

JEAN STAROBINSKI

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## Memory of Troy<sup>1</sup>

### The Night of Destruction

Through a great story within the story, Virgil, in the *Aeneid*, goes back to the beginnings of Rome's destiny. To satisfy the curiosity of Dido, queen of the African land where the storm has cast him up, Aeneas recounts his story starting from the night when Troy was destroyed. The memory Virgil attributes to his hero takes destruction for origin. It is a story of sound and fury. And the famous account promises to be a return to a grief that words cannot convey. *Infandum regina jubes renovare dolorem*. You order us, queen, to revive an inexpressible grief. The reminder is itself an object of horror: *animus meminisse horret*. Speech declares itself wanting, unfit to go back over past misfortunes. This oratorical precaution invites the queen, won over by pity and by love, and the real readers whom we are, to surpass in imagination all that will be told them. The reality was worse than the picture that can be drawn of it. Nothing remains of the city so long defended, and the ground also gives way under speech. Why, then, not trust an account that admits from the start the insufficiency of its resources?

In the night of the disaster, one help remains. Apparitions, divine *voices*, direct the course of the voyage, promising a land to Westward for the new city that the posterity of the defeated will build. The fatal night will thus have been the zero point, with no possible retreat or turning back, from which all the later action will start. The fire, its gleamings, its ashes, are preliminaries,

<sup>1</sup> This study is the expansion of a paper on "The Noise of Memory," presented on January 24, 2002, to the symposium "Poetry and Memory," directed by Yves Bonnefoy at the Fondation Hugot of the Collège de France. It was originally published in French as "Mémoire de Troie," in *Critique*, Vol. LX, No. 687–688, August–September 2004. This special issue was dedicated to Jean Starobinski.

which stamp a character of necessity upon the hazardous voyage, and on the narrative discourses that will follow.

In the terrible nocturne Virgil describes, every form, become precarious, is carried off by the general collapse. Voices, shouts, crashes take on an increased importance in the sensory space. Aeneas' account thus develops an auditory register of great breadth. From lofty divine language to the inarticulate crash of the catastrophe, the ear of Virgil's reader is on constant alert. A very quick run through the text will convince us of that.

Aeneas is at first only a witness among his own people. He tells what he saw and heard as others did: the lies of the false deserter Sinon, then the death of Laocoön and his sons in the coils of two snakes come noisily from the waves: the priest dies sending up horrible howls (*clamores horrendos*) to the stars. These monstrous cries mark the beginning of the calamity.

As the night goes on, words and noises take on ever more importance. Hardly entered into the first sleep, Aeneas is warned by the shade of Hector. It urges him to flee: his task henceforth is to gather his companions and "cross the vast sea to build mighty walls elsewhere." In the space of four lines, the same word *mænia* (walls) designates the ramparts of Troy which are about to crumble and those of the city he must build. But the devastation has already begun, and the dream breaks off, for the noises are becoming ever more violent:

Yet from all the walls of the city come mingled cries of distress; and, though the house of my father, Anchises, is remote, solitary, surrounded by trees, the noises grow louder and the horror of arms approaches. I am torn from my sleep, and I climb in haste to the highest part of the place, my ear straining. Thus, when to the furious blast of the Austers fire sweeps through the crops or when the torrent, swollen by mountain waters, ravages the fields, ravages the harvested grasses and the labors of oxen, uproots and carries off forests, the shepherd, from the summit of a rock, listens to the noise the cause of which he knows not, and stands confounded.

The disaster is pierced by cries of mourning (*luctus*), groans (*gemitus*), the raging of the storm (*sonitus*), the clamor of human beings (*clamor*), the blare of trumpets (*clangor*). In Aeneas' words, Virgil proclaims the impotence of speech and of tears to tell of destruction and the vain struggle against death (*clades, funera, labores*). "Within there is nothing but groaning, tumult, and

suffering. All the courtyards howl with the lamentable cry of women: the clamor goes up to strike the golden stars.” The noise calls up the comparison with the crash of a tree blown down by a storm. In the thickening darkness, Aeneas meets his mother Venus, a luminous apparition who allows him a brief glimpse of what mortals do not see: the gods set against Troy, themselves working for its destruction. And the order to flee is repeated. The noise, the crackle of the flames, the terrors multiply. At last, in the fire and the terrifying silence that ensues once all resistance has ceased (*simul ipsa silentia terrent*), Aeneas sees appear the shade of Creusa, his wife, who addresses him with the final premonitory words. She informs him that his destination is Hesperia, the land of the setting sun, where the Tiber flows. Throughout the account, the register of sounds has prevailed in its greatest diversity, from the silence of night to the deafening clamor of destruction and massacre—from inhuman noises to the lofty language of the prophecy that calls to action.

Virgil’s epic has offered European literature one of the great models of a simultaneous opening onto a recollected past and onto a future to which action will lead. This double opening gains in prominence when Aeneas, having descended into Hades in the sixth book, meets figures from the past—his father Anchises, the self-slain Dido—and souls preparing to enter into life, the future living, heroes who will sacrifice themselves for their country. He hears weeping and music, the wailings of dead children and the religious singing of the blessed. Annunciatory voices give shape to the empire to be constructed. The descent into Hades makes the Virgilian hero penetrate to the core of time. In the successive stops of his subterranean journey, he learns the punishments of those who have been judged, and he sees the swarm of souls whose destiny has been announced but not yet accomplished. Trojan ancestors and Roman descendants inhabit the same groves. Virgil affirms himself here as the poet who knows how past and future connect.

And when Virgil appears in the first canto of the *Commedia*, Dante marks him out by having him declare: “I was a poet and sang of that just / son of Anchises who came out of Troy / when proud Ilion was all aflame.”<sup>2</sup> Thus his capacity as initial guide in

<sup>2</sup> Dante several times attributes the sin of pride to Troy.

the great cosmological journey finds itself justified, a role related to that which the *Aeneid* attributes to the Sibyl of the sixth book. Setting out on a movement which is consciously related to that of the Latin epic's descent into Hades, the *Divine Comedy* is a journey between past and future, starting from the "middle of the way." The goal is not to found an empire, but to receive the revelation of God's justice, and then to attain to loving consciousness—to the beatific vision. Virgil, the pagan poet, accompanies Dante only to the threshold of the earthly paradise, when, with Beatrice, divine clarity appears. All along this way, and to its contemplative end, the sonorous register plays a major role, in which Dante shows himself a perfect disciple. The sonorous ambit extends from the howls of the damned to the songs of the angels, from infernal discordances to celestial harmonies. Dante's journey will have for its end not the walls of a temporal capital, but the contemplation of the "sovereign light." A juncture is accomplished, in canto XXX of the *Purgatorio*, by virtue of two Latin quotations: for readers who have a memory for contexts, a strict liaison is established between the Latin verses of the *Aeneid*, on the one hand, in which Anchises, who has been present at the burning of Troy, announces the future of Rome up to the funeral of Marcellus, and, on the other hand, the words of the Gospel of Matthew, which form part of the ritual of the mass. The "messengers of eternal life" greet the arrival of Beatrice by singing successively "*Benedictus qui venit*" and "*Manibus, oh, date lilia plenis.*"<sup>3</sup> Through the power of poetry, a fictive historical memory is added to images invented and sustained by a present faith. But, contrary to Aeneas' account, which begins by declaring language unfit to utter all the suffering lived through, Dante finds himself forced to renounce the expression of the highest joy: "Oh, how frail is speech and how it falls short / of my thought! so short of what I saw / that to say 'little' is not little enough."

### The Brutal Conqueror: Three Appearances of Pyrrhus

In the memory of the burning of Troy, Pyrrhus, the violent

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed is he who comes"; "With full hands, oh, cast lilies." [Trans.]

conqueror, whose name proclaims him the “fiery one,” appears in the foreground. I find that, by a coincidence that is not entirely accidental, this personage appears at certain important moments in Western literary tradition.

Hamlet asks the player who has just arrived in Elsinore to give him “a taste” of his art. And he specifies that he wants to hear one passage that he “chiefly loved” from a play that “was never acted.” This passage is “Aeneas’ tale to Dido; and thereabout of it especially, where he speaks of Priam’s slaughter.” Hamlet is thinking of murdered kings. He wants to hear a tirade that he remembers. His memory is good, he searches a little for the words, and begins himself. This will be an amplification, overloaded with rhetorical effects, of a portion of the events recounted by Aeneas to Dido in book II of Virgil.<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare then pointedly draws his audience’s attention to the way in which the declaiming prince elicits the player’s effusion:

Hamlet: If it live in your memory, begin at this line: let me see, let me see:

“The rugged Pyrrhus, like the Hyrcanian beast,—”

’Tis not so, it begins with Pyrrhus:

“The rugged Pyrrhus, he, whose sable arm,  
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble  
When he lay couched in the ominous horse,  
Hath now this dread and black complexion smeared  
With heraldry more dismal . . .”

In the tirade recited by Hamlet, the fire of “the parching streets” will throw its “tyrannous and damned light” on the murder of the king. The player continues by evoking the unequal combat between Pyrrhus and the old man. In his hyperbolic account, the citadel falls with a crash, the thunder “rends” the heavens. When the conqueror’s sword comes down on Priam, the cry of Hecuba, his wife, “would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven.” At the end of his declamation, the actor’s eyes are filled with tears, as if he had lived through this moment. It is then that Hamlet, in one of his great soliloquies, meditates on the fiction of the theater, and on his own inaction. “And all for

<sup>4</sup> *Aeneid*, II, ll. 469–558. In Virgil, Pyrrhus is compared to a glistening snake casting his skin, not to a tiger (the Hyrcanian beast). Hecuba does not appear at the moment of Priam’s death in the Latin poet, etc. The differences are considerable.

nothing! / For Hecuba! / What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba / That he should weep for her?" Hamlet marvels at and denounces the way in which the player has been caught up in his role. And on the other hand, the mere fictive *representation* of a legendary misfortune makes what remains paralyzed in his will insupportable for Hamlet. He is not a player, but a son. His motives are all the more real. Yet he has not cried out his grief like Hecuba and the actor playing his role. His silence, by comparison, accuses him. Troy, and the death of Priam by the sword, here represent the imaginary *par excellence*, but at the same time reflect a sort of norm. Even if the city has been taken by fraud, the murder of Priam is carried out in the open. On the other hand, the actions of Claudius and Gertrude are monstrous, as his own indecision is revolting for Hamlet: "Yet I, / A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak / Like John-a-dreams . . ." Pyrrhus was sheer, overt violence, that of the tiger ("the Hyrcanian beast"); Claudius and Gertrude, for their part, are enclosed in the underhandedness of poisoners. The actor's declamation brings Hamlet back to himself, or rather to the awareness of his lapse, his *inadequacy* (I purposely borrow the term from Montaigne<sup>5</sup>).

Racine's *Andromache* is bound up with the matter of Troy, in a play entirely constructed around a double impossibility. The captive of Pyrrhus, son of the murderer of her husband Hector, the heroine cannot accept the union he proposes to her; and she knows that Pyrrhus will put her son to death if she refuses. Racine's tragedy, like Shakespeare's, concerns the point of decision. The night of Troy, in the captive's memory, was a scene of murder, abduction, and hostage-taking. Andromache's words are among the most beautiful of Racine's verses:

Think, Céphise, think on that cruel night,  
Which was an eternal night for all a people.  
Picture to yourself Pyrrhus, with flashing eyes,  
Coming through the glow of our burning houses,  
Making his way over all my slain brothers,  
All soaked in blood, arousing him to slaughter.  
Think of the victors' shouts, the cries of the dying,  
Stifled in flame, expiring under iron.  
Amid these horrors paint for yourself the lost Andromache.

<sup>5</sup> *Insuffisance* in French. [Trans.]

In the depths of memory, the scene of destruction has not been effaced, the cries have not ceased to ring out. The present is an impasse, the future unacceptable.<sup>6</sup> At the point when the action of the tragedy takes shape, the alternatives are dreadful: Andromache is hemmed in by horror. Wherever she turns, she sees the same massacre and the same clamor surge up again. At the end, in the story of Orestes, when his gaze is fixed on a massacre and is filled with darkness, noises return: it is the “cry of rage” of the Greeks stabbing Pyrrhus. “I saw him struggle in their hands awhile, / All bloody, seeking to avoid their blows; / But at last he went and fell down at the altar.” To the image of the conqueror with “flashing eyes,” which Andromache found in the depths of her memory, corresponds, at the end of the tragic day, the image of the same character in the figure of the king falling down “at the altar.”

Andromache reappears in French poetry, associated once again with the memory of Troy:

Andromache, I think of you! This little river,  
A poor, sad mirror where once there shone  
The immense majesty of your widow's grieving.  
This mock Simois swollen with your tears,

Has suddenly impregnated my fertile memory . . .

The remoteness has increased. In “The Swan,” that great poem of memory, the occasion Baudelaire treats is the surprise at the appearance of a swan “escaped from its cage” on the field of ruins of the “old Paris,” which is in the process of being demolished. The swan’s exile amidst this “confused bric-a-brac” reminds Baudelaire of the image of Andromache in exile, bending over the cenotaph of her “great husband” on the banks of a “mock Simois.” The name of Troy itself, the cries of that “cruel night,” are not heard. Andromache is a captive and a widow, whose only resource consists in a derisory mimesis—the simulacrum, the reduced image of the world she has lost.

<sup>6</sup> On the irruption of the cry in Racine, one must cite the last scenes of *Phèdre*. These cries do not belong to a remote memory, but to the extreme present of the catastrophe. In *Iphigénie*, the function of the non-verbal acoustic register is very important, from the initial silence of the sea to the rumbling of thunder and the trembling of the wind, which finally picks up when Ériphile, the substitute victim, expires. Both silence and noise express the divine will.

The reminiscences of the *Aeneid* in “The Swan” are only too evident, having been pointed out many times. Just as mention has been made of that which, for an attentive ear, resonates in this poem with Racine’s *Andromache*.

Andromache, from the arms of a great husband fallen,  
Worthless cattle, under the hand of proud Pyrrhus . . .

The anteposition of the adjective “proud” is a Racinian feature, a stylistic mark of the great age. When the poet of “The Swan” evokes “proud Pyrrhus,” one is quick to think of “proud Hippolytus” in *Phèdre*. And at the same time this “proud Pyrrhus” has a great resemblance to the “rugged Pyrrhus” of Hamlet’s tirade, which gives us something to think about. Did not Baudelaire, in “La Béatrice,” lend his own voice to the sarcasms that precisely designate him as “that caricature / And shade of Hamlet mimicking his pose”? How not imagine, indeed, the *interest* Baudelaire might take in Hamlet’s grievances? There was something there to spark an identification. Hecuba’s cry, like Andromache’s devotion, are living reproaches to mothers who do not mourn for long. The name of Pyrrhus, that of Hector, and the expression “worthless cattle” are enough of an allusive charge to send readers’ thoughts back to the fatal day of the fall of Troy, and to the famous texts that reflect its glow. It is our knowledge of poetic tradition that is invited to create the image. The readers Baudelaire wrote for had done their Latin verse!

The memorious thought of the poetic “I” in “The Swan” behaves with compassion towards a being inhabited by memory. He thinks himself in that being, as he recognized himself in the swan, in the blocks of stone of the destroyed city. The first part of the poem contains the short account of the strange meeting with the animal. The second part is an interpretation, which becomes a self-interpretation. “All became allegory for me.” The reflective activity brings into play images of intimacy and estrangement, sometimes by mixing them. Baudelaire’s intuition has made him maintain an acoustic register, but different from that which accompanied the classical image. It is first and foremost the violent noise of the urban foreground, modernity at its most

brutal; it makes itself heard in Paris at the hour “when Labor awakes” and the street sweepers “send up a dark *storm* in the silent air.” And, at the very end of the poem, before this city that is being destroyed in order to build “new palaces,” thought projects itself into the imaginary distance of a “forest” where the noise is softened and becomes an “old Memory” which sounds with a full blast of the *horn*. The calamity has come, nothing will redress it; poetic meditation is an echo. A musicalization is thus produced. The matter of Troy, present to the poet’s thought in the figure and name of Andromache, has been only the first signal of a compassion that gathers, while leaving it open, the scattered community of exiles. The enumeration is left suspended: “I think of sailors forgotten on an island, / Of the captive, the vanquished! . . . and of so many more!” The tone is that of elegy, on a motif come from an epic poem. In the allegorical system of the poem, Pyrrhus is the emblem of all the dominating powers that treat other beings as “worthless cattle.”

## Ovid, Goethe

The mourners, the exiles, the captives, the abandoned—towards whom Baudelaire turns his thought in the last stanzas of “The Swan”—are also those to whom speech has been granted in the elegiac genre for a very long time. Who speaks in the elegy? A loving being or a saddened being. One of the archetypal texts of this genre is the poem of the *Tristia*, in which Ovid recalls his departure from Rome for exile, remembering the Trojan night, as if the disruption of a life was the equivalent of the fall of a kingdom. The motif is introduced as a reminder, a simple far-off echo, by way of comparison and superimposition.

When there comes back in all its sadness the image of that night which was the last I spent in Rome, when I think of the night when I left so many dear things, my tears flow even today . . .  
Wherever one turned one’s eyes, one heard only tearful and sobbing people; one would have thought it a funeral, the sort at which grief is not mute. Men, women, and children take part in the funeral lament. In the house, there are tears at every corner. Thus, if it is

permitted to compare great scenes with scenes less imposing, such must have been the aspect of Troy at the moment of its fall.<sup>7</sup>

The memory of Troy belongs to the repertory of exemplary facts, not to the personal history of the poet who is writing. Literary memory projects a reflection of the legendary collective event on the private life of a Roman citizen whom the princely will condemns to flee hurriedly. To move his literate readers, the poet appeals to their cultural complicity. The night of Troy (from afar) confers an epic solemnity on the Roman night of departure. It should be added that the poetry of exile gains emphasis when it takes the poetry of the founding journey the other way round. In truth, the whole of mythology is a source of comparison in the *Tristia*, as it is in that other variety of the same genre, the love elegy, of which Ovid was also the great practitioner. He is an expert in the matter. He knows that every resemblance with the heroes and situations of myth allows for the introduction of the colors of the supernatural into the elegy. He is not unaware of the divergence, and, in his farewell to Rome, he marks it by slipping in the mocking corrective that one uses in cases of exaggeration: "*Si licet*" (If it is permitted) . . . Ovid senses very well the disparity between his domestic story and the disaster that Virgil had recounted through his hero. The punishment that strikes Ovid is only a miniature reproduction of the fall of Troy. The night, the groans of lamentation, the scenes of farewell are the common element, and that is already a lot. But the resemblance ends there: Rome was not destroyed on the night of Ovid's hurried departure, and his journey to the Pontus Euxinus in no way reproduces the conquering voyage of Aeneas and his companions to Latium, except that a storm awaits them both. The repertory of mythology is only a storehouse of costumes for a clever adoption of roles, according to the various legends

<sup>7</sup> *Quum subit illius noctis imago*  
*Quae mihi supremum tempus in urbe fuit,*  
*Quum repeto noctem qua tot mihi cara reliqui,*  
*Labitur ex oculis nunc quoque gutta mihi . . .*  
*Quocumque aspiceres, luctis gemitusque sonabant*  
*Formaque non taciti funeris intus erat.*  
*Femina virque meo pueri quoque funera maerent*  
*Inque domo lacrimas omnis angulus habet.*  
*Si licet exemplis in parvo grandibus uti,*  
*Haec facies Troiae cum caperetur erat.*  
 (I, III, ll. 1-4 and ll. 21-26)

evoked. In the five books of the *Tristia*, Ovid recalls famous couples separated by destiny. His life renews great examples. He does not lack for names, that of Ulysses principally, but also of Capaneus, Hector, and so on; and he attributes to his wife Fabia, left in Rome, the analogous corresponding roles: Penelope, Evadne, Andromache . . . Thus, throughout the five books of the *Tristia*, and in the *Pontica*, Ovid compares the decree of exile—the “anger of Caesar”—to the thunderbolt of Jupiter. It is a compliment to the persecuting prince at the same time as a source of pride for himself.

The relations between speech and sounds multiply and become complicated in the *Tristia*. That is so in the poetic texts and legendary episodes Ovid remembers, it is so in the various stages of his journey into exile, it is so again in the writing situation evoked in the elegies themselves. These various levels of experience coexist and communicate. And yet the goal sought in this collection of poems is not only to express this experience, but to obtain what will prove (it seems) impossible: the abrogation of the decree of exile, the pardon of the emperor who was offended by the insolence of the *Art of Love*, and above all by the mysterious misdeed which Ovid limits himself to designating as a “mistake.”

Just now I spoke of the irreversible separation that the destruction of Troy imposed on Virgil's hero. No return, no retreat are permitted him. The space of previous existence is abolished. The protection assured by the high walls has disappeared. From this impasse result, as we have seen, the first impulse of the epic and the background of the tragedy. Behind the elegiac lyricism of the *Tristia*, a punishing power seems to close the way of return. This power is of a political nature: it is the anger of the prince. That does not prevent the poet from writing in exile, but it imposes on his speech a pathetic rebellion tending toward complaint, retraction, a defensive posture. The poet, not hesitating to compare his long journey to that of death, sees his whole previous life as another shore, henceforth inaccessible. And it is the present shore, that of exile, that on which the poetic word tries to establish itself, which captures attention. On those savage banks, speech is threatened in all ways, overcome by noise, hindered just when it wants to form itself, incomprehensible to the barbarians with their strange customs amidst whom the poet lives.

The poem cannot avoid taking its own difficulty for object, if only in passing. The discourse goes back over the words that constitute it and that encounter innumerable obstacles. Ovid's complaint often deplores its own awkwardness, its too-poor resources, its ineffectiveness. As spectator of himself, the exile feels himself a prey to the additional suffering of stifled speech. In the second elegy of Book I of the *Tristia*, which evokes the voyage to the Pontus Euxinus, Ovid develops images (partly conventional) of the storm at sea. In the crash of waves beating against the boat, speech is cut off by the violence of the elements:

I, wretch, lose useless words. Enormous waves cover my mouth that utters them . . . So we perish, and nothing can save us, as I speak, the wave floods my face, and my mouth, open in vain for prayer, is filled with a sea-surge that stifles it.<sup>8</sup>

The use of the verb in the narrative present produces an increased emphasis. It reinforces the effect of the hyperboles that express the whole violence unleashed against the poet who insists on speaking. Here he precisely describes in a perfectly mastered fashion the waves that shut his mouth. The regularity of his distichs suffers no disorder.<sup>9</sup> We find again here the same recourse to denial with which Virgil begins the story of Aeneas, who declares that the grief he is going to recount in a superb story is inexpressible (*infandum*).

The elegiac formula makes of the poet the matter of his poem. The first person is the rule. The possibility of taking the situation of writing as the object of discourse always makes itself felt. Ovid, in the eleventh elegy of the first book of the *Tristia*, evokes the furious winds, and he compares the storm that churns up the sea with the one that shakes his soul. But his courage has not abandoned him. He shows himself writing under the mounting waves of the sea. His intention, to be specific, is to affirm a persevering

<sup>8</sup> *Verba miser frustra non proficentia perdo;  
Ipsa graves spargunt ora loquentia aquae . . .  
Scilicet occidimus nec spes est ulla salutis,  
Dumque loquor, vultus obruit unda meos.  
Opprimet hanc animam fluctus frustra que precanti  
Ore necaturas accipiemus aquas.*  
(I, II, ll. 13–14 and ll. 33–36)

<sup>9</sup> The expression "as I speak" (*dum loquor*) reappears, with the same assault of the interrupting wave, in elegy I, IV, which is a variation on the same theme.

will, and, in veiled terms, to defy the “anger of Caesar.”<sup>10</sup> The “I sing,” in which, at the beginning of the Virgilian poem, a voice is imposed that is keeper of the memory of great deeds (*Arma virumque cano*), becomes the self-affirmation of a subject who defies hostile forces. Behold me, not relaxing my resistance. It is my misfortune that I write, with the resources left to me and which I set against adversity. I am once again the sailor beaten by the waves:

Under a foggy light, the untamed deeps toss me, and the shock of the blue wave falls back on my pages. The fierce squall fights against me and is indignant that I persist in writing under his harsh threat.<sup>11</sup>

But why write? How write? Sing for whom? To recover what lost good? The putting in question of poetic creation, of the language chosen, of the audience hoped for, is thus integrated into the poetry itself and is expressed there in an extremely adroit fashion, though without abandoning accepted conventions.

Schiller saw the elegy as the genre in which the regret for lost nature and the unattainable ideal predominate. He wanted elegiac sorrow and mourning, even on a particular occasion, to be expressed for themselves, in a sort of absolute. To deplore the loss of the golden age, of the joys of youth, of a native City, of love itself, makes no sense, according to him, unless the complaint concerns what he calls, rather awkwardly, a vanished “moral harmony.” He immediately mentions Ovid, but to reproach his *Tristia* for giving too great a place to concrete interests and needs (*Bedürfnisse*). “This is not a poetic work,” Schiller writes with severity, while conceding that “these complaints are noble in spirit.” “But if the imagination does not begin by ennobling Rome itself, the age of Augustus in all its splendor and with all its blessings, then Rome is only a finite greatness. It is then an object that is not worthy of poetry. The latter, raising itself above all that

<sup>10</sup> The expression appears frequently, for example in line 72 of elegy III, XI: “The anger of Caesar brings all ills with it” (*Omne trahit secum ira Caesaris malum*).

<sup>11</sup> *Iactor in indomito, brumali luce, profundo,  
Ipsaque caeruleis charta feritur aquis.  
Improba pugnat hiems indignaturaque quod ausim  
Scribere se rigidas incutiente minas.*  
(I, XI, ll. 39–42)

See also O. Pot, “*Prologèmes pour une étude de la tempête en mer.*” *Versants*, No. 43, 2003, pp. 71–133.

reality can offer, has the right to regret only the infinite.”<sup>12</sup> To be sure, Ovid sought in every way imaginable to sway the emperor and make him revoke the decree of exile. The expression of sentiment is not separate from the request for a measure of clemency. The infinite, invoked by the Kantian aesthetic of the sublime, was not taken as authoritative in the literary thought of the Augustan age. The premise of the ideal, which makes of Ovid an imperfect poet, is an anachronism. Might one not, rather, reproach Schiller for abandoning finitude too easily, and for selling too cheaply that which receives *determination* in the real world? Does the idealist demand not obliterate all concrete outline, does it not forget chance, the contingent circumstance outside of which poetry risks losing itself in the abstract smoothness of well-meaning?

In the magnificent page that Baudelaire devotes to Delacroix’s picture representing *Ovid in Exile Among the Scythians*, the poet of the *Tristia* finds grace with another great poet.<sup>13</sup> And we even see the steps of a progress of poetry stand out—a sort of process of perfection that does not renounce the preceding stages. According to Baudelaire, the hardship of exile permitted Ovid to add to his art a quality that it lacked: sadness. Through the painter’s intervention, this sadness has taken on the colors of melancholy. In passing, it is true, Delacroix has transformed the hand dealt out by Ovid. The latter complained that he was not understood by the barbarians, that he was the butt of their hostility. The argument set down by Delacroix himself evokes, on the contrary, a hospitable welcome: “Some study him with curiosity, others welcome him after their fashion, and offer him wild fruit and mare’s milk.” Exile and its sadness have taken on an idyllic coloring. Baudelaire comments: “Sad as he is, the poet of elegance is not insensible to this barbaric grace, to the charm of this rustic hospitality. Everything that there is of delicacy and fertility in Ovid has passed into Delacroix’s painting; and, as exile has given the brilliant poet the sadness he lacked, melancholy has covered with its enchanting gloss the painter’s lush landscape . . .

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Schiller, “*Ueber naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*,” in *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. XII (Stuttgart, 1838), pp. 214–215.

<sup>13</sup> In “Horreur sympathique” (*Les Fleurs du mal*, LXXXII), Baudelaire has the libertine say:

—Insatiably avid  
For the obscure and uncertain,  
I will not moan like Ovid  
Chased from the Latin paradise.

The mind sinks into it with a slow and greedy voluptuousness, as into the sky, into the sea's horizon, into pensive eyes, into a tendency that is fertile and big with reverie."<sup>14</sup> In Baudelaire's phrase describing the relation of the viewer to the picture, let us follow carefully the succession of terms: "the sky," "the sea's horizon," "eyes," "a tendency" . . . It seems as if Baudelaire's mind plunged into external space, but only so as to abandon it, to turn to a beloved being, then to himself. It is the movement of a subjectivization. And we recognize here, in brief, the very movement that promoted the nostalgic reflexivity of nineteenth-century modernity. At the end of his discussion, Baudelaire defines the greatness of Delacroix: "It is the infinite in the finite. It is the dream!"<sup>15</sup> Thus is uncovered, thus is recovered, the infinite that Schiller found lacking in Ovid. How uncovered? First by the sympathy and imagination of the painter. Then by the reflection which the poet-critic brings to the painted work. It was thus through a succession of interpretations and translations that the motif of exile bore so much into the nineteenth century.

When Jacques Réda in turn takes up the complaint of the exile, by lending speech to Ovid, the variation shifts ironically without ceasing to be moving. In the verses of "Ex Ponto, V," Réda places himself in the winter landscape evoked in the third book of the *Tristia* (poems 9 and 10). He sends a last message to a Roman friend who very likely will not reply. The French distichs (fourteen and twelve syllables) mimic the meter of the Latin poet. And this Ovid whose role Jacques Réda borrows momentarily turns his thoughts to Troy. He compares the "swirling of this snow" to the "dream of combat / Under Troy: Achilles with his plumes and lance, / Phantoms of Hector, of horses whinneying in silence."<sup>16</sup> The parody, phrased thus, places on this story of warlike deeds the mute of snow.

Goethe, in Rome, remembered Ovid's love elegies and was inspired by them. At the moment when he must leave Rome, he also remembers, in all its details, the elegy in which Ovid describes his own departure. Goethe has the feeling that Ovid already expressed, with unsurpassable force, what he himself was

<sup>14</sup> Charles Baudelaire, "Salon de 1859," in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. II, ed. by Cl. Pichois (Paris, 1975-1976), p. 636.

<sup>15</sup> Baudelaire, pp. 636-637.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Réda, *Lettre sur l'univers et autres discours en vers français* (Paris, 1991), pp. 80-83.

in the process of living. We must reread the page, famous as well, of his *Italian Journey* (written afterwards). At the end of his second stay in Rome, Goethe took leave of a young woman he knew was in love with him. Three days before his departure, he contemplated the city under the glow of the full moon. The contrast of the masses of shadow and light moved him deeply: this was “another world,” much more vast. He went down the Corso for the last time, then climbed up to the Capitol, which appeared to him like “a fairy palace in the desert.” At the idea that he would never come back to those places, he experienced a feeling “that cannot be conveyed in words.” His memory was haunted by the elegy that Ovid had composed “when the recollection of a similar fatality pursued him to the end of the inhabited world.” Goethe, like Baudelaire later thinking of Andromache, remembered a consciousness inhabited by memory. On the page that closes his *Italian Journey*, Goethe translates the first four lines, which we have cited above, and joins to them the passage in which silence suddenly falls:

. . . Already the voices of men and dogs were still, and the moon was guiding her nocturnal chariot through the heights. I raised my glance to her, then turned it on the Capitol, whose nearness was of no use to our Lares . . .

Now, precisely because this was an “expression foreign to his personal feeling,” Goethe felt himself hindered from repeating these words in applying them to himself and his own situation. He sensed both the aptness of the Ovidian text and the impossibility of making use of it to express his own sorrow. There were “no words” for describing and sharing what he had just experienced; he feared at the same time to dissipate the “delicate vapor” of sorrow in which he first wanted to enclose himself. Thus there appears once again the motif of the inexpressible (the *infandum* of Aeneas), but the obstacle will not persist. Goethe has enough inner resources; he is capable of surmounting the difficulty by transferring his thought to another object. On the way back to Milan and Germany, he reopens his eyes to the beauty of the world. Feeling himself drawn by “a free poetic activity,” he absorbs himself in the character and destiny of Torquato Tasso, on whom he had begun to write a play. Then, in the superb gardens of Florence, he writes passages that might be related to the feelings he had just experienced. We have here a

fine example of what Freud will call “displacement” in his theory of dreams. Goethe, in a few quick but very clear terms, points out the analogical connections: what Ovid had suffered in terms of space (*dem Lokal nach*)—exile, “irrevocable banishment”—Tasso had suffered “in his destiny” (*dem Schicksal nach*). “This feeling,” Goethe adds, “did not abandon me throughout the journey.” And the labor of writing developed to the point that “the play became almost impossible to perform in the theater.” For the protagonist, the torment no longer results from a relegation to the confines of the world, but from a subjective rending. “I am torn away from myself” (*Ich bin mir selbst entwandt*) . . . Goethe’s character affirms that he has kept the faculty of finding words that will manifest his suffering (as Ovid, let us add, found words to describe his voyage). By a divine favor, there remains to him “the power to express how one suffers.” There also reappears, in the bitterness of the play’s last words, the sea-sound that echoed in the first book of the *Tristia*. The storm no longer batters a ship sailing to a place of exile, it devastates the depths of a consciousness: “The rudder is broken, and the vessel is splitting apart; the deck cracks and sinks under my feet.”

To heroize a poet, to show in him the torment of “a character who plays himself” (in the expression of Hofmannsthal<sup>17</sup>) and who breaks with the court that has crowned him with laurel: that, for Goethe, was to give a very great impetus to a “poetry about poetry,” in the expression that would be used by Friedrich Schlegel. Troy is only remotely implicated in it, by the reflection of it inscribed in Ovid’s poem, which Goethe was unable to forget during the days and nights when he took leave of Rome. But the memory of Troy clung to him all the more and would not abandon him. It was again a “poem about poetry” that his mind was occupied with when, in 1826, he wrote Helen’s act in the second part of *Faust*, giving the queen of Sparta a chorus of captive Trojan women as companions.

## The Wave at Mandelstam’s Bedhead

The work of Osip Mandelstam, born into a completely differ-

<sup>17</sup> Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “Unterhaltung über den ‘Tasso’ von Goethe” (1906), *Gesammelte Werke*, Prosa II (Frankfurt am Main, 1951), p. 218.

ent situation, has also been perceived as a “poetry about poetry” —a poetry about the condition of the poet in the age of revolutions, by a reader of Dante and the Latin elegiacs. This is far from being the only modern work that has this character. I mention it because of its astonishing proximity to Ovid and to the motifs that have held our attention. The elegy that Goethe had kept in his memory reappears at the beginning of the poem Mandelstam entitled “*Tristia*,” which gives its title to the whole collection of 1922:

I have learned the science of parting  
 Amid bareheaded laments at night . . .  
 Tearful eyes gazed into the distance  
 And women’s weeping mingled with the Muses’ song.<sup>18</sup>

Mandelstam’s poem evokes a parting, a return that will restore presence, and the uncertainty of the day that will be born with the crowing of the cock. What will the “new life” be whose “dawn” is breaking? Can one question the dead of the “Greek Erebus”? No, it is impenetrable to us. This poem of separation—the farewell of lovers—ends on the threshold of the unforeseeable, with the presentiment of combat for the men, of death for the women who “speak the future” (one thinks of Cassandra).<sup>19</sup> It is the present and anxiety on the threshold of the future that rule the whole poem. The memory of separations inscribed in the past of poetry, and which one has “learned,” only underlies what comes in the living moment. Mandelstam insists that poetry be addressed to “a distant, unknown interlocutor.”<sup>20</sup> As a result, the memory of classical beauty in no way calls for imitation. It is a challenge: it is what “builders” knew how to construct, by words or in stone.

<sup>18</sup> Osip Mandelstam, *Tristia* (St. Petersburg, 1922); trans. by R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky. Further translations of Mandelstam’s poetry are by the same translators. [Trans.]

<sup>19</sup> The strong presence of Latin poetry in this text is marked, alongside Ovid, by the memory of an elegy by Tibullus (I, 3): the poet has left Rome where Delia has remained. The latter has tried in vain to question the future. The poet, ailing, is expecting to go down among the dead. He regrets the golden age, when no swords were forged. But he promises to appear to Delia in her sleep and sees her running towards him, “barefoot and her hair in disorder.” The image is taken up again in Mandelstam’s poem. The evocation of the Elysian Fields (under the name of Erebus) is found in Tibullus’ poem.

<sup>20</sup> “On the Addressee” in Osip Mandelstam, *The Complete Prose and Letters*, ed. by Jane Gary Harris, trans. by the editor and Constance Link (Ann Arbor, 1979), p. 73. [Trans.]

Mandelstam lays claim to a magnificent ancestry for himself and for Russian poetry: at one stroke “Pushkin, Ovid, and Homer” are named.<sup>21</sup> He adds Dante, Villon, Ariosto . . . But, in relation to what is expected of him, they seem to him to be only “presentiments.” Another voice, that of an elemental force, imposes itself on his hearing, and he is in search of a response. That is what a famous poem of 1915 tells us:

Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails.  
I’ve read to the middle of the list of ships,  
That long-drawn brood, that string of cranes,  
Which once upon a time rose over Hellas.

Like a wedge of cranes into foreign borders—  
Divine foam upon the heads of kings—  
Where are you sailing to? If it weren’t for Helen,  
What would Troy be to you, men of Achaea?

The sea, Homer—all is moved by love.  
To whom shall I listen? Here Homer is silent,  
And the black sea rumbles oratorically  
And with a heavy roar rolls up to my bedhead.<sup>22</sup>

These lines are far from being the only appearance of the Trojan fable in Mandelstam’s work. The taking of the city is also recalled in another poem, from 1920, which speaks of a separation of lovers. On a night of amorous sorrow there is superimposed the insistent image of the destruction of the city of Priam. Ovid did the same thing, as we have seen, in the elegy on the night of his departure from Rome. Mandelstam feels that he is in a threatened city:

...  
The men of Achaea ready the horse in darkness.

...  
Where is sweet Troy? where the king’s, where the maiden’s house?

<sup>21</sup> In “The Word and Culture,” *Complete Prose*, p. 114. [Trans.] See also Ovid, *Tristia*, III, X, ll. 33–34, and Mandelstam, *Tristia*, No. 60. Very precise similarities have been proposed by Clarence Brown, “*Une tristesse transparente: l’élément classique dans Tristia*,” *La Revue de Belles-Lettres*, Geneva, Nos. 1–4, 1981, pp. 237–260. The author of this study refers to the work of Victor Terras in the *Slavic and East European Journal*, No. 3, 1966, pp 251–267.

<sup>22</sup> From *Stone* (1916). [Trans.]

It will be torn down, Priam's lofty starling-box.  
And arrows fall like dry wooden rain . . .<sup>23</sup>

In these lines, as in the poem entitled "Tristia" (in which the Muses, the Acropolis, and Delia are named), images from classical tradition slip into the present: the threads become entangled. But the feeling of separation and of a loss are keenly maintained. Thus, in the poem that speaks of reading Homer during insomnia, the reading of the catalogue of ships from the *Iliad* (Book II) breaks off, after giving place to the beautiful comparison with the "wedge of cranes," that is, with what belongs to the natural order and not to human history. The admirable image of the Achaean ships with taut sails compared to the flight of cranes inscribed beauty on the horizon of the heroic legend and at the same time on that of nature: the gods were announced there. This double inscription is evident when it is said that "divine foam," that is, Aphrodite,<sup>24</sup> lies "upon the heads of kings." Then arises the ancient image of Helen and the thought of the power of love. As soon as the word "love" is uttered, a question comes up in which I detect a certain anguish: "To whom shall I listen?" The answer does not come from what the beautiful language of the epic sang: "Here Homer is silent." Just now we saw, in *Tristia*, that "the Erebus of the Greeks is impenetrable." The sea comes roaring up to the insomniac's bedhead, breaking on the place of existence, the now of anxiously watchful consciousness. The poem stops there. We cannot avoid thinking that the poet is brought back to his own story, and, from the point of view which is henceforth ours at the start of a new century, we also cannot avoid thinking of the meaning that this moment of insomnia in the Petersburg of 1915 bears for us on the scale of collective history. (Here *our own* historical memory intervenes, and our knowledge of Mandelstam's destiny.) Paul Celan writes: "The poem, for Osip Mandelstam, is the place where that which is made perceptible and accessible through language gathers around a center, from which it draws its figure [*Gestalt*] and its truth: around the existence of this singular being who asks about the hour, his own and the world's, the ticking of the world, and

<sup>23</sup> From the poem "Because I could not keep your hands," in *Tristia*. [Trans.]

<sup>24</sup> See the poem of 1910 entitled "Silentium" in *Stone*. Paul Celan translated the poem into German in Osip Mandelstam, *Gedichte* (Frankfurt, 1959), p. 11.

the eternal [*den Äon*].”<sup>25</sup> The center is reached, in the poem on insomnia, when the noisy wave breaks on the poet’s bedhead (*izgolovye* in Russian). The “oratorical” shock of the sea constitutes a last inarticulate word, which sets all the preceding words at a distance.<sup>26</sup> Mandelstam writes: “My desire is not to speak about myself but to track down the age, the noise and germination of time. My memory is inimical to all that is personal.<sup>27</sup> If it depended on me, I should only make a wry face in remembering the past . . . I repeat—my memory is not loving but inimical, and it labors not to reproduce but to distance the past . . . Where for happy generations the epic speaks in hexameters and chronicles, I have merely the sign of the hiatus, and between me and the age there lies a pit, a moat, filled with clamorous time, the place where a family and reminiscences of a family ought to have been . . . and only by listening to the swelling noise of the age and the bleached foam on the crest of its wave did we acquire a language.”<sup>28</sup> The poet owes to the world and to himself the forgetting of his own particularity. But the blotting out of the “reminiscences of a family,” for Mandelstam, is all the same not accompanied by any temptation to anonymity. The refusal of “familial” memory (a refusal whose motivations are among the most complex) plays to the advantage of the present moment, when the words of language are elaborated in the first person, in the most responsible manner, equal to the time and its noise. This refusal also plays to the advantage of a greater memory, on this side of the hiatus which Mandelstam wants to reserve for the “noise of time.” I have spoken several times of distance. Now we can be specific: the voices of the past belong to a shore where perfect works—come from what Mandelstam calls “the sources of being”—make a signal from far off. Mandelstam acknowledges that he cannot expect any help from them for the words of his own language. In this sense, he does not appeal to a “classicizing” art, and he is not

<sup>25</sup> Paul Celan, “*Notice sur Ossip Mandelstam*,” in *Le Méridien et autres proses*, trans. by Jean Launay (Paris, 2002), p. 91. Translation slightly modified.

<sup>26</sup> In many poems of modernity, for instance those of T. S. Eliot, the poem ends with words that express the noise that stops on the threshold of words, or that drowns them out.

<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere he wrote, to define the poetic program of Acmeism: “Love the existence of the thing more than the thing itself and your own existence more than yourself: that is Acmeism’s highest commandment” (in “The Morning of Acmeism,” *Complete Prose*, p. 64). [Trans.]

<sup>28</sup> Osip Mandelstam, “The Noise of Time,” in *The Prose of Osip Mandelstam*, ed. and trans. by Clarence Brown (Princeton, 1967), p. 122–123. [Trans.]

susceptible to the romantic invitation of a return to a lost plenitude. In a poem that can be called exemplary of a poetry about poetry, Mandelstam evokes a performance of Racine's *Phèdre*:

Mighty drapery  
Separates us from another world;  
Deep folds stirring,  
Between it and us a curtain hangs . . .

I am late for the festivity of Racine!<sup>29</sup>

Great figures are thus perceptible, above or across the hiatus and the "noise of time." If there is nostalgia, all the same, it is a regret that attributes no metaphysical scope to itself. Mandelstam does not suffer from being separated from a world of essences, he does not complain of an ontological exile. Between what belongs to the past and what occurs in present life, when the appropriate word is retained, it is possible to experience "the swelling joy of recognition . . . To mortals is given the power to love and recognize."<sup>30</sup> It is also a question of recognition in the the famous lines of the third stanza of the poem "Tristia":

Already barefoot Delia comes flying!  
Oh, the meager warp of our existence,  
Far too poor is the language of joy!  
All has been, all will be again,  
And sweet to us is only the instant of recognition.

There is in these lines not only a recognition between lovers, but a recognition of a few perfect words of Tibullus, beginning with the name of Delia. It is not a question of Platonic recognition, but simply of not yielding to oblivion, to death, of not letting the "black ice" of the "Stygian knell"<sup>31</sup> rise to his lips.

## Bonnefoy

Was Mandelstam the last to keep the memory of Troy? No. The far-off flame has persisted in the poets' gaze. Those places are

<sup>29</sup> From "I will not see the famous *Phèdre*," in *Stone*. [Trans.]

<sup>30</sup> From "I have forgotten the word I wanted to say," in *Tristia*. [Trans.]

<sup>31</sup> End of "I have forgotten the word I wanted to say," from *Tristia*.

fraught with too many appeals for poets to stop thinking of them. The recognition of the great fire intervenes at least twice in Yves Bonnefoy, and each time in close connection with a care and a hope concerning poetry itself. In “Clouds,” the penultimate section of *The Lure of the Threshold*, the gaze is lifted to the clouds in the sunset pierced by gleams of light. The poet sees repeated there the gestures of reconciliation of Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale*, the decisive moments of recognition. Then he sees “a flat-bottomed ship, its prow a figure of fire, of smoke”:

It approaches,  
Tacks about slowly, you cannot see  
Its decks, its masts, cannot hear the shouts  
Of its crew, cannot guess  
The chimeras, the hopes of the men  
Crowded at the bow, wide-eyed,  
Nor what new horizon they glimpse,  
What shore perhaps, nor do you know  
What burning city they’ve had to flee,  
What interminable Troy . . .<sup>32</sup>

Troy in flames: this is the persistence of an image from a former world. Yet there is a “black stain” in the image. The spectacle, appearing in the clouds, of anxious agitation aboard a ship come from a burning city, is succeeded by the thought of “a shore perhaps,” which will not be another earth, but simply “the saved earth” coming into its truth:

Have faith, meaning  
May grow in your words, saved earth,  
Like transparency in the ageing summer’s  
Cluster of grapes. You speak, you sing,  
Child, and I dream at once that the whole  
Earthy vine lights up . . .<sup>33</sup>

Bonnefoy wishes for a healing. A meaning must be recovered. That what is too well fixed in a representation be scattered, and

<sup>32</sup> “The Clouds,” in Yves Bonnefoy, *Poems 1959–1975*, trans. by R. Pevear (New York, 1985), pp. 133–135. (Translation slightly revised.)

<sup>33</sup> From “The Clouds,” *Poems 1959–1975*. (Translation much revised.)

that new words, a new song be born in simple presence. Reflecting elsewhere on *The Winter's Tale*, Bonnefoy is mindful of what may remain of illusion in the poetic representation of a disillusion. He claims nonetheless, for the speech of the work, for the labor over words, "a right to be," the right to bear "a truth."<sup>34</sup> In the lines that have just been cited, the child's song is the signal of a speech begun anew.

Thought follows the same movement, in a still more explicit manner, through very similar images, in the text from *La Vie errante* entitled "De vent et de fumée" (a first publication had for title "Une Hélène de vent et de fumée").<sup>35</sup> Then the name of Helen appears, the story of her abduction, that is to say, the first motif of the fable of Troy. This text, written as a poem, is a reflection which agrees to dream. It is one of Bonnefoy's *ars poeticae*. The historical destiny of Troy is not in question, nor the fate of mythical heroes, nor their feelings: the questioning bears upon the status of the *representation* of Helen, as it was offered by the art of painters:

The Idea, it was thought, is the measure of all.  
Whence it follows that "la sua bella Elena rapita," says Bellori  
Of a famous painting by Guido Reni,  
May be compared to the other Helen,  
She whom Zeuxis imagined, and maybe loved.  
But what are images beside the young woman  
Whom Paris desired so much? The only vine,  
Is it not the quivering of real hands  
Under the fever of lips? And may the child  
Ask hungrily for the grapes, and drink  
The light straight off, in haste, before  
Time breaks upon what is.<sup>36</sup>

But was she whom Paris carried off the real Helen? Did she have "real hands"? Has it not been said that she was a shade, a statue? Bonnefoy recalls the palinode of Stesichorus, who held

<sup>34</sup> W. Shakespeare, *Le Conte d'hiver*, trans. by Y. Bonnefoy (Paris, 1994), pp. xxv–xxvi; text reprinted in *Théâtre et Poésie. Shakespeare et Yeats* (Paris, 1998), p. 112.

<sup>35</sup> See the English translations by John Naughton, entitled *The Wandering Life* and "Wind and Smoke" respectively, in Yves Bonnefoy, *New and Selected Poems*, ed. by John Naughton and Anthony Rudolf (Chicago, 1995), pp. 196–203.

<sup>36</sup> This and the following passages from the same poem have been translated by R. Pevear.

that the real Helen was kept in Egypt during the ten years of the Trojan War. It must be recalled that Euripides and Hofmannsthal have given dramatic form to this exculpatory hypothesis. In the course of Bonnefoy's reverie, the "big reddish stone" is transformed, it becomes "these clouds, these red gleams / Who knows whether in the soul or in the sky?" Bonnefoy asks himself if the truth might not be that "the semblance of Helen was only a fire." A fire which Paris loaded "on the boat" in order to bring it to his native shore, from which it spread to the sky, the clouds. "And even if Troy should fall the fire would remain / To cry out beauty, the protest of the spirit / Against death." The reflection is pursued to the point of making Helen "the dream of a dream." As soon as too proud a form "prefers itself as figure," it is punished by dispersion. Helen "was only that intuition which made Homer bend / Over sounds from lower down than his strings in / The clumsy lyre of earthly words." Once the too-perfect image is dispersed, it will be possible to think of a new beginning: of a "dawn of meaning," and the role may fall, as in the preceding example, to the child who sings:

It was a child  
 Naked on the great beach when Troy was burning  
 Who last saw Helen  
 In the thickets of flame above the high walls.  
 He wandered, he sang,  
 He had taken a little water in his hands,  
 The fire came to drink of it, but the water escaped  
 From the imperfect cup, thus time  
 Ruins the dream and yet redeems it.

Here the clamor that poetic tradition had associated with the memory of Troy, and that we have encountered in so many texts, disappears. There persists, on the other hand, another motif which I have underscored several times: the difficulty of speech, the inexpressible, the *infandum* deplored by Aeneas at the beginning of his story to Dido. This is what the third part of the poem speaks of:

These pages are translated. From a language  
 That haunts the memory I am.  
 The phrases of this language are uncertain

Like the very first of our memories.  
I have restored the text word by word,  
But mine will only be a shadow of it, you might think  
That origin is a Troy that's burning,  
Beauty a remorse, the work fills its hands  
Only with a water that withholds itself.

Between the Iliad of Homer and Virgil and the Troy of a "poetry about poetry," of which we have just found so fine an example in Bonnefoy, a relay must be mentioned. This is the second part of *Faust*. At the end of the first act, the emperor has asked to see Helen and Paris "in distinct form." Faust descends among the Mothers, to "the kingdom of scattered images," of "that which has long since disappeared." He comes back followed by a thick mist which condenses to take the form of Paris, then of Helen. At one moment of this scene, the audience sees "this goddess" bend over Paris "to drink his breath." Bonnefoy's poem also contains a moment when the two shades drink from the same cup:

Drink, says Paris  
Who awakens, and stretches out his arm in the narrow darkness  
Of the room stirred by the slight swell,  
Drink,  
Then bring the cup to my lips  
So that I may drink.

I bend down, replies  
She who is, perhaps, or of whom he dreams.  
I bend down, I drink,  
I have no more name than the cloud,  
I am scattered like her, pure light.

And having given you joy I have no more thirst,  
Drunk light.

These words sound like a farewell, a leave-taking of the "classical" world, to the advantage of simple, natural light. The speaking voice admits its lack of being, while accompanying a gift. In the second part of *Faust*, Euphorion, the poet born of Faust and Helen, takes flight and kills himself like Icarus. Helen's

body then disperses, and her garments, become clouds, bear Faust off to his undertakings as a man of action. Helen's image returns to the "kingdom of the Mothers," that atemporal focal point where the accomplished and the imaginable, the completed and the immortal, merge.

These last texts will perhaps have been a help in understanding why the memory of Troy has so durably inhabited the speech of poets. It is no doubt because there has persisted in them, owing to the multiple versions in which that memory has declined itself since Antiquity and the Middle Ages, far more than a wonder at the immense plot that closely mingles men and gods, love and combat, sacrifice and vengeance, glory and the fall of cities. The matter of Troy, which for Homer and for Virgil was already a storehouse of memory and a source of fabulatory invention, was the first testimonial of poetic sovereignty in European culture. The gradations of this memory, its multiple ramifications have enabled it to offer, through millenia, a key of reading applicable to the world nearest to hand. Ulysses lies so well in Homer that in the twentieth century he could become Bloom journeying through Dublin.

If it were only a question of testifying to the amplitude of an echo, and also of an obvious nostalgia, the task would be easy, though one would have to allow for a greater number of examples from the last century (Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Archibald MacLeish, George Seferis). My intention was not to see the survival of a "theme" lay itself out in its metamorphoses. It was to show that the memory of Troy has held up a symbolic mirror to poetry in its development through the ages. We have just seen that, in proportion as it faced a less hospitable world, poetry has questioned itself in an ever more insistent way about its own condition, about its powers and its limits. In referring back to the imaginary scene of Troy and its surroundings, woven of so many voyages, the poets have *recognized* triumphant beauty and the fire of destruction, the conquering impetus and the grief of exile, and the thousand guises of speech that commands or beguiles. It has often happened to them to perceive in it, by reflection, the figures of their own peril, come from the depths of time.

*[Translated from the French by Richard Pevear]*