope of Blanchot's criticism widens, so its grounds come increasingly under question. Hence his only extended study of an author, 'L'expérience de Lautréamont', which forms the main part of Lautreamont et Sade¹⁰, is prefaced by a section beginning 'Peut-on commenter Maldoror?' which examines closely the role of the critic. In his L'Ecrivain et son ombre Gaëtan Picon again misunderstands Blanchot's purpose however:

avec autorité et profondeur, Maurice Blanchot a précisé le point de vue d'une critique philosophique. Le critique n'est pas celui qui se prononce sur la valeur d'une oeuvre et qui l'éclaire, mais celui qui en manifeste le sens: il s'agit d'un passage du concret à l'abstrait, du dynamique au statique, d'une explication fixatrice et, peut-être, approfondissante¹¹.

His commentary is clearly an anticipation of his later claim that Blanchot's criticism tends more and more towards abstraction. However, the way he quotes from Lautré-

amont et Sade to illustrate what is presumably a parallel between its author and Ramon Fernandez, reveals the error of his claim:

le critique, ... suspendant le mouvement intérieur par lequel il donne sens, vie et liberté à une réalité composée de mots, y substitue des relations écrites nouvelles, un système d'expressions stables, destinées à fixer la puissance toujours en mouvement de l'oeuvre dans une perspective où elle s'arrête pour apparaître plus manifeste, plus claire, plus simple, dans un repos trop semblable à la mort¹².

As it stands, this passage undeniably interprets the critic's role as producing abstraction, and does not appear out of tune with Fernandez's search for 'la substructure philosophique d'une oeuvre, ... le corps d'idées, organisé par une hypothèse, qui fournit une explication des caractères essentiels de cette oeuvre'¹³. However, as the final words of his quotation should have told Picon, this statement of the realities of criticism is not intended by Blanchot as a guide to perfect practice. On the contrary, the prefatory section of Lautréamont et Sade is concerned solely to portray how untenable the critic's position is if such is the nature of his art. Though in reply to his opening question Blanchot does write 'le commentaire est inévitable', the image he provides of the commentator is far from prepossessing: 'le commentateur, personnage fort suspect, ... /ē/ n'état de faute originelle' (p. 55); 'le commentateur joue le rôle d'un "mixte". ... Créature ambiguë, incomplète et trop complète, hermaphrodite malheureux. ... un destructeur' (pp. 56-57).

It thus emerges from careful reading of what he says at this time that Blanchot is far from resigned to the inevitabilities of his function. Indeed, he is as yet quite undecided as to how to proceed. The opening section of 'L'expérience de Lautréamont' concludes that 'le critique ... est par nature du côté du silence' (p. 58), only to be followed by over a hundred pages of critical analysis, while 'L'énigme de la critique' ends on the lamest of paradoxes in an effort to define its subject:

ne serait-elle pas la netteté qui respecte

le vague, la rigueur qui accueille le confus et l'explication qui n'a d'autre raison d'être que de perpétuer l'inexplicable?

At this stage in his writing, therefore, his dilemma appears total, and Blanchot acknowledges it as such. His concern with the abstract function of criticism is thus not equivalent to a choice of method, but corresponds to an awareness of a fundamental incompatibility between criticism and its object, and thus of the impossibility of abstraction for the critic. Awareness of that impossibility is the governing factor in the development of his thinking at this time, and it is thus from that standpoint that I shall seek to trace it in La Part.

The most conspicuous aspect of that awareness consists of repeated assertions of the shortcomings of existing critical approaches to an author. In the case of Kafka, Blanchot claims that 'la vraie lecture reste impossible' (p. 12), and a succession of conflicting critical interpretations of his work are cited as proof of 'le malaise d'une lecture qui cherche à conserver l'énigme et sa solution' (p. 13). Hence, the chapter concludes, 'nous ne ... comprenons /son oeuvre/ qu'en la trahissant, et notre lecture tourne anxieusement autour d'un malentendu' (p. 19). The chapter on Gide begins in a similar fashion: 'de cette oeuvre, on ne peut guère parler que d'une manière injuste' (p. 208). Such observations are moreover no mere formality. Far from paying lip-service to the irreducible singularity of literature, they coexist with the repeated affirmation of that singularity, which indeed they render possible. Hence those who argue as to whether Pascal was sincere or not when he wrote the Pensées are engaged in an irrelevant discussion: 'ces différences ne relèvent que de l'analyse qui distingue dans un ensemble étranger à l'analyse' (p. 257); while those commentators who argue that the themes in Valéry's poetry oscillate between Eupalinos's 'absence créatrice' and 'une présence invinciblement actuelle' fall short of their author's vision:

est-ce seulement une oscillation, un va-

et-vient entre des tendances contraires?
 Pour /Valéry/, ne s'agit-il pas d'une con-
 tradiction paradoxale qu'il ne peut pré-
 tendre surmonter et qui le partage? (p. 272).

Virtually the same point is made in reply to Sartre's
 reading of Baudelaire:

la poésie est un moyen de se mettre en dan-
 ger sans courir de risque. ... Il est juste
 de le rappeler, parce que cette critique est
 exigée par la littérature même et qu'en vérité
 celle-ci n'a de sens et de valeur que comme
 passion vécue par l'écrivain, dans l'impost-
 ure dont il se sent complice. Mais quand l'on
 commence de souligner l'ambiguïté du poète,
 l'on perd aussi le droit d'arrêter ce mouve-
 ment, de le stabiliser dans un de ses points
 pour le qualifier. C'est le propre de l'ambi-
 guïté d'échapper à l'arrêt et à la qualific-
 ation (p. 142).

This passage reiterates the description of the critic's
 task in Lautréamont et Sade which misled Picon, in order
 this time to use it quite openly to reject the form of be-
 haviour so described, and the difference between the two
 instances of its use makes it clear that in each of these
 three cases, Blanchot's argument is in effect proceeding
 from two distinct angles, one from which critical analysis
 appears as inadequate, and another from which, nevertheless,
 the critic may affirm the irreducibility of literature to
 his own terms, by recognising in it an essential mobility
 which permanently eludes the stasis to which criticism
 would reduce it. As it stands, of course, such a mode of
 argument is hardly extraordinary, and could well prolifer-
 ate indefinitely on the basis of the alternation it seems
 to display. That such a conventional approach to the pro-
 blem is not what Blanchot intends, becomes more apparent
 when he extends his critique of critical (that is, non-
 literary) language to what authors themselves have to say
 about their art. Again in the chapter on Baudelaire, he
 quotes the poem Le Gouffre in order, rather astonishingly,
 to justify Sartre's controversial reading of the poet:

nous citons ce texte bien connu pour mont-
 rer à quel point la terminologie philosoph-
 ique du commentaire innove peu sur l'atti-
 tude qu'il commente, et par conséquent ne
 la saurait trahir (p. 137).

A few lines further on, however, the true import of this

statement becomes apparent. Commenting upon the effect of the revelation that 'tout est abîme', including 'la Parole', upon Baudelaire, Blanchot writes:

comment cela est-il possible? Quel sens une telle révélation peut-elle prendre chez un homme dont la principale activité est d'écrire et qui ... ne prétend pas écrire en vain?

Nous ne disons pas que cette question trouve en Baudelaire l'esprit le mieux fait pour l'éclairer, car cet esprit est justement trop attaché à l'esthétique, trop capable d'éclairer l'art en l'approfondissant théoriquement plutôt que par rapport à lui-même (pp. 137-138).

This then leads him to a conclusion which is crucial for our understanding of La Part:

un pareil problème ne peut pas cheminer dans la conscience d'un créateur à l'aide de réponses générales. Il ne peut être que passagèrement et superficiellement l'objet de considérations critiques. C'est ce problème qui lui-même est critique, qui fait la critique du créateur (p. 138; my italics).

Sartre has by now been left behind, his method uncontested (it is worth Baudelaire's), and we have entered a domain explored neither by Sartre nor even by Baudelaire in so far as he commented upon literature and art, but solely, Blanchot claims, by Baudelaire the poet and thus by his reader.

The position he is adopting in his defence of literature is thus a daring one, for he does not merely claim that literature is incompatible with critical analysis (in a sense that would be simply stating the obvious), he would also have us believe that that incompatibility is not confined to the external relations literature entertains, but lies first and foremost within the minds of the creators themselves, so that they themselves are by no means always aware of what they are engaged in. It is not only of Baudelaire that this is claimed. In the chapter on Nietzsche we read:

le P. de Lubac ... croit peut-être trop volontiers que ce qu'a pensé Dostoïevski, par exemple, sa foi dans la résurrection du Christ, nous livre le sens de son oeuvre. Mais le sens qu'a cette oeuvre pour nous n'est pas lié à ce qu'a pensé Dostoïevski (p. 289).

In the case of Rimbaud, this standpoint is used to provide an explanation of the poet's silence:

Rimbaud a eu soif de cailloux, de roc
et de charbon, c'est-à-dire de ce qu'
il y a de plus desséchant au monde. Et
à partir de cette absolue dureté, il a
voulu l'absolue porosité du sommeil,
innocence des chenilles, taupes, limbes,
oisiveté du crapaud, patience infinie
capable d'un oubli infini.

Au regard de cela, que valent les
mots, même les mots de Rimbaud? (pp. 158-
159).

It is clear from these examples that in asserting the irreducibility of literature to critical analysis, Blanchot is not content simply to restrain the latter or modify its claims with a view to improving upon what it says himself. In doing so, he is seeking to shift the very ground upon which such analysis is based, by locating the true site of the dilemma away from the objective, theoretical domain entirely. In his study of Nietzsche, which I have already quoted, this shift is at its most explicit. In keeping with what I have suggested is the rule in La Part, this chapter does not concern Nietzsche directly, but the reaction of a Christian theologian to his claim that God is dead. Moreover, again in accordance with the rule, Blanchot is not seeking thus to improve upon the analysis of the problem which the theologian, Henri de Lubac, provides, but quite simply to exclude the problem from the field of analysis altogether. Hence, he claims, 'en aucune façon le thème de la mort de Dieu ne peut être l'expression d'un savoir définitif ou l'esquisse d'une proposition stable' (p. 282). His objection is thus not merely methodological in nature. In the case of a writer like Nietzsche, the difficulty does not depend upon 'les mérites particuliers du commentateur' but concerns 'la possibilité d'un commentaire écrit du dehors sur un penseur passionné' (p. 280; my italics). Nietzsche may well therefore pose a threat for the Christian. However, 'la vraie menace de Nietzsche ne peut être mesurée que du point de vue de Nietzsche lui-même' (p. 279).

In his zeal to respect the true significance of the

works he examines Blanchot would thus indeed seem to deserve Delbouille's reproach that, at a certain moment in his analyses, he launches off into the speculative domain of 'la psychologie des écrivains'. Or else he would seem to be proposing a purely solipsistic interpretation of literature, according to which the only time one understands an author is when one is reading him. The latter attitude is by no means absent from Blanchot's approach to literature. In the opening pages of 'L'expérience de Lautréamont' he writes the following:

il est vrai que, des livres qu'il aime le mieux, le critique aussi voudrait ne pas parler. Car il n'a pas toujours le désir de les éloigner de lui-même, de les engager dans ce travail étrange par lequel il les détruit en les réalisant, il les diminue en les exaltant, il les simplifie en les approfondissant, il leur donne tant de sens que l'auteur, étonné et gêné de cette richesse inconnue, proteste plaintivement contre une générosité qui l'écrase et le réduit à rien¹⁴.

It is as a conclusion to this passage, moreover, that he makes the claim that 'le critique ... est par nature du côté du silence', and there is no doubt that those writers closest to Blanchot are rarely and always circumspectly made the subjects of his criticism. However, as though absolved by such discretion towards those in whom he sets the greatest store, he does not make his apparently solipsistic approach to literature grounds for either speculation or silence, but, from the standpoint of literature, simply persists in confronting criticism with the irreducibility of its object until its entire structure begins to give under the strain. For although he repeatedly posits the existence of an enigmatic, paradoxical significance at the heart of literature, this significance is never endowed with any theoretical status in La Part. On the contrary, the certainty that it exists does not merely serve to discredit specific critical versions of literature, it throws everything that is certain about literature into question, obliging criticism constantly to beg the question 'comment la littérature est-elle possible?'. In short, the affirm-

ation of the singularity of literature is not related dialectically in La Part to the negation of theoretical versions of that singularity. Despite appearances, the argument of the work is not a unified one, but is conducted, in a totally illegitimate fashion, from two separate, antagonistic standpoints which can never be reconciled dialectically and whose antagonism undermines the entire dialectical position as it relates to literature. When Blanchot wrote, with reference to Baudelaire, 'c'est ce problème lui-même qui est critique, qui fait la critique du créateur', he is referring explicitly to what is implicit throughout his argument: literature itself is critical by nature, therefore the literary critic must seek to accommodate two distinct critical standpoints in his discussion of his subject. In seeking to argue from both of them in La Part, he provokes a distortion in the field of theoretical analysis which soon proves impossible to control, and whose consequences for his thinking will be far-reaching. I shall now examine the different stages in this process.

I began by claiming that Blanchot's concern with the problem of literature in general at the period under consideration cannot be construed simply as a retreat into abstraction. As the 'prière d'insérer' to La Part makes clear, though it is not a historical problem, it is inseparable from (passe par) the works which history has preserved, and has assumed a particularly acute form in the age within which he is writing. This latter aspect becomes very apparent when we realise that, though it is easy to overlook the fact today, La Part occupied an original and indeed unique position in the post-war literary debate, and it was from there that it sought primarily to approach the problem of literature. Although unlike Camus or Merleau-Ponty he never even appeared to be speaking from the same standpoint as Sartre, no-one so consistently took up the challenge of the call for commitment as Blanchot at this time. Almost all of his writing in the years following the

Liberation is concerned to examine the implications of Sartre's call, and it can be said without exaggeration that no-one took Sartre more seriously. This has been obscured because we have come to understand the post-war period in terms of the more enduring debates which arose from it, and to see its vitality and its historical significance stemming from its moral and political heart, rather than in relation to the rather suspect theme of committed art. This has meant, however, that the quite fundamental literary debate inaugurated by Sartre has remained as it were in suspense, petrified as it stood when it ceased to be relevant, so that only its most salient features now remain for us to identify it. Moreover, the artistic shortcomings of almost every product of 'la littérature engagée' have encouraged the assumption that everything of lasting value written at the time must have come from the opposite camp. Yet if the literary debates of the time could be boiled down to a confrontation between Jean-Paul Sartre and either François Mauriac, Thierry Maulnier or Etienne, the critic's task would be simple. Nothing could be further from the truth however. Yet nothing is more representative of our attitude to literature in France since the war. Anathemas uttered at the time, in the heat of battle and with distinct goals in view, have developed into the only critical currency for dealing with the period, so that it can be claimed that no adequate critical understanding of how French literature has developed since the war has yet been achieved. This was perhaps inevitable in the first instance. However it is just as inevitable, a generation later, that such a simple view should start to be questioned, and it is through studying Blanchot that I believe we may set about the task.

The value of La Part in relation to the question of commitment is that it appeared at the very end of the period during which the question was being considered. It thus coincided with what for R.-M. Albérès was 'le tournant du siècle', that moment when literature of a moral or metaphysical nature gave way to 'le roman de la désinvolt-

ure',¹⁵, and when, doubtless in reaction to Sartre's attacks, literature as art entered a period of great uncertainty. There can be no doubt that the date of its appearance was a major reason for the neglect of the argument against commitment contained in the work, and a cause of the subsequent neglect of the political aspect of Blanchot's writing then and since. By the time the articles it contains were published together, the focus of intellectual concern was shifting, under pressure from events at home and abroad, away from literature as such and onto political and moral questions. Blanchot thus found himself as it were high and dry: passionately engaged in a debate which had ceased to interest his adversaries, and caught in the position he was occupying when they chose to call it off. What is more, his argument too displays the uncertainties which were beginning to mark the new literary era. As soon as it is read independently of its attitude to the contemporary debate, his argument begins to founder in the manner I have alluded to, until it attains a state of utter uncertainty and contradiction. Yet it is this which makes it a unique document of its time, for if it concludes on a note of uncertainty, it reaches that point after having conducted a concerted dialogue with contemporary doctrine. At its appearance in 1949 it therefore encapsulates involuntarily the pattern of intellectual development in relation to literature in the period which it covers. It is thus, in a sense, a mirror of its time -- the post-war years en abyme -- so that at its close it points forward to the complex, uncharted zone into which literature was driven after 1950 by the unresolved contradictions it contained. A means of understanding that new era would thus seem to lie in the behaviour of the argument of La Part, and it is in this spirit that I shall examine it.

The seeds of the uncertainty which ultimately affects his argument are sown from the moment Blanchot enters the debate over commitment. This is because although he resolutely opposes Sartre's call, he does not place himself in the opposing camp, but seeks to argue from a standpoint outside of the alternatives of 'la littérature engagée'

and 'la littérature dégagée', in an attempt to expose the very conditions which give such a debate its sense. One thing must be clear from the outset however: Blanchot did not merely sit on the fence during this crucial period. Suspension of judgement only occurs in La Part within the context of an unequivocal declaration of commitment to a certain type of art, and it is significant that it is in the chapter on Sartre that this is made:

l'art le plus pur, qui ne sait aujourd'hui qu'il est le plus impur, rendu coupable par son innocence, art de propagande parce que désintéressé, où la société, dans le monde parfait de la culture, trouve une garantie pour ses abus? (p. 189).

This declaration is fundamental to Blanchot's thought at the time. Not enough attention has been paid to the political and social orientation of his attitude from the time he became a critic, and this has obscured his true originality. Though as the article 'De la révolution à la littérature'¹⁶ tells us, literature replaced politics at a certain moment in history as an effective sphere of activity for Blanchot, this was not a disavowal of his revolutionary past, so that it is quite possible to extract from his writings then and since a political attitude quite as uncompromising as Sartre's and not far removed from it in nature¹⁷. Indeed, if we look at the first version of the above passage, as it appeared in L'Arche in 1945, this is even more evident:

l'art le plus pur, qui ne sait aujourd'hui qu'il est le plus impur, rendu coupable par son innocence, art de propagande qui fournit à la société un alibi par la culture, qui, bien plus, est à la fois l'expression de cette société et sa défense en superposant à une vie misérable et scandaleuse le monde parfait et vide sur lequel il appelle tous les regards? (My italics).

The toning down of this passage for inclusion in La Part is indicative of how reluctant Blanchot was to use conventional political discourse to express the dilemma, or define the rôle, of the artist. Undoubtedly because, by the end of the war, his political career lay resolutely behind him¹⁸, while Sartre's had scarcely begun, he proved far more circumspect than Sartre in his approach to

the problem, and instead of seeking to justify the commitment of literature to political ends, sought to resituate the question by claiming that, well before Sartre conceived of 'une littérature engagée', art and literature had of their own volition become permeable to political considerations.

His opposition to Sartre does not therefore lead him simply to avoid having to argue from the opposite camp either. This would indeed have been an abstract position. It is on the basis of his conception of literature that he rejects both the call for commitment and the simple conception of uncommitted art which was defended in reaction to it. Belonging to neither camp did not therefore place him in a third camp: it permitted him to focus his critical attention upon the very validity of the distinction between them. The originality of his standpoint in relation to the contemporary debate is crucial to an understanding of his development at this time, and it is quite perceptible in the opening passage of the chapter on Constant, which begins with the subject of tradition:

dans quelle mesure cette notion d'une tradition romanesque agit-elle même sur les écrivains qui s'en écartent le plus? Et que représente cette tradition? Un petit nombre de jugements qui la résument, de règles qu'on en tire? Ne serait-ce pas d'abord le sentiment d'une réalité mystérieuse, figurée par le pouvoir qu'ont eu quelques oeuvres de durer, de demeurer opiniâtement à l'arrière-plan de notre expérience littéraire et de notre langage? Lorsqu'une littérature devient classique, c'est cette tentation de dépasser le temps que son influence apporte à tous ceux qui se sentent chargés de prendre sa suite. Tentation peut-être avantageuse, mais aussi pleine de dangers. C'est la tentation de l'intemporel. C'est l'espérance d'exister par-delà l'histoire et d'agir et d'être admirable indépendamment des conditions historiques du succès.

Then a little further on, this line of argument gives rise to a comparison which clearly situates it in relation to its time:

quoi qu'on pense de l'idée d'engagement, elle a au moins ce mérite de n'être qu'un engagement à terme, limité au temps très bref de

notre vie, et non pas cet engagement, hypocrite et vague, mais sans fin, mais pour tous les temps et même pour l'au-delà du temps, que signifie le petit enfer de l'immortalité artistique (p. 221).

The way the argument of this opening paragraph is constructed reveals that, to Blanchot's mind, the entire question of commitment is simply one aspect of a broader problem, which it reflects but does not resolve, namely the conflict between the timelessness of art and the times in which it appears, the struggle between art and history. Thus, in seeking to take up a position somewhere between these two antagonistic elements in La Part, Blanchot is not merely watering down into a more palatable but also more insipid form the differences and antagonisms of the time: on the contrary, he hopes thereby to draw them into each other's orbit until it becomes clear that, far from being a great divide across which two historically incompatible forms of literary art exchange invective, the difference expressed in the opposition between 'la littérature engagée' and 'la littérature déagée' is inherent in literature itself, is in fact what constitutes literature as literature and has been the single motive force behind the evolution of literary art in the century and a half which precedes the debate over commitment.

Blanchot thus seeks repeatedly in La Part to explore the relationship between literature and politics. Hence, just as René Etiemble reminded his readers in 1946 that André Gide was 'l'écrivain le plus engagé de son époque',¹⁹, it is to Gide that Blanchot turns for an illustration of the writer's relationship to politics. Unlike Etiemble, however, he does not use the example of Gide so as to devalue the notion of commitment or render it banal. Gide's decision in 1934 to abandon writing in the face of political necessity is cited by him in a manner which gives depth to the current question of commitment:

cette contestation de l'art en vue de la liberté objective est une des plus importantes qui puissent s'imposer à un artiste. Le débat d'André Gide avec le communisme est le moment pathétique de cette exist-

ence, son moment suprême et celui qui doit être regardé avec le plus de sérieux (p. 216).

Though in disagreement with Sartre over the terms upon which he seeks to commit the writer, Blanchot reveals here that he nevertheless recognises the absolute authenticity of the need for commitment which writers feel and have felt. Indeed, in what he goes on to say it is clear that he considers that need to be of greater import for the writer than for other men:

il arrive aux hommes politiques d'avoir été communistes et de cesser de l'être; cette étape pour eux n'a pas toujours grande importance. Il n'en va pas de même pour l'écrivain. D'une telle confrontation, s'il se retire, fût-ce pour les raisons les plus fortes, il ne se retire pas intact; en sa vocation quelque chose a été frappé de mort; ce qui l'a une fois contesté, même tenu par la suite pour contestable, continue à lui rendre suspecte une activité dont il voit tout ce qu'elle lui coûte par les satisfactions qu'elle lui apporte (ibid.).

What is more, this broadening of the field within which the question of commitment is examined is not an attempt to temper the partisan nature of Sartre's call. Indeed, it is already apparent in the above quotation that, if anything, Blanchot is seeking to narrow down the political perspective from which the problem should be examined, and in the chapter on the Surrealists this is made even clearer:

la profession de foi marxiste ... demeure très significative comme un exemple des engagements profonds que la littérature ne peut s'empêcher de conclure dès qu'elle prend conscience de sa liberté la plus grande (p. 96).

Hence though it is usual, Blanchot continues, to take the Surrealists' commitment to Communism rather lightly, 'l'étape n'a été ni fortuite ni arbitraire' (ibid.), and he goes on to spend five pages of his study (pp. 96-101) analysing the links between the search for communication through poetry and the aims of Communism. His main theme is the inevitability of the encounter between art as it has developed so far and political action:

peut-être est-ce une loi que tout art qui

se dégage des éléments intérieurs qui l'asservissent (rejet de l'imitation, refus des mots comme instruments d'échange, refus de l'art considéré comme un divertissement), tend à s'engager dans une action extérieure qui l'alourdit. Plus il devient inutile, plus il a besoin d'une fin qui fasse de cette inutilité quelque chose d'utilisable. C'est sa gratuité qui rend inévitable sa mise 'au service de la révolution' (p. 99).

He then proceeds to state quite unequivocally what has so far only been implied in his arguments:

il est clair ... que si Breton et Eluard et Aragon ont rencontré le marxisme plutôt que toute autre activité politique, ce n'est pas par hasard. ... En vérité, il saute aux yeux que la dialectique historique offre à tous ceux que hantent les idées d'homme total, de limite de la condition humaine une chance de premier ordre: l'homme total n'est pas à chercher, maintenant, dans les déchirements et les désordres de la société capitaliste, il n'est pas à connaître, il est à faire Quand la dialectique sera à son terme, alors la conscience sera tout entière présente à elle-même; avec la société sans classe, elle se réalisera et se verra dans sa totalité (ibid.).

Blanchot is here both analysing and justifying, in an article dating from 1945, a form of commitment comparable with that called for by Sartre, and presented as just as imperious a necessity. Yet he is not merely seeking to disqualify Sartre's conceptions, or even to refine upon them. Although he is often lumped together with them, Blanchot was no Surrealist. He is quite convinced that their literary method, 'l'écriture automatique' was a failure²⁰, and correspondingly laudatory towards Sartre's use of the novel²¹. His aim is thus not to arbitrate between two different forms of literary commitment, but, by juxtaposing the two distinct responses to the problem, to broaden the scope of its examination to include the fundamental contradiction it contains.

For in presenting the commitment of the Surrealists to Marxism as inevitable, Blanchot is not simply prescribing what form commitment should take. The inevitability which leads an art form that refuses the conventions of

art to ally itself with a political doctrine opposed to the established social order, is on the contrary presented by him as something essentially problematical, and the result not of choice but of unease. Having described the Surrealist form of commitment, therefore, Blanchot also describes, in terms which are intentionally Sartrean, the dilemma which lies at its heart and which for him is its true significance:

affirmer qu'on écrit, non par divertissement ni par amour de l'art, mais parce que dans cette activité est engagé le sort de l'homme, ne va pas à la fin sans malaise. L'engagement purement intérieur paraît souvent illusoire. On n'est jamais sûr de ne pas 'jouer' et de ne pas 'tricher'. L'engagement veut devenir plus sérieux, c'est-à-dire se conclure, être quelque chose qui pèse, qu'il faut accepter, dont on ne peut se défaire qu'en le faisant sien à chaque instant (p. 98).

This could stand as an analysis of Sartre's own motivations in turning to commitment. Its purpose in La Part goes further than that however, for, in describing the process whereby the artist feels obliged to turn to politics, Blanchot is concentrating his attention upon the cause of that constraint, which, far from arising out of a fundamental identity of purpose between literature and politics, lies in the absolute contradiction which each discovers at the heart of itself when it becomes revolutionary. In La Part Blanchot locates that common discovery in the notion of la liberté. The difference between Sartre's form of commitment and that of the Surrealists turns upon the way each uses this notion. Sartre's entire doctrine rests upon the assumption that political freedom and the freedom experienced by the writer can be rendered compatible and made to coincide. The Surrealists also saw the link between political freedom and the freedom they were seeking through art. At no time, however, did they behave as if they were the same. Rather, the freedom achieved by political means would lead all men to the experience of freedom of which only a few men were capable for the moment. The road to freedom could thus only be travelled

in two stages, because, on the way, the nature of freedom changed fundamentally. Blanchot sums this up as follows:

c'est lorsque la liberté de l'homme ne sera plus à faire, lorsqu'elle sera donnée dans les faits, réalisée dans toutes ses conditions, c'est alors que la liberté prendra conscience d'elle-même, conscience d'elle comme de ce qui dépasse toujours ces conditions, de ce qui n'est jamais réalisé, jamais donné ni fait. L'homme sera libre, ... parce que, dans une société libre où il ne pourra que se choisir libre, il lui faudra tout de même encore se choisir lui-même, sans pouvoir se décharger sur personne de ce soin, ni en être 'affranchi' jamais (pp. 100-101).

Once again it is in terms that are intentionally Sartreian that Blanchot pursues his analysis, in order to bring out as clearly as possible the grounds for his opposition to Sartre: namely that the entire problem is not as simple as the latter would seem to claim. In Qu'est-ce que la littérature? Sartre maintains that 'l'imaginaire pur et la praxis sont difficilement compatibles'²², and it is on the basis of this incompatibility that he conceives of the need to commit the writer. At no time in La Part does Blanchot seek to contest this in his own name. Rather, by confronting it with another version of itself, he directs his attention to the true nature of that incompatibility. For like Sartre, the Surrealists were aware that between the freedom given to all men (that of imagination) and the freedom for which all men must fight (through praxis), no common measure exists. Whereas Sartre concluded from this that the former must simply be suppressed in favour of the latter, the Surrealists, according to Blanchot, faced up to their incompatibility: 'le propre de l'école de Breton est d'avoir toujours maintenu solidement ensemble des tendances inconciliables' (p. 95), and their example must therefore call into question the validity of Sartre's entire project.

Having gone thus far in his argument, Blanchot could well have gone no further, sure in the knowledge that he had totally undermined the argument for commitment simply by pointing to the flaw in its basic premise. Indeed, one level of the argument in La Part does consist of reiterat-

ing the difference between freedom in the world and the freedom of the imagination, and allows Blanchot to conduct a measured dialogue with Sartre independent of the polemic which marked the period. However, just as in his defence of what is specific in literature he is not content to remain within the established arena of debate, so his assertion of the incompatibility between freedom for the writer and political freedom is turned by him from being a means of suspending the debate over commitment, into the basis for an entirely original form of commitment, differing both from that of Sartre and from the Surrealists'. So far, he has merely claimed that commitment is relevant to literature, but only for the incompatibility it displays: in short, the need for commitment is symptomatic, in the writer, of his encounter with an essential contradiction in his activity. He goes on in La Part, however, to make the much more audacious claim that literary commitment is possible if it occurs on literature's terms. So far, the problem has been couched in terms of art which breaks with tradition and turns to politics for support. However the way he expresses this process in the study of the Surrealists points to the way in which he is going to proceed beyond the stage of mere analysis. As we saw, he recognises as 'une loi' the fact that 'tout art qui se dégage des éléments intérieurs qui l'asservissent ... tend à s'engager dans une action extérieure qui l'alourdit' (p. 99). His use of these two opposing terms is by no means innocent. If in using them he situates his argument squarely within the current debate, by making them signify first and foremost the opposition between them, and thus emphasising that each corresponds to an autonomous form of activity, he prepares the ground for a positive reply to Sartre from a standpoint which the latter's argument does not anticipate.

It is on the two occasions in La Part that he explicitly rejects 'l'engagement' that this is made most apparent. One of these occurs in the article on the Surrealists:

la littérature la plus dégagée est en même temps la plus engagée, dans la mesure où

elle sait que se prétendre libre dans une société qui ne l'est pas, c'est prendre à son compte les servitudes de cette société et surtout accepter le sens mystificateur du mot liberté par lequel cette société dissimule ses prétensions (pp. 101-102).

This is a clear rejection of the basic premise from which Sartre argues, and it seems to be presenting the knowledge of its inadequacy as an alternative form of commitment. It does then 'break with the conception of 'la littérature dégagée' as something above politics altogether. It does not, however, offer any practical indications as to how such a form of commitment might be more effective than Sartre's. In the second case of direct rejection of 'l'engagement' the same seems at first to apply:

on découvrira bientôt que, lorsque la littérature cherche à faire oublier sa gratuité en s'associant au sérieux d'une action politique ou sociale, cet engagement s'accomplit tout de même sur le mode du dégagement. Et c'est l'action qui devient littéraire. ... Ecrire, c'est s'engager; mais écrire, c'est aussi se dégager, s'engager sur le mode de l'irresponsabilité (p. 33).

In this passage, indeed, the knowledge of the impossibility of commitment seems to have developed into an end in itself, as if by 1949, when it was written, Blanchot had simply come to rest upon the position he had forged in the preceding years (an impression confirmed by the appearance of the original article, 'Kafka et la littérature', in the main mouthpiece for 'la littérature dégagée', the Cahiers de la Pléiade).

A last-minute modification to the original text points, however, to the true import of this use of the idea of 'le dégagement', and to a desire, on Blanchot's part, to situate La Part firmly outside of the existing framework of debate into which its constituent articles might at times seem to slip. It ends with the words 'écrire, c'est s'engager; mais écrire, c'est aussi se dégager, s'engager sur le mode de l'irresponsabilité'. In its original form, however, this sentence was much shorter and to the point: 'écrire c'est s'engager sur le mode de l'irresponsabilité'.

The change from one to the other is most significant, for, by transforming what is virtually a polemical statement into an objection in the form of a paradox ('s'engager' = 'se dégager'), Blanchot does not end the debate, but suspends it, by maintaining both sides simultaneously in the forefront of his argument. His encounter with the problem of commitment thus does not provide him with a solution to that problem, it modifies the very means whereby so far a solution to the problem has been sought. For the emergence of paradox in his examination of the problem is by no means innocent. On the contrary, it provides him in La Part with a logical standpoint corresponding to the illogical affirmation of the singularity of literature we have already encountered in his argument. Paradox is the one illegitimate form which the laws of logic can accommodate, and in La Part Blanchot takes full advantage of this. In the present instance, it allows him to concentrate his attention upon the conflict between the two tendencies which he has already examined in the case of the Surrealists. Above all, however, it allows his argument to pivot upon itself and turn paradox from a sign that logic has been defeated, into a sign of what it is that causes that defeat.

The site of this pivoting movement in the passage last quoted can be located in the sentence 'c'est l'action qui devient littéraire'. On the surface, this appears to mean that action pursued through literature is devalued by being rendered ineffective, and on one level, this is what it does mean. However, by arguing within the terms of the dialectical debate begun by Sartre and opposing l'engagement and le dégagement, Blanchot is also seeking to reorient the debate entirely. Hence, the words 'c'est l'action qui devient littéraire' are also meant to signify the far more complex and paradoxical fact that there exists a mode of action or praxis which has its origin in literature, in imagination. Blanchot thus behaves in relation to literary commitment as we saw him behave towards literary criticism. There, what appeared initially as a conventional analytical approach to the irreducibility of liter-

ature to non-literary language, turned out to conceal a confrontation between the two irreducible standpoints in presence. Now, just as literature itself was affirmed as the true seat of 'le problème critique' which must concern us, so literary commitment can only be of significance, it is claimed, if it is conducted from the standpoint of literature itself. This affirmation is given its most ample expression in the long section which concludes La Part, 'La littérature et le droit à la mort'.

The two articles which make up this section appeared in Critique in December 1947 and January 1948, and there can be no doubt that, though they never argue directly with Sartre, they constitute a concerted reply to his Qu'est-ce que la littérature?. The section thus begins by posing a question which Sartre does not, namely: why do people write? This question, Blanchot claims, is a pressing one, for it corresponds to 'cette mise en cause de l'art, que représente la partie la plus illustre de l'art depuis trente ans' (p. 294). It is moreover not merely a sign that art has lost confidence in itself, but constitutes its most original development so far, and one to which criticism must respond. Consequently, our entire way of talking about literature must be called into question. This is however something that Sartre, it is implied, does not do:

on a constaté avec surprise que la question 'Qu'est-ce que la littérature?' n'avait jamais reçu que des réponses insignifiantes. Mais voici plus étrange: dans la forme d'une pareille question, quelque chose apparaît qui lui retire tout sérieux. Demander: qu'est-ce que la poésie? qu'est-ce que l'art? ou même: qu'est-ce que le roman? on peut le faire et on l'a fait. Mais la littérature qui est poème et roman, semble l'élément de vide, présent dans toutes ces choses graves, et sur lequel la réflexion, avec sa propre gravité, ne peut se retourner sans perdre son sérieux (pp. 294-295).

Yet it is precisely in the terms of this futile question that Sartre's entire conception of the writer is couched. In order to counter it, Blanchot therefore avoids arguing

on the same terms as Sartre, but sets out from another standpoint, one based upon what he saw as the true historical situation of the artist after the war. This is clear from the following passage in the chapter on Sartre:

on peut évidemment penser que si Jean-Paul Sartre a écrit, en même temps que des oeuvres philosophiques considérables, des romans, des pièces de théâtre et des essais critiques qui ne le sont pas moins, cette capacité d'oeuvres si différentes lui est propre et exprime la seule diversité de ses dons. C'est un fait cependant: cette rencontre en un même homme d'un philosophe et d'un littérateur pareillement excellents vient aussi de la possibilité que lui ont offerte philosophie et littérature de se rencontrer en lui (p. 191).

There is however nothing maliciously iconoclastic about this. Although he cites the examples of Simone de Beauvoir, Georges Bataille, Albert Camus, Jean Grenier, Gabriel Marcel, Brice Parain and Jean Wahl in order to be able to say of Sartre 'il est clair qu'il n'est qu'un exemple frappant d'une situation presque générale' (ibid.), this is solely in order to broaden the scope of the problem raised by commitment, by presenting it as an all-embracing one of concern to the entire age:

existentialistes ou non, poètes, romanciers et philosophes poursuivent des expériences et des recherches analogues, ils sont engagés d'une manière semblable dans le même drame dont ils ont à donner une image ou rechercher le sens. S'ils font leur salut, c'est par des voies si peu différentes que chacun est tenté de les prendre toutes ensemble (p. 192).

Nor is it a matter of simplifying the problem by presenting it as a global one, for Blanchot concludes:

naturellement, ces remarques générales n'expliquent rien. Même les questions purement littéraires qui se posent à partir d'un tel phénomène sont aussi difficiles que les problèmes dits fondamentaux, puisque désormais la littérature et, par conséquent, la technique ont un sens et une valeur extra-littéraires (ibid.).

This is the heart of Blanchot's standpoint in La Part. It recalls his rejection of 'l'art pur' and reveals that

art, for him, consists in itself of a particular form of commitment to the world, analogous with, but irreducible to that of other intellectual disciplines, and essentially contradictory in nature. In 'La littérature et le droit à la mort' he seeks to respect the contradiction which, in itself, constitutes literature's commitment to the world, by arguing on the basis of paradox. Thus, in a manner which casts light upon the conversion of the opposition between l'engagement and le déengagement from simple distinction into paradox, he takes as his premise Hegel's discovery that we can only know the significance of an action once that action is accomplished, yet in order to accomplish it, we have to have a knowledge of its significance. According to Blanchot, the writer experiences this dilemma in its most acute form so that, to borrow Hegel's expression, he is never more than 'un néant travaillant dans le néant' (p. 296). Having identified this paradox, he proceeds to take it as his standpoint for an extended examination of the writer's activity. On one level, it is a phenomenological description of literary creation, his own answer to the question 'qu'est-ce que la littérature?'. However, since the dialectic of his analysis constantly leads back to the initial paradox he has identified as the essence of the literary act, it is therefore a parody of the processes it is employing, intended above all to demonstrate the futility of the phenomenological approach to literature.

This is the first stage in his use of the standpoint of literature not merely to refuse the argument for commitment, but to counter it by defining the nature of literature more accurately. It is an unavoidable aspect of Sartre's theories that any contradictions encountered on the way must either be resolved or skirted. The virtue of Blanchot's approach is that by taking as his premise the paradoxical nature of literary practice, each time a contradiction is encountered on the level of description, it can simply be referred back to the contradictory principle of which it is a manifestation. Such an approach comes no closer than Sartre's to resolving the problem posed by literature to theoretical analysis. It has the inestimable

advantage over Sartre's, however, of allowing analysis to continue despite the contradictions it encounters, and thus to proceed at all times while respecting the nature of its subject.

There is a second stage to this use of paradox as a standpoint, however, and one which is of far greater methodological import than the mere accommodation of contradiction. For as I have already indicated, Blanchot seeks also, in 'La littérature et le droit à la mort', to present an alternative form of commitment with its roots in the paradoxical nature of literature itself. Paradox, I have suggested, serves as a pivot upon which he shifts the angle of his argument in La Part, and the counterpart to his perfectly conventional reply to Sartre consists of the affirmation that the writer, as he is writing, is in a position compatible with a certain form of political action. There are thus two distinct standpoints present in the argument of this section, and their existence can be discerned in the following passage:

on comprend la méfiance qu'inspirent aux hommes engagés dans un parti, ayant pris parti, les écrivains qui partagent leur vue; car ces derniers ont également pris parti pour la littérature, et la littérature, par son mouvement, nie en fin de compte la substance de ce qu'elle représente (p. 301).

The parallel here is clear: the writer is not so much incapable of commitment as committed to literature before all else, and it is this commitment to what is presented as an autonomous process, at odds with any of the forms it may be obliged to adopt, which, by the parallel prendre parti/prendre parti, constitutes the incipient counter-argument which will eventually be formulated in La Part.

In order to do so, Blanchot returns to the distinction which he examined in the case of the Surrealists, namely the absolute nature of the writer's experience of what, as experience in the world, is always relative. Then, he was concerned with the notion of freedom. Now he makes the same point in the case of negation. Both the man who seeks to transform the world by his actions, and the writer

who transforms it through imagination, employ the same tool: negation, and in an extended comparison between the man who makes a stove in order to warm himself and the man who writes a book, Blanchot seeks to bring out the difference in the way each one uses it. Each man's activity resembles that of the other very closely; each is a form of praxis in its own right and indeed, Blanchot goes so far as to claim, the writer's activity is exemplary:

si l'on voit dans le travail la puissance de l'histoire, celle qui transforme l'homme en transformant le monde, il faut bien reconnaître dans l'activité de l'écrivain la forme par excellence du travail (p. 304).

This is because he is capable at any time of realising instantaneously what the man at work must attain through his labour. He is thus the most perfect example of the man at work:

que fait l'écrivain qui écrit? Tout ce que fait l'homme qui travaille, mais à un degré éminent (p. 305).

At the same time, however, he differs from him entirely, for so great is the negative force at his disposal that he can never deal with anything less than everything. Clearly, this is the secret of the writer's power, of the power of the imagination to transport us: 'que peut un auteur? Tout, d'abord tout ...; ainsi, écrivant, l'homme enchaîné obtient immédiatement la liberté pour lui et pour le monde' (p. 306). His work is thus, in its way, an effective form of action, of praxis. However:

pour autant qu'il se donne immédiatement la liberté qu'il n'a pas, il néglige les conditions vraies de son affranchissement, il néglige ce qui doit être fait de réel pour que l'idée abstraite de liberté se réalise (ibid.).

Despite appearances, therefore, his action can never lay claim to the value of the more limited action of the man at work. The writer is fundamentally irresponsible and therefore, it is implied, totally unsuited to the type of commitment which Sartre has prepared for him.

This is ground which has already been covered in La Part, and what is more, Blanchot seems here to be adopting Sartre's standpoint and, having provided an analysis

of the analogous nature of work and writing, to be coming down finally to a far less sympathetic interpretation of the absolute nature of the writer's conception of freedom, and use of negation, than was the case when he studied the Surrealists. However, as what follows this stage in his analysis shows, this apparent retreat is no more than a means of throwing additional weight upon the standpoint of literature as an alternative to that of theoretical analysis. Hence, though part of the writer's unsuitability for commitment stems from the fact that he is constantly looking beyond the here and now towards a point where everything has been negated and transformed, this impatient desire for everything at once contains the seeds of an alternative form of commitment. For the 'beyond' at which he aims is not, in the present age, the immutable plane of absolute values: it is, Blanchot claims, the world as it will be after the negation and the transformation of everything. This is the essence of the paradox from which he argues in 'La littérature et le droit à la mort', and as a description of the imagination, it is not at variance with Sartre's own. For each thinker, the imagination is an autonomous mode of negative consciousness whose relationship to reality is fundamentally contradictory. Where they differ is in the conclusion they draw from this observation. For Sartre, pure imagination and praxis are incompatible. For Blanchot, however, it is impossible to speak of imagination as pure: it is essentially impure because it is caught inextricably up in the reality of the world, capable at any time of negating that reality entirely, yet incapable of ever realising once and for all the nothingness of which it consists. Whereas for Sartre this contradiction condemns imagination never to participate in praxis, for Blanchot it constitutes in itself an autonomous mode of praxis. It is undeniably incompatible with that called for by Sartre. Nevertheless, it is involved with the same reality as Sartre's, and the writer is therefore turned just as resolutely towards life in the world as the man of action:

en lui /la/ négation ... ne se satisfait pas

de l'irréalité où elle se meut, car elle veut se réaliser et elle ne le peut qu'en niant quelque chose de réel, de plus réel que les mots, de plus vrai que l'individu isolé dont elle dispose: aussi ne cesse-t-elle de le pousser vers la vie du monde et l'existence publique pour l'amener à concevoir comment, tout en écrivant, il peut devenir cette existence même (pp. 308-309).

Herein lies the key to the alternative form of commitment which Blanchot is proposing, for, he goes on, it is while the writer is engaged in the normal processes of his art that:

il rencontre dans l'histoire ces moments décisifs où tout paraît mis en question, où loi, foi, Etat, monde d'en haut, monde d'hier, tout s'enfonce sans effort, sans travail, dans le néant. L'homme sait qu'il n'a pas quitté l'histoire, mais l'histoire est maintenant le vide, elle est le vide qui se réalise, elle est la liberté absolue devenue événement. De telles époques, on les appelle Révolution (p. 309).

In times of revolution, the incompatibility between imagination and praxis disappears, but not because the contradictions of the former yield to the unambiguous dictates of the latter. On the contrary, for the duration of a revolution, it is praxis which displays the same contradictory behaviour as imagination. Hence, 'l'écrivain se reconnaît dans la Révolution' (p. 311). He can commit himself to revolution because this is commitment on literature's terms: revolution is literature in its most consummate form:

moments fabuleux ... : en eux parle la fable, en eux la parole de la fable se fait action. Qu'ils tentent l'écrivain, rien de plus justifié. L'action révolutionnaire est en tous points analogue à l'action telle que l'incarne la littérature: passage du rien à tout, affirmation de l'absolu comme événement et de chaque événement comme absolu (p. 309).

At this stage in his argument, it is clear that Blanchot has pivoted completely upon the notion that, in commitment, 'c'est l'action qui devient littéraire', turning his objection to Sartre from being something comprehensible from the latter's standpoint (action becomes literary and therefore ineffective) into something requiring to be

understood from another standpoint entirely (literature is a supremely effective form of action). He thus meets Sartre head on over the question of commitment. Not content merely to reject commitment in the name of literature (and thus to state what amounted to the obvious), he takes literature as the point of departure for an argument which arrives at the same conclusion as Sartre's -- namely revolution -- after starting out from the opposite direction. Sartre conceives of a theory of revolutionary literature on the basis of the political exigencies of the moment, while Blanchot expounds a theory of revolutionary action on the basis of the nature of literary imagination. Clearly, Sartre could have objected that such a theory, even if coherent, was too abstractly so to be of any relevance to the situation in France after the war. Indeed, it is possible to see in Blanchot's attitude an ultimate version of the reactionary political idealism of his pre-war writings, a coming full circle of the reasoning which led him 'de la révolution à la littérature', for he gives absolute status in his argument to a moment which for Sartre is not an authentic one, and which both refer to, after Hegel, as 'la Terreur'. In an interview on the subject of Les Chemins de la liberté, given in 1945, Sartre rejects this attitude quite resolutely:

Mathieu incarne cette disponibilité totale que Hegel appelle liberté terroriste et qui est véritablement la contre-liberté. ... Il n'est pas libre parce qu'il n'a pas su s'engager. ... Mathieu, c'est la liberté d'indifférence, liberté abstraite, liberté pour rien²³.

This description could well be applied entirely to Blanchot, and sums up how out of tune his reasoning was with the dominant thinking at the time. Nevertheless, he was able to claim that his conception of the problem did have historical validity, for during the French Revolution reality did come to resemble imagination, as the individual was confronted by the paradoxical revelation that absolute freedom left him with only one right, 'le droit à la mort':

c'est le moment où Je meurs signifie pour moi qui meurs une banalité dont il n'y a

pas à tenir compte: dans le monde libre et dans ces moments où la liberté est apparition absolue, mourir est sans importance et la mort est sans profondeur (p. 310).

This, for Blanchot, is the true revolutionary attitude, and, in what is an indirect rejection of Sartre's entire approach, he concludes the above passage with the words 'cela, la Terreur et la révolution -- non la guerre -- nous l'ont appris' (ibid.).

Each writer therefore desires a revolutionary situation. They differ over the question of its mode. As Pierre Verstraeten points out in his 'Note pour une confrontation entre le statut de l'écrivain chez Sartre et chez Blanchot'²⁴, this difference turns on the validity each grants to the standpoint of the writer. Both see literature as a means of confronting the distress born of the human condition. Whereas for Sartre it fulfills a cathartic function, is a means of banishing the evils of 'la vieille passion absolutiste' which produces that distress and thus no more than 'l'étape ascétique dans le devenir authentique de l'existence'²⁵, 'l'avant-dernière étape d'un processus de libération'²⁶, in Blanchot's thinking the final stage in Sartre's is absent, because it is impossible. For Sartre, literature is 'une étape inauthentique'²⁷ in the search for freedom; for Blanchot, it is nevertheless 'l'étape ultime de l'authenticité scripturale'²⁸, so that for him, 'sacrifier l'écriture ..., la dépasser en l'"utilisant"'²⁹ is quite unacceptable, and the problem must be explored by the writer on the basis of his own activity³⁰.

In La Part Blanchot thus provides a coherent theory of commitment, which respects the conditions of literary practice and even finds a precedent in history, in that during the French Revolution, there existed a writer whose experience as a writer corresponded absolutely, he claims, to the Terror which reigned at that time: 'Sade est l'écrivain par excellence' (p. 311). Sartre would have had no difficulty in dismissing such a theory as idealistic. However, as Verstraeten points out, it is logically coherent, whereas Sartre's is not:

dans le chassé-croisé où nous voyons les positions de Sartre et de Blanchot se recouvrir respectivement en des étapes différentes de leur itinéraire, Sartre préserve toujours un au-delà de possibilité par-delà l'impossibilité reconnue: la négation de celle-ci purement et simplement, /ce qui est/ la seule possibilité de salut que détient encore l'homme³¹.

At a given point in his argument for commitment, Sartre quite simply ignores the contradiction which renders it unpractical, and it is possible to claim that this process lies at the heart of his entire philosophy³². Though Blanchot's version of the problem suffers from an apparent lack of immediate efficacy, it nevertheless assumes the contradictions inherent in the problem and thus provides a coherent basis from which to argue. He thus commits himself entirely, at this period, to his counter-statement of the relationship between literature and politics, whereas Sartre does not do so in relation to the call for l'engagement. The result, as I said initially, is that once the relevance of the call disappears under the pressure of events, Sartre is able to move on. Blanchot cannot do so however, so that though unlike for Sartre the commitment he defines at this time continues to govern his behaviour as a writer, the position he finds himself in at the end of the post-war period turns out to be an impasse from which his theory cannot extract itself intact.

Blanchot's restatement of the case for committed literature, though more coherent than Sartre's, must thus nevertheless be considered in its turn as a failure, if for different reasons. However, it is at the same time the only level of the argument in La Part which retains its coherence throughout. As I began by saying, Blanchot seeks in this work to argue from two distinct standpoints, that of theoretical analysis, in terms of which literature is an irreducible quantity, and that of literature itself, which, if it cannot be defined, can at least be affirmed. It is this affirmative standpoint which constitutes the originality of his argument, and, in the case of commit-

ment, it allows him to sustain a position which is equally as defensible as Sartre's. However, as soon as he quits the domain of history which provides the basis for his argument, the coexistence within his reasoning of two distinct and antagonistic standpoints becomes increasingly impossible to sustain. The process whereby his argument pivots upon certain notions so as to turn the contradiction they signify into the premise for unambiguous affirmation, gradually so distorts its field that his reasoning is simply paralysed. If we turn now to what forms the main subject of La Part, namely literature itself, we may see how this begins to occur.

I began this chapter by showing how, from 1945 onwards, Blanchot became preoccupied by the validity of criticism and thus by the relationship between literary language and the language of theoretical reason. This leads him, in the articles he publishes at the time, to pay almost exclusive attention to the critics of an author rather than to his works. The case of Malraux indicated how direct analysis of a work held little attraction for Blanchot, and in one chapter of La Part this is made quite explicit when, referring to Michel Leiris's Aurora, he writes:

nous ne voulons pas entrer dans le mouvement des thèmes, dans cet entremêlement qui unit ce qui est déchiré et ce qui est aimé, ce qui blesse et ce qui rassure, ce qu'on aime comme image de la mort et ce qu'on aime comme chance de ne pas mourir. Tout cela appartient au livre. Mais nous voudrions montrer à quel point l'ambiguïté des motifs en approfondit la signification (p. 245).

Thematic analysis is indeed always absent from Blanchot's criticism, as is any attention to the particular work as an autonomous entity. Its autonomy is recognised ('Tout cela appartient au livre'), but only in passing. Far more important is the principle which it manifests -- here once again referred to as ambiguity -- and, above all, the task of identifying that principle.

Part of this task consists in repeatedly evoking what

Blanchot sees as the erroneous encounter between literature and theoretical analysis, and in the cases of Kafka, Mallarmé and Rimbaud, he reflects anxiously upon the proportions which this activity has attained. The case of Kafka opens the work, and sets the pattern for much of its argument:

Kafka a peut-être voulu détruire son oeuvre, parce qu'elle lui semblait condamnée à accroître le malentendu universel. Quand on observe le désordre dans lequel nous est livrée cette oeuvre, ce qu'on nous en fait connaître, ce qu'on en dissimule, la lumière partielle qu'on jette sur tel ou tel fragment, l'éparpillement de textes eux-mêmes déjà inachevés et qu'on divise toujours plus, qu'on réduit en poussière, comme s'il s'agissait de reliques dont la vertu serait indivisible, quand on voit cette oeuvre plutôt silencieuse envahie par le bavardage des commentaires, ces livres impubliables devenus la matière de publications infinies, cette création intemporelle changée en une glose de l'histoire, on en vient à se demander si Kafka lui-même avait prévu un pareil désastre dans un pareil triomphe. Son désir a peut-être été de disparaître, discrètement, comme une énigme qui veut échapper au regard. Mais cette discrétion l'a livré au public, ce secret l'a rendu glorieux. Maintenant, l'énigme s'étale partout, elle est le grand jour, elle est sa propre mise en scène. Que faire? (p. 9).

This passage first describes the processes of critical analysis, then affirms the inaccessibility of what it claims to define before going on to recognise the dilemma which the existence of these two inexorable tendencies poses for reason, and which is explicitly made the starting-point for Blanchot's analysis: 'Que faire?'. When Mallarmé becomes the subject of his attention, moreover, he makes the same point, this time with reference to the work of Henri Mondor and to the 'Pléiade' edition of the poet's works:

toutes ces études, si remarquables et si dignes de leur objet, nous ont certes rendu Mallarmé plus proche. Nous le connaissons mieux et nous savons aussi plus précisément ce que, de lui, nous ne connaissons jamais. Sa gloire est maintenant celle d'un auteur classique. 'Tel qu'en lui-même enfin...' Peut-être, cependant, ne nous est-il si présent que parce que

sous bien des aspects il s'est éloigné de nous (p. 35).

Finally, in the case of Rimbaud he writes:

de Rimbaud, on sait sans doute à peu près tout ce que l'on saura jamais. De temps en temps nous sont envoyés d'Abyssinie des milliers de vers, qui se volatilisent en route. Même M. de Renéville n'a pu mettre la main sur La Chasse spirituelle, dont il affirme qu'elle a été écrite au cours du premier semestre de 1872 et qu'il distingue des Illuminations. Nous ne disons pas: qu'importe. Mais il est probable que nous savons sur Rimbaud autant et plus que celui-ci n'en savait sur lui-même (p. 153).

It is clear from the latter two passages, however, that though Blanchot by no means approves of the tendency he describes, he does not use his disapproval as the basis for a frontal attack upon criticism. No blame and only the gentlest of irony is levelled at those individuals who engage actively in such processes because, as he suggests in the chapter on the Surrealists, it corresponds to a tendency inherent in literature itself:

il n'y a plus d'école mais un état d'esprit subsiste. Personne n'appartient plus à ce mouvement, et tout le monde sent qu'il aurait pu en faire partie. Il y a dans toute personne qui écrit une vocation surréaliste qui s'avoue, qui avorte, apparaît quelquefois usurpée, mais qui, même fausse, exprime un effort et un besoin sincères. Le surréalisme s'est évanoui? C'est qu'il n'est plus ici ou là: il est partout. C'est un fantôme, une brillante hantise. A son tour, métamorphose méritée, il est devenu surréel (p. 90).

It is thus of the nature of what is most secret in literature to disseminate itself everywhere. That is what renders it so inaccessible. The dilemma caused by the proliferation of critical commentary surrounding literature is thus not something which can be denied, rejected or even ignored, because it corresponds, albeit erroneously, to the true behaviour of literature itself: it is in fact a vain reflection of it. For Blanchot at this time it is thus not so much an obstacle in his path, as part of that path, and therefore something which must be carefully negotiated. It is in this spirit that he undertakes his study

of other critics' readings of their authors.

A striking aspect of this approach consists of confronting conflicting views upon a given author so as to reveal their contradictions. Max Brod, Claude-Edmonde Magny, Jean Starobinski and Pierre Klossowski in the case of Kafka; Jean Mistler, Charles du Bos, Albert Thibaudet and several others unnamed in the case of Constant; Marcel Arland and Albert Béguin in the case of Pascal and the established critical tradition surrounding André Gide and the American novel, are cited with no other end than that of reaffirming yet again the irreducible nature of what each so earnestly seeks to define. There is of course a danger, in such a method, of becoming so satisfied with this sort of sharpshooting that it becomes a self-justifying and self-perpetuating process with no ultimate purpose, or, worse still, an alibi for a non-literary interpretation of literature. Picon and Delbouille each make this claim in their way, and, taking as his pretext the fact that in the case of Kafka Blanchot pays almost exclusive attention to what the author says about his art, Tzvetan Todorov has recently concluded that Blanchot is not really interested in literature at all:

il n'est pas certain ... que ... Blanchot échappe à la tentation biographique. ... De nombreuses pages commentent les journaux et les lettres de Kafka, et il est rarement question du Château; or, n'est-ce pas à cause du second qu'on lit les premiers?³³

I hope to show, however, that the almost exclusive attention to the critical act to be found in La Part and subsequently, far from constituting a move away from literature itself, arises in response to the complexities of works such as Kafka's, and forms the basis for a new theoretical approach to literature which leaves that illustrated by Todorov, and centred upon the work as a theoretical absolute, far behind.

The most common way Blanchot proceeds in La Part is by taking a critic of a given author, and following his arguments closely to the point at which their analysis encounters resistance from its object, and finally breaks down. The chapter on Baudelaire thus concentrates upon the flaw

in Sartre's otherwise wholly acceptable analysis:

la démonstration de Sartre est très impressionnante et, dans l'ensemble, fort équitable. ... Tous ces jugements appellent peu de réserves. Mais si on les accepte, comme on le doit, il faut en accepter un autre, que Sartre néglige: c'est que Baudelaire a aussi mérité Les Fleurs du Mal, c'est que cette vie, responsable de son guignon, est responsable de cette chance insigne, l'une des plus grandes du siècle (p. 133).

Such an approach may be negative in nature, but it is concerned above all to affirm, in reply to negative criticism of a sort highly dangerous for literature, something 'positive' which that criticism simply allows to escape. It does not seek therefore to dismiss the approach of the critic it studies, and thus simply to negate the negative so as to replace it by the positive. It seeks rather to suspend the other critic's argument at that critical point where it breaks down. The other critic's argument is thus, as I have said, not an obstacle to Blanchot, but an essential part of his own. By restating it from the standpoint of what it fails to explain, he maintains it, but in effect changes its sign from positive to negative, thereby throwing the weight of his own argument beyond the confines of that of the other critic, into the affirmation of what the latter does not even approach. He thus repeatedly precipitates the other critic's argument towards its furthest point, in order to exceed the inherent limits of that argument which appear most clearly at that point. There is thus never any polemical intent in Blanchot's readings of other critics (indeed, one would be hard put to extract from anything he has written on literature a sign of any sustained opposition to a particular writer), but rather a sincere wish to cooperate with other writers in what he considers an impossible task. His study of René Char is a good example of this.

He approaches Char's poetry, not for itself, but in terms of what Georges Mounin's scholarly work Avez-vous lu Char?, admirable though it be, cannot by its very nature approach. In an opening paragraph whose careful nuances

failed, as we shall see, to impress the critic in question, Blanchot indicates quite clearly the nature of his approach:

nous aimons le livre de Mounin, parce que de René Char il s'approche avec la méthode et le sérieux, la patience fervente et l'esprit de mesure auxquels l'Université recourt pour étudier les gloires poétiques consacrées. L'essentiel de la gloire de Char ne peut que demeurer étranger à une consécration. Mais pourquoi les moyens traditionnels de l'histoire littéraire ne pourraient-ils servir à nous parler de textes dont toute manière de parler sera fautive? Le besoin de comprendre et de traduire, les nombreux c'est-à-dire dont il fait suivre la lecture des poèmes, selon ce penchant si étonnant, et presque fatal, qui fait tenir la poésie pour plus accessible si on lui substitue des mots analogues qui la détruisent, ces naïvetés, d'ailleurs souvent corrigées par de vifs scrupules, n'ôtent rien à l'admiration de Mounin, à ce que celle-ci a en elle-même d'admirable pour sa sûreté, sa pénétration; l'intimité de ses liens avec le mouvement poétique le plus fort. Son expérience de lecteur mérite tout estime, car elle est celle d'un homme assez heureux pour avoir su lire, grâce à une confiance absolue, le poète qui pouvait donner à cette lecture le plus de sens et le plus de dignité (p. 103).

This passage displays great critical rigour. With care and tact, Mounin's entire approach is called into question, yet at no time are its inadequacies attributed to the critic himself. Blanchot is at pains to distinguish method from reader, the 'naïvetés' of the former from 'l'admiration de Mounin, ... ce que celle-ci a d'admirable', so that the true focus of his attention is not that method at all, but the reading, the 'expérience de lecteur' which inspires it. This distinction is crucial. As I have already claimed, his method is not negative but resolutely positive in nature: though he concentrates upon the point at which Mounin's version of his author fails, in his opinion, to account for what is particular in that author, he does not do so in order to rush in himself and fill the interpretative gap thus created. Rather, by affirming unconditionally the value and authenticity of Mounin's reading of Char, just as by subscribing wholeheartedly to Sartre's

version of Baudelaire, he allows the discrepancy between their method and its object to emerge and assume a specific value of its own. Hence, by shifting the emphasis of his critical attention from the method of other critics to their experience as readers, Blanchot does not simply prolong the subjective-objective controversy as it relates to literature, by asserting the primacy of the former category over the latter: he opens that controversy out to include a third term which has so far been consistently excluded from it, namely the very gap between them which renders them incompatible -- in other words, their difference.

The emphasis on experience, upon what is subjective in literature, is therefore no more than a means in La Part, part of an original attempt at bringing into perspective something almost everyone agrees about but which no-one has as yet either respected or even properly defined: what is specifically literary in literature. The chapter on Hölderlin is a further case in point. As with Baudelaire and Char, Blanchot approaches Hölderlin from the point of view of a critic, the philosopher Martin Heidegger. Now nothing would have been simpler for Blanchot than precipitately to condemn the philosopher's controversial exegesis of 'Wie wenn am Feiertage', in the name of that literary absolute which he has taken as his standpoint. As with Sartre's reading of Baudelaire, and indeed with his entire doctrine of engagement, such an approach would have certainly met with the approval of many of his readers and constituted a significant contribution to the current literary debate. Such was not Blanchot's way however. Without ever agreeing with Heidegger's approach, yet without ever rejecting it, he patiently explores its implications until at last its true incompatibility with its object emerges.

He begins by evoking the obvious objection to Heidegger's undertaking:

le commentaire de Heidegger suit mot à mot
le poème, aussi soigneux, aussi minutieux
que pourrait l'être un commentaire pour-
suivi selon les méthodes de l'érudition di-
dactique. Une telle explication est-elle
légitime? C'est ce que le commentateur n'a

pas tenu à nous faire savoir (p. 115).

This is not far from the critique of Mounin's method. In Heidegger's case, however, the problem is no more than apparent, in that the philosopher:

progressant selon la démarche circulaire qui lui est propre, aboutit finalement, non pas à recomposer le sens général à partir de tous les sens particuliers qu'elle spécifie, mais à retrouver dans chaque moment le passage de la totalité du poème sous la forme où celui-ci s'y est momentanément déposé et arrêté (ibid.).

In other words, the integrity of the poem is respected, so that this aspect of Heidegger's method cannot be objected to. Nor can what appears as another striking anomaly:

on pourrait aussi se demander si la rencontre est possible entre le vocabulaire d'une réflexion philosophique autonome et un langage poétique, venu dans notre monde il y a près d'un siècle et demi. Mais, sur ce point, le poème a répondu: un poème n'est pas sans date, mais malgré sa date il est toujours à venir, il se parle dans un 'à présent' qui ne répond pas aux repères historiques. ...

Il apparaît d'ailleurs très vite combien le commentaire de Heidegger cherche à répondre fidèlement aux intentions du poème. Même le vocabulaire dont il use, quoique en apparence le sien propre, est aussi le vocabulaire du poète. ...

On n'a donc pas à craindre que le commentaire ajoute au texte. Ce qu'il lui prête, on peut dire qu'il le lui avait emprunté (pp. 116-117).

Blanchot is now into the third page of his study, yet so far this has consisted merely in refuting the most obvious objections to Heidegger's own. He thus places the emphasis of his argument, as he did with Sartre and Mounin, on the legitimate nature of what he is criticising, the better to reveal, as he now goes on to do, the true anomaly in such an approach:

c'est une autre remarque qu'on serait tenté de formuler, sur le plan des correspondances entre le langage qui interprète et le langage objet d'interprétation: on le sait, la langue de Hölderlin est en apparence pauvre, pauvre en mots, pauvre en thèmes, monotone ... Mais la langue de Heidegger est

au contraire d'une richesse et d'une virtuosité incomparables (p. 117).

In itself, Blanchot points out, this aspect of Heidegger's philosophy constitutes 'un phénomène remarquable'. For the philosopher, words contain hidden meanings and, in the case of the term physis, he reveals layers of significance about which Hölderlin was totally ignorant. Yet this is precisely the problem:

Hölderlin a ignoré ce jeu intérieur des mots, cette virtuosité éclatante qui est celle de son commentateur et contraste avec la modestie de son propre langage. Ajoutons que l'essor sans pareil de ce langage, ce rythme qui est sa vérité supérieure, cet élan vers en haut sont à leur tour ignorés par le commentateur qui du chant ne retient que son développement et sa composition prosaïques (p. 118).

This is the crux of Blanchot's argument. The problem of the critic does not stem from a particular philosopher's method, nor even from what are generally considered to be the shortcomings of philosophical discourse. By rejecting such objections, Blanchot narrows the problem to something which it is far less simple to comprehend, namely the fundamental difference between poetic language and the language of theoretical analysis, a difference which the critic must not seek to abolish, but to bring out and to respect. In the case of Heidegger and Hölderlin, he expresses this difference in terms of two types of rhythm, 'jeu intérieur' and 'élan vers le haut', and this contrast between something static and something dynamic recalls what he said about Sartre's analysis of Baudelaire: 'quand l'on commence de souligner l'ambiguïté du poète, l'on perd aussi le droit d'arrêter ce mouvement, de le stabiliser dans un de ses points pour le qualifier' (p. 142). He is clearly seeking in each case to affirm literature as a process in opposition to the static conception of it imposed by theoretical analysis. However, it is once he has brought his argument to this stage that his difficulties begin to arise. The examples I have quoted show, I hope, that this initial stage in his criticism consists in extricating the problem of literature from the field of theoretical analysis by as it were isolating it within that field, and thus obliging anal-

ysis to face up to the incompatibility between its own processes and those of literature. It seeks in so doing to be as positive in its argument as the analyses it seeks to counter, and thus influence the entire standpoint of theoretical analysis in relation to literature. Everything turns, in such a method, upon transforming the alternative positive standpoint from which it undeniably speaks, into an effective point of departure for an alternative theoretical approach to literature: of transforming the paralysis which that standpoint imposes upon existing analytical processes into a means of evolving a more complex mode of reasoning, compatible with the experience which literature reveals. The danger, in the absence of such further impetus, is that this stage in his analyses will remain as merely a negative moment of criticism, however 'positive' it may be in essence, an elaborate sign of the 'mauvaise conscience' which Blanchot has already diagnosed at the time.

In his defence of René Char's poetry, Georges Mounin makes just this accusation against Blanchot's method:

la négation de la communication sert de base à Blanchot pour construire une image aussi insaisissable que possible de la Transcendance. ... Par toutes ces définitions mystiques et métaphysiques de la poésie, Blanchot traduit la révolte des esprits -- théologiques à leur insu -- qui, privés par leur propre raison de la conception traditionnelle de Dieu, la recréent sous des formes inattaquables pour la raison³⁴.

Displaying a distinct lack of the reserve which Blanchot exercised when examining his own work on Char, Mounin makes his disagreement with Blanchot's conclusions a rejection of his entire approach to poetry. Yet as early as Faux pas Blanchot had examined the difference between literature and mysticism³⁵, and, by La Part, any suggestion that the mystery of God and 'le mystère dans les lettres' have anything in common for him is a simple misrepresentation of his thinking (and one which is all the more difficult to accept for having been formulated in 1958³⁶). In La Part he rejects the methods of negative theology as resolutely as Mounin does. Indeed, in the chapter entitled 'Le mystère

dans les lettres', he evokes the possibility of a via negationis for the critic in search of what is at the heart of literature:

le mystère serait bien de ces sortes de questions qui se trouvent traitées lorsqu'on met à ne pas les voir toute la méthode et toute la rigueur qu'on devrait appliquer pour mieux les considérer (p. 49).

From the beginning, he has referred to literature in terms of a secret, an enigma or a mystery. His problem at this stage, however, is that he is no longer by any means convinced, as the conditional serait in the above passage indicates, that literature can be understood in terms of 'un mystère' at all. His method as I have sought to describe it so far is an attempt to break out of the simple categorical framework to which terms such as le mystère belong, and which inevitably condemn theoretical analysis to something resembling negative theology. At the turning-point in his argument however, when in order to accomplish that break he must shift the very ground of his argument, the impetus is lacking. In the case of his critique of commitment, as we saw, he was able to pivot upon the position from which he criticised Sartre and, by affirming the paradoxical nature of literary experience, point to a form of political action compatible with it. Though lacking in efficacy, his argument did stand as a coherent whole. His behaviour towards other critics is a parallel to his attitude to Sartre over commitment: as then, he seeks to meet them head on over their common subject. However, when he seeks to pivot in the same fashion so as to propose an alternative theoretical approach to literature, deprived of the existence of a precedent as was the case with commitment, his argument simply founders until it finally breaks apart.

In an article written shortly after the publication of La Part, Jean-Jacques Salomon identifies the process I have so far sought to describe:

la critique de Maurice Blanchot ... est ... au premier chef une réflexion sur le sens du mot critique. M. Blanchot ne réalise l'objet qu'en le forçant à se renoncer. Après

l'avoir contesté, compromis, nié, il l'adopte, il le fait venir au monde, il reconnaît son destin: la critique est un raffinement de la vérité. Elle ne met en cause rien de moins que la possibilité de la création artistique³⁷.

Salomon's analysis is by far the most penetrating one ever inspired by La Part. It identifies precisely how Blanchot's critique of criticism runs alongside a constant affirmation of the specific nature of what it seeks to define. It is for that reason that the reserves which Salomon goes on to make are of such importance:

après avoir résisté au langage, il semble que Maurice Blanchot résiste à l'oeuvre elle-même. Il ne lui offre plus ses chances, il la retire de son propre univers et l'expose dans un désert fait à dessin où le langage ne rend plus compte que du néant. La dialectique, certes remarquable, de 'La littérature et le droit à la mort' mène jusqu'à un point ultime et limite où le langage paraît devoir désormais se réduire au silence³⁸.

Clearly, Salomon cannot perceive any counterbalancing argument emerging from Blanchot's negative approach to criticism. Hence, though convinced by that approach, his expectations as to where, as 'un raffinement de la vérité', it should lead -- to a better understanding of given literary works -- leads him finally to reject it. This is a clear indication of how original Blanchot's undertaking was at the time. Salomon's ultimate misunderstanding of where it is seeking to go mirrors its author's uncertainty as to how he should proceed. All Salomon can perceive beyond the point to which he is prepared to accompany Blanchot is a sterile domain, in which the work is reduced to an unresolvable struggle between language and silence. This is precisely the situation which Blanchot is seeking to affirm as the source of literature and the essence of its irreducibility to theoretical analysis. The conflict of interpretation which emerges from the encounter between the two thinkers is therefore the crux of Blanchot's dilemma, and the point to which the true originality of his thinking may be traced back. In La Part, however, he reveals himself incapable of occupying the theoretical standpoint at which

he arrives. The result, as I have suggested, is quite simply the breakdown of his argument, and it is to this, the most complex aspect of La Part that we must now turn.

Probably the most striking aspect of the argument in La Part, and indeed of all of Blanchot's criticism, is its affirmative nature. He constantly counters the negative element in his analyses by free use of that most hazardous of discursive tools, arbitrary affirmation. As I have already pointed out, however, the negative and positive poles of his reasoning do not entertain a continuous relationship with each other. The negative, reductive part of his argument coexists with the positive, affirmative one so that, though as he intervenes to suspend other critics' arguments it can at all times be felt that he is doing so in the name of something specific which their method neglects, there is never anything systematic about this process. The two aspects of his argument do not alternate in a regular, dialectical fashion, but are juxtaposed asynchronously within the confines of the work. Herein lies the originality of La Part, but also what will ultimately condemn it to failure. On the one hand, the absence of dialectical reasoning at the heart of his argument permits the two mutually exclusive stages within it to reveal parallels which would otherwise have gone unperceived. On the other, however, the tension created by the existence of two standpoints within a single argument condemns it to stagnate and then to decompose.

As we saw initially, the basic parallel which emerges through the juxtaposition of two positive theoretical standpoints in La Part, consists of the claim by Blanchot that literature itself is critical, that the problem it poses for criticism in itself 'fait la critique du créateur'. The literary critic is therefore engaged in seeking to criticise what in itself is critical: the processes of his argument are attempting to provide an account of another version of themselves. In each case, reason has encountered the limit

between literature and non-literary language. In one case, however, it is an 'external' limit, one beyond which critical analysis cannot go. In the other, it is an 'internal' limit, that constituted by the use by a writer of non-literary language to literary ends. In the absence of any encompassing perspective from which these two positions in relation to the 'same' limit may be viewed from a single angle, the heart of the argument of La Part lies rather uncomfortably between them, caught, as its original title had it, entre chien et loup³⁹. In effect, Blanchot succeeds in La Part in standing traditional logic on its head. In such logic, a principle of identity serves as a transcendent standpoint from which to explore and ultimately reduce the domain of the different. In La Part, because of the composite nature of its argument, all a priori reference to identity is impossible, for, by presenting traditional opposites as fundamentally the same, it projects difference itself as the transcendent principle governing its argument. It is this reversal which proves impossible to contain. The methodological possibilities inherent in it have since become a major preoccupation for French thinkers. At the time, however, they were virtually undreamed of, and it is for this reason that Blanchot must be considered as a precursor. Yet at the same time, he was unable to master them. The consequences of his adopting two 'critical' standpoints in the work is that the limit either side of which he consequently stands constitutes the real standpoint from which he is arguing. The challenge posed by his reasoning is to transform this reality from being a virtual one into being one on the basis of which reason can evolve beyond the limits imposed upon it by existing structures. His career as a thinker has consisted solely, I would claim, in meeting that challenge, and can only be understood in those terms. The first stage in the undertaking, however, consists of what amounts to a catastrophe. For as soon as his argument seeks to pivot, and as it were put its weight, on the affirmative standpoint from which it so skilfully criticises other critics, it discovers that the 'positive' reality in whose

name it conducted its 'negative' analyses of critical tradition begins to affect its own analytical terms too. In short, Blanchot finds himself increasingly hoist with his own petard, in a manner which he describes quite plainly in 'La littérature et le droit à la mort':

si la réflexion imposante s'approche de la littérature, la littérature devient une force caustique, capable de détruire ce qui en elle et dans la réflexion pouvait en imposer. Si la réflexion s'éloigne, alors la littérature redevient, en effet, quelque chose d'important, d'essentiel, de plus important que la philosophie, la religion et la vie du monde qu'elle embrasse. Mais que la réflexion, étonnée de cet empire, revienne sur cette puissance et lui demande ce qu'elle est, pénétrée aussitôt par un élément corrosif, volatil, elle ne peut que mépriser une Chose aussi vaine, aussi vague et aussi impure et dans ce mépris se consumer à son tour (p. 295).

Unwittingly, Blanchot is here describing exactly the path which his own reasoning follows in La Part: the discovery that literature is something distinct not only from 'la réflexion' but from the forms in which it would appear to be at its most expressive; the decision to act upon that discovery by creating a distance between theoretical analysis and what is specific in literature; and the third, most hazardous stage in that process, the attempt at comprehending through theoretical analysis what has now appeared as something essential. The true curve of the argument in La Part is constituted by the gradual erosion of his position by the 'élément corrosif, volatil' which he seeks to define in this way, and this is apparent even when that argument is at its surest.

The way Blanchot counters Sartre's call for commitment is to maintain, as we saw, that the writer, as a writer, is capable of political commitment of a fundamental kind. He bases this claim upon an event in history. Nevertheless, he also maintains that the present moment at which Sartre is seeking to commit the writer to revolution, is also one in which he is ripe as never before for the commitment founded in literature which Blanchot has proposed. This, he claims, is because modern literature has become a mode of experience.

In the chapter on Sartre he puts this as follows:

la possibilité pour une fiction de devenir
une expérience révélatrice hante toute notre
littérature moderne (p. 191).

In the chapter on Gide, entitled 'Gide et la littérature d'expérience', this modern development is singled out as a criterion for appreciating the works of the past:

les Traités que le succès n'a jamais tout à fait reconnus -- à l'exception des Nourritures terrestres -- et qui peut-être ne désiraient que cette demi-clarté, continuent à exercer une profonde influence et, au même titre que les plus fortes oeuvres de Rimbaud, de Lautréamont et des surréalistes, sont responsables de ce besoin de la littérature contemporaine d'être plus que de la littérature: une expérience vitale, un instrument de découverte, un moyen pour l'homme de s'éprouver, de se tenter et, dans cette tentative, de chercher à dépasser ses limites (p. 209).

His entire examination of Gaëtan Picon's book on Malraux, indeed, is concerned to counter that critic's claim that Malraux is not a novelist, because his books are simultaneously too close to their author and too bound up in external events, by claiming that before all else, Malraux's fiction constitutes for its author 'une expérience irréductible' (p. 204):

pourquoi ces livres, ... fidèles à l'élan d'un moi solitaire, le sont-ils aussi à l'objectivité d'une conscience historique qui domine tous les choix et, enfin, au choix propre de cette histoire? Cela tient à la force même de l'expérience, capable de recréer, du dedans et dans une référence perpétuelle à soi, le sens et la valeur d'événements du dehors, qu'on observe, qu'on subit et qu'on ne crée pas (p. 205).

Far from being dismissable, as it is for Sartre, as mere Erlebnis, experience for the writer assumes categorical status in Blanchot's argument. It neither gives rise to literature, nor results from literature: it is inseparable from literature since it is the mode upon which literature exists. The audacious message of La Part, therefore, is that whenever traditional values crumble, literature is not the last bastion from which men may slowly build new ones from among the ruins: it is a way of turning the collapse of values into an authentic mode of human experience and

of revolutionary praxis. Furthermore, since today as never before the writer is seeking to turn his craft into a conscious mode of experience, he is poised as never before to become an authentic agent of revolution.

Blanchot thus reinforces his rejection of Sartre's call for commitment not merely by demonstrating the inherently revolutionary nature of literature itself, but also by claiming that, in the here and now which for Sartre is all that matters, the writer is uniquely prepared for the commitment of which he is capable. His critique of Sartre is thus not merely a rejection of his premises, it is a redefinition of his interpretation of history also: another view of modern times. Very rapidly, however, this alternative definition of the here and now reveals itself as no more than a polemical stance, condemned, by its own logic, to be abandoned by Blanchot. This is not merely for the obvious reason that revolution is too abstract an idea upon which to build a theory of commitment. It is because the logic of revolution, once set in motion, does not brook limitations. Had Blanchot's call for commitment resulted in a real revolutionary situation, things would have been different. Since, however, it remained on the level of ideals, the logic it set in motion within the argument over commitment remained as it were confined within that argument. For Blanchot, the revolutionary writer had no authority to instigate revolution:

le langage de l'écrivain, même révolutionnaire, n'est pas le langage du commandement. Il ne commande pas, il présente (p. 308).

In the absence of revolution, therefore, all Blanchot could do at the time was seek to accommodate, in his writing, the significance of the revolutionary experience of the modern writer. This task proved fatal for his reasoning. For he discovered that once the logic of revolution is espoused theoretically, it carries off with it much more than is ever allowed for in advance. The last-minute change of the title of his work would seem to suggest that he eventually came to realise this. There can be little doubt that he replaced Entre chien et loup by La Part du feu in response to some-

thing Andre Breton writes in Nadja (a work, like L'Amour fou, whose influence is clearly perceptible, albeit in a critical light, in L'Arrêt de mort):

n'empêche que s'il faut attendre, s'il faut vouloir être sûr, s'il faut prendre des précautions, s'il faut faire au feu la part du feu, et seulement la part, je m'y refuse absolument⁴⁰.

Blanchot's reply to Breton is to demonstrate unwittingly, by what occurs in his own argument, that that 'part du feu' is indeed something which cannot be measured or contained. The experience it constitutes is revolutionary in nature, but it has no independent political significance. Therefore, in countering Sartre's call, Blanchot was doing no more than reorganising the terms present in Sartre's argument. Hence, when the argument itself ceased, as we saw, to be relevant any longer, the entire basis of Blanchot's reasoning disappeared. The claim that 'la possibilité pour une fiction de devenir une expérience révélatrice hante toute notre littérature moderne', so apparently self-sufficient as a reply to Sartre, effectively turns to dust once there is nothing to reply to any longer.' The revolutionary reasoning which, as we saw, provides the framework for much of La Part, gradually turns in upon itself, creating uncertainty and self-contradiction which, manifest on the primary level of the opposition between experience and modern, can be traced down to the very heart of Blanchot's thinking at the time.

Hence, the notion of modern literature is contested in La Part virtually as often as it is proposed. In the chapter on Sartre, as we saw, it is referred to as a reality. In the chapter on Leiris, on the contrary, we read that L'Age d'homme is 'l'une des oeuvres centrales de la littérature dite moderne' (p. 238; my italics). Blanchot then goes on to list the problems which concerned Leiris when he was writing the book:

échapper à la gratuité des oeuvres littéraires et accomplir un acte réel ..., réaliser une qui pût l'éclairer sur lui-même et éclairer les autres sur lui ..., écrire un livre qui fût dangereux et pour ses autres livres et pour la littérature en général (ibid.).

He then concludes:

toutes ces intentions répondent à des problèmes dont la littérature ne se sépare pas (ibid.).

In the original article, however, this sentence read:

toutes ces intentions répondent à des problèmes dont la littérature depuis trente ans ne se sépare pas (my italics).

It is thus possible to discern, between the article on Sartre (written in 1945) and the article on Leiris (written in 1947), then between the article on Leiris and the composition of La Part, a gradual move away from the historical position which Blanchot adopted after the war in response to Sartre. Modern literature becomes the literature of the last thirty years (which, it must be remembered, was not modern literature by Sartre's standards), before becoming so-called modern literature: literature whose relevance to history as we understand it is open to question. It is in 'La littérature et le droit à la mort', written between 1947 and 1948, that this move is made most explicit.

Like the original article on Leiris, this text, written nine months later, specifically dates the phenomenon known as modern literature when it refers to:

cette mise en cause de l'art, que représente la partie la plus illustre de l'art depuis trente ans (p. 294; my italics).

It does so, however, in order to dispel the notion that there is anything specific or original about 'modern' movements in art. This becomes clear if the above passage is replaced in its context. The study begins with the affirmation 'admettons que la littérature commence au moment où la littérature devient une question' (p. 293). Then on the following page we read:

la littérature n'a peut-être pas le droit de se tenir pour illégitime. Mais la question qu'elle renferme ne concerne pas, à proprement parler, sa valeur ou son droit. S'il est si difficile de découvrir le sens de cette question, c'est que celle-ci tend à se transformer en un procès de l'art, de ses pouvoirs et de ses fins. La littérature s'édifie sur ses ruines: ce paradoxe nous est un lieu commun. Mais encore faudrait-il rechercher si cette mise en cause de l'art, que représente la partie la plus illustre de

l'art depuis trente ans, ne suppose pas le glissement, le déplacement d'une puissance au travail dans le secret des oeuvres et ré-pugnant à venir au grand jour, travail originellement fort distinct de toute dépréciation de l'activité ou de la Chose littéraire (p. 294).

This means that that section of La Part which sets out most concerted to argue with Sartre over the writer's role in the present, is simultaneously directing its argument away from the present altogether by criticising the very notion upon which its political argument is based. Hence, the questioning of art discernible over the last decades has in fact nothing to do with an increase in the artist's sensitivity to life around him. It may appear as the realisation that, faced with the crises of his time, the artist has no right to make an absolute of art. For some artists, however, there is more to it than that:

la littérature n'est pas seulement illégitime, mais nulle, et cette nullité constitue peut-être une force extraordinaire, merveilleuse, à la condition d'être isolée à l'état pur (ibid.).

He is clearly leading up to the claim that the writer's activity makes him suitable for revolution. In doing so, however, he is simultaneously directing his argument away from the present altogether. This reference to the 'nullité' of literature leads him directly to the Surrealists, who for Sartre belonged to the past. Then a little further on this move away from the present is made even more explicit:

l'on se tromperait en rendant les puissants mouvements négateurs contemporains responsables de cette force volatilisante et volatile que semble être devenue la littérature (p. 295).

One hundred and fifty years ago, Hegel described precisely those traits which in today's writers are proclaimed 'modern', in the paradox which I have already examined. In modern times, therefore, it is not literature which has at last come into step with reality: it is reality which has at last come to resemble literature. The situation of the writer is thus far more complex than Sartre would have it, because he has now lost any foothold in the here and now which he might once have had. Modern times have at last coincided with

what is for all time. The present is now indistinguishable from something from its past. Instead of signifying the coming full-circle of human endeavour, however, this encounter between past and present results in the collapse of the present. Timelessness is revealed as loss of time not freedom from time, so that the conflict and contradiction which mark the artist's experience are exacerbated by the encounter with reality, not overshadowed by its more imposing presence.

Blanchot's reply to the call for commitment thus tips over almost immediately from being an alternative version of that call to being something which renders the terms of that call meaningless. The writer experiences a fundamental alienation through literature. He is caught up in a process which makes of him 'un perpétuel absent et un irresponsable sans conscience' (p. 303), so that from the moment his condition coincides with the conditions of his time, his alienation is total, and far more radical than that of other men. The idea of a 'modern' version of the writer is thus absurd. The 'objective' pole of Blanchot's reply to Sartre is an illusion, so that, in the absence of Revolution, his theory of the revolutionary writer vanishes almost instantaneously, leaving the writer to come to terms with the increased complexity of his experience.

However, the other pole of his reply to Sartre, namely the experience of the writer, proves no more solid a reference outside of the immediate confrontation with Sartre over commitment. In the chapter on Gide, which is specifically concerned with experience, a variant points to the same uncertainty affecting that notion as affected its counterpart. The original article contains the following passage:

le pouvoir de s'essayer soi-même, de se risquer dans cette expérience vitale-ment dangereuse qu'est l'art pour l'artiste, le roman pour le romancier et, d'une manière plus générale, le fait d'écrire pour celui qui écrit.

When it appears in La Part, however (p. 210), the italicised verb is replaced, so that the article reads 'cette expéri-

ence vitalemt dangereuse que serait l'art pour l'artiste (&c.)¹. Moreover, the original itself goes on to make explicit what is implied in the added conditional:

il est aisé de répéter: écrire a pour celui qui écrit une valeur d'expérience fondamentale; on le dit, on le répète; mais finalement, on ne répète qu'une formule, sans contenu, illusoire et qui ne résiste à l'examen qu'en échappant à la critique dont elle affirme pourtant la valeur intégrale (p. 211).

Like the chapter on Leiris, this one dates from 1947, and it is clear that, in the very year in which Blanchot was seeking most concertedl to repl to Sartre over commitment, his argument was crumbling under the attack of its own logic. The complexity of his position at this time is expressed perfectly in the above passage, when he accuses the notion of experience of seeking to escape the critique whose absolute value it recognises. The vicious circle present in those words is precisely the one into which Blanchot's entire argument is gradually being drawn. His dilemma, given the unpracticality of his argument for commitment, is henceforth to seek to provide an adequate theoretical definition of the processes which correspond to that argument. This proves a daunting task. Blanchot's ambition as a critic is to assert the reality of literature for the writer. However, as we have seen, he only succeeds in endowing that reality with any positive status when he is engaged in negating false versions of it. As soon as he moves on to affirm its existence directly, his own version falls victim, in its turn, to the very negation he so skilfully turned upon those of others. As witness the case of experience. The positive and negative moments of his argument thus alternate, as I have already suggested, in what is a parody of the dialectical process, and instead of giving substance to his criticism, by allowing it gradually to define its object, they turn it into an ever deepening void, as its object reveals itself increasingly to consist of nothing other than its own inaccessibility. This is the heart of the argument of La Part, the crux of its message and also the stumbling-block against which it quite scandalously founders, as it degenerates into paradox and rhetoric. For whereas the political and the critical as-

pects of the work, which I have examined so far, can be said to be under their author's control, and indeed testify to the remarkable rigour of his criticism, this third aspect is not so at all. As if the price he had to pay for his mastery in the first two was one of passive submission in the third, his argument is gradually drawn into an exhausting and sterile oscillation between terms, which finishes in an impasse from which it will take Blanchot several years to emerge. It is to this third stage that I should now like to turn.

The source of Blanchot's dilemma in La Part lies in the fact that he seeks to argue from the standpoint of literature itself: he affirms in the name of literature. However, be espousing the logic of literature, he effectively cuts himself off from the logic of non-literary language. Hence, having expounded a theory of commitment based upon the experience of the modern writer, he is obliged to contest both the notion of modern and the notion of experience in the name of what they were intended to define, so that, in strict logical terms, he finds himself suspended, ultimately, in a void. By adopting literature as his standpoint in order to contest the validity of the non-literary approach to literature, he finally comes full circle and is obliged to contest the standpoint he adopted originally. This means that, in the process of criticising other versions of literature, he has in fact arrived at an experience which exactly parallels the one he is seeking to define. Ideally speaking, he has succeeded in placing himself outside of the bounds of non-literary language. His argument contains an irreducible fissure where normally its continuity should have been at its most powerful: criticism, independent of the works it is destined to examine, is at grips with the corrosive 'nullité' whose specificity it was seeking to defend. Yet Blanchot is not, in this case, a writer: he is a critic, a writer about writing who employs non-literary language to approach literature. Therefore, however much the behaviour of his argument may appear to partake of the writer's condition, the

same gulf separates the two as kept them separate by design in Sartre's case. This state of affairs is both the source of everything that has been found exceptionable in Blanchot's thinking, and the basis for what will be most original in it ultimately. It thus constitutes a turning-point for him, and one which must be examined in detail.

The root of his problem lies in the fact that, by virtue of the standpoint he adopts initially, his task as a critic is unavoidably a two-fold one. Sartre relied, in his literary manifestos, upon a consensus of opinion as to the compatibility between the freedom of the writer and freedom in the world. More generally, when he uses a term in relation to literature, he uses it on the assumption that it means what it appears to mean. In short, 'il appelle un chat un chat'⁴¹. Blanchot, on the contrary, does not merely note, in passing, as he had already demonstrated in Thomas l'obscur⁴², that 'un chat n'est pas un chat' (cf pp. 302, 312-314): his entire approach to the problem of literature bears witness to the fact that, except in one exceptional circumstance, revolution, no consensus as to the significance of what occurs in literature can exist, because, as he makes explicit in a passage omitted from the chapter entitled 'Traduit de...', it is something unique:

l'habitude de rapprocher les oeuvres, le besoin de les comprendre les unes par les autres, nous rendent étrangers à ce qu'elles ont d'unique, à la part d'énigme irréductible qui est le seul point que nous devons fixer pour apprendre à les voir (variant to p. 178).

His ambition as a critic is therefore, according to the terms of this passage, to provide a point of view from outside of literature which will nevertheless be compatible with what is unique to literature. In other words, when he affirms in the name of literature, he is seeking not merely to take up a position within the existing sphere of theoretical analysis, but to introduce into that sphere a point of view which it has so far never contained. His argument does not therefore consist of improving upon existing terms for defining what everyone knows already as literature: he has both to affirm the existence of what he is talking about and invoke

the terms by which it may be expressed. His argument is thus condemned to develop in two irreconcilable stages, obliged both to affirm the truth and express it logically, to declare and to record, to demonstrate and to conceptualise what is demonstrated. It thus constitutes an alternative logical system within the existing one, but one which is at odds with that system. The result is that Blanchot is reduced, in La Part, to launching the terms available to him in successive waves against the reality they are purported to express, and simply watching them founder. His argument thus revolves inwards, in an ever-diminishing vicious circle, until it comes to a paralysed halt. Pierre Verstraeten suggests that, in Blanchot's thinking, 'l'écrivain remplit la fonction traditionnellement remplie par le Christ'⁴³, and indeed, by the end of La Part, his argument has in fact become a self-generating, semi-mystical symbol of the impossible essence of literature. In this work, Blanchot crucifies himself -- or, if its title is to be respected, immolates himself -- logically. He thus submits, unwillingly and unwittingly, to the same fate as befell the false narrator of L'Arrêt de mort: of him, by the end of La Part, it is possible also to say what the doctor says to the director of one of the reviews for which the narrator wrote: '"X.? Mon pauvre monsieur, il faut faire une croix dessus"'⁴⁴.

The process we have so far seen at work upon the terms in which his call for commitment was made, also attacks the broader basis upon which, at the time of Faux pas, Blanchot pursued the significance of what is unique in literature. At that time, it was designated variously as 'un secret', 'une énigme' and 'un mystère'. In La Part, each term is still present, but the one which predominates is 'le mystère', which appears as often as the other two put together. There is more to this than simply a refinement in terminology however. 'Le mystère' subsumes the other two in order to provide a better focus for the critical scrutiny present in La Part, and, in the chapter entitled 'Le mystère dans les lettres', Blanchot proceeds in his usual fashion to agree with Jean Paulhan's view of literature, the better to extr-

icate it from the limits imposed upon it by his use of the notion of mystery. He thus begins, in a passage I have already quoted, by acknowledging the mysterious nature of literature:

le mystère dans les Lettres est sans doute d'une nature telle qu'on le dégrade si on le respecte et qu'on le lâche si on le saisit. ... Le mystère serait bien de ces sortes de questions qui se trouvent traitées lorsqu'on met à ne pas les voir toute la méthode et toute la rigueur qu'on devrait appliquer pour mieux les considérer (p. 49).

This is not, however, a justification of a simple negative approach to literature. Blanchot notes that, in La Clef de la poésie, Paulhan breaks the silence with which he has so far surrounded the mystery of literature, by proposing to formulate 'une loi dont la légalité soit celle du mystère' (p. 59). What concerns Blanchot in such a project (which, it must be noted, is a sort of prototype of structuralist method) is not the answer it comes up with -- a mathematical formula -- but the form in which the problem is expressed. For it assumes that we can discuss 'le mystère' in the same way as we discuss other aspects of reality, when in fact this is not the case:

déraison, façon de voir secrète, pensée insaisissable, ces termes sont encore des pièges que la raison tend à cette part d'elle-même qui lui échappe et où elle se prend à ses propres amorces. Le mystère n'est pas non-sens, puisqu'il est étranger au sens, il n'est pas illogique, si la logique ne le concerne en rien, il n'est pas secret, car il est en dehors du genre de choses qui se montrent et qui ne se montrent pas. Qu'est-il? Rien peut-être. Mais déjà une telle question l'excède en tout (p. 60).

As was the case with Sartre, the entire ontological assumption present in the attempt to define what literature is, is called into question here. Again as in the case of Sartre, however, negative reasoning is not used merely as a subterfuge by means of which the unapproachable may appear to be approached. Blanchot uses negation to negate what is already negative, and thus to neutralise negative reasoning. In this way, the reality at which such reasoning is directed is extricated from the limitations imposed upon it by the form

of the question 'qu'est-ce que', and, by simply being affirmed, is allowed to shift the field of enquiry onto an entirely different plane.

Immediately, however, the problem of designating this reality arises. On the one hand, it cannot be simply termed a mystery because it is first and foremost a part of our thought processes:

réserver le mot pensée au seul mode de la pensée conceptuelle et rejeter dans la déraison, dans le mystère, tout ce qui est hors du concept, c'est donner ~~au~~ mystère plus qu'il ne demande (pp.60-61).

There is thus no clear-cut division between thought and the unknown quantity which it contains. Hence 'le langage le plus clair est ... souvent le plus "mystérieux" (p. 64). On the other, however, Blanchot has no clear idea as to how it can be expressed. This is apparent in another passage, in which the process of neutralising the field of established analysis leads on to an attempt at proposing a positive version of what Blanchot is defending:

il y a un autre sens que le sens intelligible, il y a une signification qui n'est encore ni claire ni distincte, qui n'est pas pensée expressément, mais qui est comme jouée ou mimée ou vécue par tout être capable de saisir et de communiquer un sens (p. 60; my italics).

The series of three verbs by which Blanchot seeks to designate what he can no longer simply term experience, coupled with the double remove from the domain of reality signified by the use of comme with terms such as jouer or mimer, indicate clearly the extent of his dilemma. The 'mystery' lies so close to the heart of everyday reality that, once we attempt to approach it from a standpoint other than the conventional one, we quite simply lose all perspective, and become engaged in a confusing chase after inadequate terms.

The notion of mystery is thus rendered ineffective as a means of defining what occurs in literature. It continues to occur in La Part, but, like experience and modern, it has been deprived of any valid status. This is an important parallel to what occurs during Blanchot's dialogue with Sartre. The attitude to literature which led him in the post-war

years to take a stand against Sartre, was formed under the influence of Jean Paulhan's thought. His Comment la littérature est-elle possible? draws much of its strength as an epistemological alternative to the question Qu'est-ce que la littérature? from its reliance upon a conception of literature as something secret, enigmatic and mysterious. What is now apparent is that, in so doing, he did not only leave himself open to accusations, by the defenders of commitment, of quasi-mystical adherence to the ineffable: more important still, he condemned his own counter-argument to certain failure, by couching it in terms which could never be durably its own. For le mystère and its variants are no more than the opposite pole to a principle of clarity entirely determined by non-literary reason. To defend the mystery of literature against reduction to non-literary terms is thus to continue unawares along lines laid down by non-literary reason. By devoting an entire chapter of La Part to exposing this state of affairs, Blanchot frees his argument from such an alien dependence once and for all. He leaves himself, at the close, in a very exposed position however: at odds with the doctrines of the time, yet unable to formulate that opposition in any satisfactory way, it is clear that he does not know which way to turn.

Another notion which could have appeared satisfactory is also rejected quite firmly: namely silence. Blanchot recognises that it is the practical response to a recognition that there is a mystery at the heart of literature: 'le silence est ce que nous préférons pour parler du mystère' (p. 64). The notion of silence was used extensively at the time by thinkers who differed with Sartre, and it must therefore have been a tempting one for Blanchot. Indeed, he follows up the above statement with quotations from Hölderlin, Goethe and Schiller which at first make it seem that he approves of it. However he spares no occasion in La Part to criticise and reject the notion: it is 'un subterfuge' (p. 15); 'une illusion' (pp. 30, 71); 'une superstition' (p. 66); 'un mythe' (p. 63); 'un langage qui s'ignore' (p. 215) and 'une complaisance' (p. 243). Brice Parain is repeatedly quoted

in this context as the contemporary exponent of 'un silence juste' towards which all language aspires. So too are Merleau-Ponty, the Surrealists and also Heidegger, whose reading of Hölderlin makes the poet's silence instrumental in expressing 'le sacré'. According to Blanchot, the notion of silence displays the same contradictions as that of mystery: each claims to correspond to something lying beyond the limits of language, yet each is merely a product of language, and therefore absolutely determined by its form: 'le silence est marqué de la même contradiction et du même déchirement que le langage' (p. 129). The entire concept is thus discredited and rendered useless by being revealed as merely a negative construct of the system it purports to transcend, while the reality which it so conveniently kept at a distance is relocated within the sphere of language itself, as a concomitant of language in its purest form, which is 'le bavardage quotidien'. In the latter, communication, which is the goal of language, is at its most perfect. Such language is 'un chef-d'oeuvre extraordinaire par sa double perfection de nullité et d'efficacité' (p. 255), and it is only at this other extreme from literature that silence is to be found. Therefore, since poetry is in search of a primary, original absence, 'l'on peut bien voir dans la recherche du silence l'un de ses soucis les plus obsédants'. Nevertheless, Blanchot goes on:

il faut remarquer que ce nom de silence ne convient guère ici: il n'y a à proprement parler silence que dans la vie quotidienne, dans ce que M. Merleau-Ponty appelle 'la parole parlée', où nous sommes à ce point plongés dans les mots que les mots deviennent inutiles (p. 77).

What is commonly taken to be the silence at the heart of literature is not, Blanchot claims, silence at all, but 'une absence tout court' (ibid.), and silence is merely one of the inadequate terms by which that absence may be designated, but not expressed.

Like mystery, then, silence is dislodged, in La Part, as an adequate term for talking about what is specific to literature, by simply being rejected arbitrarily as inadequate. As ever, the position Blanchot adopts is prevented

from becoming an entrenched one, however, by being deprived of all polemical force. This is both the strength and weakness of his argument: it prevents it from solidifying once and for all into a doctrine, founded upon the notions left to it once it has rejected everyone else's. At the same time, however, it leaves it ultimately helpless, capable at the most of indicating where a solution to its dilemma might lie. Thus, in criticising Brice Parain, Blanchot refrains from engaging in any direct discussion with him:

ce sont là des affirmations sur le sens desquelles on ne saurait trop appeler la réflexion, même si l'on ne s'accorde avec elles que par un malentendu (p. 254).

This respect for his adversary, which we have already witnessed elsewhere, allows his rejection of the latter's view of the problem to avoid merely being contained within the broader confines of the problem as it already exists. Attention is thus directed not only away from the view being criticised, but also from the standpoint from which that critique is being carried out, and onto the problem itself which, in Blanchot's eyes, is what is most important. Such modesty on his part is a positive attribute of his criticism. On the other hand, in so throwing the weight of his reflexion onto the problem itself, he simultaneously causes it to become volatile, as he is aware in his criticism of Heidegger's claim that silence is the sole authentic means of communicating the absolute:

admettons-le, mais qu'est devenu le problème? Il a pris une autre forme, mais il reste toujours problème, ou plutôt il y a maintenant une double énigme: pourquoi et comment '... le Sacré' peut-il se laisser transformer et rejoindre par le silence? Et ensuite, pourquoi et comment le silence se laisse-t-il rejoindre par la parole? (p. 128).

He does not reject Heidegger's theory here: this would simply be to remain in the same dilemma as the one he is rejecting. On the contrary, he adopts what Heidegger is saying. He thus reduces his own direct intervention to nothing, replacing it by a submission to the full effect of the logic of what Heidegger is saying, and thus indicating the complexity which neither Heidegger's explanations, nor any simple

alternative to them, can express.

There is thus visible, within the conventional form taken by the articles making up La Part, a strange and only half-intentional quest for a standpoint adequate to what their author is trying to say. If there is any direction to it, it is one determined by pressures from the existing literary debate. Mystery and silence are rejected by Blanchot as inadequate notions. Much more effort is expended on rejecting silence than on rejecting mystery, however, and this is simple to explain. Mystery belongs fairly and squarely within a non-philosophical tradition of thought, and one either subscribes to it or one does not. Silence, on the other hand, though part of the mystic's vocabulary, was also current at the time as a philosophical category and, as such, posed greater problems for Blanchot than did mystery. In his opposition to Sartre, all he needed to do was eschew all reference to literature as a mystery in order to be taken seriously. When it came to silence, however, he found himself being driven constantly, at the time, towards theories based upon it, as he contested the primacy of language as a means of explaining literature. The task he set himself in contesting Sartre was, as we have seen, to argue the irreducibility of literature to non-literary language from within the sphere of the latter, by emphasising the discrepancy between the two. Such an approach entails using the method one rejects in order to demonstrate in practice why it is one rejects it. It therefore also entails having momentarily to identify with the negative pole of that method's argument, and thus running the risk of having one's position understood solely in terms associated with that pole. Silence, at the time, was the most hazardous of these terms, and it is fair to say that Blanchot has never fully freed himself, in the eyes of others, from his momentary contact with that term, despite the immense efforts exerted by him, then and since, to explain his position in relation to it.

The principal way in which he sought to do this at the time was by using a term with the same meaning as silence, but which, by its form, did not slip so easily into the same

inadequate analytical mould: this was 'le non-langage'. Commenting upon what Kafka saw as the wonder of literature, namely its ability to express 'le malheur' directly, Blanchot writes: 'le langage est réel parce qu'il peut se projeter vers un non-langage qu'il est et ne réalise pas' (p. 28). It is clear that, by using the term non-langage instead of silence in this sentence, Blanchot succeeds in maintaining the problem at a far more acute level than would otherwise have been the case. This is because, by using as the opposite of language, not an autonomous concept belonging to an alternative domain of significance, but simply what amounts to its technical, or formal opposite, he keeps the problem confined within the domain from which it initially appeared to have been expelled. The result is the same as that achieved in the case of Heidegger. His argument refrains from taking the weight of affirmation it denies its adversary upon itself, but, having negated, allows the negative force it has exerted to affect the sphere in which the problem was initially posed. In the case of Heidegger this resulted in a multiplication of the problem, which dislocated the sphere of argument. In this case, the result is the emergence of a hybrid term with no significance other than that it introduces into the argument a stumbling-block, which is visible in the form of the dash whereby the non is attached to langage (or langage seeks to expel from its sphere what cannot be confined to it).

This absence of significance displayed by the term is visible in what Blanchot goes on to say in his study of Kafka:

nous avons remarqué que le langage n'était réel que dans la perspective d'un état de non-langage qu'il ne peut réaliser: il est tension vers un horizon dangereux où il cherche en vain à disparaître. Ce non-langage, quel est-il? Nous n'avons pas à l'éclaircir ici. Mais nous nous souviendrons qu'il constitue pour toutes les formes de l'expression un rappel à leur insuffisance (p. 30; my italics).

On the one hand, Blanchot uses the term non-langage in the same way as, elsewhere, he uses the term silence or even mystère. On the other, however, the affirmatory nature of

this use is curtailed radically, the question begged by its use quite summarily refused: 'nous n'avons pas à l'éclaircir ici'. The term non-langage is thus not intended by him as a more accurate definition of what he is seeking to approach. In itself, it is no more equivalent to its object than is the term silence. By using it, however, and thus rejecting terms such as silence or mystery, Blanchot is above all orienting his argument inwards, towards what it is in its own heart that corresponds to what is unique in literature. The term is therefore no more, at this stage, than a marker -- or, as Blanchot puts it, 'un rappel'. It has no content, its meaning does not therefore need to be analysed. It is an artificial construct whose composite form constitutes its entire significance. On the level of analysis, as we have seen, the process of breaking out of the confinement imposed by non-literary language upon the significance of literature, leads to a closing of the illusory gap between the two, on the basis of the affirmation that literature emerges from within language. On the one hand, categories of the ineffable were rejected, while on the other, what they purported to express was relocated. Blanchot's dilemma consisted of the obligation, sooner or later, to turn the first stage of this process, which is a negative one with its own practical validity, into an alternative positive one, without falling immediately into the same errors which elsewhere he denounced. The term non-langage fulfils this purpose. As we have seen, it dispenses with the need to use the term silence. There is also an instance in La Part when it is proposed as an alternative to the dilemma caused by the term le mystère.

Blanchot begins by evoking the dilemma of the mind seeking to encounter 'le mystère dans les lettres':

tantôt /il/ prend ... le parti de l'expliquer:
 en le rendant pareil à ce qu'il sait de soi;
 tantôt /il/ se résigne ... à l'éloigner: en lui
 abandonnant les mots les plus vagues, indicible,
 ineffable, secret (p. 64).

This is precisely the dilemma he is seeking, in his criticism, to avoid, and the way he goes on indicates how he seems to think this is possible:

que peut-il d'autre? Le passer sous silence?
 Mais c'est à l'occasion de la parole que le
 mystère joue et c'est peut-être comme une part
 de non-langage, comme la part qui dans le
 langage même serait toujours étrangère au
 langage et sa contradiction et sa fin, mais
 c'est aussi à partir de cette fin que le lan-
 gage parle le mieux. (p. 64).

The peut-être here is a sign of the uncertainty with which Blanchot is using the notion of un non-langage at this time. It serves to displace the term mystère and locate the problem within the sphere of language (à l'occasion de la parole). Yet, as he made more evident when he used it to replace silence, it is not a fully-fledged concept: 'nous n'avons pas à l'éclaircir ici'. Nevertheless, in what he goes on to say on this occasion, its potential as an alternative to theoretical analysis, if only glimpsed at by Blanchot, is quite considerable:

le mystère est moins dans ce non-langage que dans le rapport de la parole avec lui, rapport indéterminable, car c'est dans ce rapport que la parole s'accomplit, et le non-langage, de son côté, n'apparaît jamais que comme un langage simplement différé, c'est-à-dire tel que les mots doivent le décrire pour nous le faire comprendre, mais tel qu'il ne peut être puisque ces mots mêmes ont besoin de lui pour se fonder dans le rapport qui les constitue (ibid.).

Blanchot is here as close as he ever comes, at this period, to confronting his problem directly. The above passage is an exact description of the dilemma he finds himself in, a mirror-image of the very processes in which he is engaged. In it, moreover, he resorts to terms which are destined, in his work and in that of others, to become essential for understanding the problems of language and literature. The heart of literature consists of un rapport, yet one which is un rapport indéterminable because its essence is simply not yet to be language: it is thus a deferment of language, a perpetual difference between language and itself out of which there arises literature. However, as the form taken by the term non-langage reveals, language as it exists will be obliged to undergo some fundamental changes before it becomes capable of expressing that deferment and that difference. At this stage of his thinking, Blanchot does not en-

visage such change however. He remains, on the contrary, caught in the uncomfortable position of having both to bar access by language to what lies at its heart, while seeking to bring it to recognise its existence in adequate terms. Consequently, this inaccessibility itself, which, as he realises in using the term non-langage, constitutes the true nature of what he is seeking to express, comes to affect his own reasoning, driving it in a constant search for further terms and further proof of their inadequacy.

The essence of his problem is that he must discover an encompassing category which, from within language, will account adequately for what, within language, is at the same time outside of it. This search inevitably led him, in his flight from the domain of the ineffable, towards the language of philosophy. In La Part he thus seeks a solution to his dilemma in some of the concepts which were being evolved in what, as he says in the chapter on Sartre, were analogous experiences to that of the writer. Close reading of the work reveals, however, that he goes about this very tentatively. For example, a key notion at the time was that of 'le dépassement', and Blanchot employs it to describe the Surrealists' practice:

la poésie ... est à la fois la prise de conscience /d'un/ dépassement sans fin et aussi son moyen et ce dépassement même (p. 97).

However it is perfectly clear from this sentence that, although the term dépassement is used as if it were an adequate definition of the poetic process, it is simultaneously rendered virtually useless by being charged with such paradoxical force that it means everything, and therefore nothing. It is therefore not surprising that in the chapter on Nietzsche, a similar passage is omitted. We do read that in Nietzsche, according to Jaspers, 'la connaissance veut se confier à toutes ses possibilités pour dépasser chacune d'elles' (p. 281). However the preceding sentence, which defines this dépassement, is omitted:

la notion de dépassement exprime cet effort infatigable, le vertige de refus et de négation qui doit aboutir à une chute et qui aboutit aussi à un nouvel essor.

It would seem that, by La Part, Blanchot had decided that the term did not simplify matters, but rendered them more complex by introducing into the argument a series of paradoxes, and also indicating a form of spatial behaviour which his thinking, for the moment, could not accommodate.

The same pattern is visible in his use of the term transcendence. Like 'le dépassement', it was a term very much 'in the air' at the time, and it is used quite frequently in La Part to designate what Brice Parain termed 'la transcendance du langage', namely its hidden power to influence us (cf p. 94). Similar unease is detectable in Blanchot's use of the term as was the case with 'le dépassement', and it is again with reference to Jaspers that the unease is manifest. Blanchot begins by criticising Jaspers use of the term in relation to Nietzsche, in which he oversimplifies Nietzsche's problem:

il n'est pas réellement sûr, comme le croit Jaspers, que la négation de la transcendance doive s'enfermer dans une affirmation dogmatique de l'immanence (p. 284).

For in Nietzsche, not only is transcendence itself a complex notion: 'La transcendance le hante, comme ce qu'il doit surmonter pour être libre' (p. 287); its complexity merely gives rise to greater complexity as soon as reason attempts to approach it. Jaspers does not realise this, and merely resorts to its opposite in order to explain the complexities of the notion. Hence, Blanchot writes:

Jaspers se demande si la négation de Dieu, chez Nietzsche, n'est pas l'insatisfaction toujours en mouvement d'une recherche de Dieu qui ne se comprend plus (p. 285).

In other words, that it is Nietzsche who is being contradictory rather than the logic he is using. In the original article, he then went on:

ce qui dans le langage de Jaspers pourrait se formuler ainsi: la transcendance n'est jamais que la recherche de la transcendance, est donc aussi la négation de la transcendance.

The omission of this section from La Part is symptomatic of Blanchot's dilemma. He refuses the simple paradox arising from Nietzsche's behaviour as a thinker, according to which he was in fact in search of what he appeared to be contest-

ing. In so doing, however, he is obliged to make one term of that paradox bear all of the weight of what was contradictory in Nietzsche's experience. The result is what amounts to the saturation of his proposition by that single term, and the virtual paralysis of the logic which seeks to come to terms with it.

The omission of the passage reveals that, by 1949, Blanchot was becoming aware of his dilemma. Nevertheless, the argument of La Part remains caught up in it, so that no way out of it appears forthcoming. This is most apparent in the way Blanchot uses what was the most available philosophical notion at the time: existence. It clearly presented a thinker such as Blanchot with a convenient category under which to range what could be defined neither in terms of personal experience nor in strict logical terms. However, when he uses it, it seems inevitably to lead him to greater rather than less complexity, and thus defeat his object. Hence, in the original article on Baudelaire, we read:

/par/ le dogme de l'immortalité, l'horreur
de toujours se dissoudre dans l'existence
est devenue l'espoir d'être toujours, et
l'au-delà de l'existence qu'est l'existence
l'être de l'au-delà.

This is highly confusing. The philosophical term which is employed here as a tool to dismantle a category belonging to the domain of the ineffable, in its turn displays such complexity that one is hard put to decide which of the two, immortality or existence, is the more mystifying category. In La Part, the last two 'existence's are replaced by 'vie' (p. 149), but the effect is a cosmetic one: the problem remains intact. Indeed almost every time the term existence is used by Blanchot, it gives rise to a problem. In the case of Pascal, he speaks of:

ce mouvement où l'existence se découvre en se
mettant en jeu, où elle se sent justifiée, mais
pour autant qu'elle se sent impossible (p. 260).

This is already a paradox. The original, however, goes further: 'ou, pour mieux dire, où elle éprouve qu'il n'y a d'existence que dans l'impossibilité d'exister'. As in the case of Jaspers, the omission of this from La Part would seem to indicate an awareness on Blanchot's part that, in concentr-

ating the problem too narrowly within a single notion, he succeeds merely in paralysing his argument. At the time, he resorted to greater paradox pour mieux dire. Eventually, however, he would seem to have realised that he was just making his problem worse.

In the case of existence, moreover, a solution to this problem is arrived at in the article on Pascal. We have already seen that Blanchot rejects the entire argument as to whether Pascal was sincere or not. He goes on from there to write:

ce que postulent, ce qu'exigent les Pensées, ce ne sont pas les détails de sa vie ou les détails de sa sincérité, mais l'existence dans son entier, ce qui ne signifie pas naturellement l'existence entière, l'histoire entière de cette existence, mais l'existence comme telle (p. 257).

Existence is thus used here as an autonomous category, capable of providing the meaning of the most complex of problems. Blanchot would thus seem to be ranging himself with those philosophers who, at the time, took the notion of existence as a positive tool for philosophical analysis. What follows reveals this not to be the case however:

il n'est pas besoin de recourir à des exposés techniques pour entendre ce qu'implique un tel mot. Le sens courant reconnaît très bien qu'on ne peut commencer à parler d'existence qu'avec certains moments critiques, états d'excès où la violence du fait de vivre submerge la vie, n'en paraît plus dépendre et au contraire la menace et est prête à la sacrifier. L'existence ainsi commence à se révéler lorsqu'elle se met en cause (ibid.).

Blanchot here quite intentionally removes the problem from the domain of philosophy entirely, and this is the logical conclusion to the processes we have seen at work every time his reasoning fastens upon a particular philosophical notion in order to approach the problem of literature. His choice of the term existence is undoubtedly a symbolic one. The refusal to philosophise, in this case, is not merely a refusal of the terms of the debate: it is a refusal of philosophy itself, which, at the time, had come to be equivalent to Existentialism.

The untenable nature of the position which Blanchot was gradually creating for himself is now becoming clear. He contested theoretical versions of literature in the name of the experience of literature itself. When he came to search for an adequate definition of what he was defending, however, the notion of experience had to be rejected. All of the other abstract terms which might have served his purpose also succumb, in their turn, to the critical force of what he is affirming until, in what amounts to a burning of boats, he rejects philosophy ('des exposés techniques') altogether, in the name of 'l'existence comme telle', of the excess and violence of 'le fait de vivre' -- in short, of experience. It is clear, from this, that La Part is the scene of a slowly turning vicious circle, and that it only survives as a coherent whole at all because of its composite nature, which allows a certain 'time-lag' to exist between the discrete stages of its collapse. In the final analysis, all that remains of the work's argument is a gaping crack, and eventually, Blanchot's reasoning is undermined by its existence.

He does make a final effort to measure up to the complexity of what he is trying to express. This consists of positing a notion of ambiguity as a category whereby it may be defined. With it, Blanchot seeks to rein in the uncontrolled movement to which his argument is gradually succumbing, and, by endowing it with a practical mode of application, paradox, to render systematic the anarchic oscillation between terms and their opposites which has control of his argument. This attempt is visible in the way Blanchot emphasises the difference between contradiction and paradox. A passage from 'Le paradoxe d'Aytré' illustrates this, when, evoking once again Mallarmé's attempt to create absence through language, he continues:

qu'une telle tentative soit contradictoire, irréalisable et, comme le dit Mallarmé, ne soit qu'un leurre, c'est ce qui apparaît à première vue. Mais il faut pourtant remarquer que la poésie réelle est un effort vers cet irréalisable, qu'elle a pour fondement (suivant les poètes) cette impossibilité et cette contradiction qu'elle tend vainement à réaliser. Elle exige en somme que s'accomplisse et s'affirme -- à titre d'as-

piration -- le langage comme paradoxe, et elle laisse entendre qu'il n'y a de vrai langage qu'autant que dans les formes courantes de la parole s'esquisse et se profile ce paradoxe et, comme on dit, ce mystère (p. 69).

Every element in Blanchot's argument as we have examined it so far is contained in this passage. Poetry is recognised as 'un leurre', yet Blanchot affirms, on the strength of experience, that this is the reality of poetry. This is a contradiction. However, he is not content to leave things there. Contradiction is something logically unacceptable, and to describe poetry as contradictory is to espouse the viewpoint of non-literary reason and refuse any authentic status to poetry: 'cette contradiction qu'elle tend vainement à réaliser'. Therefore, as soon as we insist upon the positive existence of poetry ('elle exige ... à titre d'aspiration'), and thus break out of the logical limitations imposed upon the problem, a new terminology is needed. Thus, impossibility becomes aspiration, and contradiction, which is merely an exclusion from the domain of logic, is replaced by paradox, which also lies outside of its domain, but simultaneously acts upon it from within. The above passage thus effectively brings Blanchot's argument full circle. It begins with the second stage of that argument, namely the recognition that poetry is 'un leurre', and arrives at its final stage, paradox, which is explicitly coupled with the other stage in order to replace it: 'ce paradoxe et, comme on dit, ce mystère'. Nothing shows more clearly how the argument of La Part circles round its problem in search of a possible approach to it, rather than progressing in a linear fashion. By placing mystery and paradox side by side, the former is put into perspective by the latter, turned into a metaphor for what can now boast a precise term.

This circularity now seems controlled. It permits Blanchot, in the above passage, to hold off a term such as mystery and thus render it ineffective much more decisively than simply be negating it. In his study of Valéry, moreover, he uses it in a similar fashion to hold off the term contradiction. We saw earlier that he seeks in this study to reject simple

critical versions of Valéry's poetic practice, what he calls 'un va-et-vient entre des tendances contraires' (p. 272), and he goes on:

ne s'agit-il pas d'une contradiction paradoxale qu'il ne peut prétendre surmonter et qui le partage? (ibid.)

In the original article, this sentence read:

ne s'agit-il pas paradoxalement d'une contradiction véritable qu'il ne peut prétendre surmonter et qui le partage?

Between these two versions, Blanchot's thinking moves from a purely logical approach, the identification of a contradiction, whose uncertainty is merely indicated by the qualifying adjective paradoxale, towards an approach in which this uncertainty has been confronted and turned into a principle in its own right, and one to which logical considerations are subordinate. The argument in La Part thus clearly tends away from a simple negative logical approach, towards a form of logic within logic. At the same time, as we saw, it abandons terms relating to the ineffable as mere metaphors for the reality they served once to define. Each of these tendencies is governed by his use of the term paradox. 'Ce paradoxe et, comme on dit, ce mystère', 'ne s'agit-il pas d'une contradiction paradoxale': these two statements mark the exact position at which Blanchot arrives in the work. Both the realm of the ineffable and that of logical analysis are held at a distance by his argument, and the instrument of this is paradox.

The term thus appears to offer Blanchot an opportunity of constructing a coherent theory of literature, and, in the chapter on Baudelaire, this ambition appears most clearly. Having quoted the poet's definition of Delacroix's work as 'l'infini dans le fini', he goes on:

il n'est donc pas assez de l'effort contradictoire dans lequel nous pousse cette 'pointe acérée qu'est l'infini'. Portant à un plus haut point la contradiction, il faut, avec ce mouvement toujours inachevé, excluant tout terme, tout repos, réaliser un objet fini, achevé, parfait (pp. 140-141).

Contradiction is effectively surpassed as a term during this

passage, as Blanchot's reasoning is directed towards what is to become a major category for him subsequently: poetry itself:

si la poésie laissait clairement paraître les contradictions qu'elle suppose, l'expérience de son impossibilité ne pourrait se faire, et le tourment poétique serait sans valeur. Mais c'est dans l'ambiguïté que la poésie devient création. Et quand, en elle, l'on ne voit plus que déchirement et passions contradictoires, à cet instant, l'instant de la plus grande difficulté, l'on découvre aussi la facilité qui concilie tout (p. 141).

There emerges from this what appears to be a self-sufficient logical system, able to stand alone as an alternative to that displayed by reason, and hence to constitute a coherent definition of literature. At the heart of human experience lies a principle of ambiguity, whose paradoxical application achieves real status in the poem. Such a system partakes of the domains of both the ineffable and the rational while existing in total independence from them. Indeed, far from being determined by them, it is they which attain a greater degree of significance through being related to each other through it. The logic within logic I referred to earlier would thus appear to be latent in La Part as an alternative to the logical approach to literature. By affirming, in reply to Sartre, that 'l'art littéraire est ambigu' (p. 190), Blanchot uses all the weight of experience to extricate the question of literature from existing logical limits, before going on to posit a category in terms of which the question may be examined independently of both logic and experience. Paradox stands at the confines of logic, and although, from the standpoint of logic, it marks an end, it simultaneously inaugurates another mode of discourse and renders accessible another field of exploration. It both presents logic with the ultimate problem, contradiction, and at the same time dismisses the problem ('ce n'est pas là une difficulté logique' (p. 121)) by attributing it to an alternative principle relating reason and experience.

It would thus appear that the instability displayed by Blanchot's argument in La Part, which arises from the need both to affirm the existence of his subject and also to de-

fine its nature, is finally brought under control by the triad ambiguity-paradox-poetry. In these three notions, his logic appears to regain the coherence which it elsewhere denies itself. This alternative logic is fundamentally unstable however, for the simple reason that ambiguity, which constitutes its governing category, is contested, like experience, as a valid standpoint from which to argue. We have already seen that, in reply to Sartre's reading of Baudelaire, Blanchot wrote:

quand l'on commence de souligner l'ambiguïté du poète, l'on perd aussi le droit d'arrêter ce mouvement, de le stabiliser dans un de ses points pour le qualifier. C'est le propre de l'ambiguïté d'échapper à l'arrêt et à la qualification (p. 142).

Here, Blanchot's use of the notion of ambiguity serves to extricate literature from simple analytical terms. When he tries elsewhere to move on and use it positively as a definition of literature, however, he succumbs to the same process as he used against Sartre. Hence, when he maintains that at the heart of literature there is 'une ambiguïté ultime' (p. 329), which generates all of the particular cases of ambiguity and paradox to be found in it, and that, therefore, in literature, 'l'ambiguïté est aux prises avec elle-même' (ibid.), he is falling into the same trap as beset his use of the notions of 'le dépassement' and 'la transcendance': his reasoning is becoming saturated with a single notion, and grinding to a halt as a consequence. He is thus led to reason in the following manner: in literature, 'on dirait que s'offre un piège caché pour qu'elle /l'ambiguïté/ dévoile ses propres pièges' (p. 323). This is tantamount to saying that in literature, ambiguity becomes ambiguous. That is not saying very much. At most, it displays a vague presentation of the trap into Blanchot's own reasoning is being driven, and which he seeks to avoid in the first chapter, which was written in 1949, when he declares:

l'ambiguïté ne nous satisfait pas, l'ambiguïté est un subterfuge qui saisit la vérité sur le mode du glissement, du passage, mais la vérité qui attend ces écrits est peut-être unique et simple (p. 13).

Thus, in the slow circle of self-contradiction present in the

work, even the category which appeared to rein in that circular movement, and prevent it from becoming exorbitant, has fallen victim in its turn to the logic of what Blanchot is seeking to define. Though the whole weight of his argument leads up to a point where what is signified by the term ambiguity appears to correspond to the reality he is seeking to express, as soon as the term is used, its inadequacy becomes patent, and all it remains capable of signifying is the oscillation which literature generates, and which has ultimately taken over the field of analytical language too. Literature contains 'un point instable' at which its meaning changes constantly (p. 329); it is as if 'elle pivotait invisiblement autour d'un axe invisible' in a movement where 'ni le contenu des mots ni leur forme n'est en cause' (ibid.). At the same time, however, Blanchot's reasoning, in seeking to affirm the existence of this movement and of the principle which governs it, eventually degenerates into a monstrous version of what it is trying to define.

The concept of ambiguity thus constitutes the final stumbling-block to Blanchot's reasoning in La Part. Yet, by the time it reaches this point, its achievements cannot be said to be negligible. By adopting the affirmative approach I have sought to illustrate, Blanchot performs a considerable philosophical feat by dislocating the sphere of traditional literary analysis, and obliging it to acknowledge that what is inaccessible in literature poses a threat to its very existence. He both destroys the myth of a mysterious secret at the heart of literature, by revealing that this was merely a rationalisation of what literature is; and also challenges the positivism which hitherto marked the opposition to a notion of something ineffable in literature, by locating the ineffable within the field of logic itself. In this way, by means of what might be called an anti-dialectic which gradually undoes the stratified synthetical core upon which several centuries of reasoning have been wound, he presents reason with an irreducible human quantity which it can neither accommodate nor simply ignore.

Nevertheless, the price Blanchot has to pay for this is

a heavy one. Because the standpoint from which he conducts his argument is consistently that of literature itself, as the gap between reason and literature is gradually narrowed, in La Part, through the successive assaults upon the terms by which reason seeks to define literature, the work becomes the site of a confrontation between two different positions in language, that of the writer and that of the theorist. Consequently, Blanchot's argument begins to display two positive poles within the single mode of discourse he is employing: that of theory and that of literature. The narrowing of the gap between them, the fact that affirmation of the complexity of literary experience is accompanied increasingly by complexities within the field of reason as it seeks to comprehend it, eventually precipitates a form of sympathetic behaviour within the language of reason, whereby it begins to perform as if it were the language of literature. Because of the approach he adopts, Blanchot's argument is ultimately left without an objective pole to it. Therefore, the force of affirmation encounters such a blockage in the system of that argument that, deprived of its normal field of exercise, it is left free to react in what may be seen as a pathological fashion upon the structure of that argument itself. The affirmation of literature so neutralises the effects of logical analysis, that the language of logic in which it is couched begins to behave as literature. The most striking sign of this (one might almost call it a symptom) is the role played by paradox in La Part.

So far, we have encountered paradox as the practical dimension of a positive category in terms of which the nature of literature appears explicable. As such, it marks the most advanced point to which Blanchot's reasoning develops at this stage, allowing it to treat as an objective phenomenon the reality at the heart of literature. At the same time, however, paradox is a form of behaviour which his own argument displays, every time it begins to depend too exclusively on a single term or concept. His argument thus also encounters paradox 'subjectively', in as much as reason itself becomes the seat of the phenomenon it is out to explain. The argument of La Part is thus caught in a trap of its own making.

When it appeared to have reined in the circle of self-contradiction in the passage which concluded 'ce paradoxe et, comme on dit, ce mystère', the means whereby it did so, the notion by which the domain of logic and that of the ineffable were kept at a distance, was not paradox alone: present also in his argument was the comme of 'comme on dit', and this word, which served in the context to indicate the metaphorical nature of a term such as le mystère, was also a discreet reminder that all terms applied to literature in order to define it are merely metaphors. It is to this reality that Blanchot's argument eventually succumbs in La Part, by relying too heavily on its own paradoxes in order to free itself from the impasse into which it has come.

This is the beginning of what is undoubtedly the most critical and dangerous period in Blanchot's thinking. For the irreducible gulf separating reason and literature, which he renders increasingly apparent as his argument progresses, suddenly transfers itself from something lying outside of his argument to something affecting his argument from within. The paralysis he imposes upon logical reasoning from a standpoint simultaneously outside and inside of its bounds, begins uncontrollably to affect the processes of his own reasoning, so that, instead of calling a halt, in his analyses, at the point where it is clear that reason can go no further, he continues to reason by adopting the paradoxical mode which he has designated as that of literature. This process is only partly conscious at this period, and it leads Blanchot to a state of dependence upon paradox in which his reasoning seems almost to founder. Kenneth Douglas remarks that, at this period, Blanchot is 'shackled by paradox'⁴⁵, and indeed, it is possible to see this development as a form of passion for reason. Pierre Verstraeten's comparison of the writer's function and that of Christ now appears even more pertinent. Paradox becomes a form of expiation for the assertion by Blanchot of something more fundamental than reason, and as a conclusion to this chapter, I should like to point to the two most far-reaching consequences of this.

The first consists of the paradoxical assertion of the logic within logic which we saw emerge as an alternative to

logic itself. This centres round the notion of the poem as an entity with an autonomous existence in relation to that defined by logic. It is in the chapter on René Char that this is affirmed most clearly:

tous deux, poète et lecteur de ce poème, reçoivent de lui leur existence et sont fortement conscients de dépendre, dans leur existence, de ce chant à venir, de ce lecteur à devenir. C'est une des mystérieuses exigences du pouvoir poétique. Le poète naît par le poème qu'il crée; il est second au regard de ce qu'il fait; il est postérieur au monde qu'il a suscité et par rapport auquel ses relations de dépendance reproduisent toutes les contradictions exprimées dans ce paradoxe: le poème est son oeuvre, le mouvement le plus vrai de son existence, mais le poème est ce qui le fait être, ce qui doit exister sans lui et avant lui, dans une conscience supérieure (p. 104).

This is what he terms 'l'antériorité du poème par rapport au poète' (ibid.), and this term, in the years which follow La Part, will become the pretext for an entire paradoxical topography in which Blanchot, instead of reasoning in response to literature, will resort increasingly to providing a description of the strange encounter with the limits of reasoning which is that of the writer.

As a complement to this, there emerges a theme which is eminently suitable to paradoxical reasoning: that of death. In literature, the writer and the reader experience something which exceeds their individual capacity to comprehend it. The writer is thus, in a sense, dead in relation to literature. Consequently, the paradoxical space within which the writer's experience takes place is designated by Blanchot as a space of death, and that theme comes to dominate his reasoning in relation to literature. However, undoubtedly because his own experience as a thinker has come to parallel that of the writer, his use of the notion of death constantly transforms his reasoning from being logical analysis, albeit of a particular kind, into something akin to the thought of the mystics. In La Part this tendency is only incipient, as indeed is the emergence of the paradoxical topography I referred to. Nevertheless, it is on the basis of this that Blanchot will subsequently be obliged to revolutionise his

reasoning, in L'Espace littéraire. A sign of the emergence of this theme of death is to be found in a passage from the chapter devoted to Leiris. In many of his studies, the theme of death is present because it is relevant to the author he is studying. This is the case with Leiris. However, during the course of his argument, his relationship to that theme changes:

la crainte de mourir est aussi la crainte de ne pouvoir mourir. Le fait que nous ne pouvons pas éprouver jusqu'au bout la réalité de la mort rend la mort irréelle, et cette irréalité nous condamne à craindre de ne mourir qu'irr-éellement, de ne pas vraiment mourir, de demeurer comme pris, à jamais, entre la vie et la mort, dans un état de non-existence et de non-mort, duquel toute notre vie prend peut-être son sens et sa réalité. Nous ne savons pas que nous mourons. Nous ne savons pas non plus que les autres meurent, car la mort d'autrui nous demeure étrangère et demeure toujours incomplète, puisque nous qui la connaissons, nous vivons. Nous ne nous reconnaissons certes pas immortels, mais nous nous voyons plutôt condamnés, dans la mort même, à l'impossibilité de mourir, à l'impossibilité d'accomplir, de ressaisir le fait de notre mort en nous y abandonnant d'une manière décidée et décisive (p. 246).

Death here becomes the focus for everything that is paradoxical in experience. Like the other terms we have examined, it gradually saturates the argument of which it is the theme. Whereas in their case, however, the term itself became unfit for use, in the case of death, it is reasoning itself which is affected. This is because the subject of the argument, the nous in whose name it is conducted, shifts, at a certain point, from being the nous of philosophical analysis to being the nous of what amounts to quasi-mystical experience. The force of affirmation which in effect destroyed such terms as existence or transcendence here dislocates the very standpoint from which Blanchot is reasoning. This dislocation, in conjunction with the new topos provided by the poem, will gradually lead Blanchot's reasoning into a new and dangerous domain, where reason, though appearing to behave analytically, is in fact engaged in a process of mimesis in relation to its subject. We must now go on to see where this will lead him.

Notes to Part II, Chapter 1

1. Gaëtan Picon, L'Usage de la lecture I (Paris, 1960), p. 199.
2. Gaëtan Picon, L'Ecrivain et son ombre (Paris, 1953), p. 238.
3. At most, certain vague patterns can be discerned in the way chapters are positioned. The first and the second chapters are about Kafka, and belong respectively to the beginning (1945) and the end (1949) of the period represented by the book. The next three originally appeared in the same order in March-April, May and June 1946, and form what appears to be an extended exploration of literary language, which culminates in a fourth, 'Le langage de la fiction', which, apart from one or two paragraphs, was not published previously. The following five chapters all concern poetry. From here on, however, no pattern is evident. The mixture of the contemporary and the Classical, the French and the foreign, is total.
4. 'Le Tout-Puissant', La Table Ronde, 3e cahier (juillet 1945), pp. 189-193; 'En bonne voie', Cahiers de la Pléiade, 1 (avril 1946), pp. 143-151.
5. 'La critique de Charles du Bos', Paysage Dimanche, 2 décembre 1945, p. 3.
6. 'L'énigme de la critique', Carrefour, 24 janvier 1946, p. 6.
7. *ibid.*
8. *ibid.*
9. 'L'Honneur des poètes', L'Arche, 18-19 (août-septembre 1946), p. 162.
10. Lautréamont et Sade. This was originally published in 1949, then re-edited in 1963. 'L'expérience de Lautréamont' is on pp. 53-188 of the 1963 edition.
11. Picon (1953), p. 238.
12. *ibid.*. The quotation is from p. 56 of Lautréamont et Sade (1963).
13. Ramon Fernandez, 'De la critique philosophique', in Messages (Paris, 1926), pp. 28-29.
14. Lautréamont et Sade, p. 58.
15. R.-M. Albérès, Bilan littéraire du XXe siècle (Paris, 1970), pp. 107-116.
16. 'De la révolution à la littérature', L'Insurgé, 13 janvier 1937, p. 3.
17. From the beginning of the 1950s, Blanchot was closely associated with André Breton, Dionys Mascolo, Marguerite Duras and other disaffected Communists in an 'Association d'Intellectuels Révolutionnaires' about which, for

the present, little is known. One sign of this is his collaboration with the group who launched the newspaper Le 14 Juillet in opposition to de Gaulle in 1958. In a footnote to the publication of one of his articles from that paper, 'Le refus', in L'Amitié, Blanchot writes:

par exception, j'indique quand et où ce petit texte a été publié pour la première fois: en octobre 1958, dans le numéro 2 du 14 Juillet. Il fut écrit peu de jours après que le général de Gaulle revint au pouvoir, porté, cette fois, non par la Résistance, mais par les mercénaires (p. 131).

The culmination of his activity at this period was his signing of the Manifeste des 121, which called upon Frenchmen to refuse to join up for the war in Algeria. This text is usually associated with the name of Sartre. What is clear from the style in which it is written is confirmed by Claude Roy, first in Moi, je (Paris, 1969) then even more explicitly in Somme toute (Paris, 1976): namely that the text of the Manifeste is by Blanchot's hand. I and others undertook to publish the text, in Gramma, 3-4 (printemps 1976), pp. 27-31. In a letter concerning this, Blanchot does not admit that he is the author, pointing out that, as he said to the judge who questioned him after the event, the text was and is of collective inspiration. (For further details surrounding the Manifeste, cf Le Manifeste des 121 (Paris, 1962)).

As an upshot of the events surrounding de Gaulle's return to power, several writers from France and elsewhere attempted to found a review inspired by their rejection of what had occurred. It was to be called Gulliver International. It never materialised however. Since the first number was nevertheless ready, a friend of Blanchot's, Elio Vittorini, published it as a number of his own review Il Menabó (number 7 (1964)). Blanchot contributed four pieces to it, one of which is incorporated into L'Entretien infini.

In May 1968, Blanchot was again involved in what occurred. He was very active in the 'Comité d'intellectuels et d'étudiants' whose organ, Comité, although anonymous, is clearly substantially indebted to Blanchot. Indeed, one of the texts it contains, 'Les trois paroles de Marx', was republished by the Italian writer Leonetti in his review Che fare?. Blanchot therefore felt authorised to publish it under his own name, and it appears in L'Amitié (pp. 115-117). In the same number of Gramma in which the Manifeste appears, there appear three other anonymous texts from Comité, which are clearly identifiable as by Blanchot. A year after the events of May 1968, a series of discussions were held on the subject of the 'Comité d'action', in an attempt at drawing the lessons of the Comité group. They are published in Les Lettres Nouvelles. The participants are anonymous, but one can identify Blanchot, as well as Maurice Nadeau, Dionys Mascolo and Robert Antelme. The debate is especially interesting in that, during it, Blanchot attempts

to defend his notion of 'l'absence de livre' as the true link between literature and revolutionary action. His words fall on rather stony ground however (cf 'Le comité d'action: exigence révolutionnaire illimitée' and 'Sur les comités d'action', Lettres Nouvelles (juin-juillet 1969), pp. 150-162, 185-188. Finally, in a recent enquête held by the Nouvel Observateur for its 'Spécial Littérature' number (1981), Blanchot reveals, in a text entitled 'Refuser l'ordre établi' (pp. 45-46) and inspired by a question concerning 'l'engagement', that his preoccupation with Judaism still does not preclude his commitment to a certain form of revolution.

18. This was quite irrevocably so. Brasillach, who was shot after the Liberation, had written, like Blanchot, for Combat. Both Robert Francis and Jean-Pierre Maxence, whose careers parallel Blanchot's for quite a time in the 30s, were on the wanted list. Only Thierry Maulnier and Jean de Fabrègues seemed otherwise to have emerged unscathed from the Occupation.
19. Etiemble, Hygiène des Lettres. II. La littérature dé-gagée (Paris, 1955), p. 11.
20. 'Peut-être a-t-on le tort de négliger ce qui a été /la/ découverte centrale /du surréalisme/, le message automatique. Il est vrai que sur ce point l'échec de la tentative paraît quelquefois sans appel' (La Part du feu, p. 90). It is noteworthy that the quelquefois was added for the composition of the work.
21. Writing of Les Chemins de la liberté. Blanchot remarks:
le drame ne se passe pas en débats intéressés. Il ne s'exprime pas non plus dans une histoire qui, comme nous l'avons vu, est nulle. Mais il se pose sur les choses, il coule dans le monde, il se mêle à la réalité extérieure comme une eau qui avec le sable forme ciment. C'est là le grand don de Sartre, celui qui manifeste le mieux en lui la parfaite correspondance du théoricien et du romancier (La Part du feu, p. 199).
22. Jean-Paul Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la littérature, in Situations II (Paris, 1948). The reference is to p. 368 of the edition of this work in the Gallimard collection 'Idées'.
23. Interview with Christian Grisoli, Paru, 13 (décembre 1945), pp. 5-10.
24. Pierre Verstraeten, Violence et Ethique (Paris, 1972), pp. 421-441.
25. *ibid.*, p. 424.
26. *ibid.*, p. 432.
27. *ibid.*, p. 435.
28. *ibid.*, p. 432.

29. *ibid.*, p. 425.
30. I would part company with Verstraeten, however, when he concludes this comparison with the following remark:
 c'est dans le malheur produit par le mouvement de l'écriture elle-même -- qu'elle tire du même néant auquel participe le malheur de l'homme -- que celle-ci opérera une adéquation authentique à son essence (p. 438).
 Blanchot's refusal of a 'dépassement' of the writer's condition cannot be seen as the sort of solipsistic 'misérabilisme' which Verstraeten describes. By confronting the conflict at the heart of literary experience, Blanchot is not seeking to make literature attain essential status, but on the contrary to break out of the essentialist sphere altogether.
31. Verstraeten, p. 440.
32. The recent publication of Sartre's notes for his Grande Morale must change our perspective however. Cf Obliques 18-19 (1979).
33. Tzvetan Todorov, 'La réflexion sur la littérature dans la France contemporaine', Poétique, 38 (avril 1979), p. 136.
34. Georges Mounin, 'Maurice Blanchot et la poésie toujours mal entendue de René Char', in La Communication poétique (Paris, 1969), p. 236.
35. Cf in particular the following chapters in Faux pas: II. 'Maître Eckhart'; IV. 'Autour de la pensée hindoue'; V. 'L'Expérience intérieure'.
36. It is instructive, in the context of Mounin's unstinting hostility to Blanchot's view of Char, to quote the following passage from a letter sent by Char to Georges Bataille, concerning Blanchot's article on him which appeared in Critique in October 1946:
 les lignes de Blanchot (quel que soit le sujet qui les a provoquées) sont autant de coups de projecteur sur une matière et son expression que la critique ne goûte plus, dans l'ignorance et la crainte où elle est de ses arcanes. Je suis vraiment touché que Blanchot ait parlé si intelligemment et si souverainement de la poésie à travers moi. Il m'est difficile de lui écrire en particulier et j'aimerais que vous lui fassiez savoir mon émotion. Je crois Blanchot indispensable à la place où il s'exprime, comme vous êtes indispensable à la vôtre. Toute une région majeure de l'homme dépend aujourd'hui de vous. Je le disais hier à Breton qui partageait mon opinion (...). (Dated le 7 décembre 1946). (This letter was part of the Paris-Paris exhibition, Musée Georges Pompidou, 1981. It is in the Bataille archive in the Bibliothèque Nationale).

37. Jean-Jacques Salomon, 'La Part du feu par Maurice Blanchot', Temps Modernes, 49 (1949), p. 437.
38. *ibid.*
39. In Le Très-Haut, which appeared in 1948, La Part du feu is announced under the title Entre chien et loup.
40. André Breton, Nadja (Paris, 1928). The reference is to p. 206 of the original version.
41. Cf Qu'est-ce que la littérature, p. 341. (This reference is the edition of the work in the collection 'Idees'.
42. Cf chapter V of Thomas l'obscur, where a dying cat becomes the standpoint from which Thomas is viewed. The significance of the episode is that, by calling a cat a cat, we simultaneously attain the essential cat and destroy the particular one we are referring to.
43. Verstraeten, p. 436.
44. L'Arrêt de mort, p. 89.
45. Kenneth Douglas, 'Blanchot and Sartre', Yale French Studies, II, 1 (1949), pp. 85-95.

PART II, CHAPTER 2: YEARS OF TRANSITION

Another six years elapsed between the publication of La Part and that of Blanchot's next work of criticism, L'Espace littéraire (henceforth referred to as L'Espace). During that time, French literature had put the debates of the post-war period resolutely behind it, and was headed on the course which has led it directly to where it is today. On the one hand, almost every link with its pre-war past had by now been severed; while on the other, the cluster of new authors who had appeared, after the war, to constitute a single force for change, had broken apart, each one going his separate way both in relation to the others and in relation to literature. Literature was thus at a turning-point. It was also at its nadir, and the rigorously conducted experiments of the 'Nouveau Roman' proved helpless to counter the shift of intellectual concern away from literature as such, and towards more general human questions.

In his chapter on 20th century literature in the Encyclopédie de la Pléiade, Gaëtan Picon refers to this trend when he writes: 'les essais apparaissent ... parfois en ce milieu de siècle comme plus dignes d'intérêt que les créations',¹. The reason for this, he claims, is that 'l'essai récupère les exigences formelles qu'il est arrivé au roman d'abandonner',², and he cites the case of Blanchot to illustrate what he is saying. The way he does so, however, once again reflects his view of Blanchot as a philosopher of art rather than as a critic or a writer:

Maurice Blanchot a apporté dans ses récits mystérieux et transparents (Le Très-Haut, Le Dernier homme) un souci rhétorique, une continuité d'écriture une cohérence de perspective qui les

situent dans la récente évolution technique. On hésite pourtant à parler d'eux en fonction d'une technique romanesque: l'expérience métaphysique du vide, de l'absence, l'expérience des choses invisibles est leur seule voix, leur seule vérité -- que nous retrouvons dans les₃ pages critiques de L'Espace littéraire³.

In this passage, Picon shows that he is aware of an unusual link between Blanchot's fiction and his criticism. However, he uses this to deny his novels any fictional status, while in the same work discreetly denying that L'Espace is a work of criticism, by omitting it from the bibliography of Blanchot's writings at the end of his study. This is no accident. He begins his study of L'Espace in L'Usage de la lecture by recalling that the work was refused consideration for a 'prix de la Critique' because the judges had been 'intimidated' by it⁴. He does not seek thereby to devalue Blanchot's writing. It is merely that, in his eyes, both his fiction and his criticism are no more than disguises for an increasingly abstract and arbitrary philosophy of subjective experience, and this judgement illustrates what has become the current means of accounting for what occurs in L'Espace.

Hence for Sarah Lawall, L'Espace and the critical work which follows it, Le Livre à venir, complement each other, the one dealing with 'the impersonal space of literary creation' while the other is concerned with 'the incarnate text'⁵. It is a fact that the articles which make up Le Livre à venir are almost exclusively concerned with specific texts, and that Blanchot's approach depends very closely upon the more general considerations contained in L'Espace. For Lawall, however, this relationship is a limiting one, for though 'as an explanation of literary creation, his theory is consistent and unimpeachable'⁶, it lacks any absolute justification because, she claims, 'Blanchot's work is based upon a unique existential experience'⁷. Consequently, 'because the experience itself dominates his theory and writings, his work cannot be called conventional literary criticism'⁸, and this, for her, is tantamount to saying that it cannot be called criticism at all.

In Neil Oxenhandler's reading of L'Espace, the same view comes gradually to prevail. He first describes how this work differs from the previous two:

this volume is a sustained exploration of the meaning of the literary enterprise. Taking the various texts and authors which he here discusses as pretexts, Blanchot develops a literary theory which seems especially adapted to the concerns of modern literature. Only rarely does he turn to writers of another period⁹.

Though it is noteworthy that his conclusion differs in one important respect from that of Picon which I quoted in the previous chapter, like his French counterpart, Oxenhandler sees in L'Espace a calculated retreat into abstraction, and this is made synonymous, for him, with an increase in the subjective nature of Blanchot's reasoning:

Blanchot's method is to assume a secret in the work he is studying, a secret which cannot be communicated directly but only by paradox. ... Hence the critic must turn conventional values upside down, must speak in paradoxes if he is to give some sense of the paradoxes of the work¹⁰.

What is more, this sybilline function is presented as a matter of conscious choice, as the decision by Blanchot no longer to respect the diversity which literature displays and, through a process of 'bizarre levelling'¹¹, to pursue in his own name and for his own ends the elusive significance which lies at the heart of literature:

we feel in the writings of the critic himself a kind of anguish, a desperate searching after meaning which always eludes the painful ratiocinations of his prose¹².

For Manuel de Diéguez, this choice is a choice of style, and in L'Ecrivain et son langage, where he sets himself the task of defining 'un classicisme au niveau existentiel'¹³ on the basis of style in literature, de Diéguez in his turn emphasises the subjective nature of Blanchot's thinking:

Blanchot ... appellera mort, ou présence de la mort, ce pouvoir d'abstraction qui nous re tranche de l'existence, et le terme de mort est ici un abus de langage, une qualification toute subjective, car l'abstraction n'a jamais tué personne, elle

peut seulement être ressentie comme une mise à mort de l'existence. Ce choix du drame à partir d'une puissance abstractive fatalement liée au langage est un choix de l'âme, un choix de l'écrivain Maurice Blanchot. Ce choix est d'une grande valeur littéraire, il suggère 'un frisson nouveau', il est beau, c'est un choix esthétique¹⁴.

De Diéguez's conclusions are all to Blanchot's advantage. Nevertheless, they simultaneously situate his work entirely outside of the domain of the verifiable. For him, L'Espace is not an essay, it is a new type of literature:

le ton biblique, les résonances sépulcrales, la vision solennelle: une esthétique s'affirme. C'est une grandeur que nous avons perdue, celle d'une littérature reposant sur la mort: en plein XXe siècle, la revanche de Pascal sur Voltaire¹⁵.

Blanchot has thus become a Classic. However, this disqualifies him henceforth from writing convincingly about the Classics: 'ce que Blanchot écrit de Pascal, personne d'autre ne pouvait l'écrire. Nous sommes devant l'admirable arbitraire du choix que fait un écrivain'¹⁶.

A clear pattern is visible in these versions of what Blanchot is attempting in L'Espace: on the one hand, his undertaking is acknowledged as a worthwhile and original one; but on the other, it is denied any significance except in relation to its author. This is a clear illustration of how insidiously logical analysis can conjure away something which constitutes a threat to it. None of these critics is hostile to Blanchot, and therein lies the problem. Ill-founded praise, as I have already suggested, is much more difficult to discredit than ill-founded condemnation, and the way these four critics assess Blanchot's work has gradually imposed itself as the sole means of doing so. Yet nothing could be wider of the mark with regard to the situation in which Blanchot found himself between 1949 and 1955. This is because, although all of the significant elements in L'Espace are recognised by these critics, they are interpreted falsely by them in terms of an assumed act of choice on Blanchot's part, and thus, I would maintain, on the basis of a misunderstanding

of the rôle played by affirmation in his thinking at the time. As I sought to show in the chapter on La Part, the emergence of paradoxical affirmation, and of 'subjective' themes such as death, occurs independently of any direct intention or clear-cut act of choice on Blanchot's part. His critical thinking finds itself, by 1949, caught up in such a sterile circle of painful self-contradiction that he is scarcely in a position to make any clear choice at all. If there is any choice present in L'Espace, it is, as I hope to show, the decision to free critical discourse from the impasse into which it had been driven by La Part, and direct it towards a new relationship with its object.

To see L'Espace in its true light, it is thus first necessary to examine what became of Blanchot the critic after the publication of La Part. By 1949, the context within which its constituent chapters were originally written had all but ceased to exist. Moreover, French society was politically, socially and culturally in such a state of flux that, for many writers, no new context appeared forthcoming. The appearance of La Part and of Lautréamont et Sade in 1949 conceals the fact that otherwise Blanchot published only two pieces of writing that year, one of which, Un récit?, was a piece of fiction. Indeed, 1948 was scarcely more productive a year, and the dearth persisted until 1951. There can be no doubt that during this period, the innovations he was attempting in the domain of fiction occupied much of his energy. Nevertheless, his critical writing was also displaying extreme uncertainty, partly because of what was going on in his fiction, and this is manifest on two levels: in where he wrote, and in what he wrote.

By 1950, as Julien Gracq pointed out, two literary camps had established themselves, 'deux planetes separees' governed by Le Figaro Littéraire and Les Lettres Françaises respectively, and leaving little room for a writer who was not a satellite of one of them¹⁷. Independent of both camps, Les Temps Modernes and Critique were by now

well-established. However, Critique was a forum open to experts from every discipline and providing specialist accounts of new research in a wide variety of fields. It could not therefore accommodate a writer such as Blanchot seeking a regular position on a review¹⁸. Les Temps Modernes, though non-partisan, was nevertheless oriented politically and culturally in a manner still requiring the sort of commitment which Blanchot felt unable to accord¹⁹. Meanwhile, the self-styled organ of 'la littérature dégagée', Les Cahiers de la Pléiade was on its last legs, so that, at the heart of the literary journalism of the time there continued to exist a vacuum, that caused by the enforced absence of the Nouvelle Revue Française. Some abortive attempts were made at filling this gap. In 1950, Albert Camus, René Char and Albert Béguin founded Empédocle, in which Gracq's pamphlet was originally published and to which Blanchot gave 'Un récit?'. The review was short-lived, however, as was one founded as an alternative to Camus's by Claude Mauriac, Liberté de l'Esprit. Meanwhile in Italy a prestigious international literary review entitled Botteghe Oscure began to appear in 1951, and it was there that Blanchot published five extracts from his ré-cits between 1951 and 1958. There was still no satisfactory niche for him as a critic however. In an attempt to return to the literary journalism of his beginnings he became, with Léon Pierre-Quint, the literary columnist of the newly-founded left-wing weekly L'Observateur in 1950. For reasons as yet unknown, however, he suddenly ceased to contribute to the journal after only seven articles, and it was not until the appearance of the Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française in 1953 that his dilemma was finally resolved.'

These years of uncertainty were thus affected by external circumstances. However they were also the product of the internal uncertainties which his theory had begun to display in 1949. In an article whose particular interest lies in the fact that it was written in 1953, and thus without the degree of hindsight available to other critics in their interpretation of this period, Jean Pfeiffer descr-

ibes Blanchot's situation as follows:

apres La Part du feu et notamment l'étude intitulée La littérature et le droit à la mort, ... la pensée de Maurice Blanchot ... semblait avoir si bien atteint /le/ fond, qu'il ne lui restait plus apparemment qu'à y séjourner et, puisqu'il lui était impossible de s'y perdre, à s'y maintenir comme en suspens et à perpétuellement le redire²⁰.

Pfeiffer's view is not out of tune with the conclusions of the previous chapter, and reveals that, between 1949 and 1953, Blanchot's thinking gave the impression of being caught in the extreme position at which it had arrived. As I have already suggested, in La Part Blanchot positioned himself at the heart of the dilemma of literature and there assumed, in Christ-like fashion, all of the contradictions to which that dilemma gave rise. Therefore, when circumstances began to change after 1949, the mark they had left on his thinking was much slower to disappear. It is of course all to the credit of his thinking that it should so have remained true to itself, even in adversity. Nevertheless, for the first time in his career Blanchot found himself left behind by events and out of step with what was beginning to occur. The result was not, however, sterile persistence or reactionary withdrawal, but a series of variously aimed 'shots in the dark' in directions where pursuit of his problem seemed possible.

The essence of Blanchot's position in La Part was a respect for the nature of literary experience, while his dilemma arose from the ultimate disregard for literature as such on the part of those with whom he had sought to argue on literature's terms. It was therefore inevitable that when, after 1949, that disregard turned into a total shift of concern, Blanchot should have turned to those thinkers who continued to devote their critical attention exclusively to artistic questions. It was a sign of the times, however, that it was not only Sartre and those close to him who abandoned literature: concern with the problems of art was henceforth concentrated upon another domain entirely, that of painting and sculpture, and this

was of course under the influence of André Malraux. There can be little doubt that the publication of La Psychologie de l'Art²¹ by an author who had already excelled himself both in the domain of literature and in that of commitment, marked an important turning-point in French culture after the war, and corresponded profoundly to the political and social transformations which were moulding modern France. All of the elements present in the immediate post-war climate of commitment were also present in Malraux's work, but elevated onto a higher plane and synthesised into a coherent system of absolutes. With his non-conformist and adventurous literary past now behind him, Malraux was the cultural representative of a rising political 'establishment', and, in parallel to this development, art had ceased to be something to be debated over in specific, concrete cases and become an all-embracing human phenomenon, capable for the first time of being contemplated in its entirety. This fundamental shift of perspective, during which literature went by the board, is deserving of study in its own right, for it constitutes, I believe, the most concerted and significant reaction to the call for commitment after the war, and proved a determining factor in the evolution of literary and artistic theory in subsequent decades. Blanchot responded to it readily in two articles, published in Critique in December 1950 and January 1951, and entitled 'Le Musée, l'art et le temps'. It is a sign of the unease with which he greeted Malraux's work, however, that these texts were not published in a volume of criticism until 1971, and we must pay close attention to the grounds for this unease, for they contribute substantially to the project which finally resulted in the composition of L'Espace.

The two articles on Malraux are generally regarded as favourable to their subject, and indeed, faithful to the method which governed La Part, Blanchot is at pains to enter as far as possible into the spirit of what Malraux is undertaking. Moreover, Malraux's desire to demonstrate that the absolute nature of art is of fundamental human significance was very much in keeping with the ambitions Blanchot had set himself with regard to literature. Yet

if, as is clear from the repeated references to painting in the criticism he publishes at this time, Malraux's project appeared to Blanchot of the utmost importance, he was never able entirely to reconcile Malraux's theories with his own, so that the nature of his encounter with Malraux is a crucial indication of Blanchot's position at this period, and more precisely, of his divergence from trends which, under Malraux's influence, were beginning to develop. These trends may be summed up as a return to the question of aesthetics, and two works written in 1953 may be considered typical of what was going on at the time. They are Gaëtan Picon's L'Ecrivain et son ombre²², and Mikel Dufrenne's scholarly work Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique²³. Each of these works is openly indebted to Malraux, and they constitute a substantial indication of the direction being taken at the time by the reaction to Sartre's neglect of purely artistic values. It is significant, however, that neither is a direct attack upon Sartre, and indeed Dufrenne's work is to a great extent a sympathetic dialogue with him. It is noteworthy, moreover, that in 1960 Manuel de Diéguez justified his own undertaking in the following way:

c'est à partir de Sartre ... que, par une sorte de renversement dialectique, une méthode 'existentielle', arrachée à l'historicisme, aurait pu rendre possible une approche féconde des chefs-d'oeuvre classiques. Il n'en fut rien, hélas!²⁴

Yet seven years earlier, Picon and Dufrenne had, each in his way, provided what for de Diéguez is a long-overdue pendant to Sartre's theories and, with Malraux's help, carried out that 'renversement dialectique' to produce an original synthesis of the situation created by Sartre. The consequences of this for Blanchot's thought were very serious. Both Picon and Dufrenne took as the focus of their analyses the same problematical artistic reality that Blanchot defends in his dialogue with Sartre. However, whereas Blanchot's critical encounter with that reality plunged him ever deeper into a sterile pursuit of an elusive significance, Dufrenne and Picon simply endow it with a spe-

cial status, different from but analogous with that of other forms of reality. This is not the place to examine this process in detail. Suffice it to say that what Blanchot in 'La littérature et le droit à la mort' refers to as 'une Chose', the better to distinguish it from the object of everyday usage and thus safeguard its fundamental lack of particularity (cf La Part p. 300), is transformed by Dufrenne and Picon into an object capable of being studied, and governed by a certain form of judgement. What Blanchot extracts from Hegel as a sign of the irreducibility of literature to non-literary terms, is redefined by Dufrenne with Hegel's help as an object accessible to phenomenological analysis²⁵, and presented by Picon as 'essentiellement une chose' having a specific mode of existence: 'l'existence de cette chose n'est rien d'autre que sa durée dans un ordre qui est celui du jugement'²⁶.

Thus, inspired by the example of Malraux, these two thinkers independently shifted the ground which their analyses shared with Blanchot's, by annexing it to the central territory of theoretical reasoning. Each acknowledges that the reality which concerns him lies within neither of the opposing domains familiar to reason. For Picon, 'l'expérience esthétique ne s'oppose pas moins aux réactions de l'instinct qu'aux déductions de la logique'²⁷, while in Dufrenne's reasoning the problem gives rise to a vicious circle:

l'objet esthétique ne peut être défini lui-même que comme le corrélat de l'expérience esthétique. N'allons-nous pas, alors, être pris dans un cercle? Il faudra définir l'objet esthétique par l'expérience esthétique et l'expérience esthétique par l'objet esthétique²⁸.

However, whereas such a situation is tantamount, for Blanchot, to a logical catastrophe in which his reasoning can only founder, for Picon and Dufrenne it is no more than a further challenge to reason, posing it considerable problems but unable to affect its inherent nature. Each therefore affirms, as a preliminary to his argument, the absolute legitimacy of his approach, and defines the relationship which will exist in his work between reason and its

object. In each case, this relationship excludes from its bounds the moment of unmediated experience which Blanchot so insistently returns to. For Dufrenne, this amounts to a choice only to consider 'l'expérience du spectateur' and to consider 'l'expérience de l'artiste' only in so far as it is revealed to the spectator in the work²⁹; while for Picon, it consists of rejecting any approach to art which is based upon instinct, since, he claims, at the heart of aesthetic experience there is always to be found 'une compréhension, une attitude théorique -- confuse ou explicite, peu importe. ... Il y a toujours une conscience quelque part'³⁰. Hence, 'le spectateur conscient de tout ce qu'implique sa relation à l'oeuvre est le seul qui soit qualifié'³¹, whereas,

se situant dans l'indiscutable, abordant l'oeuvre d'art comme un domaine qui échappe à l'erreur puisqu'il échappe à la vérité, l'instinct a des faux pas irrémédiables³².

Each of these thinkers therefore relegates subjective experience to a secondary, unauthentic level of rational behaviour, so that, as Picon's last words unintentionally remind us, by 1953 opposition to Sartre's view of literature had succeeded as radically as Sartre in expelling from the field of philosophical and critical enquiry everything which is of significance in Blanchot's theory of literature. The motive force behind this process was of course the search for a new form of humanism which marked the later post-war period. If as early as 1946 Sartre had felt it necessary to interpret his Existentialism in humanistic terms, by 1950 the need for renewed human values had assumed the nature of a powerful imperative for thinkers from every side. Malraux's theory of art and the aesthetics which were based upon it were part of that search, and it is over this question that Blanchot parts company with Malraux's analyses.

His criticism of Malraux is far from precipitate. He seeks, as I have said, to enter into the spirit of his subject's research, and spends a dozen pages of his study analysing with total approval an undertaking which he

describes as 'restituer à l'art l'expérience qui est la sienne, le monde qui lui est propre'³³. Moreover, when at last his analysis begins to diverge with Malraux's, this is marked by indulgence and comprehension:

plus on avance dans la recherche d'un problème, plus il devient difficile de ne pas l'exprimer au regard de toutes les questions auxquelles on est lié vitalement. Malraux s'intéresse à la peinture, mais, on le sait, il s'intéresse aussi à l'homme: sauver l'un par l'autre, il n'a pu échapper à cette grande tentation³⁴.

Nevertheless, the question of the human significance of art is the stumbling-block to any further agreement with Malraux, and it is on this point that Mikel Dufrenne enters the debate. He sums up Blanchot's position as follows:

M. Blanchot semble reprocher discrètement à Malraux d'avoir abandonné en route le thème du Musée imaginaire qui eût dû le conduire à considérer l'art vraiment pour lui-même, comme un univers clos, ... et d'avoir au contraire forcé les portes de cet univers, réintroduit en lui les valeurs de culture et les figures de l'histoire, pour en faire 'non plus le temple des images, mais celui des civilisations, des religions, des splendeurs historiques'. Ce soupçon nous semble injuste³⁵.

He agrees with Blanchot that Malraux's concern with painting is inseparable from his concern for man, but adds:

mais pourquoi parler de tentation comme s'il s'agissait d'un péché ou d'une erreur? Le souci de rendre justice à l'art moderne et à la conception moderne de l'art qui, tout en se manifestant à travers cet art, a permis la résurrection et la confrontation de tous les arts du monde, est-il incompatible avec un humanisme?³⁶

In fact, he never truly answers this question -- not, that is, through logical argument, and there is no surer sign of the difference of standpoint which lies at the heart of this debate. He acknowledges that Blanchot's analyses take as their point of departure a fundamental absence at the heart of literary experience, but refuses to understand the term except as 'l'envers d'une présence'³⁷, a presence which is equivalent to what Malraux calls creation. At no time is Blanchot's reasoning analysed for the way it

uses the term absence. Dufrenne takes no account of the arguments of 'La littérature et le droit à la mort' and merely assumes the true sense of the word for Blanchot in order to exclude it quite arbitrarily from consideration:

ce que M. Blanchot appelle absence, n'est-ce pas ce qu'il y a d'inépuisable dans l'oeuvre et qu'attestent ses métamorphoses, et ce qu'il y a d'infiniment exigeant dans l'art et qu'atteste son histoire? L'absence serait alors l'envers d'une présence, et le néant, l'expression de la plénitude de l'être. Sinon, de quel droit évoquer le néant à propos de l'oeuvre? Comment refuser à Malraux que l'oeuvre soit d'abord création? Cet autre monde qu'elle porte en elle, ce n'est pas le néant, c'est la négation du monde quotidien, négation qu'il faut mettre très positivement au compte de l'homme et au racine de l'humain. Et si cette négation implique le néant, il faut l'entendre au sens où l'entend Sartre; ce n'est pas un néant qui affecte l'objet esthétique³⁸.

There is something ironic about this appeal to Sartre by a thinker who must be considered as in opposition to Sartre as a theorist of literature, and this appeal is symptomatic of the absolute refusal of thinkers at the time to admit the validity of Blanchot's position. Dufrenne does not argue with Blanchot, he denies him any say ('de quel droit évoquer le néant à propos de l'oeuvre?'), and merely dismisses his thinking as based upon unreflexion, as 'une métaphysique de l'art émouvante mais équivoque'³⁹. Blanchot thus finds himself, as previously over Michaux, taken to task over his refusal of the humanistic significance of art. At this stage in his career, however, the question has become a crucial one, for it marks a parting of the ways between his thinking and a rising tradition of artistic theory, and is at the heart of his originality as a thinker. During the period in question, so to find himself out of tune with the prevailing ideology was of course to risk the wilderness. Yet in his pursuit of a counterargument to Malraux's humanistic interpretation of art can be seen the first signs of an awareness that a way out of the impasse could be found.

If Blanchot rejects Malraux's conclusions, it is because they are at variance with the logical conclusions at which his argument should arrive. If the Museum is the place where art, free at last from contingent circumstances, can emerge as truly and entirely itself, how is it possible to restrict the definition of this absolute by labelling it 'human'? The significance of the Museum is that it reveals art as an autonomous value capable of many forms of expression:

si l'art se définit et se constitue par sa distance à l'égard du monde, par l'absence de monde, il est naturel que tout ce qui met le monde en question, ce qu'on appelle d'un mot, devenu d'un usage si peu rigoureux, la transcendance, tout ce qui dépasse, nie, détruit, menace l'ensemble des relations stables, aisées, raisonnablement établies et soucieuses de durer, toutes ces puissances, qu'elles soient pures ou impures, proposées au 'salut' de l'homme ou à sa destruction, dans la mesure où elles font voler en éclats la validité du monde commun, travaillent pour l'art et lui ouvrent la voie, l'appellent⁴⁰.

Blanchot is here arguing from the standpoint of 'l'absence de monde' which the Museum incarnates and which corresponds, for him, to the experience of art. He is thus espousing totally the standpoint from which Malraux seems to argue but only partially respects. This allows him to reinterpret the evolution of art from a religious to a secular context upon which Malraux bases his humanism. By devoting his art to the Gods, the artist was safeguarding its essential nature, in that their absence from the world accommodated its own. They were thus 'l'illusion étonnante qui a permis à l'artiste, en se consacrant à leur culte, de consacrer l'art':

l'art est à ce moment religion, c'est-à-dire étranger à lui-même, mais cette étrangeté, étant ce qui l'arrache aux valeurs profanes, est aussi ce qui à son insu le met au plus près de sa vérité propre, bien que non manifeste. En ce sens, on pourrait dire que les dieux n'ont été que les substituts temporaires, les masques sublimes -- mais sans beauté -- de la puissance artistique, aussi longtemps que celle-ci, par la dialectique de l'histoire et des métamorphoses, n'avait pu conquérir, dans l'artiste enfin réduit à soi,

la conscience de son autonomie et de sa solitude⁴¹.

Art is thus an autonomous power, exercised by men and relayed in various forms over the centuries until its emergence in the modern age as truly itself. It is over the interpretation of this latest and final stage in its metamorphosis that Blanchot differs with Malraux:

a partir du moment où l'art a pris conscience de sa vérité, où il s'est révélé comme refus du monde et affirmation de la solitude du Musée, cette absence, cette profondeur où vivaient les dieux pour habituer l'artiste à se passer de la vie, reconquise par la peinture, ne doit-elle pas à son tour disparaître dans la peinture, être peinture -- et rien de plus, être ce fait que la peinture vaut en tant que peinture -- et rien d'autre? 42.

In other words, is it not possible to claim that painting itself is the value by which the evolution of art as visible in the Museum must be understood, that what the gods concealed from the artist was not that the transcendent, absolute value of his activity lay in reality within him, but that the sole value governing his activity was immanent in the particular work he was producing? In short, that art is not of human significance, but that man's true significance lies in art? In Malraux's thinking however, Blanchot claims:

l'absence ... n'accepte pas de se laisser ainsi maîtriser par l'art et elle prétend encore, sous des noms plus ou moins éclatants -- la qualité humaine, l'image idéale de l'homme, l'honneur d'être homme, en un mot, 'la part essentielle du monde' -- à demeurer la puissance exemplaire, la divinité que l'art ne saurait laisser inexprimée sans se perdre⁴³.

Malraux thus remains incapable, in Blanchot's eyes, of assuming theoretically the full consequences of his reasoning, and the way he explains this is an important indication of how his relationship to criticism had developed at this stage. For when he recognises that Malraux's fundamental aim is to 'restituer à l'art l'expérience qui est la sienne, le monde qui lui est propre', this is based not on deduction but on imagination:

Il y aurait des raisons assez fortes pour imaginer la Psychologie de l'Art occupée uniquement à restituer à l'art l'expérience qui est la sienne, le monde qui lui est propre, cet Univers du Musée (monade sans fenêtre), que crée et que suscite l'artiste jusque dans l'infini du temps, parfaitement suffisant, ordonné par soi-même, orienté en vue de soi seul, animé par la durée de ses métamorphoses, solitude digne de toutes les passions et de tous les sacrifices, où celui qui s'y engage sait qu'il va au-devant du plus grand danger, car ce qu'il cherche, c'est l'extrême. Oui, on peut imaginer cette tournure qu'auraient prise les recherches de Malraux, et on se dit qu'elle ne serait peut-être pas en désaccord avec 'une de ses parts essentielles', celle qui l'a lié à la peinture et aux arts plastiques d'une passion véritable⁴⁴.

This use of the verb imaginer must be taken in its fullest implications, as what Blanchot goes on to say makes clear:

Mais peut-être eût-il fallu pour cela que Malraux fût peintre, qu'il s'intéressât à la peinture pour la continuer et non pour la justifier, pour la faire et non pour la voir⁴⁵.

It would seem, in the light of this conclusion, that Blanchot's dilemma, at the time, had led him to the conclusion that the best way to explore the experience of art was to become or to remain a practitioner. As if he was becoming aware of the true nature of the standpoint which he had come to occupy in La Part, Blanchot would here seem to be repudiating criticism as an autonomous discipline. Indeed, in his opening description of Malraux's method this is made quite clear. He begins by citing the general view that Malraux's art criticism is disorganised, in order to refute it: 'ce mouvement -- cet apparent désordre -- est, à coup sûr, un des côtés attrayants de ces livres'⁴⁶. Malraux's ideas are not rendered incoherent by it, because 'ce ne sont pas tout à fait des idées qui ici ne seraient guère à leur place'⁴⁷, and it is precisely this absence of ideas as such (and thus of theory) that justifies Malraux's undertaking in Blanchot's eyes:

les pensées, bien qu'elles tendent, selon leurs exigences propres, à une vue importante et générale de l'art, dans leur dialogue aventuré avec les oeuvres, avec les

images qu'elles accompagnent, réussissent, sans perdre leur valeur explicative, à s'éclairer d'une lumière qui n'est pas purement intellectuelle, à glisser vers je ne sais quoi de plus ouvert que leur sens, à réaliser, pour elles-mêmes -- et pour nous qui sommes destinés à les comprendre --, une expérience qui imite celle de l'art, plutôt qu'elle n'en rend compte. Ainsi les idées deviennent-elles des thèmes, des motifs, et leur développement peu cohérent, dont on se plaint, exprime, au contraire, leur ordre le plus vrai, qui est de se constituer, de s'éprouver au contact de l'histoire par un mouvement dont la vivacité, le vagabondage apparent nous rendent sensibles la succession historique des oeuvres et leur présence simultanée dans le Musée où la culture, aujourd'hui, les rassemble⁴⁸.

The significance of this for Blanchot's development is crucial, for what he identifies as the saving grace of Malraux's method, as that which prevents its logical shortcomings from being equivalent to the betrayal of its subject (as was the case with Sartre), is precisely what we have identified as the involuntary sympathetic behaviour which gradually overtook Blanchot's own argument in La Part; Malraux has turned theoretical reasoning into a form of mimesis. Moreover, he does not see this as a voluntary process but as one of the results of 'un débat pathétique que Malraux semble poursuivre entre les diverses parts de lui-même'⁴⁹, so that, in a quite remarkable fashion, Blanchot has succeeded by 1950 in identifying and defining, in what amounts to a process of transference, precisely that complex situation in which his own reasoning finds itself. What is pathetic in Malraux's dilemma clearly corresponds to the pathos of Blanchot's, and though there can be little doubt that, at this stage, Blanchot was not directly aware of this correspondence, there occurs at the same period an important mutation in his approach to criticism which must be seen, I believe, as a gradual coming to awareness of what his encounter with Malraux reveals about his own situation.

This coming to awareness takes two forms, neither of which is without its dangers. On the one hand, it leads

Blanchot to devalue the critic's rôle quite radically, while on the other, partly as a counterweight to this, it drives him to adopt an extreme theoretical position in his defence of what is essential to art. His devaluation of the critic's role is of course visible simply in the inconsistency with which Blanchot wrote critically at this time. In the first article to appear in L'Observateur, however, it becomes the theme of his analysis. The article is entitled 'La condition critique' and it begins: 'Il faut peut-être se demander encore: pourquoi la critique, pourquoi cet exercice?'⁵⁰. After what occurs in La Part this question is by no means a rhetorical one, and what is more, the answer Blanchot provides is far from comforting. He begins by quoting a remark once made by a patient of the psychiatrist Pierre Janet: 'un livre à propos duquel il faut réfléchir devient sale'. Rilke is then quoted as an echo of the same attitude: 'les oeuvres sont d'une infinie solitude; pour saisir une oeuvre d'art, rien n'est pire que les mots de la critique'. Blanchot is not out merely to agree with these judgements however. The description of criticism by the patient and by Rilke is not contested, but is presented as a necessary evil. There is no denying that criticism interferes inexcusably with the work: 'son rôle est d'attirer les oeuvres hors d'elles-mêmes, hors de ce point de fascinante discrétion où elles se forment et voudraient s'enfermer'. However, these works must be so profaned, 'il faut qu'elles deviennent impures', for it is only in this way that art may be freed from 'l'égout de l'éternel' which tempts it. This could appear as no more than cynical resignation to the condition which for so long he sought to refuse. However, in what he goes on to say, Blanchot reveals that this recognition of the inevitability of the conflict between criticism and literature is pointing tentatively towards an entirely new definition of their relationship:

la puissance critique appartient au jour
dans ce qu'il a de fugitif, d'instantané;
elle a la versatilité du jour qui passe,
mais cela signifie aussi qu'elle est mouve-
ment et devenir, et son rôle est de dissou-
dre la solennité et le caractère abrupt,

enfermé, des oeuvres en les livrant à la réflexion de la vie, qui, on le sait, et par bonheur, ne respecte rien. En outre, on comprend que le critique doive être sans art propre et sans talent personnel: il ne doit pas être à lui-même son centre; il est un regard, soit, mais un regard anonyme, impersonnel, vagabond. En ce sens, on peut dire que la condition du critique est des plus difficiles et exige une ascèse presque insoutenable. Un être anonyme, irresponsable, une présence sans lendemain, quelqu'un qui ne doit jamais dire 'je', mais tout au plus 'nous', l'écho puissant d'une parole exprimée par personne. Cela n'est pas dit par dérision. L'un des torts des philosophies contemporaines est d'avoir déprécié futilement la valeur du 'on'.

In La Part, as we saw, the tendency of what is most secret in literature to become public was resisted in an argument conducted from the standpoint of literary experience itself, and which gradually degenerated into helpless mimesis of that experience. At that stage, therefore, Blanchot's criticism could be analysed on three distinct levels. What has now become evident, however, is that the dilemma in which he found himself in La Part was not only the result of his uncompromising adherence to a single affirmative position, but the fact that, owing to the continued subordination of the work's overall argument to the traditional theoretical standpoint, the three levels of its argument -- the descriptive, the prescriptive and the mimetic -- were unable to appear for what they are: namely, exact parallels of each other. If, as we concluded, the behaviour of the theoretical argument of La Part ends up as a mimesis of the experience it is seeking to define, what was less easy to conclude from reading that work has now occurred to Blanchot himself: the interference of critical discourse with what the work is attempting to say is not an obstacle to its saying it, it is an integral part of that attempt. Throughout La Part, the experience of literature was presented as a contradictory one, and contradiction was repeatedly affirmed as the essence of that experience. Therefore, Blanchot now infers, that which most radically contradicts the movement of literature, namely

criticism, must therefore be that which most fully respects it. Hence, he concludes:

la critique est ... dans son rôle quand elle contrarie le mouvement de l'oeuvre. ... Cela n'est pas tout. Il est clair que la contrariété exige davantage et qu'elle n'atteint son vrai point qu'au moment où le critique et l'art se confondent, quand ce qu'on appelle la conscience créatrice accepte de se perdre dans le regard superficiel du jour et s'affirme complice de la préoccupation qui la méconnaît. ... /L'/ important, c'est que le créateur se déclare solidaire non pas de la vaine éternité où la création l'attire, mais du présent périssable qui /que?/ lui assure la création d'une critique sans lendemain.

This is an absolute reversal of the perspective governing La Part, and thus a clear break with the situation in that work. There, the parallel between the work's behaviour and the nature of the experience, it sought to respect condemned Blanchot's argument to passive mimesis in an attempt to ward off the incursions of traditional critical discourse. Now, by a simple shift of parallelism, it is the mimetic trap itself which is rendered harmless as Blanchot becomes aware of the fundamental complementarity between criticism and literature. The standpoint he so tenaciously occupied in La Part now appears as quite unjustified, as he seems unwittingly to recognise when he writes:

le critique qui se dévoue avec excès à l'intimité de l'art, passe, à la fin, dans l'obscurité de l'art et se renie lui-même. Il n'est plus la mauvaise volonté, la volonté capricieuse du moment présent qui éclaire un instant le livre (ou le néglige) et en tire ce qu'il veut; mais il devient la bonne volonté assidue qui aime la culture, qui par-dessus tout aime les livres et les respecte et les sauve.

His method has now broken out of the paralysing situation to which it had condemned itself, dispelled 'l'obscurité de l'art' which had overtaken it and discovered the basis for a viable theoretical standpoint in relation to literature.

The emergence of this new standpoint depends upon a

redefinition of two related factors, common to it and to the standpoint it replaces. They are the subject of experience and the present moment of experience. Blanchot's entire argument in La Part consisted of affirming the loss of identity and the break with temporal continuity undergone during literary experience. But now it is precisely that loss and that break which are being affirmed as what occurs during the process of criticising literature. This shift is crucial. In La Part, as I have said, the parallel was present. On the one hand, the way criticism invades and disseminates what is most secret in literature is a constant theme; while on the other, the way literary experience destroys individual identity and condemns consciousness to err endlessly in search of itself is affirmed repeatedly. One thing separated these two levels absolutely however: the assumption that on the first, the standpoint of theory remained intact while on the second, it had been eclipsed. Clearly, that distinction was simply a reflection of Blanchot's knowledge that, in writing about literature, he was inevitably adopting a theoretical standpoint. What his argument in 'La condition critique' reveals, however, is that although it was an anti-critical standpoint, an attempt by theory to disarm theory, it remained incapable of extricating itself from the theoretical sphere. This was because, although it argued from the standpoint of literary experience, and thus from a standpoint of temporal discontinuity and loss of identity, it did so in response to theory and thus in terms of continuity and identity. It was thus still, to recall Alexandre Astruc's definition of Blanchot's method in Faux-pas, a reactionary⁵¹ method and, in a manner not dissimilar to the behaviour of his political discourse in the later 1930s⁵², it compensated for its inability to break out of the vicious circle of theoretical abstraction by projecting an image of the experience it was unable to define.

The cause of this impasse was thus the persistence of the theoretical standpoint throughout the process whereby it was contested, and, in what amounted to the ultimate development of Blanchot's reactionary political attitude as it is manifest before the war, the mainstay of that

standpoint consisted of what amounted to his counter-revolutionary reply to Sartre. With the disappearance of the relevance of the argument which originally gave rise to it, this mainstay to Blanchot's theory simply vanished. Initially, as we saw, the result lay outside of Blanchot's control. What the 1950 article reveals is that, at last, he has drawn fully the lesson of his experience in La Part. Henceforth, his criticism will not argue from an ideal standpoint both inside and outside of theoretical analysis: it will turn the dualism present in that ideal standpoint into a real process of alternation, in which a new subject, nous, will seek to evolve a form of literature consisting essentially of the encounter between reason and what exceeds it, a mode of communication respecting what is most real in the human condition.

At the time, however, this acceptance of the need to break altogether with the individual subject of reason, and adopt a standpoint corresponding to the loss of self which occurs in experience, led Blanchot to place excessive emphasis upon certain concepts and categories. This tendency, which can be seen clearly now as a process of compensating for the loss of traditional standpoint, left him open at the time to quite justified accusations of idealism. Unable any longer simply to affirm the truth as he did throughout La Part, Blanchot began to place his reasoning under the aegis of a series of anti-humanistic categories, which gradually came to constitute an abstract framework, which threatened his reasoning as much as its adherence to an individual, personal subject did. A case in point is his use of the notion of madness. In an article entitled 'La folie par excellence', published in 1951 as a review of Karl Jaspers's book Strindberg und Van Gogh and later published as the preface to its French translation ⁵³, his reaction to a humanism founded upon the supremacy of rational judgement takes the form, as it also does elsewhere, of affirming the creative power of madness. There is of course nothing untoward about this in itself, and, in the hands of thinkers since Blanchot, it has become an important subject of reflection.

The problem, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out, is that though Blanchot was seeking, in this article, to free the madness of Hölderlin from definition in terms of either its conventional opposite or its clinical equivalent, this need to locate it somewhere quite outside the established framework of reasoning could not be fulfilled by the form of argument Blanchot was still employing: .

tout en affirmant la nécessité d'échapper à l'alternative des deux discours ('car le mystère tient aussi à cette double lecture simultanée d'un événement qui cependant ne se situe ni dans l'une ni dans l'autre des deux versions', et d'abord parce que cet événement est celui du démonique qui 'se tient hors de l'opposition maladie-santé'), Blanchot retrécit le champ du savoir médical qui manque la singularité de l'événement et maîtrise d'avance toute surprise. 'Pour le savoir médical, cet événement est dans la "règle", n'est du moins pas surprenant, correspond à ce que l'on sait de ces malades à qui le cauchemar prête une plume.' Cette réduction de la réduction clinique est une réduction essentialiste⁵⁴.

In attempting to assert the impersonal nature of Hölderlin's experience (and also of Artaud's), in keeping with his recent insight into the true nature of literary experience, Blanchot's reasoning simply grinds to a halt, as can be seen in the following passage which Derrida quotes:

on ne peut pas se contenter de voir dans le destin de Hölderlin celui d'une individualité, admirable ou sublime, qui, ayant voulu trop fortement quelque chose de grand, dut aller jusqu'au point où elle se brisa. Son sort n'appartient qu'à lui, mais lui-même appartient à ce qu'il exprima et découvrit, non pas comme étant à lui seul, mais comme la vérité et l'affirmation de l'essence poétique⁵⁵.

It is clear here that, although Blanchot recognises the need for a new subject and a new mode of communication in this passage, he cannot accommodate them in his reasoning. He goes so far: Hölderlin, as an individual, gave himself up completely to a process during which he lost all status as an individual. Blanchot is here on the threshold of defining the new subject of literary communication, the nous he referred to in his 1950 article: Hölderlin discovered and

expressed something which was 'non pas ... à lui seul'. At this point, however, his argument can go no further, and, as if it had overstretched itself in so affirming what cannot be reduced to theoretical terms, it falls heavily back upon theoretical reasoning at its most substantial: 'la vérité et l'affirmation de l'essence poétique'.

Another of the anti-humanistic categories under which Blanchot seeks to range his argument at this period is that of death. We have already encountered his use of it in La Part, and in the period following the publication of that work, it becomes, far more so than the notion of madness, a veritable scourge in the passion endured by his thinking. Time and again, between 1950 and 1955, when L'Espace at last puts an end to the existing state of affairs, his reasoning falls back, just as with madness, upon the experience of death as a means of communicating to its reader that irreducible moment of excess, which constitutes what he can no longer call the experience of literature. There is no better illustration of this than the long study, first published in Les Temps Modernes under the title 'L'art, la littérature et l'expérience originelle' in 1952⁵⁶. This study is undoubtedly a turning-point for Blanchot after La Part, for it is simultaneously a sum of all of the excesses of which his thinking was capable at the time, and also the matrix for all of the themes and subjects which were to make up the studies in L'Espace. In it, he refines upon the position he adopted in 'La littérature et le droit à la mort' in order to argue against Sartre. In doing so, however, he comes up brutally against the limits of the discourse he is using, and resorts in a quite excessive fashion to what amounts to a rhetoric of pathos, by which his argument compensates for its inability to define its subject by simply behaving as it does.

The study begins by asserting the fundamental nature of the question: 'une réponse juste s'enracine dans la question ... La réponse authentique est toujours vie de la question' (p.281 of L'Espace). 'La littérature et le droit à la mort' also began with such an affirmation. It based its argument, however, upon paradox. This study seeks to break

with the dependence upon paradox which we saw affect the argument of La Part. Hence, instead of proceeding, as did 'La littérature et le droit à la mort', by basing the dialectical progress of its argument upon a paradox which simultaneously revealed it as illusory, this text constantly returns to the basic question of literature. Moreover, the question is explicitly presented as an alternative to a sterile form of reasoning, which could well be a description of what Blanchot's own had been until then:

il se peut que la question cherche seulement à se perdre dans la répétition où ce qui a été dit une fois, s'apaise en redites. Mais, peut-être, par ce harcèlement, entend-elle surtout rester ouverte. Rester en suspens? Non. Maintenir les oppositions, les laisser se heurter dans l'espace stérile où ce qui s'oppose ne se rencontre pas, cela n'a rien à voir avec le vif de la question. Il faut donc écarter les contrariétés qui lassent les problèmes et, au contraire, tenir fermement la littérature à l'écart des débats où elle se divise sans pouvoir remonter à elle-même comme à l'origine de ce partage (pp. 281-282).

In principle, this would appear as a viable alternative to his former method. By using the question as an instrument of analysis, affirmation, owing to which his reasoning had eventually foundered, could be transformed into something which freed reasoning from its impasse, by locating what is certain outside of the existing framework of reasoning yet maintaining it in a relationship to reason which was active rather than passive in nature. The question, by combining the force of affirmation and the complexity of paradox, would seem the ideal way out of the vicious circle to which the other two had given rise. Hence it is to a basic question, 'qu'en est-il de l'art? qu'en est-il de la littérature?' (p. 281), that Blanchot allows his argument repeatedly to return, as it seeks to come to terms with an affirmation which is now that of 'les chef-d'oeuvres' themselves: 'cette affirmation qu'ils nous apportent', in which 'ce que l'oeuvre dit, c'est qu'elle est, et rien de plus' (p. 298, plus variant). This permits Blanchot to range widely over the entire field of contemporary problems, and re-

late them to the fundamental question of literature. Thus, after exploring the paradox that man's possibility arises solely from his own impossibility, that his power to negate is an expression of his subjection to death, he goes on:

mais qu'en est-il de l'art, qu'en est-il de la littérature? La question revient à présent avec une violence particulière (p. 326).

It is evident from this section of his argument that his point of departure in a question undeniably prevents his argument from remaining caught in the paradoxes which it encounters. A little further on, in a section entitled, in L'Espace, 'Retour à la question', he makes this point once again:

nous parvenons ici au point où la question qui nous a été posée fait surgir dans toute sa force la contradiction à laquelle toute réponse retourne (p. 332).

Then, after restating the terms in which that question has come to be posed by him, he says: 'Telle est la question. Elle demande à ne pas être dépassée' (p. 333). Finally, he reiterates the primacy of the question, in terms which show how significant an instrument it has been in his emergence from the impasse present in La Part:

nous pourrions donc avoir l'oeuvre? nous aurions l'art?

A cette question, il ne peut être répondu. Le poème est l'absence de réponse. Le poète est celui qui, par son sacrifice, maintient en son oeuvre la question ouverte. ... /La/ question est réservée dans l'oeuvre (p. 337).

It is clear here that his previous assertion that 'le poème devance le poète', his affirmation of 'l'antériorité du poème par rapport au poète' have had the idealism which marks them reduced and rendered ineffective by this use of the question. Blanchot is clearly using the question, if not in an original way, nevertheless in a way which permits him to purify his own argument as much as to explore other people's.

Nevertheless, the study as a whole remains caught, despite its methodological refinements, within the same circle of argument as emerged from La Part. A sign of this is that though the notion of the poem's 'antériorité' is prevented from exerting the same idealistic influence as it

once did, in the original article, Blanchot went so far as to quote the passage in La Part which uses the expression. This is omitted when the article is included in L'Espace (cf p. 297), and omitted a second time (p. 208) when it recurs. On another occasion, however, it is left in, when, after referring to 'la dépendance de l'artiste au regard de l'oeuvre', Blanchot goes on:

l'étrangeté de l'inspiration est liée à cette antériorité essentielle du poème par rapport au poète (p. 306).

Significantly, this passage is otherwise fundamentally reworked for its inclusion in L'Espace, and I shall examine in it in due course. For the moment, this is significant above all for the way it points to what, between the original article and L'Espace in which it is incorporated, amounts to a struggle between two fundamental tendencies in Blanchot's thinking. The volume published in 1955, although by including the article it acknowledges the validity of the arguments it contains, in effect neutralises it in the process. Such is the omission and reworking that Blanchot carries out that if, as I said, the article contains everything which provides the argument of L'Espace, it is simultaneously superseded as a means of approaching its problem. This is because, even though he replaces affirmation by questioning as the mode upon which to approach the significance of literature, as his approach gradually encounters the same resistance from its subject as did that of La Part, he indulges, much more than in the preceding work, in excessive paradox.

This begins with the emergence of the theme of exile:

le poème est l'exil, et le poète qui lui appartient appartient à l'insatisfaction de l'exil, est toujours hors de lui-même, hors de son lieu natal, appartient à l'étranger, à ce qui est le dehors sans intimité et sans limite ... l'artiste n'appartient pas à la vérité, parce que l'oeuvre est elle-même ce qui échappe au mouvement du vrai, ... désignant cette région où rien ne demeure, où ce qui a lieu n'a cependant pas eu lieu, où ce qui recommence n'a encore jamais commencé (p. 322).

Gradually, in this passage, an obsessive tone begins to make itself heard, while the language of analytical discourse rapidly changes into that of the pathetic evocation of unbearable experience. As his argument progresses, this rhetoric and this topography of poetic experience begin to impose themselves more and more upon the argument. Hence, beginning as a definition, the following passages ends up as the monologue of an anguished soul:

erreur signifie le fait d'errer, de ne pouvoir demeurer parce que, là où l'on est, manquent les conditions d'un ici décisif; là, ... ce qui arrive, n'arrive pas, mais non plus ne passe pas, n'est jamais dépassé, arrive et revient sans cesse, est l'horreur et la confusion et l'incertitude du ressassement éternel. ... L'errant n'a pas sa patrie dans la vérité, mais dans l'exil, il se tient en dehors, en deçà, à l'écart, là où règne la profondeur de la dissimulation, cette obscurité élémentaire qui ne le laisse frayer avec rien et, à cause de cela, est l'effrayant (p. 323).

All logical considerations (including etymological ones) are gradually thrown to the winds by this stage in Blanchot's argument. He is no longer truly reasoning: he is indulging in a strange and only half-controlled form of lyricism, a sort of Ode to death. Time and again, logical categories yield to such terms as 'l'entrelacement du Oui et du Non, le flux et le reflux de l'ambiguïté essentielle' (p. 325), or 'le piétinement harrassant de la répétition' (p. 328), or 'l'éternel clapotement du retour' (p. 331).

There is a clear influence present in this: it is that of Emmanuel Lévinas, whom Blanchot refers to at this point in his argument (p. 326), but whom he also pastiches in a rather alarming way in the following passage:

l'art, comme image, comme mot et comme rythme, indique la proximité menaçante d'un dehors vague et vide, existence neutre, nulle, sans limite, sordide absence, étouffante condensation où sans cesse être se perpétue sous l'espèce du néant (p. 330).

This passage is a clear echo of the following one, to be found in Lévinas's De l'existence à l'existant:

mourir, c'est chercher une sortie de l'être, aller là où la liberté et la négation opèr-

ent. L'horreur est l'événement d'être qui retourne au sein de cette négation, comme si rien n'avait bougé. ... Dans le néant que crée le crime, l'être se condense jusqu'à l'étouffement et arrache précisément la conscience à sa 'retraite' de conscience⁵⁷.

There can be no doubt that, at this period, Lévinas's ontological researches provided Blanchot with an alternative analytical mode in the impasse in which he found himself. It also fuelled the passion of theoretical analysis to which he was subject. It is only in composing L'Espace littéraire that he finds a means of breaking free of that subjection, and it is to that work that I now wish to turn.

Notes to Part II, Chapter 2

1. Gaëtan Picon, 'Littérature du XXe siècle', in Encyclopédie de la Pléiade. Histoire des littératures, III (Paris, 1958), p. 1359.
2. *ibid.*, p. 1361.
3. *ibid.*, p. 1359.
4. Gaëtan Picon, L'Usage de la lecture, I (Paris, 1960), p. 199.
5. Sarah Lawall, Critics of Consciousness (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 239.
6. *ibid.*, p. 263.
7. *ibid.*, p. 258.
8. *ibid.*
9. Neil Oxenhandler, 'Paradox and Negation in the Criticism of Maurice Blanchot', Symposium, 16 (1962), pp. 38-39.
10. *ibid.*, p. 40.
11. *ibid.*, p. 39.
12. *ibid.*, p. 42.
13. Manuel de Diéguez, L'Ecrivain et son langage (Paris, 1960), p. 11.
14. *ibid.*, p. 159.
15. *ibid.*, p. 161.
16. *ibid.*, p. 171.
17. Julien Gracq, La Littérature à l'estomac (Paris, 1950), p. 12.
18. There can be little doubt that Blanchot's relationship with Critique was not an easy one. Cf the following chapter.
19. Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle provides the following indication in his Les Non-conformistes des années 30 (Paris, 1969):
 à la Libération il collabora aux premières
 - livraisons des Temps Modernes, mais s'éloigna de l'existentialisme militant par son refus de tout engagement politique (p. 458).
20. Jean Pfeiffer, 'Maurice Blanchot', Le Disque Vert, 4 (1953), p. 50.
21. André Malraux, La Psychologie de l'art (Genève, 1947-1950).
22. Gaëtan Picon, L'Ecrivain et son ombre (Paris, 1953).
23. Mikel Dufrenne, Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique (Paris, 1953).
24. de Diéguez, p. 13.

25. Dufrenne, p. 281: 'l'objet esthétique est un objet essentiellement perçu, je veux dire voué à la perception et qui ne s'accomplit qu'en elle'.
26. Picon, p. 28.
27. *ibid.*, p. 76.
28. Dufrenne, p. 4.
29. *ibid.*...
30. Picon, p. 29.
31. *ibid.*, p. 81.
32. *ibid.*, p. 82.
33. L'Amitié, p. 32.
34. *ibid.*..
35. Dufrenne, pp. 211-212.
36. *ibid.*, p. 212.
37. *ibid.*, p. 213.
38. *ibid.*
39. *ibid.*, p. 212.
40. L'Amitié, p. 33.
41. *ibid.*..
42. *ibid.*, p. 34.
43. *ibid.*..
44. *ibid.*, p. 32; *my italics*.
45. *ibid.*..
46. *ibid.*, p. 21.
47. *ibid.*..
48. *ibid.*, p. 22; *my italics*.
49. *ibid.*, p. 35.
50. 'La condition critique', L'Observateur, 18 mai 1950, p. 18.
51. Alexandre Astruc, 'A propos de Faux pas', Poésie 44, 19 (1944), pp. 88-92.
52. For an indication of what this process entailed, cf Introduction.
53. Cf Critique, 45 (février 1951), pp. 99-118. Also Karl Jaspers, Strindberg et Van Gogh, Swedenborg et Hölderlin (Paris, 1953).
54. Jacques Derrida, 'La parole soufflée', in L'Ecriture et la différence (Paris, 1967). The passage quoted is from p. 257.
55. *ibid.*..
56. 'L'art, la littérature et l'expérience originelle', in

Temps Modernes, 79 and 80 (mai, juin 1952), pp. 1921-1951, 2195-2212.

57. Emmanuel Lévinas, De l'existence à l'existant (Paris, 1947), p. 100.

PART II, CHAPTER 3: L'ESPACE LITTERAIRE

Before he even begins to read L'Espace, the reader is given a sign that his task is not going to be a simple one. This takes the form of a short prefatory note, not unlike the one which introduces the new version of Thomas l'obscur and, like that one, destined to indicate how the work it introduces differs from those which precede it and thus breaks with generic tradition. It reads as follows:

Un livre, même fragmentaire, a un centre qui l'attire: centre non pas fixe, mais qui se déplace par la pression du livre et les circonstances de sa composition. Centre fixe aussi, qui se déplace, s'il est véritable, en restant le même et en devenant toujours plus central, plus dérobé, plus incertain et plus impérieux. Celui qui écrit le livre l'écrit par désir, par ignorance de ce centre. Le sentiment de l'avoir touché peut bien n'être que l'illusion de l'avoir atteint; quand il s'agit d'un livre d'éclaircissements, il y a une sorte de loyauté méthodique à dire vers quel point il semble que le livre se dirige: ici, vers les pages intitulées Le regard d'Orphée.

Now there can be no doubt that these lines will signify virtually nothing to the unprepared reader who simply opens L'Espace in search of traditional critical fare. First of all, they seem concerned solely with the author's relationship to his work, so that their concluding indication appears as little more than a grudging concession by him to the lesser intelligence of his reader. What is more, in a manner for which Blanchot has by this stage become notorious, they resort to such extended paradoxical reasoning in order to make their point that, when it comes, the temptation is to feel that it could have been made far more simply.

When one approaches this preface in the light of a knowledge of Blanchot's position at this time, however, it appears far less mystifying and indeed provides a precious indication of how Blanchot is seeking, in L'Espace, to put his new conception of the critic's rôle into practice. An important element in what it says is the recognition that L'Espace is a fragmentary work. This means that, unlike the two works which precede it, it is not seeking to synthesise the reflexions of several years into a single, continuous argument, but, in keeping with the realisation by Blanchot that the critic's role is to maintain and assert the primacy of the present moment over the eternity into which literature seeks constantly, with the aid of theory, to slip, to bring together a number of texts from the years preceding its appearance while preserving what gave them their particular significance at the time. A second, even more important element in what the preface has to say is therefore that a fragmentary work is not without form. L'Espace may not be constituted according to the laws of the genre, it is nevertheless governed by an alternative formal principle, and therefore capable of containing as fragments the texts it brings together.

At first sight, this principle appears to be one which can be understood by analogy with the one it replaces. The work, according to the preface, continues to have a centre and its argument to tend towards a certain point. In short, though fragmentary, L'Espace would seem still to be a volume of critical analysis. What complicates matters is that though the work continues to be definable in terms of traditional form, this is only negatively: according to the preface, L'Espace is essentially the absence of that form. On the other hand, however, this does not mean that the work is formless. Fragmentation is neither a state of imperfection nor a state of alternative perfection. Indeed it is not a state at all, but a process during which absence of unity is constantly affirmed as something towards which a satisfactory relationship must be sought. Within

the confines of the work there thus coexist two distinct and traditionally incompatible dimensions, one real and one imaginary, and this is complicated by the fact that what constitutes the unity of the work, namely its ability to be perceived as a volume, lies entirely within the imaginary dimension it contains. In reality, therefore, it is not a work at all, but, to use the terms of the preface, the process of desiring the work. L'Espace is thus, in anticipation of the work which follows it, purely un livre à venir, and one whose advent, moreover, lies in a moment of time which is absolutely inaccessible, since, as the preface points out with reference to its centre, 'le sentiment de l'avoir touché peut bien n'être que l'illusion de l'avoir atteint'.

All of this, it must be remembered, is imparted to us as constituting the author's experience of his work. His desire for a form of which he has lost all knowledge is what relates the various texts contained by L'Espace, and this corresponds to what he had come to see, by 1950, as the authentic critical attitude towards literature. In composing L'Espace, therefore, Blanchot was undoubtedly seeking to create, as a medium within which the separate products of that new insight might come together without losing their singularity, an encompassing instance of authentic critical behaviour, and thus to orient the reading of his work in a manner compatible with its subject. We must therefore expect, as we read L'Espace from beginning to end as, on one level, it asks to be, to find ourselves being gradually directed towards another way of approaching our subject, as the continuous curve of theoretical argument is deflected, distorted and ultimately broken under pressure from the new, critical, standpoint which inhabits it. The only clue we are given as to how this will occur is the information that the point towards which the work seems to tend lies in the section entitled 'Le regard d'Orphée'. This would appear to be extremely vague. However, if we understand the verb seem the way the preface intends us to, things become a little clearer: the relationship of criticism to literature is henceforth based upon their

common source in the imagination, and the task of criticism is to maintain the flow of imagination against the tendency of the completed work to transform its opposition to reason into a higher form of reason. Criticism must thus seek before all else to submit its own rational structure to the power of imagination, and in L'Espace, as we saw, Blanchot sets about this by making its relationship to that structure a purely illusory one. Hence the information that 'il semble que le livre se dirige ... vers les pages intitulées Le regard d'Orphée' is, despite its appearance, extremely precise, for it reveals that criticism will attain the most acute stage of its subjection of reason to imagination when it encounters the myth of Orpheus. We must now go on to examine how it brings about that encounter.

The articles which make up L'Espace are organised under a series of headings and sub-headings which make the work the most closely structured of all Blanchot's works of criticism. The first and the last chapters are constituted by the two important general studies of literature which Blanchot had written in the preceding years, respectively 'La solitude essentielle' and what in L'Espace is entitled 'La littérature et l'expérience originelle'. Between them lie what are identifiably two distinct sections of critical analysis: one, consisting of chapters II to IV, dealing with a series of authors (Mallarmé, Kafka and Rilke) and their relationship to their art; the other, consisting of chapters V to VI, and concerned with specific aspects of literary practice (inspiration, communication). Chapters I to IV occupy approximately two-thirds of the main body of the work, and it is clear from their chapter-headings that they are meant, despite the fragmentary nature of L'Espace, to be read in a continuous fashion. Indeed, according to those headings, they trace out a precise itinerary for the reader from a point of departure in chapter I. Hence, 'La solitude essentielle' leads to 'une approche de l'espace littéraire', as indeed is promised in

the opening sentence of chapter I:

Il semble que nous appenions quelque chose sur l'art, quand nous éprouvons ce que voudrait désigner le mot solitude (p.9).

This approach does not lead to an autonomous, identifiable form of space, however, for literary space, as the next chapter heading reveals, is space subject to a certain influence, for it is entitled 'l'espace et l'exigence de l'oeuvre'. Literary space differs from ordinary space through being as it were subject to the pull of the literary work. It is not the space of the work as might have been expected, but space as it becomes within the 'sphere' of literature, and, as chapter IV reveals by its title, this is a form of space bearing no relation either to everyday space or to what we might deduce from it about the space of literature, for that title is 'l'oeuvre et l'espace de la mort'.

It is clear from these chapter headings that though the reader is being directed firmly along a path which will lead from existence to experience, it is not a simple path, for between its beginning and its end he will somehow have left the domain of the possible (solitude), and entered that of the impossible (death). In short, experience which can be understood in relation to reality as I know it will have become experience of something which I can never know. It would thus appear that Blanchot has at last mastered the situation which, after La Part, condemned his reasoning to sterility. For this itinerary is none other than that followed so uncontrollably by Blanchot himself in the years preceding the appearance of L'Espace. The way his reasoning proceeded in La Part led, as we saw, to an increasingly sterile oscillation between two entirely incompatible standpoints, that of theoretical analysis with its roots in the possible and that of literature itself, which for Blanchot constituted an experience of the impossible. The outcome of this state of affairs was that the argument of La Part oscillated, outside of any conscious control, between these two opposed standpoints, so that the vacant centre of its theoretical field consisted of a mobile fissure, whose alea-

tory paralysis of the theoretical process resulted in a pathological form of mimesis, as compensation for the semiosis it could not achieve. Unwittingly, therefore, theory practised what it could not preach and, in the increasingly frequent intervals when its argument broke down, provided a demonstration of what it was trying to say.

By taking as the theme of his first four chapters precisely the itinerary which his reasoning has so far followed in an uncontrolled fashion, Blanchot would seem to be seeking to extricate his criticism once and for all from the trap into which it had fallen, by going step by step over ground he has already covered repeatedly. As has already become apparent, L'Espace is a work about the critical process and is concerned before all else to elaborate an approach to literature compatible with its true nature. By thus describing thematically the pattern displayed by his own criticism hitherto, and presenting it as the true pattern of our relationship to literature, he in effect frees his argument from the mimetic trap into which it had fallen, by separating once and for all the critical and the literary domains. The subject of L'Espace is thus the relationship between theoretical analysis and literature. It is thus a work of metacriticism which seeks, as I hope to show, to concentrate its analytical processes upon the difference between the two standpoints present in his criticism so far, and hence to occupy, consciously and cognitively, the vacant theoretical position discernible in that criticism.

There is thus more to these chapter headings than would first appear. Simply to claim that one is progressively leading one's reader from the domain of possible experience to that of impossible experience by talking to him about certain exemplary authors or works, does not constitute a solution to the dilemma in which Blanchot's reasoning finds itself at this time, and would not be any less susceptible to the processes it is seeking to analyse than the writing which precedes it. The itinerary thus traced out is not a simple one however. As we saw, the literary space towards

which experience of solitude points us does not turn out to be something topologically familiar, but to consist of a submission to some force or influence exerted upon our conception of space by the literary work. Theoretical space and literary space thus display no analogous relationship. Indeed, literary space does not exist as theoretical space does, in that, once one has approached it, one discovers that it is not space that changes in literature, it is experience itself and the subject of experience: literature (l'oeuvre) transports the writer and the reader from the domain of the possible into the domain of the impossible. Literary space is therefore space distorted by literature. It is not something in terms of which literature may be understood, but a transformation of our means of understanding literature. This is the heart of the difference between L'Espace and the works and writings which precede it: it seeks to evolve a theory of literature by examining the effect literature has upon the very structure of theoretical analysis. Hence, the true focus of the apparently linear path traced out in the first four chapters of the work is l'oeuvre, for it is in l'oeuvre that what is simple becomes complex, and the reader is asked to lose his footing and allow himself to be transported from the domain of the familiar into a space which he can never know. The site of this reversal lies between chapter III and chapter IV, as is clear from the repetition of the term l'oeuvre and the reversal of its relationship to space between the two: 'l'espace et l'exigence de l'oeuvre' 'l'oeuvre et l'espace de la mort'.

In these four chapters Blanchot has thus distanced himself theoretically from the processes in which his theory had become caught, and which constituted a sterile mimesis of what he claimed were the true processes of literature. Were things to stop here, however, we might salute his clairvoyance and even admire his intentions. We would not necessarily be convinced that he had made any further advance in his search for an authentic critical mode. There is however a second level of thematic organisation present in the

first four chapters of L'Espace, and this holds a further key to Blanchot's intentions. For the chapters which form the itinerary we have already examined are also divided up into sub-sections whose titles reflect the stages in that itinerary. Hence chapter I, which concerns experience is followed by a chapter whose sub-title is 'L'expérience de Mallarmé', then by one whose second sub-section is entitled 'Kafka et l'exigence de l'oeuvre'. So far, therefore, chapters I to III do no more than reflect by their content what is claimed to be their theme. In chapter IV, however, there occurs a change. For chapter IV contains, in the form of sub-sections, exactly the same thematic pattern as is displayed by chapters I to III. Hence it begins with a section on experience, 'La mort possible', which is followed by one on another aspect of Mallarmé's experience, 'L'expérience d'Igitur' then one on another aspect of the influence of literature, 'Rilke et l'exigence de la mort', which is in its turn divided into three further sub-sections. On the secondary level of its thematic organisation, therefore, L'Espace proceeds not in a linear, but in a cyclical fashion: chapter IV, which is longer than the first three chapters put together, repeats the pattern of theoretical analysis which marks the latter and thus includes under one thematic heading what previously was ranged under three.

There is thus a change of analytical level between chapter III and chapter IV. From here on, it apparently becomes possible to embrace under one heading and from one standpoint what could previously only be examined in successive stages. The significance of this change becomes clearer when we realise that it coincides, on the primary thematic level, with the repetition of the word l'oeuvre which, as we saw, indicates the point at which, in the itinerary being traced out by L'Espace, experience is transformed from something possible into something impossible. Thus, at a certain point in the simple thematic fabric of the argument in L'Espace, there occurs a moment of repetition affecting the entire content of the work. All of the ground covered up to the point where space gradually comes under

the influence of 'l'exigence de l'oeuvre', is gone over again, according to the same pattern, once space, responding to that 'exigence', has become 'l'espace de la mort'. The structure of the argument of L'Espace is thus repetitive in a quite fundamental way. On what might be termed the 'horizontal' and the 'vertical' planes of thematic organisation, it displays a break which occurs at the point where they intersect in the notion of l'oeuvre. The focus of theoretical attention in L'Espace is thus upon l'oeuvre as something absolutely dislocated. The work thus seems to undermine the very basis upon which theoretical analysis of literature traditionally evolves, and to submit all of the research and reflexion which went into the original articles it organises in this way, to this encompassing process of dislocation which corresponds to the experience they seek so vainly to express.

If we look now at the detail of the differences which exist between the two distinct three-fold developments, this becomes even clearer. The simplest of these is the fact that, in accordance with the change which occurs on the simple thematic level, the 'exigence' which is examined in chapter IV is that of death, whereas in chapter II, it is that of the work. It is also quite consistent with the thematic development of L'Espace up to this point, that the experience discussed generally at the beginning of chapter IV should be an impossible one (death) examined in terms of an attempt to render it possible (suicide), instead of a possible one (solitude) taken as the point of reference for a description of the impossible (the experience of literature). The most significant link between the two levels of development lies, however, with the author who is studied each time as the subject of the experience of literature, namely Mallarmé. For on the first level, he is studied in terms of his own experience, while on the second, it is for the experience of Igitur -- that is, not the experience of a character of fiction (Igitur), but the experience of the work itself in which he appears (Igitur). This is an important distinction. It means that between one lev-

el of analysis and another, it is not merely the site of experience which changes, but its very mode. Experience is thus doubly transformed as a subject of analysis between one level and the other of L'Espace, for not only does it change from being possible to being impossible: it becomes impersonal instead of personal. In keeping with the reversal brought about on the thematic level by reference to l'oeuvre, it is now from the standpoint of literature itself (that of the writing and the reading of it) that experience is purportedly being analysed, and not from the personal standpoint of the individual who writes it or reads it. That is why it can now be examined in its impossibility.

This is made quite explicit, moreover, in a section added to 'L'expérience de Mallarmé' for its inclusion in L'Espace. This text has as its subject Mallarmé's discovery of the power of language to abolish things, resuscitate them in their absence and finally seek to disappear in its turn by means of the same process, and survive as the most consummate form of absence. This power of language to attain its most perfect state at the moment of its own abolition is, says Blanchot, 'un acte d'auto-destruction, en tout semblable à l'événement si étrange du suicide, lequel précisément donne toute sa vérité à l'instant suprême d'Igitur' (p. 41). Blanchot is here taking as his theme the similarities between the exercise of literature and the relationship between reason and death which so far, in his criticism, have influenced his thinking uncontrollably. This is another indication of his attempt in L'Espace to rise above the dilemma of criticism as he experienced it. Hence, having made this comparison, he goes on in a footnote to examine the dangers of taking too simple a view of those similarities, as, in his opinion, does Georges Poulet, when he claims that Igitur is 'un exemple parfait du suicide philosophique', in which Mallarmé found an intellectual solution to the dilemma of his existence (p. 41, note 1). For Blanchot, Poulet's remarks do not go far enough. He forgets that 'Igitur est un récit abandonné', and that it cannot therefore be read as constituting a solution to the dilemma

in which Mallarmé found himself owing to his experience. The fact that it is incomplete is rather the true indication of the nature of the problem it seeks to solve for, as Blanchot goes on:

il n'est pas sûr que la mort soit un acte, car il se pourrait que le suicide ne fût pas possible. Puis-je me donner la mort? Ai-je le pouvoir de mourir?'

For him, it is not Igitur but Un Coup de dés which holds the answer to this, one which is the only answer possible, because it is 'une réponse où demeure la question', and which consequently maintains the unresolvable dilemma which the problem of my death poses to my ability to conceive of it. This leads him to a statement of the problem which corresponds closely to the thematic movement traced out in the chapter headings examined so far:

le mouvement qui, dans l'oeuvre, est expérience, approche et usage de la mort, n'est pas celui de la possibilité -- fût-ce la possibilité du néant --, mais l'approche de ce point où l'oeuvre est à l'épreuve de l'impossibilité.

Therefore, he claims, to seek to create a 'philosophical' parallel between the experience of death and literary experience is to ignore the complex movement which, within literature itself, renders such a parallel impossible. Mallarmé, Blanchot implies, was aware of this. Poulet, on the contrary is not.

All of the argument as I have examined it so far belongs to the original article. In incorporating the original into L'Espace, however, Blanchot adds a passage at the beginning of this note which shows that, as ever, his true intention in opposing another critic is not to provide the right answer in place of what is a wrong one, but to remove the problem from the sphere of argument where 'right' and 'wrong' are the sole criteria. It reads:

nous renvoyons à une autre partie de ce livre (L'oeuvre et l'espace de la mort) l'étude propre de l'expérience d'Igitur, expérience qui ne peut être interrogée que si l'on a gagné un point plus central de l'espace littéraire.

He thus indicates quite unambiguously here that, between chapters I to III and chapter IV, which he refers to by name, not only does it become easier to examine certain

questions (that is a commonplace of theoretical analysis): it becomes so because 'on a gagné un point plus central de l'espace littéraire'. In other words, the pattern I have described on the 'horizontal' and 'vertical' levels of thematic organisation in L'Espace is not merely intended by Blanchot to serve as an indicator of what he is attempting to say. If we are to believe him, the break in thematic development corresponds to a real change in the theoretical standpoint of the work. His organisation of the first four chapters of the work is thus not meant simply to tell his reader what he is trying to say. It constitutes an itinerary in the truest sense, in that, before all else, it seeks to place the reader in a position from which alone he can understand what there is to be said.

It is now more apparent than ever that L'Espace is not really about literary space at all. 'L'espace littéraire' is not the theme or the subject of the work bearing the same title, because Blanchot is not seeking in the work to describe or define literary space, but simply to deploy it. In short, L'Espace littéraire constitutes 'l'espace littéraire'. There can be no doubt that, in this work, Blanchot is concerned solely to overcome the limitations of critical discourse as he had come to experience them, by engendering the dimension outside of which discussion about literature must either break down or, as in his own case, fall the helpless victim of the processes it recognises but cannot define. In La Part, the standpoint of theory was intermittently and involuntarily interfered with by the standpoint of what it was attempting to analyse. In other words, theoretical space (that corresponding to the geometry of lines and circles) gave way sporadically to literary space (one governed by a principle of exorbitance and irregularity), and thus suffered distortion by the forces it was seeking to define. In L'Espace, as I have already suggested, Blanchot is seeking to control this movement. In the original article on Mallarmé, he sought already to take as a theme what in his criticism hitherto had been predominantly present as an effect, namely the gulf separating theoretical

versions of experience, and fiction modelled upon such versions, from the true movement of experience exemplified by the processes of literature itself. At that stage, however, his analysis consisted solely in designating that gulf and pointing to a work by Mallarme, Un Coup de dés, in which its existence becomes the problematical heart of the work. By the time it has been included in L'Espace, however, the aims of his analysis have been transformed. For L'Espace is not content merely to designate that gulf: it is seeking no less than to provide as adequate an expression of it as does Un Coup de dés. A sign of this change of intention is apparent in the reference to Un Coup de dés in the footnote devoted to Poulet. Originally, it read:

Ai-je le pouvoir de mourir? Un coup de dés
jamais n'abolira le hasard est comme la ré-
 ponse où demeure cette question. Elle 'mon-
tre' que le mouvement qui dans l'oeuvre est
 expérience, approche et usage de la mort
 n'est pas celui de la possibilité (&c) (my italics).

In the chapter of L'Espace which it constitutes, however, the italicised passage reads 'Et la 'réponse' nous laisse pressentir que le mouvement qui, dans l'oeuvre, &c.'. This is a refinement upon the analysis present in the original. There, the awareness on Blanchot's part that the movement of experience is undemonstrable finds only the feeblest of expression in his argument, that constituted by the placing of an unsuitable term in inverted commas. By the time it has come to be included in L'Espace, however, that awareness has become the inspiration for an original piece of composition. Hence the inverted commas are resituated so as to disqualify what in the previous sentence had already been so ('une réponse où demeure la question' can never be more than 'une "réponse"'), while the entire mode upon which Un Coup de dés responds to the movement of experience, is redefined without reference to existing categories at all, in terms of what in Blanchot's thinking is to become an original category of a precise descriptive kind: 'le pressentiment'¹. The first lines of 'La solitude essentielle' claim, as we saw, that 'il semble que nous apprenions quelque chose sur l'art, quand nous éprouvons ce que voudrait désigner le mot solitude' (p. 9). In other words, a pre-

requisite for a knowlege of what art is consists of a certain form of experience. This pre-sentiment is provided by Un Coup de dés, and, by seeking to organise the arguments and analyses it contains within an encompassing dimension of literary space, it can be claimed that L'Espace, too, is attempting to make theoretical analysis coexist with an experience, and thus a pre-sentiment, of what it seeks to express.

In so doing, L'Espace extricates theoretical analysis from the clutches of the discourse which it is its function to examine. By claiming to conduct its argument from within literary space, it removes what was the primary incompatibility of Blanchot's reasoning up to La Part, and what condemned it ultimately to become no more than a version of its object, namely the dualism it displayed. The stumbling-block to the entire argument of La Part lay in the obligation to affirm what lay outside of the sphere of theoretical analysis in terms taken from within that sphere. The experience of literature was affirmed, and its affirmation allowed Blanchot to influence the direction of theoretical analysis in relation to literature. Ultimately, however, the paradox that what lay outside of theoretical analysis could only be affirmed in terms of theoretical analysis caught up with Blanchot, and his argument decomposed onto three separate levels unable any longer truly to relate to each other: the level of analysis, the level of experience and the level of performance or mimesis. This state of decomposition constituted a veritable passion for the mind in which it occurred. In composing L'Espace, Blanchot turns this passion into an original mode of action. He breaks out of the vicious circle created by having to affirm what is irreducible to theory in theory's terms, simply by changing the standpoint of his argument from one predetermined by theoretical analysis, into one which itself predetermines the course theoretical analysis will take. An important variant to be found in a passage which itself is added to the study of Kafka to form the beginning of chapter III, reveals exactly how he goes about this.

This opening passage is added to the original article

in an attempt, it says, to take stock of where the work has led the reader, and its author, so far:

nous devons d'abord essayer de rassembler quelques-uns des traits que l'approche de l'espace littéraire nous a permis de reconnaître (p. 51).

This is a further confirmation of the fact that L'Espace has organised the texts it contains with a view to orienting their original argument towards a point which, from their standpoint, remains an ideal one. The study of Mallarmé which makes up chapter II, and which consists as I have said of an examination of Mallarmé's conception of how poetic language behaves, employs the notion of 'un point central' in order to describe what is at the heart of Mallarmé's experience. In the original article, the term is used in a perfectly straightforward fashion. As a footnote reveals, it corresponds to Mallarmé's own way of characterising his experience, to the 'centrale pureté' at the heart of it (p. 40, note 1), and thus appears, in Blanchot's discussion of that experience, to be completely in its place. We have already seen in La Part, however, that the way authors speak about their experience as authors provides no sure reference as far as Blanchot is concerned. His use of the idea of a central point in experience may seem to accord with Mallarmé's ideas. However, in keeping with his usual practice, he is not seeking in this study simply to analyse or criticise the existing terms in which that experience is couched. The article on Mallarmé, like those on Kafka and Rilke which complete this section of L'Espace, extends to the authors themselves the same process of critical affirmation which, in La Part, was reserved predominantly for other critics. In each case, Blanchot is contesting their version of their experience in the name of his own reading of their works, and thus of his own experience. This is an audacious step forward compared with his method in La Part, and one whose risks are obvious. It means that, in effect, the critic is speaking for the author he is examining, and telling him what he should have written. This is the most extreme development of his original critical standpoint, according to

which every work of art contains within itself the ideal work it is seeking to be, and, in the case of Rilke, it is taken to such lengths that the study is predominantly a restatement and a refinement of the poet's own way of expressing himself. There can be little doubt that this fact led Blanchot into direct conflict with the review, Critique, in which the articles on Rilke appeared². However, it is at the same time the source of what is most original in L'Espace.

This is because Blanchot came to realise, having written these studies, that, in pursuing his usual course as a critic in relation to authors themselves, his analyses repeatedly had what amounted to automatic recourse to spatial terms in order to say what they had to say. His study of Mallarmé consists of little more than contesting the poet's distinction between 'la parole essentielle' and 'la parole brute', by affirming that, within the former, there exists a division, so that the problem is a three-fold one:

la parole poétique ne s'oppose plus alors
seulement au langage ordinaire, mais aussi
bien au langage de la pensée (p. 38).

This is an important and a legitimate reply to Mallarmé. Its significance for our understanding of Blanchot, however, lies in the fact that, in so opposing Mallarmé's theoretical analyses of his poetic experience in the name of what, in that experience, they leave unaccounted for, Blanchot eventually refers to it in spatial terms. This begins to occur at that stage in his argument which, as we saw in La Part, is the crucial one, when, having negated and thus neutralised the existing terms of analysis, he seeks to couch his own affirmation in terms compatible with what it is seeking to respect. In La Part this ultimately condemned his argument to behave as literature: to fall victim to l'espace littéraire. In the study of Mallarmé, space again emerges at this crucial stage. This time however, it is the more conventional space to which theoretical analysis refers in order to illustrate metaphorically what it cannot define. Blanchot's analysis would thus seem to have surmounted the difficulties it encountered in La Part, by drawing the conclusion that, if in exploring literary ex-

perience analysis ultimately encounters literature itself, the best way of controlling this situation is to resort to metaphor at the point where analysis breaks down.

By 1953, then, Blanchot would seem to have arrived, by an extremely roundabout route, at the realisation which for most people is no more than the obvious: that theoretical analysis employs metaphor as a means of extending its field. As his argument gradually forces Mallarmé's simple distinction to yield, revealing a complexity which its terms cannot account for, we therefore read:

tel est le point central, auquel toujours Mallarmé revient comme à l'intimité du risque où nous expose l'expérience littéraire. Ce point est celui où l'accomplissement du langage coïncide avec sa disparition, où tout se parle ..., tout est parole, mais où la parole n'est plus elle-même que l'apparence de ce qui a disparu, est l'imaginaire, l'incessant, l'interminable.

Ce point est l'ambiguïté même (p. 42).

This passage displays the now unmistakable pattern of Blanchot's reasoning. The standpoint in experience, the paradoxical statement of the reality of experience and finally the slide from analysis into the discourse of experience itself: 'l'imaginaire, l'incessant, l'interminable'. This slide is arrested in this case, however, by the statement 'ce point est l'ambiguïté même', in which the complexity at the heart of experience is quite simply given an equivalent through metaphor, and thereby reconciled with reason. This is not the end of his study however. Having thus located the site of experience without succumbing immediately to its influence, Blanchot's argument goes on to use the metaphor of un point central as a standpoint from which to explore the more general problem of speaking theoretically about literature. From here on, therefore, Mallarmé is no longer the subject of his analysis. Seemingly emboldened by the firm basis provided by spatial metaphor, he proceeds to pursue the ambiguity to which it provides an equivalent beyond even the confines provided by that metaphor. Using the notion of un point central as the pivot which his reasoning has so far painfully lacked, he seeks no less than to account for the process of ambiguity which

in La Part was cited as disqualification of the static nature of theoretical analysis.

This is clear from the following passage, which begins as a commentary upon Mallarmé's description of the central point of his experience in terms of an encounter with being, as 'un moment de foudre':

ce moment de foudre jaillit de l'oeuvre comme le jaillissement de l'oeuvre, sa présence totale, sa 'vision simultanée'. Ce moment est en même temps celui où l'oeuvre, afin de donner être et existence à ce 'leurre' que 'la littérature existe', prononce l'exclusion de tout, mais, par là, s'exclut elle-même, en sorte que ce moment où 'toute réalité se dissout' par la force du poème est aussi celui où le poème se dissout et, instantanément fait, instantanément se défait. Cela, certes, est déjà extrêmement ambigu. Mais l'ambiguïté touche à plus essentiel. Car ce moment qui est comme l'oeuvre de l'oeuvre, qui, en dehors de toute signification, de toute affirmation historique, esthétique, exprime que l'oeuvre est, ce moment n'est tel que si l'oeuvre, en lui, s'engage dans l'épreuve de ce qui toujours par avance ruine l'oeuvre et toujours en elle restaure la surabondance vaine du désœuvrement (p. 44; my italics).

The italicised passage in this section of Blanchot's argument shows clearly how he is seeking to go beyond the stage which consists of locating the site of experience, and reveal what he goes on to describe as 'le moment le plus caché de l'expérience' (ibid.), that moment which precedes the coming into being of the work, and which consists solely of the process of its creation: 'oeuvre de l'oeuvre'. Hitherto, his analyses have referred to this moment in terms of 'l'antériorité du poème par rapport au poète', and as we saw, an aspect of the 'essentialisme' displayed by his thought after La Part consisted in the affirmation of an ideal state of the poem prior to the coming into existence of the poet. Blanchot is here returning to that affirmation, but in order to modify it. For what he is now seeking to do, on the basis of the spatial metaphor which his analyses have caused to emerge, is to account analytically for this ideal 'antériorité' and explore the very 'essentialisme' which it displays.

He sets about this by concentrating his attention upon Mallarmé's claim that all that remains, once poetry has performed its task as he saw it, is 'ce mot même: c'est'. Then, by using the spatial metaphor of un point, he proceeds to criticise what lies at the very heart of the analytical process he is employing, namely its ontological assumptions:

cette exigence qui fait de l'oeuvre ce qui déclare l'être au moment unique de la rupture, 'ce mot même: c'est', ce point qu'elle fait briller tandis qu'elle en reçoit l'éclat qui la consume, nous devons aussi saisir, éprouver qu'il rend l'oeuvre impossible, parce qu'il est ce qui ne permet jamais d'arriver à l'oeuvre, l'en deçà où, de l'être, il n'est rien fait, en quoi rien ne s'accomplit, la profondeur du désœuvrement de l'être (p. 45).

This is an important advance upon his theoretical position after La Part. The ideal existence of the poem is here no longer a sign before all else of the idealism of Blanchot's reasoning. His 'essentialisme' was itself the impotent sign, in a reasoning process condemned to sterility by what it had encountered, that the true site of the problem posed by that encounter lay within the ontological structure of reason itself: that in literary experience the esse itself ceases to govern what occurs. 'L'antériorité du poème' is thus no longer merely a hypostasised version of an indescribable process. It has become, in this study, the sole subject of Blanchot's analysis, and this, as the following passage shows, has been made possible by spatial metaphor:

il semble donc que le point où l'oeuvre nous conduit n'est pas seulement celui où elle s'accomplit dans l'apothéose de sa disparition, où elle dit le commencement, disant l'être dans la liberté qui l'exclut, -- mais c'est aussi le point où elle ne peut jamais nous conduire, parce que c'est toujours déjà celui à partir duquel il n'y a jamais oeuvre (ibid.).

The notion of un point clearly serves here as a pivot, allowing Blanchot's argument to distance itself from the critical stage where it forces reason to break with its object, and which hitherto has been the stage where it suffered from

that break in its turn, and thereby to take as its object that break itself: the point where what is complex in experience, and the complexity this brings about in the field of theoretical analysis, can be perceived as the same phenomenon, and conceptualised within a single category uniting literature and ontology: le désœuvrement de l'être.

The use of spatial metaphor in this study thus constitutes an attempt to raise the analysis of literature onto another plane, by drawing the conclusions of the impasse into which, on the traditional plane, it had been driven. Henceforth, Blanchot will seek increasingly to evolve a categoric mode capable of accounting not simply for 'experience', but for what his own pursuit of that notion has revealed to him: the fact that 'experience' is nothing other than that pursuit itself, and that reason has its origin in the presentiment of that pursuit. Hence, having progressed from Mallarmé to that moment of his experience which remained hidden from him, Blanchot goes on in the final section of his study to what amounts to a new departure for reason: the replacement of what he terms 'l'analyse commune' with an alternative form of analysis with its standpoint in the complex process of experience which gives rise to 'l'analyse commune'. This takes the form of a redefinition of the status of image. Traditionally, we see image as a subordinate form of the real world:

nous avons d'abord l'objet, après vient l'image, comme si l'image était seulement l'éloignement, le refus, la transposition de l'objet (p. 46).

In short, we assume that the artist has his point of departure in the real world, and that he gradually neutralises it until he has isolated what lies beyond its sphere. This, Blanchot states quite categorically, is wrong. The artist does not gradually progress from the real world to the world of the imaginary. Precisely the opposite is the case:

c'est au contraire parce que, par un renversement radical, il appartient déjà à l'exigence de l'oeuvre que, regardant tel objet, il ne se contente nullement de le voir tel que celui-ci pourrait être s'il était hors d'usage, mais il fait de l'objet le point par où passe l'exigence de l'oeuvre et, par conséquent, le mom-

ent où le possible s'atténue, les notions de valeur, d'utilité s'effacent et le monde 'se dissout' (ibid.).

As ever, his argument consists here of countering the direction of traditional analysis in the name of what it cannot account for. For the first time, however, this process lays claim to as much coherence as the process it is contesting. For the first time in Blanchot's reasoning, affirmation arises from an autonomous theoretical standpoint, so that the form it takes does not degenerate rapidly into a pathological form of the discourse of experience, but maintains a coherence provided by the paradoxical category which governs it, 'le désœuvrement de l'être'. Between the reduction of Mallarmé's problem to the question of being, 'ce mot même: c'est', and the assertion that the artist approaches the world from a standpoint outside of the realm of being, Blanchot's reasoning changes direction fundamentally, and this new departure, on the basis of an original categoric mode, is what has led his thinking to where it is today. By what amounts to an epistemological break in the logical processes he is employing, he turns the theoretical analysis of literature into a critique of our entire philosophical tradition. Well before Derrida, he is seeking no less than to turn what he knows as the reality of the gulf between reason and experience, the irreducible difference between the two domains which lies at the heart of reason itself and is its motive force, into a critical standpoint from which to dismantle (in Derrida's terms, to 'deconstruct') the entire edifice of classical reason. All of this is to be found in the original article on Mallarmé, and it is made possible, as I have repeated, by Blanchot's use, at the critical stage where his argument moves from one level to another, of spatial metaphor.

This brings us back to the passage at the beginning of chapter III in L'Espace, which is added to the original article, as I said, so as to take stock of where the work has progressed so far. The existence of this passage reminds us that, in bringing together the articles it contains, L'Espace is above all seeking to raise their separate ef-

forts onto a single coherent plane provided by the space which it deploys, l'espace littéraire. It has now become more possible to perceive how and why it does this. The passage added to the article which becomes chapter III begins, referring back to the study of Mallarmé: 'Qu'en est-il de ce point?' (p. 51). In other words, in seeking to resume 'quelques-uns des traits que l'approche de l'espace littéraire nous a permis de reconnaître', L'Espace is focusing its attention upon the spatial metaphor which, in the original article, permits the shift from one analytical plane to the other. There is an important reason for this. It is that, although by having recourse to the metaphor of un point central in the way I have described, Blanchot seems to extricate his reasoning from its impasse and lead it in a new direction, in fact this does not occur. His argument goes through the motions of such a transformation. It merely fails to endow them with any reality, so that a reader convinced of his 'essentialisme' will simply conclude that he is in search of the essence of that 'essentialisme'. In short, although the spatial metaphor does allow his reasoning to advance beyond the impasse of La Part, once he begins to apply it to the new domain which it is purportedly better equipped, categorically, to explore, it rapidly falls prey once again to the same vices as marked its original processes: excessive paradox and the rhetoric of pathos. This can be seen in what L'Espace omits from the original article at key points in its argument. I have already quoted the passage where the metaphor of un point is explicitly presented as the pivot upon which Blanchot's argument turns:

il semble donc que le point où l'oeuvre nous conduit n'est pas seulement celui où elle s'accomplit dans l'apothéose de sa disparition.... -- mais c'est aussi le point où elle ne peut jamais nous conduire, parce que c'est toujours déjà celui à partir duquel il n'y a jamais oeuvre (p. 45).

This is an evenly balanced passage in which the transition from one mode of reasoning to another, if only ideal, appears under control. In the original article this is not the case, for the above passage continues as follows:

/Le point ... à partir duquel il n'y a jam-

ais oeuvre⁷, dont l'approche nous jette hors de notre pouvoir de commencer et de finir, nous expose à la fascination de l'absence de temps, nous engage dans la migration de l'infini et de l'interminable. Ce que l'on peut encore exprimer en ces termes: l'oeuvre est le point où l'être se présente en se faisant oeuvre, mais l'oeuvre ne serait jamais oeuvre d'art si la recherche de son origine ne la mettait à l'épreuve du désœuvrement de l'être, et elle ne serait jamais force unique du commencement, si elle n'entrait dans l'intimité de l'être avec quoi jamais rien ne commence.

It is obvious from this that, rather than as a pivot, the spatial metaphor of un point serves more as a springboard for Blanchot's reasoning in its original form, permitting it to plunge from even greater heights into the labyrinth from which it seemed at first to have extricated itself. The sort of reasoning present in the above passage, with its alternation between the experience of a nous and the processes which cause that experience, is completely self-perpetuating. The encounter with art seems thus to have been a mortal one for thought, condemning it to enact eternally the moment of that encounter, in a Tragedy of Reason replacing reason itself.

In other words, the spatial metaphor which emerges, in Blanchot's analysis of literature, as a mediating factor in the encounter between two irreconcilable theoretical standpoints, reveals itself ultimately to be unfit for the task. The force of the counter-affirmation being made by Blanchot at this stage simply cannot be contained, theoretically, by metaphor. Indeed, this is clear from the way the term un point is used in the original article. It serves its purpose perfectly up to the point where theoretical analysis is confronted with the irreducibility of its object. However, once it has also to act as what amounts to a buffer for theory as it seeks to enunciate the processes of that irreducibility, its inadequacies are patent. Hence when we read: 'l'artiste ... fait de l'objet le point par où passe l'exigence de l'oeuvre' (p. 46), this may aid our reason in its attempt to adopt the standpoint which Blanchot is seeking to impose in his argument. It is neverthe-

less undeniable that the notion of un point is effectively sacrificed in the process: a point through which a process passes can, at most, indicate momentarily what is occurring. It is however impotent to contain, or even trace out, that process in its entirety. That L'Espace itself is aware of this, whereas the original article was not, can be seen from the passage which follows the one just examined:

c'est parce qu'il appartient déjà à un autre temps, l'autre du temps, et qu'il est sorti du travail du temps, pour s'exposer à l'épreuve de la solitude essentielle, là où menace la fascination, c'est parce qu'il s'est approché de ce 'point' que, répondant à l'exigence de l'oeuvre, dans cette appartenance originelle, il semble regarder d'une manière autre les objets du monde usuel (pp. 46-47).

The inverted commas surrounding the term point were not present in the original. This means that, by this stage in the original argument, the term has become inadequate to express what Blanchot has to say, so that L'Espace must again appear as an attempt at recognising, and thus transcending, the limitations of its author's reasoning. (Another indication of this in the same passage is to be found in the expression 'cette appartenance originelle': in the original article, this read: 'cette appartenance au dehors sans limite et sans intimité'. Although the notion of origin is itself excised more than once from the argument when it is incorporated into L'Espace³, it clearly appeared to Blanchot a less redoubtable adversary than the rhetoric which it replaces.)

Within the confines of L'Espace, therefore, simple spatial metaphor is revealed as an insufficient analytical tool in the exploration of literary space. As was clear from the example I quoted earlier, the reversal of direction posited by Blanchot in his attempt to replace one theoretical mode by another, cannot be accommodated by means of simple metaphor. In other words, literary space -- which, as the chapter headings tell us, is space subject to a particular influence -- exceeds the bounds of theoretical space. Hence, not even the most elaborate theoretical versions of it can respect its nature, since it consists pri-

marily of that excess itself. Literature destroys the very dimension upon which reason seeks to approach it, so that if reason perseveres in attempting to define that process, it must first modify the dimension upon which it does so. This is the challenge which L'Espace seeks to confront by concentrating upon the spatial metaphors in its argument. Somehow, in order to deploy literary space as the footnote we have examined claims it does, it must transcend the limitations of theoretical space.

The solution to the problem it seeks to solve is apparent even in the original article on Mallarmé. Criticising the assumption that the artist sets out from the world and gradually arrives at his art, Blanchot writes:

peut-être nous rendons-nous les choses trop faciles, quand, remontant le mouvement qui est celui de notre vie active, nous contentant de le renverser, nous croyons ainsi tenir le mouvement de ce que nous appelons art (p. 45; my italics).

This is the direction taken by what he calls 'l'analyse commune', but which, he claims, does not correspond to 'la psychologie de la création' (p. 46). On the contrary:

c'est ... parce que, par un renversement radical, /l'artiste/ appartient déjà à l'exigence de l'oeuvre que, regardant tel objet, il ne se contente nullement de le voir tel que celui-ci pourrait être s'il était hors d'usage, mais il fait de l'objet le point par où passe l'exigence de l'oeuvre (ibid.; my italics).

In this opposition between a simple reversal, compatible with the dualism of traditional theoretical analysis, and 'un renversement radical', lies the heart of Blanchot's dilemma. The artist is simultaneously in the world of objects because he represents them in his art, yet outside of it because his experience of art consists of a fundamental disorientation which can never attain objective status. The reversal present in the notion of representation is thus no more than a feeble theoretical response to the uncontainable process of reversal, which simultaneously exiles the artist from the world and drives him to regain it. An adequate theory of art must therefore seek to accommodate the 'point' at which these two processes of reversal encounter each other, and which the notion of a point is

ultimately incapable of doing. This is what L'Espace seeks to do. By bringing together, within its confines, a series of studies which all remain prisoner of 'l'analyse commune' and the simple renversement it displays, and enclosing them within a process of renversement governed by the processes of art, it seeks to provide a composite standpoint for theoretical analysis from which, as it evolves an alternative categorical mode for describing the significance of art, it can simultaneously be felt to be an example of the processes it is talking about.

In short, if L'Espace can be considered as deploying l'espace littéraire, this means, as the chapter headings point out, that it is exerting a certain influence upon space as we know it, transforming it from the space of the possible into the space of the impossible. This influence consists of the renversement radical referred to in the study of Mallarmé. As the original arguments proceed in what appears to be a linear fashion, L'Espace can be felt to be drawing them in another direction entirely, so as to modify and thus augment their scope. This process can be perceived in a variant to the study of Mallarmé, when, as the argument seeks to pivot upon the notion of un point, we read:

cette exigence qui fait de l'oeuvre ce qui déclare l'être au moment unique de la rupture, 'ce mot même: c'est', ce point qu'elle fait briller tandis qu'elle en reçoit l'éclat qui la consume, nous devons aussi saisir, éprouver qu'il rend l'oeuvre impossible, parce qu'il est ce qui ne permet jamais d'arriver à l'oeuvre (&c.) (p. 45; my italics).

In the original, the words underlined read 'nous devons aussi comprendre'. The change from comprendre to saisir, éprouver corresponds to the change in the entire process of theoretical analysis being attempted in L'Espace. At the point where our understanding of art must accommodate what amounts to a pure contradiction, L'Espace has realised that something other than comprehension must enter into our analyses. Something fundamentally complex, corresponding to the category of presentiment already encountered, is pres-

ent at the heart of L'Espace, and we must now look further at how it is put there.

The passage added to the beginning of chapter III which I have already referred to, consists, as we saw, of a reflexion upon the problem of space as it emerges in the study of literature. The way it proceeds reveals, furthermore, that that reflexion consists in turn of recognising what, in my study of La Part, I indicated was the basic dilemma of its author's thinking, namely the problem of affirming the irreducibility of literature to theoretical terms in the terms provided by theory. Hence, after a series of descriptions of what, in 'l'espace littéraire', language is not, Blanchot goes on:

tous ces traits sont de forme négative. Mais cette négation masque seulement le fait plus essentiel que dans ce langage tout retourne à l'affirmation, que ce qui nie, en lui affirme (p. 51).

This is his dilemma in a nutshell, and the cause of the catastrophe which threatens his reasoning. What he goes on to say, however, reveals, by a variant it contains, that he has found a way out of that dilemma:

le propre de la parole habituelle, c'est que l'entendre fait partie de sa nature. Mais, en ce point de l'espace littéraire, le langage est sans entente. De là le risque de la fonction poétique. Le poète est celui qui entend un langage sans entente (ibid.; my italics).

This is because, in the original passage, the italicised section read 'Mais, en ce point de l'expérience, le langage est sans entente'. This clearly does not simplify the problem on the traditional theoretical level: in both cases, the paradox that the poet 'entend un langage sans entente' remains impossible to comprehend. It is not the aim of this section to simplify the problem however, as is clear from the existence of the above passage within it. For although the section was written especially for the composition of L'Espace, the passage I have quoted comes, as the existence of a variant suggests, from an original article: '"Continuez autant qu'il vous plaira"', which was written in 1953 and forms the first part of the section in chapter V en-

titled 'L'inspiration, le manque d'inspiration' (pp. 235-250). This would seem to indicate quite plainly what Blanchot's intentions are in L'Espace. For in evoking the problem faced by theoretical analysis, he is not content merely to talk about that problem: by extracting from an original article a passage in which the problem can be perceived, then modifying the terms in which the problem is expressed, he would seem actually to be behaving as if an alternative solution had been found. In the original passage, the reference to experience simply maintained Blanchot's reasoning within the dualistic confine of theoretical analysis, shackled by the paradox that what is most negative about literary experience is at the same time what is most positive about it. Had he contented himself with replacing experience by the term l'espace littéraire without modifying the argument of his original analyses, he again might have succeeded in indicating where a solution to his dilemma lay. He would have been no closer to it. However, the reflexion upon the processes of his own thinking which occurs at this stage in L'Espace does not consist merely in an analysis of analysis. By taking the unusual step of quoting a passage from another source, not because it expresses the problem perfectly but so as to demonstrate the displacement of standpoint which is necessary before the problem may be solved, Blanchot reveals that, if L'Espace is manifestly seeking to provide a critical perspective upon the articles it contains, this is not going to be a simple transcendant one, purportedly closer to the perfect view of the problem which traditional analysis always posits. For the standpoint from which, in this passage, Blanchot turns back to survey his argument so far, consists of a portion of that same argument which has been subjected to the displacement caused by what it is seeking to talk about. The difference between L'Espace and the articles it contains is, therefore, that at the point where they resort to terms such as experience, in a vain attempt to affirm what exceeds the bounds of theoretical affirmation, it does not simply replace those terms: it displaces them, submits them to the very force they are seeking to define.

The standpoint of L'Espace is thus not a transcendent one: it is an immanent one. It does not contain the articles of which it consists, but rather dislocates them, rendering the position of certain of their concepts untenable while creating a 'space' within which others may begin to be significant. This is the true effect of its fragmentary nature. It constitutes a turning-point for Blanchot's reasoning, and indeed for the entire tradition to which it belongs, by refining upon the entire categoric structure whereby reason seeks to talk about what lies beyond it. This is further illustrated by another section added, during the composition of L'Espace, to one of the original articles it brings together. This occurs at the beginning of chapter IV, which has so far appeared to mark a turning-point in the work's argument, where a section entitled 'Le mot expérience' is made to preface the original argument of 'La mort possible' (pp. 101-106), and serves, at the point where the work claims to lead its reader from the domain of the possible to that of the impossible, as a form of valedictory examination of the limits of that term.

It begins by repeating, in the spatial terms which by now have been called into doubt, the nature of the artist's experience, before going on to extend the field of that doubt to the notion of experience itself:

l'oeuvre attire celui qui s'y consacre vers le point où elle est à l'épreuve de son impossibilité. En cela, elle est une expérience, mais que veut dire ce mot? (p. 101).

Hence what, in the passage I examined previously, was implicit in the act of looking back to see where 'l'approche de l'espace littéraire' had led thus far, has now become, on the threshold, as it were, to which the reader has gradually been led, and beyond which, in 'un point plus central de l'espace littéraire' which also promises to be 'l'espace de la mort', he is promised a new perception of his problem, an explicit gesture on the part of L'Espace. The displacement of the theoretical standpoint which the replacement of expérience by espace littéraire indicated at the heart of the argument in L'Espace, has now reached the surface of

the work. The break already observed at this point on the level of its thematic organisation, thus corresponds to the developments which occur in the argument of L'Espace up to this point. At this point, the dislocation of the analytical sphere indicated by the repetition of the term l'oeuvre, actually occurs, as the subjective counterpart to the notion of l'oeuvre in Blanchot's thinking, namely l'expérience, is displaced as the standpoint from which the entire question of literature may be approached. This means that the problem of how to analyse what occurs in literature, rather than being allowed, as has so far been the case, to destroy reason by affecting its concepts, is now being allowed to affect the subject of reason. In the aftermath of La Part, the processes of reason were caught up in a labyrinth of paradox and intermittently taken over by the processes of fiction. The subject of theoretical analysis thus remained intact: his unitary, transcendent standpoint simply disappeared from time to time, eclipsed by the tension for which it was partly responsible. In L'Espace, if Blanchot is seeking to evolve a conceptual framework of a complexity better befitting the complexities he wishes to account for, he is also, and indeed primarily, seeking to provide a standpoint from which these concepts may make sense. In other words, as was clear from the article on Mallarmé, where the category of le désœuvrement emerges as an alternative basis for understanding what defies ontological analysis, the epistemological transformation which Blanchot is seeking to bring about in L'Espace is condemned to remain an ideal one, unless he can also place his reader in a position from where he can recognise its reality. The displacement of the theoretical standpoint, which itself constitutes the alternative standpoint in the work, cannot therefore simply be perceived from the theoretical standpoint itself. Its effect will be perceptible from that standpoint in the form of such phenomena as the repetition of the term l'oeuvre, the placing in inverted commas of the metaphor un point, the rejection of such terms as l'expérience. Its reality, however, will arise solely from the submission of the subject of an-

alysis to what can no longer be called the experience of that displacement, because it consists entirely of the destruction of his capacity to experience it in his own name. For comprendre to become saisir, éprouver, the notion of experience must yield to the very épreuve which renders it meaningless as a term. At this turning-point in his argument, therefore, Blanchot can be seen to be conjugating the two processes at work in L'Espace within the notion of experience, which constitutes the nucleus of the theoretical standpoint it is seeking to displace. Hence, on the one hand, the term experience itself is analysed and rejected, while on the other, the very standpoint upon which it rests is displaced and distorted as the work purportedly directs its reader towards 'l'espace de la mort'. Ideally, therefore, this point of transition in L'Espace coincides with the emergence of a new theoretical standpoint, and creates a conscious subject capable of making sense of the arguments contained in the work. In order to see how this ideal is made a reality, we must look at the way 'le mot expérience' is analysed at this point.

In the first instance, Valéry's conception of the poet's activity (which is the source of the notion of 'la solitude essentielle') is examined in order to demonstrate that, if experience is taken as a standpoint from which to argue, it engages the mind in a round of contradiction from which it cannot emerge:

cette démarche et l'espèce de terrible contrainte qui la rend circulaire montrent que l'on ne saurait faire sa part à l'expérience artistique (p. 103).

Blanchot would seem here at last to have drawn fully the conclusion to which Breton came regarding 'la part du feu': it is quite impossible to appportion, and any attempt to do so simply condemns analysis, as witness La Part du feu itself, to sterile circularity. The notion of experience and the limitations of spatial metaphor are thus criticised as part of the same impasse, and what Blanchot goes on to conclude from this state of affairs points to what he is seeking to achieve in L'Espace. For if it is impossible to com-

prehend the processes of art by taking experience as one's standpoint, this is because, as authors like Gide and Bren-
tano understood, the artist is no longer capable of exper-
ience. As an artist, he has ceased to be the individual for
whom alone the notion of experience had any sense. It is
this loss of self during the processes of art that Blan-
chot is seeking to confront directly in L'Espace. In order
to do so, however, he must adopt a more radical position
in relation to that loss of self than is generally the case.
For during the creative process, he claims, it is not merely
another self which emerges, as Gide would have us believe:

peut-être s'agit-il encore d'un changement
plus radical qui ne consiste pas en une nou-
velle disposition d'âme et d'esprit, qui ne
se contente même pas de m'éloigner de moi,
de m'"anéantir", qui n'est pas lié non plus
au contenu particulier de tel livre, mais à
l'exigence fondamentale de l'oeuvre (pp. 105-
106; my italics).

Until now, therefore, by arguing from the standpoint of ex-
perience, Blanchot has unwittingly behaved as if the subject
of literature were merely another self. Hence, even when
his argument was in conflict with the position of theoret-
ical analysis -- when, for example, he criticised the not-
ion of experience in La Part -- it remained confined within
the bounds which theory lays down. Once again, therefore,
this passage is not only an analysis of Valéry or of Gide
in their relationship to their art. Placed within the con-
fines of L'Espace, it is first and foremost a critique of
Blanchot's own position and the standpoint present in the
original articles which make up the work. That it is at the
same time a solution to Blanchot's problem is clear from
the italicised section in the above passage, which was add-
ed to the original and which indicates that, coexisting with
the simple critique of the theoretical position contained
in the argument, there is another process going on which,
as the chapter headings indicate, consists of transform-
ing the very position from which we comprehend the problem:
that renversement radical -- here referred to as un change-
ment plus radical -- which is the sole reality of literary
space and which L'Espace claims to be deploying itself.

An important insight into what Blanchot is seeking to achieve in L'Espace is to be found in the article from which the section 'Le mot expérience' originally came. It is entitled 'A toute extrémité', and is of particular interest in that it was published in February 1955, and thus only a few months before L'Espace itself appeared. As the extract in L'Espace shows, it is concerned primarily with differentiating between experience as it is generally understood and what, for many years, has been expressed by Blanchot as 'l'expérience de la littérature', during which, as the title of the article itself indicates, consciousness is in the throes of death. About half of the original article is incorporated into L'Espace. The other half is of great interest also, however, for in it, Blanchot explores the possibilities which, in L'Espace itself, he claims to have realised. In that sense, therefore, it is omitted from L'Espace because it anticipates that work. It begins by reiterating the inadequacy of the term experience:

le mot expérience -- quand il nous parle de l'expérience littéraire ou poétique -- est trompeur, car il tend à nous faire croire que la littérature est liée à quelque phénomène psychologique particulier⁴.

Blanchot then goes on to examine the difference between the two domains he is seeking to distinguish from each other:

l'expérience littéraire est expérience qui survole l'expérience et épreuve de ce qui ne s'éprouve pas: non pas qu'il s'agisse de quelque état étrange, bouleversant ou ravissant, mais c'est comme si elle ouvrait, au-dessus, au-dessous de l'existence, un espace autre où elle tombe elle-même et s'engage en se dérochant, à mesure qu'elle se 'vit' et s'accomplit, aux formes et aux valeurs qui désignent l'existence⁵.

Close attention must be paid to this description, for it contains a complexity which is both the essence of Blanchot's dilemma and the key to the processes of L'Espace. It begins by describing 'l'expérience littéraire' in simple paradoxical terms, thus allowing its complexity to neutralise the traditional mode upon which it is generally approached, and locate itself somewhere beyond the confines of theoretical analysis. So far, therefore, Blanchot's reas-

oning has done no more than place itself in the impossible position it has as yet never ceased to occupy. Having done so, however, it then counters the implicit assumption contained and sustained by that position, namely that literary experience is something akin to mysticism, an esoteric other state of consciousness. For although it is a negative process, a falling away from the sphere of existence, this process constitutes in itself an accompaniment to existence, during which the artist simultaneously belongs to its sphere ('elle se "vit"') and draws it onto another dimension which encompasses yet distorts it, and upon which what hitherto has given it its significance has ceased to apply.

Blanchot thus moves beyond the simple level of spatial metaphor present in his earlier articles, by positing the existence of another space, which is above all 'un espace autre': different in nature to metaphorical space yet present within its sphere. In itself, of course, such a paradoxical description of what cannot be termed experience can claim no greater efficacy than the paradoxical definition which it replaces. In what he goes on to say, however, Blanchot reveals how he is seeking to endow what he is describing in this fashion with an efficacy of its own:

[c'est] comme si elle était le pouvoir de se mettre entre parenthèses et de créer, là où elle s'éprouve, comme une lacune scintillante où tout ce qui se passe à partir d'elle et pour celui qui la soutient n'est plus de l'ordre des états qu'on vit, des émotions qu'on éprouve, ni même des révélations qu'on reçoit, n'intéresse plus directement une conscience, ni n'importe à une connaissance. Comme si, enfin, pour qu'elle puisse se produire, il fallait qu'elle produisît d'abord cet espace et ce temps où elle pourra seulement commencer⁶.

This description of the 'experience' of literature is on one level a description of where his own fictional practice has led him by this stage, and to which he gives its most serene expression in the short piece entitled 'Le Calme' which appeared later in 1955⁷. At the same time, however, it marks a realisation, on Blanchot's part, that if literature as an 'experience' is irreducible to logical analysis, it is because, as a preliminary to its coming into

being (and thus becoming accessible to analytical reason), it creates a particular form of space, which consists of the implosive distorsion of space as we know it, and within which the mode of being it manifests simultaneously reflects and distorts the ontological structure of logical analysis. This recognition of the order governing the relationship between 'experience' and reason is a refinement upon the earlier conception of 'l'antériorité du poème par rapport au poète' which, as we have already seen, governs all of Blanchot's thinking from La Part onwards. By this stage in his thinking, he has discovered how to turn the 'essentialisme' of that concept, and the idealism displayed by the analyses to which it gives rise, into a practical alternative for reason. This is simply by shifting the site of the problem away from the realm of the concept altogether, and locating it within the medium within which concepts evolve: namely consciousness itself. The descriptions to be found in the passages I have quoted are descriptions of a conscious process. The 'd'abord' which corresponds, in this process, to the 'antériorité' displayed by the poem, allows reason to break free of the paradoxes which have so far beset it, simply by creating a mode of analytical discourse which respects the spatial and temporal peculiarity of what it is seeking to talk about. This, what L'Espace, which is contemporary with these considerations, seeks to do. The work is therefore an attempt at creating, in its reader, a conscious state corresponding to the concepts it has evolved.

There can be little doubt that this undertaking is Blanchot's ultimate response to Malraux's conception of 'le Musée imaginaire'. Malraux's claim that there is a dimension linking all works of art to each other attracted Blanchot's attention immediately, as we saw, and his resistance to Malraux's attempts at endowing that dimension with a transcendent humanistic significance, led him to assert that, in order fully to have respected the nature of 'le Musée' Malraux would have needed to become a painter. The counterpart to that claim, moreover, was that, in Malraux's reasoning in relation to 'le Musée', something other than a purely

logical process could be discerned, one which he referred to as 'une expérience qui imite celle de l'art plutôt qu'elle n'en rend compte'. The article 'A toute extrémité' is nominally concerned with Wladimir Weidlé's book Les Abeilles d'Aristée, and in a footnote, Blanchot finds himself defending Malraux's notion of 'le Musée' against Weidlé's literal understanding of the term. The footnote is referred to, after a reiteration of the unique spatial nature of literary experience, in the following terms:

l'expérience mystique ... est expérience de ce qui n'est pas donné dans l'expérience, mais l'expérience créatrice, tout en ayant ce caractère, a cet autre: c'est qu'elle est expérience qui elle-même passe au-dessous, au-dehors de l'expérience, épreuve qui ne s'éprouve pas, car elle exige, pour être éprouvée, que soit trouvé l'espace rayonnant, mais vide, où à proprement parler personne ne pénètre et rien ne s'éprouve⁸.

By thus distinguishing between mystical experience and the 'experience' of the artist, Blanchot reiterates even more clearly how inseparable the latter is from the sphere outside of which it nevertheless lies. Once again, furthermore, he clearly posits the existence of another spatial mode governed by the processes of art; and, in defending the notion of 'le Musée' against Weidlé, he is driven at last to define the difference between his own conception of it and that of Malraux:

Malraux, en nommant, en découvrant et en décrivant avec une rigueur inspirée le Musée imaginaire, nous a surtout donné une image de de cet espace particulier qu'est l'expérience artistique, espace hors de l'espace, celui d'une fascination maîtrisée, temps qui est le temps des métamorphoses⁹.

This is the final development of the view that Malraux needed to become an artist, and that his reasoning was governed, in spite of itself, by mimesis. It both simplifies Blanchot's analysis of Malraux's theories and, by defining precisely what it was that limited them, permits Blanchot to propose the alternative which, in his 1950 study, was not forthcoming. The form this alternative will take is apparent in what the footnote goes on to say:

est-il vrai, comme le craint judicieusement

M. Weidlé, que l'artiste, par le Musée, soit 'exposé à aborder son oeuvre par le même côté que le spectateur'? Oui, et c'est un danger, mais seulement si l'artiste, fatigué, voit dans le Musée un spectacle, et non pas cet espace toujours en mouvement, toujours à créer, ce temps toujours futur qui n'existe pas réellement, qui n'existe qu'au regard de l'oeuvre encore à venir qui se cherche dans l'artiste¹⁰.

According to this passage, the reality of which Malraux could only provide an image, namely the space deployed by 'le Musée', is not merely confined to the artist's experience, as the original study of Malraux suggested. If its true nature is inaccessible, as that study also claimed, to theoretical analysis, it is because the standpoint of theory attributes to the artist a standpoint opposed to itself, when in fact the standpoint of art consists solely of the encounter between these two ideal standpoints. As early as La Part Blanchot claimed that 'l'art pur' did not exist, and, by 1950 he had come to see that its impurity -- its inextricable engagement in the world -- actually justified the state of affairs against which his criticism had long sought to react: namely the interference of critical discourse with the language of literature, its explicative, interpretative intervention. In the article entitled 'La condition critique', this realisation took the form of a categorical declaration: 'il faut voir que la tâche de la critique est de devenir l'un des moments antagonistes de l'"oeuvre d'art"'. In other words, the critic, in his reading of an author's work, must counter what appears to be the movement and the sense of that work, and the article goes on:

cela n'est pas tout. Il est clair que la contrariété exige davantage et qu'elle n'atteint son vrai point qu'au moment où le critique et l'art se confondent, quand ce qu'on appelle la conscience créatrice accepte de se perdre dans le regard superficiel du jour et s'affirme complice de la préoccupation qui la méconnaît.

At the time, this article revealed solely that Blanchot had seen a way out of the impasse into which his criticism had been driven by its defence of the specificity of literature. It meant that the helpless mimesis of its object which his

criticism displayed (and which received indirect recognition by him in his claim that Malraux's reasoning constituted 'une expérience qui imite celle de l'art'), could cease -- if at a price: the loss of the right, for the critic, to speak in his own name. Henceforth, criticism could proceed with an easy conscience to propose its own reading of an author or a work. The significance of what it had to say would henceforth only be perceptible, however, from a new and complex standpoint. This did mark the end of bad conscience for criticism: it also marked the emergence of a new form of consciousness, entirely incompatible with that determined by theoretical analysis and requiring that criticism should evolve an alternative, compatible mode of analysis.

Five years later, this is what is being projected in 'A toute extrémité', and attempted in L'Espace. Weidlé's objection to Malraux allows Blanchot to reveal how what in 1950 was no more than a recognition of the true position of the critic, has now become the basis for an alternative critical mode. The critic's rôle, from having been seen as an essential part of the creative process, one which prolonged and maintained it, is now presented as the equivalent of that process, and indeed as indistinguishable from the process itself. This of course means that his rôle be understood as not merely a contemplative one. However, once it is recognised -- as the concept of 'le Musée' helps us to do -- that the perception of art is essentially a process, it is impossible not to recognise that the artist and his spectator are merely alternating moments within that process. Transposed to the domain of literature, this means that if, as Blanchot has never ceased to assert, the 'experience' of the writer consists of something irreducible to non-literary terms; and if, as by 1950 he had come to realise, the critic's rôle must be to safeguard that irreducibility by violating the traditional sanctity of the finished, but inevitably imperfect, work; then not only does the critic's role appear as more compatible with the experience of literature than that of the writer himself:

there exists, potentially, a mode of criticism which would consist not simply of accounting for literature, but of providing an equivalent to it.

This is the ambition Blanchot is seeking to fulfil in 1955. The reader and the writer, the artist and the spectator are participants in the same process of metamorphosis, during which the forms and values of the real world are subject to transformations of a unique kind. The true domain of art thus lies beyond the sphere of the real world, of its visible attributes and of its logical forms. In the case of literature, this means that the critic's experience of the inadequacies of logical analysis, far from excluding him irrevocably from the domain of literary 'experience', constitutes a version of literary 'experience', and is thus equivalent to it. The writer's struggle to express himself, and the critic's struggle to express his reading of the writer's work, are in fact the same struggle. Each finds himself, for the duration of his activity, caught at that 'point' within language where what is positive in his experience can be expressed neither positively nor negatively from the standpoint which language offers him. By this stage in his thinking, criticism, for Blanchot, consists solely of the certain knowledge of this state of affairs. As J.-J. Salomon said, therefore: 'la critique est un raffinement de la vérité'. The difference in standpoint between Blanchot the critic and the authors he studies is thus the opposite to what it should traditionally be: far from basing his approach upon respect for the original work, and making his analyses come as close as possible to indicating what is expressible only by the work, he speaks authoritatively from what he claims to be the authentic standpoint from which writers all should speak, but, by the time they have produced their finished works, rarely do. Just as Weidlé was right in saying that the artist must approach his work from the standpoint of the spectator, so, Blanchot claims, the reader of a literary work comes closer to its original significance than the writer who treats his work as a finished entity. Therefore criticism, as reading in its most system-

atic and consummate form, can actually succeed as well as literature in its existing form at the task of communicating the 'experience' which gives rise to literature.

This consists, as the reply to Weidlé makes clear, in promoting that moment of pure anticipation which precedes the finished work and which, given the latter's impossibility, constitutes the sole authentic moment in artistic creation. Criticism will therefore no longer display respect for the finished work. Rather, it will seek to become that dimension 'qui n'existe qu'au regard de l'oeuvre encore à venir qui se cherche dans l'artiste'. This is an absolute reversal of its rôle. The 'respect' for the work displayed traditionally by criticism, was in fact respect for an entity corresponding in no way to the work as the artist projected it. The way to respect the work, to have regard for its true nature is to recognise that, au regard de l'oeuvre, literature, as practised by the writer and as encountered by the reader, is an unending process of approaching completion. The originality of Blanchot's insight into this is that, instead of leaving it in the form of a conclusion -- for example, that all literature is an imperfect expression of what it is truly trying to say, so that criticism is free to disregard the particular form it takes in a given work --, he seeks to evolve a new idiom on the basis of it. The conclusion he could have drawn is, in a sense, the assumption upon which his criticism has been based from the beginning. This stage in his development as a thinker is thus a turning-point, when unconscious approach seeks to become conscious method. The challenge facing him, at this point, is to turn what has become a conscious principle into a mode of practice. In the 1950 article, 'La condition critique', he recognised that the sole function of criticism was to draw literature back into 'la versatilité du jour qui passe' and expose it to 'la réflexion de la vie' which is its original source. The nature of the critic's activity as he envisaged it then was totally unsystematic. Indeed, its originality lay precisely in its replacement of system by a process which, au regard de l'oeuvre, respected

the true nature of literary activity as much as the writer did. The drawback of this, however, was that although on each particular occasion when he criticised in this fashion, Blanchot's critic could claim to be breaking the bounds of theoretical analysis, his argument continued to fall, ultimately, back within those bounds, since its break with them was never more than momentary. In short, the critic, in his attempt to equal the activity of the writer, fell prey to precisely those limitations which he denounced in the writer's dependence upon the work. Although now transformed from a passion into an active mode, criticism nevertheless remained a mimesis of its object. What is more, as we have already remarked, this continued dependence upon the theoretical mode of analysis resulted, as compensation for the loss of authority experienced by the critic as an individual, in increased recourse to theoretical absolutes (the work, madness, being), which, in Derrida's terms, imprisoned Blanchot's reasoning in 'l'essentialisme'.

The argument of 'A toute extrémité' and the effect of L'Espace both constitute a response to this dilemma. They mark a realisation, on Blanchot's part, that if the critic's position, as he has come to conceive of it, constitutes an improvement upon that of the writer by recreating the space in which the work has not yet been confined within the artificial space of the finished work, in order to safeguard that position and turn it into a real alternative to the stalemate of literary theory, he must endow his argument permanently with the field it deploys every time it performs its critical function. In other words, to save it from the essentialist idealism into which its displacement of the real standpoint of theoretical analysis drives it, he must make that displacement the premise, in the most literal sense, upon which his argument will be based. Hence, if in literary 'experience' there emerges a form of space which distorts in advance the logical space from which we seek to account for that experience, by creating a work of critical analysis whose form constantly displaces the standpoint of its content, he will have transposed, once and for all, the reality of literary activity, which individual works have

sought with varying success to respect, and which criticism, in Blanchot's hands, has succeeded on separate occasions in restoring, from the domain of literature to the domain of criticism itself. 'L'espace littéraire' will henceforth be located within the domain of theory: criticism will have evolved into 'ce problème ... critique qui fait la critique du créateur'.

That in composing L'Espace Blanchot was aware of the turning-point the work constituted for his reasoning seems apparent in a variant to the final chapter. The original article which makes up this chapter, 'L'art, la littérature et l'expérience originelle', was written in 1952, and thus mid-way between the aftermath of La Part and the conception of L'Espace. Like what Blanchot wrote in 1950, and like what he wrote in 'A toute extrémité' in 1955, this article is concerned by Malraux's conception of 'le Musée'. Hence, evoking what he refers to as 'la recherche de l'art' which, to his mind, is what is most essential in the artist's experience, he writes:

on peut sans doute se représenter une telle recherche, la décrire, retrouver les moments de ce qui nous semble être la création artistique. Malraux, par exemple, a montré que l'artiste prend conscience de son oeuvre à venir en vivant dans cette sorte de conscience réalisée de l'art qu'est, pour celui-ci, le Musée, l'art, non pas figé dans ses réalisations, mais ressaisi dans les métamorphoses qui font des oeuvres les moments d'une durée propre et de l'art le sens toujours inachevé d'un tel mouvement. C'est là une vue importante, mais qui nous aide surtout à comprendre ou à nous figurer comment l'oeuvre est toujours en défaut par rapport à elle-même, s'il n'y a jamais d'art sans l'ensemble des oeuvres qui le rendent présent et si cependant l'art n'est 'vrai' que dans l'oeuvre toujours encore à venir (p. 318; my italics).

The same attitude to Malraux as has already been apparent marks this passage. His version of the artist's practice is at most an image ('nous aide ... à nous figurer') of the paradoxical reality which the artist encounters in composing his work. Between the original formulation of this objection and its inclusion in L'Espace, however, a change is

made in the italicised passage. This reveals that the true critical problem for Blanchot has shifted from being one of providing a more accurate description of the artist's practice, to being one of positing a more perfect mode of artistic practice than has so far either been conceived of, or even exercised. The italicised passage read as follows in the original:

l'art n'est vrai, n'est originel que dans
l'oeuvre encore à venir, toujours unique
et disant à elle seule et absolument l'art
comme origine.

In the 1952 article as well as in the final version produced in 1955, the notion of 'une oeuvre à venir' is present. This development in Blanchot's thinking is an important sign that his reasoning is beginning to emerge from the essentialist impasse into which it had been driven, and a passage from a few pages before, to be found also in the original article, makes this even plainer:

l'étrangeté de l'inspiration est liée à
cette antériorité essentielle du poème
par rapport au poète, ce fait que celui-
ci se sent, dans sa vie et dans son trav-
ail, encore à venir, encore absent en face
de l'oeuvre, elle-même tout avenir, prés-
ence et fête de l'avenir (p. 306; my italics).

However, in the 1952 article, this transformation of a simple concept: l'antériorité du poème, into a practical reality: l'oeuvre est encore à venir, remains dependent, for its significance, upon the same idealism which marked Blanchot's earlier criticism. This is clear, above all, from the position of the toujours in the two versions of the passage on page 318. In the original, it serves to reinforce the substantial idealism displayed by terms such as originel, unique, à elle seule, absolument and origine, which, furthermore, are presented as defining the truth about art. Within such a context, the nominal subject of the proposition, l'oeuvre encore à venir, is effectively deprived of significance. In the revised version, however, the excision of all of the idealistic terms which the toujours reinforced, combined with its relocation to qualify the encore à venir, corresponds to a radical change in the direction and the significance of this passage, which dis-

places the weight of the argument away from the task of explaining what occurs in art, towards that of identifying the conditions within which art may alone display its 'truth'.

This change, I would claim, corresponds to the aims of Blanchot in composing L'Espace. As the inverted commas placed around the term vrai would seem to indicate, the search for truth, which is the usual function of logical analysis, is subordinate in L'Espace to the securing of the conditions under which truth may emerge. This Blanchot seeks to achieve by creating a standpoint upon which the reader of his analyses is simultaneously submitted to the displacement which affects that standpoint during the process of reading a work of literature. L'Espace claims to be a fragmentary work, and, as we saw from the prefatory note it contains, this fragmentary nature consisted of depriving the reader of a locatable centre towards which to orient his reading. In short, as I suggested then, L'Espace seeks itself to be un livre à venir, and to make the reading of it a process of desiring the finished work it not yet is. This process, which the preface claims is primarily that in which the author was engaged while he composed the work, consists of transposing the standpoint from which the original articles in it were written, to the standpoint from which they are read. In the years preceding L'Espace, Blanchot put into effect the realisation that it was the critic's role and duty to interfere with the closed unity of the finished work. What he seeks to achieve in L'Espace is bring his reader to behave in the same manner towards that work. If he succeeds, he will have indeed replaced literature by criticism as a more authentic idiom whereby to achieve artistic perfection: his single work of criticism will stand as a perfect example of what criticism has only ever defined imperfectly, and what literature itself has hitherto never achieved: art in its purest form.

In order to succeed, however, it has to turn the position it so clearly seeks to occupy into the site of a real process. It is how it attempts this, the most difficult part of the undertaking that we must go on to examine.

Throughout La Part, as we saw, Blanchot sought to argue from the standpoint of literature itself, and, in the studies of Mallarmé, Kafka and Rilke contained in L'Espace, he makes a rule of what, in La Part, was an illuminating exception: direct criticism of an author himself, in the name of what his reading of him has told Blanchot about the work he should have produced, or the analyses he should have formulated. Hence, when he replies to Weidlé, in 1955, that there is nothing wrong with the artist having to adopt the point of view of the spectator, he is doing no more than defend his own practice in preceding years. During that period, just as the spectator whom the artist is meant to imitate does not treat art as a spectacle, so in the readings of authors he undertook, the finished work occupied no central position. This displacement of the work as the absolute reference for understanding literature is the example Blanchot sets his authors, and the instrument by means of which he criticises their work.

Hence, the study of Mallarmé, which I have already examined, is concerned solely to criticise that author's attempts to explain his relationship to language in terms of the opposition 'parole brute'/'parole essentielle'. His error, according to Blanchot, was to identify poetry with the pure movement of thought in order to distinguish it from everyday language, when in fact it is something different from both of these. Significantly, Blanchot describes what it is Mallarmé's definition cannot, by describing a work in which Mallarmé did succeed in respecting it, namely Un Coup de dés, though he does so without mentioning it by name:

sous cette perspective, nous retrouvons la poésie comme un puissant univers de mots dont les rapports, la composition, les pouvoirs s'affirment, par le son, la figure, la mobilité rythmique, en un espace unifié et souverainement autonome (p. 38).

More important than the work he seems to be alluding to, is

the dependance of his own argument, at this stage in its critique of Mallarmé, upon a reference to space. In the chapter on Kafka which follows this one, the same progression occurs, though its significance is different.

In the case of both Mallarmé and Kafka, the criticism Blanchot levels at them as thinkers and writers occurs in the clear context of a respect for their experience of literature. Hence of Mallarmé, Blanchot writes:

Mallarmé a eu de la nature propre de la création littéraire le sentiment le plus profondément tourmenté (p. 40).

Similarly, Kafka's respect for his experience is acknowledged fully:

la rigueur de Kafka, sa fidélité à l'exigence de l'oeuvre, sa fidélité à l'exigence du malheur lui ont épargné ce paradis des fictions où se complaisent tant d'artistes faibles que la vie a déçus (p. 85).

Nevertheless, as was the case with Mallarme, the integrity of Kafka's experience did not render him immune to the temptation to misrepresent it, and, once again, Blanchot undertakes a critique of the forms this misrepresentation took. Kafka's weakness, according to Blanchot, was to interpret his experience of otherness, of being an outsider, as a sign that he belonged to another world and possessed another identity. Hence for him,

la privation du monde se renverse en une expérience positive, celle d'un monde autre, dont il est déjà citoyen (p. 78).

Throughout his life, Blanchot claims, Kafka oscillated between respect for his experience and the illusion that he had found a solution to the dilemma it caused:

la passion de Kafka est ... purement littéraire, mais pas toujours et pas tout le temps. La préoccupation du salut est chez lui immense, d'autant plus forte qu'elle est désespérée, d'autant plus désespérée qu'elle est sans compromis. Cette préoccupation passe certes avec une surprenante constance par la littérature et pendant assez longtemps se confond avec elle, puis passe encore par elle, mais ne se perd plus en elle, a tendance à se servir d'elle, et comme la littérature n'accepte jamais de devenir moyen et que Kafka le sait, il en résulte des conflits obscurs même pour lui, plus encore pour nous, et une évolution difficile à éclairer, mais qui nous éclaire.

aire cependant (pp. 60-61).

His life was a pathetic torment, during which his desire to create for himself 'un séjour parmi les hommes' (p. 86) could never dispel his knowledge that he was an exile, 'qu'il appartient à l'autre rive, que, banni, il ne doit pas ruser avec ce banissement' (p. 87). It is this dilemma in all of its acuteness which Blanchot takes as his standpoint in order to analyse Kafka. As with Mallarmé, it is the third dimension of the contradictory problem which beset him, namely that contradiction in its pure form, to which Blanchot returns repeatedly, sometimes in terms which leave no doubt as to the continuity of his approach:

sa dépendance à l'égard de sa famille ...
lui rend aussi insupportables toutes les
formes de dépendance -- et, pour commencer,
le mariage ..., la vie de famille dont il
voudrait se dégager, mais dans laquelle il
voudrait aussi s'engager... (p. 87).

Again as with Mallarmé, moreover, this process leads Blanchot ultimately to couch his version of the complexity of experience in spatial terms. These are again a reflexion of the spatial dimension present in the author's own view of his problem; the itinerary imposed upon Kafka in his attempt at confronting his distress:

dans cette nouvelle perspective, celle de
la détresse, l'essentiel est de ne pas se
tourner vers Chanaan. La migration a pour
but le désert, et c'est l'approche du désert
qui est maintenant la vraie Terre Promise.
... Mais ... le désert est encore moins
sûr que le monde, il n'est jamais que l'ap-
proche du désert et, dans cette terre de
l'erreur, on n'est jamais 'ici', mais tou-
jours 'loin d'ici' (p. 88; my italics).

The way the study of Kafka goes on from here, however, points to the fact that, as the addition of the italicised words in the above passage also reminds us, a change of standpoint is gradually occurring as L'Espace progresses. The above insert does not alter the sense of the original. In both versions of the passage, it is stated that 'le désert ... n'est jamais que l'approche du désert'. By adding it to his argument, however, Blanchot reveals that, just as the original article consisted of criticising the

oversimplification of his problem by Kafka, in the name of the complexity of that problem; so L'Espace, in bringing together such original articles, is seeking in turn to prevent their critique of that oversimplification from falling prey in its turn to what it is denouncing. In the original, Blanchot wrote 'le désert qui est maintenant la vraie Terre Promise', before going on to add that 'le désert ... n'est jamais que l'approche du désert'. By repeating the latter observation in anticipation of its formulation in the due course of his argument, Blanchot is effectively putting pressure upon his own original position, so as to prevent its defence of the third, complex aspect of Kafka's problem, which Kafka himself did not respect, from being represented in simple spatial terms. The desert means exclusion from this world and the other world. It also means, as L'Espace emphasises, exclusion from the desert itself: exclusion in its most absolute form.

In thus countering its own argument, L'Espace reveals, as it did in the case of the study of Mallarmé, that it is concerned solely to influence the standpoint of theoretical analysis at the point where it has recourse to spatial metaphor so as to accommodate what it cannot define. As with the metaphor of un point central, the reference to the desert (which is nevertheless a refinement upon the topological fixity displayed by the metaphor of un point) is shown to be inadequate as a definition of the artist's experience. The difference between this chapter and the one which precedes it, however, is that, in conclusion, Blanchot indicates one instance in his author's writing when an adequate version of experience was provided. This was in the novel Das Schloss and in its protagonist K., the land-surveyor. First, Blanchot examines the figure of Joseph K. in Der Prozess in whom, he claims, Kafka saw an imperfect response to his own dilemma:

il faut errer et non pas être négligent comme l'est le Joseph K. du Procès, qui s' imagine que les choses vont toujours continuer et qu'il est encore dans le monde, alors que, dès la première phrase, il en est rejeté (pp. 89-90).

He thus proceeds with Kafka as he did with Mallarmé when he pointed out that Igitur is an unfinished work. Each author, aware of his dilemma, created a character whose response to that dilemma, in Blanchot's eyes, was designated by him as a failure. Kafka is to Joseph K., therefore, as Mallarmé is to Igitur. In Mallarmé's case, however, things proceed no further. On the one hand, the study of Igitur is postponed to 'un point plus central de l'espace littéraire'; while on the other, Mallarmé ceases to be the subject of the study altogether, to be replaced, as we saw, by a redefinition of the notion of image. It was clear from the way Blanchot described the poet's experience from the standpoint which Mallarmé neglected, that he had in mind the poem Un Coup de dés. It was not mentioned by name however. In his study of Kafka, he proceeds, in the same manner, to describe the author's experience from the standpoint of one of his works. This time however, the work is mentioned. It is clear from this that each of the studies proceeds in the same fashion: from a position within a perfect version of each author's experience, Blanchot first criticises that author's non-literary definition of his experience, then goes on to criticise an imperfect literary version of that experience. This is perfectly in keeping with his method as we have perceived it so far, and, what is more, would seem to have endowed that method with the justification it has so far seemed to lack: however critical Blanchot may be of the author, he can now claim to be simply adopting as his criterion a perfection of which the author himself has been capable elsewhere. The subjectivism of his approach would seem at last to have inserted itself into the field of objectively verifiable observation. The work, at last, is being respected.

Such is not Blanchot's purpose, however, as is evident in the difference which marks these two otherwise parallel studies: the fact that, in the study of Kafka, the 'ideal' work is brought into the field of the argument for which it provides a standpoint. This means that the parallel apparent between the studies of Mallarmé and Kafka is in fact a convergence: a closing of the distance between the ideal

standpoint of the work and the imperfect definitions of experience it is seeking to dispel. Far from pointing to a new respect for the work, therefore, this convergence reveals that it is L'Espace itself which is gradually coming to replace the 'ideal' works it seems to be referring to, by a real standpoint, superior to all others because it is absolutely conscious of the processes which it governs. This is plain from the way in which Blanchot refers to Das Schloss. Having described Kafka's dilemma in terms of 'le désert [qui] n'est jamais que l'approche du désert', Blanchot goes on:

nous savons que, de cette démarche, l'histoire de l'arpenteur nous représente l'image la plus impressionnante. Dès le commencement, ce héros de l'obstination inflexible ... est ... hors du salut, il appartient à l'exil, ce lieu où non seulement il n'est pas chez lui, mais où il est hors de lui, dans le dehors même, une région privée absolument d'intimité, où les êtres semblent absents, où tout ce qu'on croit saisir se dérobe. La difficulté tragique de l'entreprise, c'est que, dans ce monde de l'exclusion et de la séparation, tout est faux et inauthentique dès qu'on s'y arrête, tout vous manque dès qu'on s'y appuie, mais que cependant le fond de cette absence est toujours donné à nouveau comme une présence indubitable, absolue, et le mot absolu est ici à sa place, qui signifie séparé, comme si la séparation, éprouvée dans toute sa rigueur, pouvait se renverser dans l'absolument séparé, l'absolument absolu (p. 89).

This lengthy description of the action of Das Schloss appears to see the work as a reconciliation of space and the contradictions of literary experience. Its setting provides un lieu in which the irreducible paradox, present also in Mallarmé, that absence in its most extreme form is also 'une présence indubitable', can be deployed: le dehors même in which absence, in its most extreme form, is un fond upon which the paradox may turn, and within which the spatial conditions (la séparation) which obtain both confirm and complete the irreducibility of experience (l'absolu), by constituting the translation into concrete terms of what, etymologically, is their pure equivalent in the abstract sphere.

In so describing what occurs in Das Schloss, however, Blanchot is not seeking to indicate that the work constitutes the perfect version of Kafka's contradictory dilemma. A small variant to the above passage, which again reveals how L'Espace constantly corrects the argument of its constituent articles, points to Blanchot's true intentions in thus adopting an ideal standpoint from which to argue. For the first sentence of the passage read originally: 'nous savons que, de cette démarche, l'histoire de l'arpenteur nous présente l'image la plus impressionnante'. The difference between présenter une image and représenter une image contains the key to what is being attempted in L'Espace. In the original article, the image presented by the action of Das Schloss is made to constitute a convincing equivalent of the reality of Kafka's experience. Its relationship to experience is thus a simple one, as is its relationship to the work. In effect, work and image are indistinguishable (the work is the presence of the image), and together their presence provides an equivalent to reality in its absence. The work, in this perspective, appears as the transposition onto a higher level of the significance of its author's experience, so that, in taking it as his standpoint, Blanchot is conducting his analyses of the rest of Kafka's writing from the transcendent point towards which it all secretly tends, and where reason and experience at last coincide in a perfect spatial metaphor.

This is what is implied in the use, by the original article, of the expression présenter une image. Yet in that article, Blanchot is saying precisely the opposite. For when he pursues his examination of Das Schloss, it is to refute precisely the interpretation of its significance implied by that expression. Hence, although 'l'arpenteur est entièrement dégagé des fautes de Joseph K.' (p. 91); although he is never negligent, never forgetful of the need constantly to err, this does not make of him a perfect image of the unending exile to which Kafka felt himself condemned. For, Blanchot points out (in terms which do not make it clear whether this is Kafka's view of his hero or simply his own),

K. has another fault:

l'arpenteur tombe sans cesse dans la faute que Kafka désigne comme la plus grave, celle de l'impatience. L'impatience au sein de l'erreur est la faute essentielle, parce qu'elle méconnaît la vérité même de l'erreur qui impose, comme une loi, de ne jamais croire que le but est proche, ni que l'on s'en rapproche (pp. 91-92).

Therefore, if Das Schloss reflects the complex dilemma in which its author is caught, it reflects it in its complexity, it does not simplify and therefore resolve it. K. is as guilty, in his behaviour, as, from Blanchot's critical standpoint, Kafka is in relation the true complexity of his dilemma. By taking Das Schloss as his reference, therefore, Blanchot is not implying that in it Kafka has at last surmounted, through image, the contradictions of his condition. He makes this plain as follows:

on se trompe assurément autant que l'arpenteur se trompe, lorsqu'on croit reconnaître dans la fantasmagorie bureaucratique le symbole juste d'un monde supérieur (p. 92).

Das Schloss does not draw its significance from its ability to symbolise, and thus transcend, the complexities of its author's relationship to the world and to God. The true focus of its action lies elsewhere:

la fantasmagorie bureaucratique, cette oisiveté affairée qui la caractérise, ces êtres doubles qui en sont les exécutants, ... qui vont toujours par deux comme pour bien montrer qu'ils ne sont que les reflets l'un de l'autre et le reflet d'un tout invisible, toute cette chaîne de métamorphoses, ... toute cette puissante imagerie ne figure pas la vérité du monde supérieur, ni même sa transcendance, figure plutôt le bonheur et le malheur de la figuration, de cette exigence par laquelle l'homme de l'exil est obligé de se faire de l'erreur un moyen de vérité et de ce qui le trompe indéfiniment la possibilité de saisir l'infini (pp. 93-94).

For Blanchot, therefore, the novel is not an end. In it, Kafka does not provide an exemplary response to the artist's dilemma, which can be taken as a yard-stick with which to judge his other work or that of other writers. In referring to it, Blanchot is simply using it as a means whereby

the dilemma which he himself is seeking to resolve may become more apparent. What interests him about the land-surveyor is that his 'faute', impatience, is an inevitable one: 'qui n'est pas impatient est négligent' (p. 92). In other words, if K. is free of the errors of Joseph K., this does not make him a perfect character of fiction. It makes him a perfect reflection of the impossible process at the heart of fiction, which Blanchot, in L'Espace, is seeking to master.

This makes it easier to grasp the significance of the change from présenter une image to représenter une image. The original article makes it clear that the true significance of Das Schloss lies in the way it reflects the processes which give rise to it: what Blanchot refers to as la figuration. K.'s impatience, his essential 'faute', is inseparable from those processes:

cette exigence d'un dénouement prématuré est
le principe de la figuration, elle engendre
l'image (p. 92).

However, in what he goes on to say, Blanchot points once again to another sense of the term image than is generally assumed:

/La figuration/ engendre l'image ou si l'on veut l'idole, et la malédiction qui s'y attache est celle qui s'attache à l'idolâtrie. L'homme veut l'unité tout de suite, il la veut dans la séparation même, il se la représente, et cette représentation, image de l'unité, reconstitue aussitôt l'élément de la dispersion où il se perd de plus en plus, car l'image, en tant qu'image, ne peut jamais être atteinte, et elle lui dérobe, en outre, l'unité dont elle est l'image, elle l'en sépare en se rendant inaccessible et en la rendant inaccessible (pp. 92-93).

Image, on one level, is the particular image to which experience gives rise. On a more fundamental level, however, it never attains to such particularity: 'l'image, en tant qu'image, ne peut jamais être atteinte'. In the original article, as in the study of Mallarmé and indeed in the first 'Annexe' of L'Espace, 'Les deux versions de l'imaginaire', which was written in 1951, the knowledge of this other form of image is present, and corresponds to the standpoint from

which Blanchot has never ceased to argue. In composing L'Espace, however, Blanchot is seeking to turn that knowledge into a form of practice: to provide in reality the standpoint which analysis has so far only ever taken as an ideal, to render conscious what in literature so far has always remained unconscious. The way he seeks to do this, as we have already remarked, is to deploy literary space within the space deployed by logical analysis. In other words, to allow 'l'image, en tant qu'image' to affect the standpoint from which 'elle ne peut jamais être atteinte', and thus turn the encounter between analysis and literature into a superior version of the literature it apparently seeks to analyse. In including the study of Kafka in L'Espace, therefore, Blanchot is claiming to provide that dimension of image which, in the original article, can only be indicated as lying at the heart of Kafka's experience. In the original, therefore, Das Schloss does constitute, for Blanchot's argument, the ideal standpoint from which to criticise the rest of Kafka's work. In it, as nowhere else, Kafka respected the nature of his experience: the novel presents an image of the inaccessibility of image. This ambiguity corresponds to that respect. In L'Espace, however, the inaccessibility of image has been made the standpoint from which Blanchot is conducting his analyses. His relationship to Das Schloss thus changes fundamentally. It no longer constitutes the ideal standpoint from which to explore the rest of Kafka, thus proving that Kafka ultimately resolved the dilemma of the artist. From the new standpoint constituted by L'Espace itself, Das Schloss appears as an imperfect version of image. It no longer presents an image therefore (thus encompassing, in a single act of presentation, the dual, ambiguous nature of image): it represents an image (revealing that it is no more than an exemplary instance of an encompassing process of figuration, which it reflects but does not transcend).

If, in the original article, Blanchot appeared to be arguing from the standpoint of Das Schloss, by the time it is included in L'Espace, this has ceased quite positively to be the case. As has already been apparent from the var-

stants I have cited, Blanchot is seeking, in this work, to counter the tendency of his own original arguments to adopt the standpoint of the authors he is studying, even if it be an ideal one. In referring to Das Schloss, he is thus concerned not to align his own analyses with the most perfect insights of its author, and this is clear from what is said in the original article about the reading of the novel as an image of the processes which gave rise to it. First, Blanchot asks the following question:

dans quelle mesure Kafka a-t-il eu conscience de l'analogie de /la/ démarche /de l'arpenteur/ avec le mouvement par lequel l'oeuvre tend vers son origine ...? Dans quelle mesure a-t-il rapproché l'épreuve de ses héros de la manière dont lui-même, à travers l'art, tentait de s'ouvrir une voie vers l'oeuvre et, par l'oeuvre, vers quelque chose de vrai? (p. 94).

In asking it, however, he is dispensing with the need to reply to it, because, as he goes on to say, it does not matter whether Kafka was conscious of this or not:

Kafka, peut-être à son insu, a profondément éprouvé qu'écrire, c'est se livrer à l'incessant et, par angoisse, angoisse de l'impatience, souci scrupuleux de l'exigence d'écrire, il s'est le plus souvent refusé à ce saut qui seul permet l'achèvement, cette confiance insouciant et heureuse par laquelle (momentanément) un term est mis à l'interminable (p. 95; my italics).

In this passage, Kafka is simultaneously respected as an author and deprived of any true initiative in the processes which earn him that respect. Blanchot was not seeking in the original article to measure Kafka's mastery of his problem, but to locate that point in his work where, whether he knew it or not, he was closest to respecting that problem. In L'Espace, that attitude has evolved into a conscious alternative to what in Kafka (and in Mallarmé) was probably only partly conscious. Kafka has thus ceased altogether to provide the true focus of Blanchot's argument, as is clear from a small variant which can now be seen as complementing the change from présenter to représenter une image. Referring to K.'s impatience, and the inevitability it displays, Blanchot writes:

a peine arrivé, sans rien comprendre à cette

épreuve de l'exclusion où il est, K. tout de suite se met en route pour parvenir tout de suite au terme. Il néglige les intermédiaires, et sans doute est-ce un mérite, la force de la tension vers l'absolu, mais n'en ressort que mieux son aberration qui est de prendre pour le terme ce qui n'est qu'un intermédiaire, une représentation selon ses 'moyens' (p. 92).

The final words of this passage read as follows in the original: 'une "représentation" selon ses "moyens"'. The small adjustments constituted by this removal of inverted commas and the change from présenter to représenter are a sign of the processes at work in L'Espace. For, by referring to Das Schloss originally as presenting an image of the processes which gave rise to it, Blanchot was placing himself in a logical position from which his reasoning could only express itself in paradox: the novel presents an image which represents the representation of which it is product. The tautological circularity of this statement, so symptomatic of his earlier analyses, obliges him to differentiate between that representation which the novel, by its presence as image, has superseded, and that representation which is represented by the image present in the novel. Hence, K.'s activity 'represents' representation, while Kafka's presents the image which constitutes this paradox. In this analysis, Kafka appears superior to his hero because, although caught up in the same dilemma as K. is, he is able to transcend it by expressing it. As was plain from the passages quoted previously, Blanchot did not intend his analysis to signify this: on the contrary, it was suggested that it was peut-être à son insu that Kafka had so reflected his dilemma in his novel, and furthermore, that this was unimportant since the true subject of Blanchot's attention was not Kafka at all, but the problem of the artist as it is perceptible in him.

By including the article in L'Espace, Blanchot frees his argument from the limitations placed upon it through seeming to take as its standpoint the perfection which Kafka achieved in Das Schloss. Henceforth, the inaccessibility of image in its true state does not constitute a barrier to his reasoning, obliging it adopt the standpoint of works

whose presence represents it in its absence. By changing présenter into représenter to describe Kafka's activity, and removing the inverted commas from représenter in his description of K.'s activity, Blanchot renders them equal to each other. Both author and character are engaged in the same erroneous activity, and by thus aligning them one with the other, he reveals that the true axis of his argument does not pass through Das Schloss as a finished work, but, from a standpoint which is uniquely its own, is focused upon the processes -- la figuration, l'image en tant qu'image -- which engendered it.

At the end of the chapter which deals with Kafka, L'Es-pace has arrived at the point at which, according to its thematic pattern, a break is going to occur, after which the reader will find himself in 'un point plus central de l'espace littéraire', and thus find access to l'espace de la mort'. Somehow, the work is going to bring about that 'renversement radical' which constitutes the true nature of literary space, and provide its reader with a standpoint which is equivalent to that occupied by the writer and the reader in the process of their encounter with literature. Having examined the way Blanchot studies Mallarmé and Kafka in the chapters leading up to this point, we are in a better position to understand how he intends to produce this renversement. Chapters I to IV seem to require, as I remarked initially, that we read them in a continuous fashion. In so doing, they tell us also, we will experience a break at the point where our initial approach would have led us to expect the greatest degree of coherence: namely l'oeuvre. Put another way, as the work's argument tends gradually towards its apparent centre, where the heart of its argument encounters what is at the heart of its subject (l'oeuvre), it becomes increasingly apparent that another force is being brought to bear upon the direction of its argument, until, at the conventional heart of the work, it is revealed that the work's true path lies on another plane altogether. We saw earlier that the source of this deflection lay in the

displacement which L'Espace was seeking to bring about within the very standpoint of the arguments it contained. In its attempt to deploy 'l'espace littéraire', the work seeks to affect the objective pole of its argument, for which l'oeuvre constitutes an irreducible absolute, by affecting the subjective pole constituted by what, in theoretical terms, is often referred to as the experience of literature. In keeping with what, in the section 'Le mot expérience', is said about what happens to the individual mind when it becomes engaged, either as a writer or as a reader, in the processes of literature, L'Espace seeks to bring about, as a preliminary to its exploration of the problem, the displacement of the non-literary standpoint from which literature is generally analysed. On the level of analysis as well as on that of analytical structure, therefore, experience is displaced by l'espace littéraire.

In what occurs in the chapters devoted to Kafka and Mallarmé, this pattern is very perceptible. For the argument of each chapter both conforms to the conventional itinerary traced out by the chapter-headings, and also, as we have seen, submits to the influence of the original standpoint which governs them in L'Espace. This is achieved by what amounts to a ruse on Blanchot's part, which takes the form of seeming to posit a hierarchy linking the various authors he studies in the work. For the first time in his career as a critic, it appears, he is ranging in order of what he sees as perfection the efforts of writers who, hitherto, have been on the same footing in his writing. It is as if, now that he has set himself the task of confronting authors themselves with the contradiction between their 'experience' and their expression of it, it is at last possible to differentiate qualitatively between different authors, on the basis of the degree of respect each displays for what is authentic in his 'experience'. For example, in the study of Kafka, we read:

le cas de Kafka est trouble et complexe. La passion de Hölderlin est pure passion poétique, elle l'attire hors de lui-même par une exigence qui ne porte pas d'autre nom. La

passion de Kafka est aussi purement littéraire, mais pas toujours et pas tout le temps (pp. 59-60).

This judgement bears the unmistakable mark of the reasoning present in 'La folie par excellence', which Derrida so justly condemned as 'essentialisme'. For if Hölderlin's 'passion poétique' is pure, it is so because it was indistinguishable from the madness from which he suffered. The 'exigence' to which he responded may well have no other name than poetry; it nevertheless destroyed him as an individual, as the 'hors de lui-même' makes clear. At this stage, however, Blanchot is not merely taking the state of a madman's mind as the yardstick with which to measure the poetic integrity of those writers who retained their sanity. It is no accident that the study of Hölderlin contained in L'Espace is confined to an 'annexe' of the work: by placing it beyond the confines of a work which is presented as a fragmentary one, Blanchot would seem to be indicating above all that the reading of Hölderlin destroys in advance any attempt at analysing it in the usual way -- and indeed, may well have precipitated the fragmentation which L'Espace displays. In return, however, the presence of Hölderlin somewhere beyond the bounds of the work, coupled with the comparison between his passion and Kafka's, would seem to point to the emergence of a value-judgement in Blanchot's criticism. As always, his approach to his authors consists of resisting their versions of literary experience in the name of the integrity of that experience. What now would seem to be perceptible, from one author to another, is a gradual decrease in the resistance each offers to the force of his critic's affirmation. Hence, from its beginnings in chapter I, which is highly affirmative in nature, his argument proceeds to confront Mallarmé with a complexity which his analyses do not take account of. In the process, as we saw, Mallarmé ceases altogether to be the subject of the study, to be replaced by the problem of which he was not even aware. Blanchot then moves on to Kafka, who is treated in a similar fashion. However, at the point where the study of Mallarmé dispensed with the poet altogether, the study of

Kafka encounters a work by the author which displays an awareness of its author's dilemma. The parallel between this study and that of Mallarmé thus turns out, as I have already suggested, to display a convergence between the two standpoints present each time. In L'Espace, Blanchot sets out to argue from the standpoint of literature. What appears to be happening, as his argument proceeds, is that the distance between that standpoint and the standpoint against which he is arguing each time is gradually decreasing. Blanchot would thus appear to be seeking to eliminate that distance -- within which, it must be remembered, his argument in La Part oscillated helplessly -- by progressively allowing his own standpoint to coincide with that with which he is arguing, so that ultimately, it would seem, it may become impossible to extricate the standpoint of reflexion upon literature from the standpoint of literature itself.

It is in chapter IV that this process both reaches its climax and reveals itself to be an illusion. In keeping with what we have already observed on the thematic level, between chapters I to III and chapter IV there is both continuity and a disruption of continuity in the outward processes of the work's argument. It is made clear by L'Espace that in chapter IV, the reader has reached a stage in 'l'espace littéraire' where certain questions which could not previously be examined now can be. The first two sections of that chapter, furthermore, seem, each in its way, to corroborate this. The first, 'La mort possible', applies Blanchot's method of contesting versions of experience in the name of experience itself, not to the experience of literature (which allows some footing in the possible), but to the experience of death (which does not). The second, 'L'expérience d'Igitur', adopts the same standpoint in order to demonstrate, in a way it is claimed was impossible in chapter II, that 'le suicide philosophique' is as erroneous as suicide itself as a response to the notion of death. These two sections, as we saw, parallel the first two chapters of the work, and appear to conduct their arguments from a position nearer to the heart of the problem which concerns them. What is still not clear, at this stage, is how exactly the work claims to

have brought its reader to this position. This is intentional. On the level of thematic organisation, chapters I to IV trace out an unbroken itinerary, which nevertheless entails a break at some point along the way. This break is perceptible between chapter III and chapter IV; it clearly concerns the notion of the finished work, of l'oeuvre; and it coincides with a repetition of the pattern of analysis present in the first three chapters. Specifically, it claims to coincide with the passage of the reader from his original standpoint to a standpoint within 'l'espace littéraire'. In L'Espace, however, Blanchot plays upon the ambiguity of this process so that, though his reader is aware that between chapters I to III and chapter IV a change is meant to have occurred in his standpoint, he cannot immediately locate the point at which it in fact occurs. He knows, because the work has told him, that he is now in literary space. He is unable truly to orient himself within it, however, because of the two conflicting directions in which he feels he is being sent.

The climax of this process occurs in the third section of chapter IV, which is devoted to Rilke. In this section, the process of convergence, which appears to govern the order in which authors are studied in L'Espace, both comes to a point and reveals the true axis upon which the work turns. 'L'espace littéraire' both seems to be attainable through a total coincidence between the standpoint of criticism and that of the author being criticised, and is revealed as lying outside of the distinction between author and critic altogether. Both of these aspects are perceptible in the sections which precede the section on Rilke in chapter IV. On the one hand, a passage added to the beginning of the original version of 'L'expérience d'Igitur' seems to confirm the reader's impression that his reading is being made to converge upon a writer whose response to his experience was more authentic than any other. Thus, referring to the conclusion of 'La mort possible', which locates the true site of literature in that moment of negligence when the death which the suicide gives himself does not quite correspond to the death he receives, Blanchot goes on:

de ce point de vue, l'on pressent de quelle manière le souci de l'oeuvre a pu un instant, en Mallarmé, se confondre avec l'affirmation du suicide. Mais on comprend aussi comment ce même souci a conduit Rilke à chercher avec la mort une relation plus 'exacte' que celle de la mort volontaire. Les deux expériences doivent être méditées (p. 133).

Just as Hölderlin was designated a purer literary mind than Kafka, Rilke is here preferred to Mallarmé for his literary response to experience. The first four chapters of L'Espace thus indeed seem to converge upon Rilke in their approach to 'l'espace littéraire', so that the repetition, in chapter IV, of the movement of the first three chapters would seem to occur on a deeper level than the original pattern of analysis, and the break between chapter III and chapter IV to consist of a passage from outside to inside literary space. Simultaneously, however, another direction is apparent at this stage. For though the convergence upon Rilke lies through Mallarmé and Kafka (under the influence of Hölderlin), Mallarmé appears twice. Although dispensed with fairly quickly in chapter II, he turns up again in chapter IV. Moreover, this is not for some more perfect version of his experience than that encountered in chapter II. On the contrary, it is the work which, in that chapter, was designated a failure. It was also claimed, in chapter II, that Igitur could only be examined from a point closer to the heart of 'l'espace littéraire'. However, by placing it in the path of gradual convergence which seems to be the true direction of argument in L'Espace, Blanchot lets it be known that there is another direction present too. Between chapters I to III and chapter IV, a break occurs, and it is marked by the repetition of the word l'oeuvre. This repetition can now also be seen on the level of the authors studied, so that, despite appearances, no continuity exists between chapter III and chapter IV. The apparent convergence towards an author in whom literary experience found its most perfect expression suggested that the move from one level of analysis to another between chapters III and IV, though sacrificing the notion of l'oeuvre, would con-

tinue to approach the problem of literature from the standpoint of an author. What has already been apparent in the studies of Mallarmé and Kafka, and is also made clear at the beginning of chapter IV, is now manifest in all of its implications: in approaching individual authors so as to examine their experience as writers, L'Espace is seeking solely to disengage the processes at work in that experience from the particular formulations or creations in which they have come to rest.

Hence, before the apparent direction being taken by the argument in L'Espace can reach its culmination, it is interfered with. The approach to literary space, which appears to signify on one level a gradual coincidence between critic and author, reveals itself to be at the same time a basis for further criticism of imperfections which could not be adequately criticised before. What is more, this interference is not confined to Mallarmé: the first section of chapter IV, 'La mort possible', begins its main argument with a study of Kafka. The alternative pattern being displayed by the development of the argument in L'Espace now appears much more substantial. The repetition of the case of Mallarmé is not an isolated incident in the otherwise uniform convergent pattern of the work. It is now clear that, in repeating the pattern on chapters I to III, chapter IV is also reversing that pattern. On one level, Mallarmé leads on to Kafka and then to Rilke. On the other, however, before the reader can reach Rilke, he is directed back through Kafka to Mallarmé. This reversal is quite fundamental. We saw how, in the first study of Mallarmé, his poem 'Un coup de dés' provided the ideal horizon in relation to which the rest of his poetic conceptions were called into question. In effect, therefore, Blanchot's analysis of him was conducted from a standpoint within 'Un coup de dés', using the spatial perfection of the latter as a means both of judging the rest of Mallarmé and of providing a critique of spatial metaphor when used to define literature. In 'L'expérience d'Igitur', on the contrary, Blanchot's analysis of Igitur, which, as he announced in chapter II, is as critical as his analysis of Mallarmé's general con-

ception of poetry, culminates in a study of 'Un coup de dés'. Between one study of Mallarmé's experience and another, therefore, while Blanchot's judgement of the poet remains the same, his standpoint in relation to him has been totally reversed.

The same process is present in the second study of Kafka, which comes straight after the first. There is obviously a difference between the reversal which occurs here and the one which concerns Mallarmé. This is because, in the original study of Kafka, the ideal standpoint from which Blanchot undertook his critique of Kafka was brought into the study, as we saw, and revealed (by L'Espace if not in the original) as a false standpoint. This difference was already a sign that, in pursuing his usual critical method of contesting particular versions of literary experience in the name of that experience itself, Blanchot was not motivated by any respect for individual works. What occurs in chapter IV reveals that he is not motivated by any respect for individual authors either. For, in reversing the direction of his analysis, he treats the two authors he has examined so far as individual creative minds -- and thus as his equals, if not as his superiors -- simply as inaccurate versions of a broader experience. In the case of Mallarmé, this is obvious: his personal experience gives way to the impersonal experience constituted by a flawed work, Igitur. As for Kafka, he is not even examined in terms of one of his works: rather as in the case of Mallarmé the first time, his entire experience as a writer is concentrated into a single statement, taken from his Tagebücher, to the effect that in order to die happy he writes, yet in order to write, he has to be capable of dying. What is more, this paradox is evoked solely in order to indicate the experience which gives rise to it: 'la contradiction nous rétablit dans la profondeur de l'expérience' (p. 110), and to extricate it, in what Todorov clearly finds an objectionable manner, from the sphere of Kafka's work altogether:

l'on peut ... pressentir que le mouvement qui dans l'oeuvre est approche, espace et usage de la mort, n'est pas tout à fait ce même mouve-

ment qui conduirait l'écrivain à la possibilité de mourir. L'on peut même supposer que les rapports si étranges de l'artiste et de l'oeuvre, ces rapports qui font dépendre l'oeuvre de celui qui n'est possible qu'au sein de l'oeuvre, une telle anomalie vient de cette expérience qui bouleverse les formes du temps, mais vient plus profondément de son ambiguïté, de son double aspect que Kafka exprime avec trop de simplicité dans les phrases que nous lui prêtons: Ecrire pour pouvoir mourir -- Mourir pour pouvoir écrire, mots qui nous enferment dans leur exigence circulaire, qui nous obligent à partir de ce que nous voulons trouver, à ne chercher que le point de départ, à faire ainsi de ce point quelque chose dont on ne s'approche qu'en s'en éloignant, mais qui autorisent aussi cet espoir: là où s'annonce l'interminable, celui de saisir, de faire surgir le terme (p. 111).

There is no doubt that Kafka is sacrificed here in what, by all established canons of critical behaviour, is a shocking fashion. Blanchot does not even quote the tiny section of his writing upon which he bases his argument: he uses '/des/ phrases que nous lui prêtons'. Once again, moreover, the problem he identifies behind Kafka's imperfect formulae is first and foremost his own: as should now, I hope, be clear, the 'exigence circulaire' which obliges the writer to take as his starting-point what it is he is seeking, is none other than the critical processes which led Blanchot's thinking into its impasse after La Part. In short, Blanchot is here quite openly seeking to break out of the vicious circle of reasoning by projecting it into the writings of another, and thus inevitably examining it from a standpoint which, ideally at any rate, is free of its limitations.

Shocking as this approach may be, however, within the overall pattern of L'Espace it constitutes a stage in the emergence of a completely original mode of writing. For the circle which Blanchot is seeking to identify, and thus to break, is made up, in L'Espace, of the studies contained in the first four chapters. By progressing from Mallarmé to Kafka and then, before moving on to Rilke, reversing the direction of his argument and returning through Kafka to Mallarmé, Blanchot extricates his reasoning once and for all (rather as he did in L'Arrêt de mort for narrative) from

the sphere in which literary criticism traditionally evolves. His method, as ever, consists of confronting individual works and authors with a perfect version of what they express only imperfectly. In the first two studies of Mallarmé and Kafka, therefore, he extracts from his reading of each author the essence of their position as he sees it. In each case, therefore, the imperfections of particular works or formulae produced by the author leave intact the authenticity of each author's experience. In chapter IV, however, Blanchot goes a step further, by using the standpoint which originally lay, albeit ideally, within the domain of the author's experience, to conduct a second critique of each author which, this time, dispenses with his experience altogether. In short, for the first time in his criticism, Blanchot is quite openly using authors merely as a means of access to the fundamental problem of literature. Picon would thus seem ultimately to have been right. However, in examining Mallarmé and Kafka for the ideal heart of their experience, only to turn around, once this has been reached, and administer a coup de grâce to his already failing subjects, Blanchot is not seeking to move once and for all from a 'concrete' to an 'abstract' plane of argument. He is seeking, I have said, to break out of the circle of analysis governed by the notions of l'oeuvre and of individual experience, which constitute the two poles within which literary theory generally moves. In so breaking the circle, however, he is not seeking to leave it intact. Though he does retrace his steps in a circular fashion, the result of this is to leave the circle from which he has extricated himself permanently broken. This is clear in the second study of Mallarmé. By ending with a brief examination of 'Un Coup de dés', it seems to be inverting the order in which Mallarmé's work was examined the first time. However, to use the terms Blanchot uses in his critique of Kafka the second time, in taking 'Un Coup de dés' as an ideal reference initially, he is not setting out from where he hopes to arrive ('partir de ce que nous voulons trouver'). It is clear from both of his studies of Mallarmé (and will be clear subsequently too)¹⁰ that 'Un Coup de dés', like the poetry of

Hölderlin, constitutes a true ideal for Blanchot's thinking. However, in beginning and ending his circular argument with a reference to it, Blanchot is not nurturing the hope, again as he puts it: 'là où s'annonce l'interminable, / L'espoir de saisir, de faire surgir le terme'. On the contrary, the break with the circle of analysis governed by experience and l'oeuvre, the reversal of the direction of his argument which Blanchot effects in L'Espace, are intended to open the circle once and for all onto the plane of the interminable.

This is made quite explicit in the study of Igitur at the point where Blanchot returns to the subject of 'Un Coup de dés' and thus, from the standpoint of L'Espace, brings his argument full circle:

Un coup de dés n'est pas Igitur, bien qu'il en réveille presque tous les éléments, il n'est pas Igitur renversé, le défi abandonné, le rêve vaincu, l'espoir devenu résignation. De tels rapprochements seraient sans valeur. Un coup de dés ne répond pas à Igitur comme une phrase répond à une autre phrase, une solution à un problème (p. 147).

The relationship between the two works is not a symmetrical one. Therefore the reversal which Blanchot has made cannot be taken as producing a finished circle, in which the ideal work which helps to understand the imperfect work, is in turn designated as perfect expression of what the poet was seeking imperfectly to say. The term rapprochements, in the above passage, originally read comparaisons, and the change from an abstract to a concrete term to refer to what Blanchot is seeking to avoid, would seem to indicate the relationship of L'Espace to the works it is discussing. In reversing the order in which he studies Mallarmé and Kafka, he is not attempting to close the circle of analysis, but, by making it seem to close with 'Un coup de dés', to distend it once and for all and oblige it to incorporate the interminable process which, by its form, it seeks to contain. Thus the above passage goes on:

cette parole elle-même retentissante, UN COUP DE DES JAMAIS N'ABOLIRA LE HASARD, la force de son affirmation, l'éclat péremptoire de sa certitude, ce qui fait d'elle une présence autoritaire qui tient physiquement toute l'oeuvre rassemblée, cette foudre qui semble tomber,

pour la consumer, sur la folle croyance d'Igitur, loin pourtant de la contredire, lui donne au contraire encore sa dernière chance, qui n'est pas de vouloir annuler le hasard, fût-ce par un acte de négation mortel, mais de s'abandonner entièrement à ce hasard, de le consacrer en entrant sans réserve dans son intimité (ibid.).

In appearing to rise once and for all, in L'Espace, from the realm of concrete literary practice to that of abstract analysis, Blanchot is thus in reality abolishing altogether the dual distinctions which make it appear that, in writing about literature, one has inevitably emerged from the domain of literature. The reversal he carries out in appearing to bring his analyses full-circle does not therefore allow him to attain a higher level of analysis: on the contrary, the sole purpose of that full circle is to concentrate analysis upon a work which, in its own relationship to a less perfect version of what it is saying, provides a lesson for analysis, by deploying a form of space in which the imperfections of a particular work are both maintained and overcome, in what amounts to a process of creative criticism based upon the paradox at the heart of literature. In rising 'above' the circle which emerges from chapters I to IV, therefore, L'Espace is attempting to take literature with it. In seeking to deploy literary space within the domain governed by theoretical analysis, it is following the lesson of 'Un Coup de dés', and if we turn now to the study of Rilke, the way Blanchot seeks to accomplish this task will become apparent.

There can be no doubt that the study of Rilke, which occupies sixty pages of the work, constitutes the crux of what is being attempted in L'Espace. In it, as I have already indicated, Blanchot argues for the first time ever from a standpoint of overwhelming agreement with the author he is studying. This means that the process whereby affirmation based upon literary experience confronts affirmation determined by logical analysis, first in literary critics then in authors themselves, appears to reach its culmination in Ril-

ke, as the critical standpoint and the standpoint of the writer virtually coincide. In this section of L'Espace, therefore, Blanchot seems to be engaging intentionally in the process which held the argument of La Part captive, and, by a process of gradual convergence, centring the standpoint of theoretical analysis within the domain of literary space, and rendering the domain of the impossible ('l'espace de la mort') accessible at last to reason.

That, on one level at least, this is his intention in the section on Rilke, is evident from the difference in 'tension' between his argument here and that devoted to Mallarmé and Kafka. The study begins with an examination of Rilke's early attitude to death. However, it is noteworthy that the poet's attitude is examined, not for what it fails to respect in the problem, but for what it can teach us about it. Emphasis is therefore placed constantly upon the intensity of Rilke's experience, rather than upon what his critic's reading of him can tell him about his experience. This difference is crucial, and marks a perceptible shift of critical emphasis compared to what precedes it in the work. In short, the reader of L'Espace feels that he has somehow reached another stage in the work's argument. As the first section of the study proceeds, Rilke's standpoint appears constantly as one from which he so respected the nature of his experience that even the temptation to misrepresent it, which formed the focus of the previous studies, was progressively overcome, as, like the Hero of his Elegien, he advanced in an unbroken curve towards poetic perfection. The case of Malte Laurids Brigge appears, in Rilke's career, as very much the same sort of experience as the case of Igitur in Mallarmé's. Hence we read:

l'expérience de Malte a été, pour Rilke, décisive. Ce livre est mystérieux parce qu'il tourne autour d'un centre caché dont l'auteur n'a pu s'approcher. Ce centre est la mort de Malte ou l'instant de son effondrement (p. 166).

The work was thus, like Igitur, a failure:

la découverte de Malte est celle de cette force trop grande pour nous qu'est la mort impersonnelle, qui est l'excès de notre force, ce qui

l'excède et la rendrait prodigieuse, si nous réussissions à la faire nôtre à nouveau. Découverte qu'il ne peut maîtriser, dont il ne peut faire l'assise de son art (p. 167).

Blanchot emphasises, however, Rilke's knowledge that it was a failure:

l'achèvement de Malte marqua pour celui qui l'avait écrit le commencement d'une crise qui dura dix ans. La crise a sans doute d'autres profondeurs, mais lui-même a toujours mis en rapport avec ce livre où il avait le sentiment d'avoir dérobé l'essentiel, de sorte que son héros, son double, errait encore autour de lui, comme un mort mal enterré, qui voulait toujours séjourner sous son regard (p. 168).

Moreover, like Mallarmé, his imperfect response to his experience finally matured into a perfect one, the Elegien. Unlike with Mallarmé, however, emphasis is once again placed upon Rilke's conscious progress towards perfection. Hence, after evoking the patience with which the poet suffered the long years of searching which followed Malte, Blanchot goes on:

plus tard, lorsque sa patience et son consentement l'auront fait sortir de cette 'région perdue et désolée' en lui permettant de rencontrer sa vraie parole de poète, celle des 'Elégies', il dira nettement que, dans cette nouvelle oeuvre, à partir des mêmes données qui avaient rendu impossible l'existence de Malte, la vie redevient possible, et il dira en outre qu'il n'a pas trouvé l'issue en reculant, mais au contraire en poussant plus loin le dur chemin (pp. 169-170).

By the end of the first section of the study, therefore, we are justified in feeling that Blanchot has at last discovered a poet who measures up to his own standards as a critic. There is a small sign within this apparent espousal of Rilke's standpoint, however, which indicates the presence of another direction in Blanchot's argument. Referring to a letter of Rilke's which speaks of the impossibility of even dying, because Malte is present for him beyond death itself, Blanchot continues:

parole qu'il faut retenir, rare dans l'expérience de Rilke et qui la montre ici ouverte sur cette région nocturne où la mort n'apparaît plus comme la possibilité la plus propre, mais comme la profondeur vide de

l'impossibilité, région dont il se détourne le plus souvent, dans laquelle il va cependant errer dix ans, appelé en elle par l'oeuvre et l'exigence de l'oeuvre (p. 169).

Simultaneously, it would seem, Rilke is being examined as if his response to his experience was exemplary, yet treated as someone who, 'le plus souvent', turned away from what throughout Blanchot's study has been presented as its true focus. This ambiguity is strange. It is as if, in appearing to allow his standpoint to converge with that of Rilke, Blanchot is not focusing upon all of the poet's work, nor even upon the work in which, according to him, Rilke finally discovered 'sa vraie parole de poète', the Elegien, but upon some momentary act of poetic authenticity towards which his entire career secretly tends. In short, Blanchot has not discovered in Rilke the perfect poet: he has discovered, in his approach to poetry, an inkling of perfection, and in espousing Rilke's standpoint in what appears to be a process of convergence in L'Espace, he is at the same time allowing his argument to be drawn towards another standpoint altogether.

This process reaches its climax in the second part of the study, which is entitled 'L'espace de la mort'. This section concentrates in detail upon Rilke's maturer writings. It begins, in a manner now familiar to Blanchot's reader, by criticising the tendency of both readers and authors to interpret and translate what has been expressed poetically. After quoting a well-known letter of Rilke's, concerning the Elegien, Blanchot goes on:

la célébrité qui a accueilli cette lettre à Hulewicz et rendu plus connues que ses poèmes les pensées par lesquelles il a cherché à les commenter, montre combien nous aimons substituer au pur mouvement poétique des idées intéressantes. Et il est frappant que le poète soit lui-même sans cesse tenté de se décharger de l'obscur parole, non pas en l'exprimant, mais en la comprenant, -- comme si, dans l'angoisse des mots qu'il n'est appelé qu'à dire et jamais à lire, il voulait se persuader que, malgré tout, il s'entend, il a droit de lecture et de compréhension (p. 170).

The result of this, he continues, is that:

la lecture de Rilke a 'élevé' au rang des pen-

sées une partie de son oeuvre. Elle a traduit son expérience (p. 171).

However, instead of making this problem the mainspring of his approach to Rilke, and seeking to dismantle the poet's non-poetic versions of his experience, Blanchot simply goes along with them and, for a page or so, confines himself to reiterating them in his turn. This is because, in doing so, he finally encounters a stage in Rilke's reasoning which corresponds precisely to the problem with which he himself is confronted in L'Espace, namely the relationship between space as we generally know it, and the inner space of experience. Blanchot thus identifies two obstacles in Rilke's thinking: first, the limited nature of ordinary space and time, 'les limites de l'ici et du maintenant' (p. 174); then, the gulf separating inner space, which frees us from the here and now, and the real domain in which it may alone accomplish what it desires. These two obstacles Blanchot refers to as 'une mauvaise étendue' and 'une mauvaise intériorité' (ibid.). Yet, he goes on, they are nevertheless both domains of unlimited richness and extent, so that the question must arise (though, significantly, we do not know if it is a paraphrase of Rilke, or one posed by Blanchot himself):

ne se pourrait-il pas qu'il y eût un point où l'espace fût à la fois intimité et dehors, un espace qui au dehors serait déjà intimité spirituelle, une intimité qui, en nous, serait la réalité du dehors, telle que nous y serions en nous au dehors dans l'intimité et l'ampleur intime de ce dehors? (ibid.).

If the question cannot be attributed to either party to the study, the answer it receives points clearly to what it is in Rilke that interests Blanchot:

c'est ce que l'expérience de Rilke, expérience d'abord de forme 'mystique' ..., puis l'expérience poétique le conduisent à reconnaître, du moins à entrevoir et à pressentir, peut-être à appeler en l'exprimant. Il l'appelle Weltinnenraum, l'espace intérieur du monde (pp. 174-175).

This original mode of space, which relates the space of experience and the space of the world, and permits the poet to pass from one to the other, is very close to what Blan-

chot is seeking to deploy in L'Espace. His espousal of Rilke's standpoint in such an uncommon fashion thus arises from a conception of the problem of literature common to them both. Hence, once again, inadequacies in the poet's approach which, under other circumstances would have drawn Blanchot's critical fire, are passed over as insignificant. The reference to Weltinnenraum in the above passage is hedged around with expressions of doubt concerning the poet's true perception of what he also calls das Offene. What is more, Blanchot then goes on to remark that, although

l'Ouvert est absolue incertitude et ... jamais, sur aucun visage et dans aucun regard, nous n'en avons aperçu le reflet, car tout miroitement est déjà celui d'une réalité figurée (p. 176),

what is striking about Rilke's attitude is:

combien cependant il reste certain de l'incertain, comme il tient à en écarter les doutes, à l'affirmer dans l'espoir plutôt que dans l'angoisse, avec une confiance qui n'ignore pas que la tâche est difficile, mais en renouvelle constamment l'annonce heureuse (p. 177).

Yet this comment upon the poet's attitude, reminiscent of what, in relation to Kafka, constituted a concerted critique of his thinking, occurs only in passing, and within the broader context of a wholehearted assertion of the validity of Rilke's approach. For example, comparing Rilke's search for a point where, in his terms, "l'intérieur et l'extérieur se ramassent en un seul espace continu", with what Novalis and Kierkegaard were attempting in their writing, Blanchot sets him above the other two, because:

l'expérience de Rilke a ses tâches propres. Ces tâches sont essentiellement celles de la parole poétique. Et c'est en cela que sa pensée s'élève à une plus haute mesure (pp. 178-179).

Blanchot then makes explicit what has been obvious from his approach so far -- namely, that this respect for his task is more than a match for the imperfections present in Rilke's thinking:

alors s'éloignent les tentations théosophiques qui alourdisent aussi bien ses idées sur la mort que ses hypothèses sur la conscience et même cette pensée de l'Ouvert qui, parfois, tend à devenir une région existante et non pas

l'exigence de l'existence ou l'intimité excessive, sans limite, de cette exigence (p. 179).

In terms of 'poetic purity', therefore, Rilke seems to be approaching that represented so perfectly by Hölderlin. Consequently, unlike in the other studies which precede it, Blanchot does not seek, in his study of Rilke, to confront the poet with the absolute he so partially respects but, since the poet himself performs this task in his writing, merely to echo the dilemma of which he was aware. He is thus no longer even confronting the ideas of his subject with the truth his writings contain 'peut-être à son insu'. He is setting against each other those of his ideas which are less perfect with those which express the truth. Clearly, Blanchot believes that Rilke was more often wrong than right. Nevertheless, when he is right, we are being led to believe that the power of his thought is enough to redress the balance.

The consequence of this is that substantial sections of this part of Blanchot's study consist simply of reiterating the poet's ideas, so that one is hard put, at times, to distinguish paraphrase of those ideas from Blanchot's own version of the truth. It is difficult to know, moreover, how intentional this process was originally. While he was writing this study he was also writing Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas, in which the problem of space, the relationship between what is outside and what is inside, is explored in terms which clearly link it to Blanchot's reading of Rilke. Perhaps, à son insu, Blanchot actually found himself unable to distinguish between his reading of Rilke and what the poet says himself. This would account for his problems with Critique. One thing is certain however: by the time he came to compose L'Espace, Blanchot was quite aware of the difference between his study of Rilke and what had become the general pattern of his criticism, and sought to exploit that difference in the furtherance of his creative ambitions. This can be seen in three variants to an important passage in the study. The sub-section of the study entitled 'L'espace de la mort et l'espace de la parole' begins by evoking Rilke's

assent, in the Elegien, to his own mortality as essential to his poetic task, the Wolle die Wandlung upon which he bases the task of converting what is perishable into poetry. Blanchot then continues:

nous voyons ainsi que la conversion, ce mouvement pour aller vers le plus intérieur, oeuvre où nous nous transformons en transformant tout, a quelque chose à voir avec notre fin --, et cette transformation, cet accomplissement du visible en l'invisible dont nous avons la charge, est la tâche même de mourir qu'il nous a été jusqu'ici si difficile de reconnaître, qui est un travail, mais assurément bien différent du travail par lequel nous faisons des objets et projetons des résultats. Nous voyons même à présent qu'il lui est opposé (pp. 182-183; my *italics*).

The words 'qu'il nous a été jusqu'ici si difficile de reconnaître' read in the original: 'que Rilke essaie de reconnaître, d'exprimer'. The change from one version to the other indicates how the study has ceased to be primarily an examination of Rilke's success in recognising, then expressing, the problem which concerned him, and become a stage in a process which, it must be noted, is no longer concerned, as Rilke was, to express, but is seeking, and has been seeking all along, simply to recognise what it refers to as a task. It is also clear, from the jusqu'ici but above all from the à présent which complements it, and which was not present in the original, that this stage in the development of L'Espace is a crucial one. For these variants indicate that this passage is not merely another affirmation of the difference between the experience of literature and experience in the world, similar to what is said in 'La littérature et le droit à la mort' about the negative engaged in transforming the world and the negative experienced as deprivation of the world. If we are to believe what they say, this passage provides a direct perception of that difference, and one which has never been possible before.

This brings us to the third variant present in this passage. It is apparently an insignificant one. Nevertheless, it corresponds, I believe, to the climax of the processes which have so far been apparent in L'Espace. In the orig-

inal article, the first sentence read as follows:

nous voyons ainsi que la conversion ... a
quelque chose à voir avec notre fin, et
cette transformation (&c.).

In L'Espace, however, it reads as follows:

nous voyons ainsi que la conversion ... a
quelque chose à voir avec notre fin --, et
cette transformation (&c.).

The dash added in L'Espace can be justified neither syntactically nor semantically by the context in which it occurs. Its insertion into the argument at this stage would thus seem to fulfil a supplementary semantic function. I would suggest that this consists of introducing into the theoretical argument as it has evolved up to the study of Rilke, something which was latent in it originally, and, within the confines of L'Espace, has gradually been working its way to the surface of Blanchot's argument -- namely the standpoint of literature itself, that instance of literary space which, as we have already become aware, Blanchot is seeking to deploy within the sphere, and from the standpoint, of theoretical analysis, so as to make its exercise coincide with the displacement of its standpoint. Thus anticipating what is to become a major aspect of his writing, and responding to what he acknowledges is the fragmentary nature of L'Espace, Blanchot quite simply interrupts his argument at the point where theoretical analysis is face to face with what defies it utterly -- 'notre fin' -- and thus introduces really into the fabric of the work the difference which, from La Part onwards, has been at work upon his reasoning.

It is now clear that in making the argument of the first four chapters of L'Espace appear to converge upon a poet in whom his ideal was fully realised, Blanchot was seeking not to simplify the problem of talking about literature, but to transform the very basis upon which reason and literature seek to communicate. As was apparent from the way in which the full circle taken by his studies of Mallarmé and Kafka turned out to be the breaking of the circle of interpretation, the climax to the argument of L'Espace, the point where it reaches what traditionally is its centre, is revealed as the point where it is interrupted. The fact that,

in his study of Rilke, Blanchot spends much of his time simply agreeing with the poet, is exploited by him so that the coincidence of his own standpoint with Rilke's is simultaneously made the site of an entirely new approach to the problem of literature. This transformation takes the form of the emergence of a new subject of discourse, which is perceptible in Blanchot's use of the pronoun nous. In the passage under examination, the nous is at first the traditional subject of theoretical analysis, a rhetorical nous:

nous voyons ainsi que la conversion ... a
quelque chose à voir avec notre fin --.

Then, in keeping with the development of his argument, it becomes the true nous of a common purpose with Rilke:

cet accomplissement du visible en l'invis-
ible dont nous avons la charge.

So far, there is nothing exceptional about this use of the pronoun. At the same time, however, both of the variants we have already examined, which emphasise the importance of the present instance of what is a familiar argument, employ the pronoun nous: one refers to 'la tâche même de mourir qu'il nous a été jusqu'ici si difficile de reconnaître', while in the other, we read 'nous voyons même à présent qu'il lui est opposé'. The pronoun thus plays a crucial role in the argument of L'Espace at this point. If we look at how the passage continues, the nature of this becomes more apparent:

dans les deux cas, il s'agit bien d'une 'trans-
formation': dans le monde, les choses sont tra-
nsformées en objets afin d'être saisies, util-
isées, rendues plus sûres, dans la fermeté dis-
tincte de leurs limites et l'affirmation d'un
espace homogène et divisible -- mais, dans l'es-
pace imaginaire, transformées en l'insaisiss-
able, hors d'usage et de l'usure, non pas notre
possession, mais le mouvement de la dépossess-
ion, qui nous déssaisit et d'elles et de nous,
non pas sûres: unies à l'intimité du risque, là
où ni elles ni nous ne sommes plus abrités, mais
introduits sans réserve en un lieu où rien ne
nous retient (p. 183).

It is quite plain that, as was the case in the article on Leiris contained in La Part, the nous of theoretical analysis turns, during the course of this passage, into the

nous of experience. Clearly, this transition occurs to different effect in the later article than in the earlier one, where it was primarily a symptom of the broader malaise from which Blanchot's argument was suffering. Nevertheless, in each case the process entails the abandonment of the critical standpoint. We may feel that, in the case of Rilke, that standpoint may be abandoned quite fruitfully; the problem which gives rise to it still remains. L'Espace provides a response to that problem. In this paragraph, Blanchot seizes upon this moment of transition between theoretical analysis and the discourse of experience -- but not so as to control it and restore its stability to the standpoint of theory: rather to arrest it at the 'point' where the transition occurs, and to make this 'point' into the true focus of the work. This is the significance of the variants we have examined in this paragraph. In the original article, there is a simple opposition between the standpoint of theory ('nous voyons', 'nous avons la charge') and the standpoint of experience ('mouvement ... qui nous déssaisit', 'nous ne sommes plus abrités'), and, between the beginning of the paragraph and its end, in keeping with the tendency of Blanchot's thinking to coincide with that of his poet, his argument simply pivots from one to the other. In L'Espace, however, the variants to the original argument place somewhere in the middle of this simple progression from one type of nous to another a third subject, also termed nous, but distinct from both the subject of analysis and the subject of experience. For two of the variants use the words nous voyons, and what, in each case, 'we' see is the pure difference between the two existing standpoints in the argument: 'nous voyons ainsi que la conversion ... a quelque chose à voir avec notre fin --,'; and: 'nous voyons même à présent'. An aspect of the third variant now also appears pertinent: when Rilke was the subject of 'la tâche même de mourir', the verbs used to describe his efforts were reconnaître and exprimer. When these efforts become those of L'Espace itself, not only does the new subject of argument again become nous, the only activity left to it is, as we saw, reconnaître. The task of expressing that task no longer

exists: L'Espace is proposing an entirely new mode upon which to relate to it.

It would appear by now difficult to deny that, in this section of his study of Rilke, Blanchot has transformed the original standpoint of L'Espace quite fundamentally. The nous of the original 'nous voyons' has ceased to be the subject of theoretical analysis, without simply reversing its position to become the nous of common experience. Somewhere in the symmetrical field which that alternation deploys within the sphere of conventional theoretical analysis, another reversal has taken place, the renversement radical which constitutes the true relationship of the artist to the world, and which theoretical analysis can never account for. At the heart of the argument of L'Espace, therefore, three things occur: at the point where theoretical analysis encounters what is irreducible to it, there appears a break (--). Indeed, it occurs twice, first on the occasion already quoted, 'notre fin --', then later, when between the description of one type of transformation and another (the description of theoretical analysis and of the discourse of experience) a dash present in the original is made to correspond to the dash added to the original, by being freed from its grammatical context through the removal of a comma present in the original ('un espace homogène et divisible, -- mais, dans l'espace imaginaire' becoming 'un espace homogène et divisible -- mais, dans l'espace imaginaire'). Second, this break coincides with the repeated affirmation that now ('à présent') it is finally possible to see what lies outside of the bounds of both the discourse of theory and the discourse of experience: in other words, an entirely new point of view has emerged in L'Espace, one consisting entirely of the displacement of the original theoretical standpoint of the work. Third, the emergence of this new reality, and of a point of view corresponding to it, also sees the appearance of a subject unique to them, a nous which it is impossible to identify with either of the forms it took originally. In order to perceive better how this development occurred, we must go on to examine what occurs in the study

of Rilke beyond this point.

Until the break in his argument occurred, it appeared that, in keeping with the itinerary traced out in the chapter headings of L'Espace, Blanchot was gradually leading his reader deeper into 'l'espace litteraire'. In what seemed to be a refinement of the method he had practiced as a critic for years, his assertive opposition to imperfect versions of literary experience was gradually encountering less resistance from its subjects, until it gave the impression, in chapter IV, of having encountered its match: a poet whose respect for his experience was so great that his critic could do little else but concur with him. At the same time, a very different process could also be perceived. It consisted of reversing the flow of the apparent pattern of analysis, and directing it away from a point of convergence with its subject towards another subject which, by its very nature, exceeded the bounds of analysis absolutely. The single line of argument in L'Espace could thus be felt to be subject to two conflicting influences. The first, with its origins in the opening chapter of the work and consisting of simple theoretical affirmation. The second, less easy to locate, and claiming to emanate from 'l'espace litteraire'. It also became apparent, as the argument of L'Espace progressed, that the ambition of the work was not merely to conduct a two-fold argument from two separate standpoints, but to cause these standpoints to coincide, and thus bring about, within the field of theoretical analysis, a situation corresponding to that of the writer in the throes of his experience. What occurs in the section of the study of Rilke we have just examined is the realisation of that ambition. The two influences which have affected the work from the beginning finally coincide here -- or rather, the standpoint they form, and which has been affecting the work from a distance up to that point, at last reaches the surface of the work. The question remains as to what motive force is responsible for this gradual emergence. In the remainder of the second part of his study of Rilke, Blanchot reveals the answer.

Immediately after the passage in which the break occurs, Blanchot pursues his examination of Rilke's concept of Welt-

Innenraum, in order this time to begin to improve upon it. The way he seeks to do so, moreover, is the key to the true force at work in his argument. His argument is as follows:

Rilke, dans un poème, un de ses derniers poèmes, dit que l'espace intérieur 'traduit les choses'. Il les fait passer d'un langage dans un autre, du langage étranger, extérieur, dans un langage tout intérieur et même le dedans du langage, quand celui-ci nomme en silence et par le silence et fait du nom une réalité silencieuse. 'L'espace /qui/ nous dépasse et /qui/ traduit les choses' est donc le transfigurateur, le traducteur par excellence. Mais cette indication nous fait pressentir davantage: n'est-il pas un autre traducteur, un autre espace où les choses cessent d'être visibles pour demeurer dans leur intimité invisible? (p. 183).

It is in answer to his own question that Blanchot reveals where he is seeking to drive Rilke's argument:

Certes, et nous pouvons lui donner hardiment son nom: ce traducteur essentiel, c'est le poète, et cet espace, c'est l'espace du poème (ibid.).

We are made to feel quite plainly here that, in L'Espace, Blanchot is pushing against the resistance to the ultimate truth of what he is saying offered by the poet's own arguments. We saw previously that Blanchot criticised Rilke for sometimes treating das Offene as if it were an entity, and his argument here is pursuing that critique. Now, however, it is with an urgency and an ardour which make it clear that he is reaching the climax of his study. In the original article, the beginning of his objection to Rilke took the form: 'cette indication nous fait pressentir autre chose'. The davantage which occurs in L'Espace emphasise the pressure being put upon Rilke's argument, which is also apparent in the emphasis present in 'certes, et nous pouvons lui donner hardiment son nom'. For, as the developments in the preceding paragraph revealed, literary space is henceforth a reality in L'Espace. Das Offene is not merely a concept or an ideal form: it constitutes a category, a subject and a mode of practice which Blanchot names le poème and to which, there can be little doubt, L'Espace is meant to correspond.

Hence, after repeating this point, with italics added in L'Espace: 'L'Ouvert, c'est le poème', Blanchot finally reveals where his argument is leading him:

l'espace où tout retourne à l'être profond
... est l'espace du poème, l'espace orphique (p. 184).

Here for the first time in the argument of L'Espace we have a reference to what, according to the preface, lies at the heart of the work's argument, namely the figure of Orpheus who is of such importance to Rilke's poetry. Simultaneously, this reference to Orpheus allows Blanchot's close attention to Rilke to appear in its true perspective, for the space of the poem, das Offene, is:

l'espace orphique auquel le poète n'a sans doute pas accès, où il ne peut pénétrer que pour disparaître, où il n'atteint qu'un à l'intimité de la déchirure qui fait de lui une bouche sans entente (ibid.).

In his increasingly close confrontation with Rilke's poetry, therefore, Blanchot has not been identifying more and more with the poet, as would seem the obvious explanation of his behaviour. Nor has he been merely identifying with Orpheus as the individual, Rilke, augmented by his poetic talent (rather as Igitur to Mallarmé). What the preface tells us can now be perfectly understood: Orpheus has been, from the outset, the governing standpoint of the entire argument of L'Espace. It is a standpoint independent both of theoretical analysis, against which Blanchot traditionally argues, and of literary experience which has so far condemned his argument to sterility. When Orpheus is mentioned for the first time in L'Espace -- a mention which coincides with the interruption (--) of the work's argument -- the true standpoint of the work has ceased to be latent and has become patent. Blanchot's first task, therefore, is to separate Orpheus from Rilke, and leave the latter to his own imperfections. This process begins immediately:

il y a, à la vérité, une ambiguïté essentielle dans la figure d'Orphée, cette ambiguïté appartient au mythe qui est la réserve de cette figure, mais elle tient aussi à l'incertitude des pensées de Rilke, à la manière dont il a peu à peu dissous, au cours

de l'expérience, la substance et la réalité de la mort (p. 185; my italics).

The italicised passage does not exist in the original, and its addition points to the need, at this stage in the argument of L'Espace, to separate Rilke from Orpheus, to separate the false ambiguity of thought and the true ambiguity of myth, for it is their opposition which henceforth constitutes the standpoint of L'Espace. The 'Nous voyons' which is repeated in the passage where the theoretical argument of the work is interrupted (--), is an expression of 'le regard d'Orphée' towards which the work has all along been tending. The nous it refers to is thus neither the subject of theoretical analysis nor that of the discourse of experience, but the subject of a new mode of writing about literature, in which it is the interference of these two modes, their self excluding coincidence which provides the standpoint. This is made clear in the following lines:

Orphée est l'acte des métamorphoses, non pas l'Orphée qui a vaincu la mort, mais celui qui toujours meurt, qui est l'exigence de la disparition, qui disparaît dans l'angoisse de cette disparition, angoisse qui se fait chant, parole qui est le pur mouvement de mourir. Orphée meurt un peu plus que nous, il est nous-mêmes, portant le savoir anticipé de notre mort, celui qui est l'intimité de la dispersion. Il est le poème, si celui-ci pouvait devenir poète (ibid.).

The final sentence is a crucial statement of what is being attempted in L'Espace: the turning of what is a purely impersonal process into a conscious standpoint for reason, the creation of a nous whose exchange consists solely of our participation in this unending process.

By orienting his reader's attention towards 'Le regard d'Orphée' at the outset, while continuing to argue according to a traditional logical pattern, Blanchot places his own argument under increasing strain. This is his sole intention in L'Espace. It allows what originally were articles in which the affirmative power of Blanchot's argument finally destroyed it, to turn that destruction into a means of

transcending the bounds of reason rather than remaining their helpless prisoner. By enclosing his entire argument in a carefully controlled instance of the process to which they unpredictably and uncontrollably succumbed, he takes the first step towards creating an entirely original mode of discourse, in which the standpoint of theoretical analysis will simultaneously be that of literary experience. The potential of this transformation is only hinted at in L'Espace. It can be seen, for example, in the approach to categories of literary experience such as inspiration, which is turned into something utterly ambiguous, and the development of new categories, such as 'le désœuvrement' and 'la dissimulation'. Above all, it permits Blanchot to achieve what Jeffrey Mehlman, in setting himself the same task in relation to L'Espace, does not see present in the work: namely the revelation of 'une certaine incompatibilité entre le chant et l'espace'¹¹: in short, a transformation of the relationship between literature and reason, on the basis of which his thinking will henceforth develop.

Notes to Part II, Chapter 3

1. The category of 'le pressentiment' is developed during the argument of L'Entretien infini (1969), which brings together texts from the period 1954-1969.
2. The two studies Blanchot gave to Critique, and which make up two of the three sections devoted to Rilke in L'Espace were nominally concerned with J.F. Angelloz's book on the author. They did not mention him once, however. The directors of Critique (perhaps Bataille himself) therefore thought it necessary to append to Blanchot's second article an unsigned review of the work which he was supposed to be reviewing. It is significant that this article was the last Blanchot gave to Critique before his article on Bataille after the latter's death. He remained a member of the Comité de Rédaction (which has now become a Comité d'Honneur). His association with Critique would seem to have ended from this time on however.
3. Cf p. 44: 'Ce moment qui est comme l'oeuvre de l'oeuvre ... n'est tel que si l'oeuvre trouve déjà en lui son origine, s'engage en cette approche dans l'épreuve...(&c)'; p. 46: 'les facilités de l'analyse commune ... nous laissent croire que nous tenons l'art comme origine, parce qu'elles nous fournissent un moyen...(&c)'; 'C'est au contraire parce que, par un renversement radical, il appartient déjà à l'oeuvre comme origine que, regardant tel objet...(&c)'.
All of the italicised sections of the above are omitted in L'Espace.
4. 'A toute extrémité', NRF, 26 (février 1955), p. 290.
5. *ibid.*
6. *ibid.*, pp. 290-291.
7. 'Le Calme', Botteghe Oscure, XVI (septembre 1955), pp. 28-36.
8. 'A toute extrémité', p. 291.
9. *ibid.*, p. 291, note 1; *my italics*.
10. Cf Le Livre à venir, Part IV, Chapter V: 'Le livre à venir', pp. 326-358 (in the 'Idées' edition). These studies of Mallarmé and of 'Un coup de dés', one of which is subtitled, in this work, 'Une entente nouvelle de l'espace littéraire', were first published in 1957. It thus took Blanchot two years fully to confront the work which in 1955 was made an influence upon his thinking.
11. Jeffrey Mehlman, 'Orphée scripteur', Poétique, 20 (1974), pp. 458-482. The quotation is from p. 460.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a passage from 'Le mystère dans les lettres' which is not included in La Part du feu Blanchot wrote:

le vrai critique ... devrait rester littérateur et pourtant se situer en dehors de la littérature, plus: être le plus silencieux des écrivains, puisque c'est dans le silence qu'il lui faudrait exercer sa vocation de mesure et d'expression du langage (variant to p. 50).

He undoubtedly omitted it from his volume of criticism because of its excessively paradoxical nature. Nevertheless, in the light of his later work, it is possible to suggest that he did so because it corresponds to what, at the time, was no more than the dawning of the revolutionary conception of literature which he would put into practice in the following years. As such, it undoubtedly posed an impossible challenge to his reasoning, one which, moreover, could merely drive it further into the impasse in which it found itself, and within which rhetoric and excess rather than silence and measure were what he felt called to exercise. Yet although in his criticism he was unable to come up to the ideal which he set himself in this passage, in his fiction, it was precisely the situation he describes therein which was gradually being realised. The calm of which Irène was an imperfect embodiment, and which is constantly, in his fiction, the standpoint towards which narrative tends and from which it arises, is first dislodged from the predetermined sites to which reason banishes it, then, in the triptych of récits which begins with the second part of L'Arrêt de mort, gradually led back into a relationship with reason in which its independence from reason is fully respected. At the beginning of the second stage of his under-

taking, the narrator of L'Arrêt says:

avoir perdu le silence, le regret que j'en éprouve est sans mesure. Je ne puis dire quel malheur envahit l'homme qui une fois a pris la parole. Malheur immobile, lui-même voué au mutisme; par lui, l'irrespirable est l'élément que je respire. Je me suis enfermé, seul, dans une chambre, et personne dans la maison, au dehors presque personne, mais cette solitude elle-même s'est mise à parler, et à mon tour, de cette solitude qui parle il faut que je parle, non par dérision, mais parce qu'au-dessus d'elle veille une plus grande qu'elle et au-dessus de celle-ci une plus grande encore, et chacune, recevant la parole afin de l'étouffer et de la taire, au lieu de cela la répercute à l'infini, et l'infini devient son écho (pp. 64-65).

These magnificent lines, which undoubtedly evoke Petrarch's Secretum (as the reference to Laura in the first part of the story would seem to confirm), express the first terrible encounter between consciousness and what exceeds it utterly. The trap layed for the original narrator in L'Arrêt brings 'l'extraordinaire', that which lies beyond consciousness, into the sphere of consciousness by turning the present of narrative into the site of an eclipse of the first-person subject who occupied it. Henceforth, therefore, silence is lost. But not simply because it has been broken by speech. A little later, the narrator says: '"avoir perdu le silence" ne signifie rien de ce qu'on pourrait croire' (p.66). This is because silence has been lost because it can no longer be located. Henceforth, instead of being that in relation to which language evolved but which language kept constantly under control, it will continue to orient the direction taken by language, but from an unpredictable quarter. Instead of being the simple negative quantity whose essential absence permitted language and the reason it inspires to consolidate their sphere, it will henceforth be present, as absence, within that sphere, and thus necessitate a fundamental change in the perspective from which it is viewed.

In his search for this 'lost' silence, the narrator of the three récits of the triptych indeed finds himself 'en dehors de la littérature'. As we saw, now that the sole con-

tent of fiction corresponds to the inability of its form to accommodate the vision which gives rise to it, its sole aim as fiction is to turn the relationship of its form to its content into a medium within which the exorbitancy of that vision may be contained. Fiction is still possible: Le Dernier homme, which appeared in 1957 and does not belong to the triptych, seems to revert to a more traditional type of content. Its true heart lies elsewhere however: in the second part, beginning on p. 113, which contains the pieces originally published as 'Le Calme' and 'Comme un jour de neige'¹. These are meditations by a narrator who has now mastered utterly the situation in which the narrator of L'Arrêt found himself. The preceding elements in the récit, although forming a series of events, have as their sole purpose the representation of the situation in which the narrator finds himself in the present. Indeed, the triangle formed, in the first part, by the narrator, the young woman and 'le Professeur' is no more than a borrowing from Thomas Mann's Der Zauberberg (the woman in that novel, Claudia Chauchat, links up with the character named Claudia in Au Moment voulu). An aspect of Blanchot's fiction from the beginning, and one which previously might have been disconcerting, is the obvious presence in its action of elements taken from other novels. This at last appears in its true light: fiction is no more than the field in which a certain relationship between consciousness and what exceeds it is permitted to exist, so that reason should not have to come to terms with that relationship. By carrying out the transformation of narrative I have examined in L'Arrêt, Blanchot does not merely destroy that field. He annexes it to the field of reason by obliging the conscious self to confront it in the here and now which is all that is left of the narrative standpoint.

By 1955, this process is complete as far as narrative is concerned, and, as we saw, Blanchot seeks to extend the field thus deployed to the domain of reason as it is applied to literature. In L'Espace, the result is clearly illusory. By conducting his argument in a traditional manner, yet acting as if another influence were gradually affecting it,

he does cause the structure of his work to yield, at a point he has chosen, and to behave as if, at that point, the standpoint of theoretical analysis and the standpoint of what it is talking about had coincided. The demonstration is convincing, but it has no practical validity in itself: it can have no real effect upon the existing structure of theoretical analysis and its exclusion of what is excessive from its sphere. Nevertheless, given the position in which Blanchot's reasoning found itself prior to L'Espace, the process which it conducts on an unreal level -- once which is less an ideal than an imaginary one -- is exactly the one which will have to become real if his reasoning is to emerge from its impasse. It is as if it were written into his reasoning from the beginning, as the passage omitted from 'Le mystère dans les lettres' suggests. What is more, within the arguments contained by L'Espace, certain new categories are beginning to emerge from within the confusion caused by the breakdown of the old ones. They are terms such as le pressentiment, le désœuvrement, la dissimulation: all of whose structure, significantly, is openly a compound one, containing within it an articulation which renders each term not only flexible but also fragmentable in relation to the reality (sentiment, the creation of a work, the imaginary) they seek to express. These terms are the future as far as Blanchot's reasoning is concerned. They are terms which will prove capable of encompassing the exorbitant significance whose affirmation has driven more simple terms into an impasse. They will only be capable of doing so, however, if the analytical discourse within which they are deployed changes in nature also. Their existence is made necessary by the revelation that what is known as literature is present at the heart of non-literary language: that what exceeds reason lies unlocatably within the sphere of reason. If they are to allow reason to come to terms with this state of affairs, therefore, reason must be brought to change the nature of the encompassing structure it attributes to itself. In short, theoretical space and literary space must be made to coincide.

This is the ambition which gave rise to the carefully constructed demonstration contained in L'Espace: not merely

to define the nature of reason's link with the unreason of literature, but, by engaging reason in the processes of literature, to turn this new relationship into a new departure for reason itself in relation to the unreason to which it seeks to relate. A sign of this difference is to be found in the way Gérard Genette, quoting Blanchot in L'Espace, approaches the question of the opposition jour/nuit in literature:

la relation entre jour et nuit n'est pas seulement d'opposition, donc d'exclusion réciproque, mais aussi d'inclusion: en un de ses sens, le jour exclut la nuit, en l'autre il la comprend, étant alors, comme le dit Blanchot, 'le tout du jour et de la nuit'².

He thus finds himself up against the same complex problem in relation to literature as Blanchot: namely the way it is a vehicle, in its simplicity, for what he refers to as 'une dissymétrie sémantique profonde entre ses termes'³. His analysis of the problem stops there however. He is concerned only to trace this dissymetry as it affects the exemplary paradigm of jour/nuit. This leads him inevitably to limit the problem however, and to claim that, given the unsymmetrical structure of the paradigm, one combination is impossible:

aucun poète, je pense, n'aurait spontanément écrit ... : la nuit, jour du jour, parce qu'une telle métaphore serait strictement inconcevable: la négation de la négation peut être affirmation, mais l'affirmation de l'affirmation ne saurait produire aucune négation ... La nuit de la nuit peut être le jour, mais le jour du jour, c'est encore le jour⁴.

His reasoning, at the end of this passage, is close to the impasse into which Blanchot's was driven. Genette quite properly therefore puts an end to reasoning at this point. Nevertheless, he thereby denies the possibility of Blanchot's entire undertaking, which he expresses in the following passage:

car, pour nous, au sein du jour quelque chose peut-il apparaître qui ne serait pas le jour, quelque chose qui dans une atmosphère de lumière et de limpidité représenterait le frisson d'effroi d'où le jour est sorti?

This passage comes from Thomas l'obscur. It is on p. 94 of the new version, and also , significantly stands en exergue

in L'Entretien infini. It clearly refers to the existence of a dawning of light, un jour du jour within light, and, in L'Espace, as Genette recognises, this event is referred to as a form of night. In short, Blanchot does believe it possible to achieve something through affirmation of affirmation -- indeed his entire work, as we saw, is witness to that. By affirming what is positive within the sphere of what claims to be positive, Blanchot seeks to dislocate that sphere and force reason to recognise that what exceeds it lies at its very heart. By affirming what is affirmative, he seeks to call into question the certainty upon which reason is based, as is clear from the fact that, in the first version of Thomas l'obscur, the passage I have quoted was not a question but an affirmation, used to describe the emergence of Irène. The change from one version to the other of his novel, and the use of this transformed passage to introduce what is his most accomplished work of critical analysis, traces out the itinerary of his thought from its beginnings to the present day. In itself, what he proposes may simply take the form of an elaborate paradox. However, by being made to evolve within a new logical medium, of which L'Espace is a prototype, paradox is transformed into a higher form of logic based upon the relationship between reason and what exceeds it. In the years which follow L'Espace it is on the basis of this form of logic, that Blanchot will seek to evolve what amounts to a new literary idiom, in which the space of logic and the space of literature coincide.

Notes to the Concluding Remarks

1. 'Le Calme', Botteghe Oscure, XVI (septembre 1955), pp. 28-36. (In Le Dernier homme pp. 113-129).
'Comme un jour de neige', Botteghe Oscure, XVIII (septembre 1956), pp. 11-19. (In Le Dernier homme pp. 133-136, 143-157).
2. Gérard Genette, 'Le jour, la nuit', in Figures II (Paris, 1969), pp. 101-122. This reference is to pp. 103-104.
3. *ibid.*, p. 104.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

Bibliography

I(i). Books by Blanchot

I(ii). Articles by Blanchot

II(i). Books on Blanchot

II(ii). Articles on Blanchot

II(iii). Books devoted partly to Blanchot

II(iv). Articles devoted partly to Blanchot

II(v). Theses on Blanchot

The following abbreviations are used:

FP: Faux pas

PF: La Part du feu

EL: L'Espace littéraire

LV: Le Livre à venir

EI: L'Entretien infini

A: L'Amitié

PA: Le Pas au-delà

ED: L'Ecriture du désastre

N.B. All references to L'Espace littéraire and to Le Livre à venir are to the edition of each work in the Gallimard collection 'Idées'.

Bibliographical research concerning Blanchot's writing has not developed very far. A substantial part of section I(ii) of this Bibliography appeared in the review Gramma, nos 3-4 and 5, in 1976. Since then, I have added to the gaps which that bibliography displayed. There are still whole regions of his writing up until the Second World War which remain to be explored. Many of his editorials in the Journal des Débats will have been unsigned. There are years, also, which I have still to search through. His editorship of Aux Ecoutes from approximately 1938 is difficult to assess bibliographically because the entire publication consisted of unsigned writing. The Bibliothèque Nationale collection of Le Rempart is incomplete, and the newspaper it became, Aujourd'hui, has so far proved impossible to trace. The absence of references for 1934 and 1939 must not therefore be taken as a sign that Blanchot wrote nothing in those years.

I(i). Books by Blanchot

a) Fiction

Thomas l'obscur (Paris, 1941)

Aminadab (Paris, 1942)

Le Dernier mot (Paris, 1947)

Le Très-Haut (Paris, 1948)

L'Arrêt de mort (Paris, 1948)

Thomas l'obscur (nouvelle version) (Paris, 1950)

Au moment voulu (Paris, 1951)

Le Ressassement éternel (Paris, 1952)

Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas (Paris, 1953)

Le Dernier homme (Paris, 1957)

L'Attente l'oubli (Paris, 1962)

La Folie du jour (Montpellier, 1973)

b) Criticism

Faux pas (Paris, 1943)

Comment la littérature est-elle possible? (Paris, 1943)

La Part du feu (Paris, 1949)

Lautréamont et Sade (Paris, 1949)

La Bête de Lascaux (Paris, 1953)

L'Espace littéraire (Paris, 1955)

Le Livre à venir (Paris, 1959)

L'Entretien infini (Paris, 1969)

L'Amitié (Paris, 1971)

c) Essays

Le Pas au-delà (Paris, 1973)

L'Ecriture du désastre (Paris, 1980)

I(ii). Articles by Blanchot

1931

'François Mauriac et ceux qui étaient perdus', Revue Française, 26 (juin 1931), pp. 610-611

'Mahatma Ghandi', Cahiers Mensuels, 3e série, 7 (juillet 1931), pp. 10-17

'Deux hommes en moi par Daniel-Rops', Revue Universelle, 21 (septembre 1931), pp. 367-368

'Comment s'emparer du pouvoir', Journal des Débats (édition hebdomadaire), 1965 (octobre 1931), p. 338

1932

'La culture française vue par un Allemand', Revue Française, 10 (mars 1932), pp. 363-365

'Paul Morand, Flèche d'Orient', Réaction, 10 (mars 1932), pp. 58-59

'Nouvelle querelle des anciens et des modernes', Réaction, 11 (avril-mai 1932), pp. 11-16

'L'histoire désarmée', Journal des Débats (édition hebdomadaire), 2005 (juillet 1932), pp. 184-185

'La guerre à sept ans', Revue Universelle, 7 (juillet 1932), pp. 112-114

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1956

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1957

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1959

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