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Anticipatory Plagiarism

Pierre Bayard

For an Autonomous Literary History

In which it is seen, harking back to antiquity and specifically to Sophocles, that it is the entirety of literary history that we must be prepared to rewrite once we agree to take into account the notion of anticipatory plagiarism.

THE OBSERVATION THAT WRITERS ARE INSPIRED not merely by those preceding them, but in equal measure by those succeeding them, cannot remain without repercussions for our sense of literary history. Independently of the purely moral question, the historian's method cannot be restricted for long to the classical identification of sources, and it will be obliged to take into account a number of discoveries showing how other more discreet (but more pertinent) affiliations secretly link works to one another.

Once the notion of anticipatory plagiarism is accepted, it is plausible that the entirety of our conception of literary history—as it is taught in schools and universities and presented in textbooks—will have to be modified. For it is, in fact, hostage to an overly rigid conception of time, and as a result it is unable to grasp the complexities of the various interferences between epochs (sometimes quite distant from each other) and between authors, some of whom succeed in exercising an influence on others, even though the former have not yet been born.

Let us hark back at this point to the quite distant past and take the example of Sophocles and one of the founding works of our culture, *Oedipus Rex*. In two respects, that play may be considered as a case of anticipatory plagiarism.

The first reason is the more familiar one. In constructing his plot, Sophocles drew his inspiration from the principal theme of psychoanalysis and invented a story whose hero was brought to kill his father and make love with his mother, thus offering a gripping dramatic illustration, more than two millennia before Freud, of the ambivalent tangle of relations binding a child to his two parents. The fact that the plagiarism, in this case, is exercised by a literary work at the expense of theoretical texts in no way changes matters.

The most convincing index of plagiarism, above and beyond the overtly psychoanalytic nature of the plot, is that the Oedipus complex, contrary to what may have been claimed, is rather rare in Greek theater and mythology (unless one is prepared to coax it into existence through a strained interpretation of texts in symbolic terms).¹ When one examines the relations between parents and children, it is rather infanticide that is the prime recurrent motif and major unconscious fantasy of the imagination of antiquity.²

Sophocles was thus not impelled as a matter of course by his epoch to treat this theme. He was far more plausibly drawn to it by his association with a later author whose existence he intuited, even as he may have been, following Valéry's model, reversing the stance of his contemporaries, who preferred the opposite theme. We are dealing here with a *minor text*, in the sense that we have defined it, not from an aesthetic perspective, but because it develops a marginal thematic in relation to future works of the culture in which the theme will take on its true dimension.

The notoriety of this initial case of plagiarism has relegated to the shadows a second case of borrowing of which Sophocles may be accused, and which concerns the detective novel. Like Voltaire, but in a manner far more pronounced, since it is the work in its entirety that possesses this structure, Sophocles used detective-like devices in his play that were unknown in his era, but are perfectly identifiable today.

He even went quite far in the use he made of the genre, since he did not hesitate to call on a criminal technique that came late to detective fiction (one that consists of making the murderer the detective himself), thus augmenting still further the reader's difficulty in finding a solution and identifying the culprit.

It is a technique that he even managed to perfect (compared to his successors), since the specific singularity of his innovative detective-like plot is that the murderer lives in utter ignorance of his own guilt, and it is precisely because of that ignorance that he undertakes the investigation that will lead him back to himself.

As in the case of the plagiarizing of psychoanalysis, the rarity of such an investigation in the history of detective fiction is the mark of anticipatory plagiarism. With the exception of that other rather singular play titled *Hamlet* (which it would be interesting, moreover, to analyze from the same perspective), one would have to wait until the nineteenth century—first in the United States with Edgar Allan Poe, then in France with Émile Gaboriau—for the modern detective novel to be born. We have here a kind of dissonance, bearing in this case on an entire genre, explicitly employed at a time when it had not yet been invented.

It will thus be observed how Sophocles, by virtue of a twofold instance of anticipatory plagiarism, obeys, from the perspective of literary history,

a dual chronology (depending on the meaning ascribed to the word “history”). If we take the word “history” in the strict sense, the one used by historians, then Sophocles and the other Greek tragedians are unquestionably part of antiquity and precede psychoanalysis and the detective novel by more than two millennia.

But we immediately see to what an extent such an effort to situate matters historically is insufficient and perilous. Were we to be guided by it, it would lead us to misperceive the extent to which the history of literature obeys an entirely different regimen than traditional history and cannot be modeled on it.³ Even though Sophocles, historically speaking, was the contemporary of Athenian democracy, literarily speaking he is our contemporary.

If it is thus not absurd, in limiting literary history to history, to say that Sophocles heralded psychoanalysis or the detective novel, the twofold modernity of the Sophoclean text means that it is also posterior to each of them, in that its creative force conveys a sense that he was already aware of both and knew how to take adroit advantage of each of them.

Were we intent on being fully rigorous, we should thus resolve to separate once and for all the *history of events* from *literary history* and admit that writers and artists in fact partake of a *dual chronology*. While full-fledged citizens of their age, creators are equally participants in another temporality, that of literature or art, which obeys its own rhythms.

This separation between event-based history and literary history is certainly not new. All those who have taught literature are sensitive to the fact that great writers, even as they participate in their own time, are also inscribed in other times, and that classical history can serve only as a very approximate backdrop to collective as well as individual intellectual life.

But that separation of two histories, however open it may be to the principle of acceleration or anticipation, never goes so far as to call into question traditional chronology, and it retains the idea that legacies and influences always move in a single direction—from before to after. Its practitioners are thus not yet ready to accept the possibility that within the domain of literature or art the *after* may be situated *before* the before.

This dissociation of two histories has been fully intuited by all who have perceived—frequently because they are themselves writers—the extent to which situating a writer historically is not only insufficient but fundamentally useless in understanding his work.⁴

Among these writers Proust—with his theory of the “other Self,” which he develops in his *Contre Sainte-Beuve*—is no doubt the most famous. The literary work, he explains in this early essay, is not, despite appearances, written by the familiar individual we may meet in daily life and with whom we may have occasion to exchange opinions. It is the work

of an *other Self*, who cannot be reduced to that individual and whom it is vain to try to discover by frequenting him.

This theory of the other Self is staged in *La Recherche* by way of the character named Bergotte. Fascinated by the prose of this famous author, the narrator is stunned when he meets him, thanks to his inability to make his idealized image of the creative artist coincide with the insipid little fellow standing before his eyes. This is because the true Bergotte is precisely not that little fellow, but the inhabitant of another world to which his contemporaries have no access.

Proust, however, no more than those who developed in its various forms this theory of the distinction between the person and the writer, does not follow his reasoning to its limit. For if the true writer is not the historical subject encountered by the narrator—and whom historians of literature will attempt to reconstruct by detailing his childhood, environment, sources, etc.—he is not for all that a disembodied subject with no point of insertion anywhere. He simply partakes of an *other history*, which is the history of literature, with its own laws that are irreducible to those of history as classically construed.

The difficulty in situating a writer in this other history is twofold. In the first place, it is a function of the need to separate literary history from a chronological event-based history to which we have become so accustomed that it serves as an impediment to any attempt to think otherwise. But it also pertains to the fact that literary history—as we shall soon see—is far more mobile than event-based history and must be apprehended differently.

This mobility is specifically a function of the role of retrospective influence, which knows no end of modifying works and the interplay of their filiations. The place of each writer, once one takes the measure of his effects, reveals itself to be all the more difficult to establish with any precision in literary history, given that he is being read through the intermediary of the texts of those authors who follow him and particularly those from which he himself has drawn inspiration and which impel one to view his originality differently.

To be sure, the theory of two Selves does not coincide precisely with that of two histories. This is because the radical dissociation of literary history from event-based history is quite simply unimaginable, given the extent of the transformations it implies in our way of conceiving literature.

The construction of a new literary history, attentive to the properly literary dimension of history, indeed implies not only a refusal to respect the apparent chronology among works, but also recourse, in a whole series of cases, to a *reversal of traditional chronology* by restoring to authors

their true literary place in time and acknowledging that some are occasionally posterior to writers whom they appear to precede.

This gesture of reversal is deeply ambivalent and is responsive to a twofold motivation on grounds of consideration and justice. Consideration, first, since placing Sophocles in the twentieth or twenty-first century amounts to acknowledging the significance of his contribution to the history of literature. Such a displacement allows us to draw all the consequences of the feeling we may each have, in reading the Greek tragedians, that they belong to our era—their precise dating remaining, as we shall see, to be rigorously established—and not to some bygone age, and that they have everything to gain from being recognized as inhabiting a later period than the historical age that committed the error of ushering them into the world.

But the same gesture is also, this time at the level of morality, tantamount to endorsing what is nothing other than a literary crime, namely the plagiarism of a whole series of authors without whom Sophocles—whatever the mode of borrowing he has chosen in order to achieve his ends—would never have been capable of writing his most famous tragedy.

To attempt to situate authors in their true place in the history of literature is thus to render them justice twice over and allows us to bring to light that complex web of invisible relations uniting, in utter indifference to strict chronology, creators of every age, connected as they are by mysterious bonds that a traditional history of literature is incapable of detecting.

One might thus imagine newly revised textbooks of literature whose goal would consist of establishing new lines of descent among authors. Whereas traditional textbooks are based on situating as precisely as possible the social Selves of writers, these new textbooks would be drawn to those “other Selves” who, according to Proust, would be the true creators, and they would highlight the concealed chronologies whose complex successions they would organize.

Their role, by ceasing to order writers according to their date of birth, would be to demonstrate that they can be regrouped in a more stimulating manner, so long as one stops subjecting them to the laws of a chronology that is by no means groundless in the case of the flow of a history of events, but that does not allow one to understand deeply what is at play on that other stage which is the stage of literature.

For a Mobile Literary History

In which it is seen that since there can be little doubt that Sterne comes after Joyce and, undoubtedly, after the writers of the Nouveau Roman as well, it may consequently be appropriate to grant him asylum at the end of the twentieth century.

Being willing to reverse certain chronologies, however, only partially serves to solve the problems raised by writing new textbooks of literature. Such works should indeed be precise enough to give a comprehensible view of literary tendencies and to transmit them. Their task is to offer those desiring to discover literature, in the most educational manner possible, an overall view of authors and their lines of descent.

If this is the case, however, simple reversal will not suffice. It is imperative to establish new chronologies and to supply new dates for writers. Valéry had the idea of writing a history of literature without the names of authors. Without going so far, nothing prevents us from retaining the names of authors, while modifying their biographies and transporting them to a century that, without actually inhabiting it historically, they fully partake of from the point of view of a rigorous literary history.

Consider the history of the novel such as we may find it written in numerous treatises of literary history and let us focus on the case of a writer of whom it is frequently said that he occupies a major place in it, even though he seems poorly placed in his own era, the author of *Tristram Shandy*, Lawrence Sterne.

The traditional view of Sterne consists in considering him, to use Judith Schlanger's terminology, as a "precursor" of modernity,⁵ one of those authors who, somewhat by chance—like Montaigne or Rabelais—would find themselves prefiguring a whole array of writers who succeed them chronologically. The most daring critics will go as far as saying that Sterne is so far "in advance" of his age that he belongs to our time.

Although treating him in these terms is entirely honorable to him and implies genuine recognition, it will also be noted that such an attitude is in no way sufficient. To say of Sterne that he is a writer of the eighteenth century would be as absurd and limiting as to say of Sophocles that he is an ancient writer. For the "is" that attributes an essence leads us astray by superimposing, to the point of confusion, two states that are totally different in that they are played out on two different stages. Sterne is indeed, historically speaking, a writer of the eighteenth century, but he is not at all one from the point of view of literature, something that the use of a common verb to characterize the two states may cause us to forget.

For certain writers, it is thus insufficient to reverse chronology; one should not hesitate—even if it entails slightly distorting the "facts," or what are presented as such—to place them resolutely at other dates than those that are ascribed to them too hastily, by taking into account that other history which is literary history, and thus being willing without shame—in the very interest of those writers—to display a bit of imagination.

Where then to situate Sterne? For me there is scarcely any doubt that his literary place is not at all in the eighteenth century, even if I do not

dispute the fact that he was historically part of it. I would be tempted to say that we are not yet able to gauge his true place, and that the modern novel, even in its most daring advances, has not yet caught up with him.

For with *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne leaves nothing in place of the novel as it exists and reinvents all books, including those that would follow. He does away with the notion of plot by giving free rein to interminable digressions. He transforms the idea of character by reducing it to a voice. He shatters every novelistic construct by arraying the different parts of the book in a disorder. He creates a new form of punctuation by inventing the elongated dash. He even takes on the very materiality of his book by dispersing white and black pages. He destructures the language from within by inventing words without meaning.

Need we recall all the authors plagiarized by Sterne? To take but a few examples, the destruction of plot and character was thus probably borrowed from the French *nouveau roman*. The disordering of the structure of the novel may have come to him from numerous texts of contemporary fiction, which deem it necessary, in order to convey the complexity of a life, to break with strict chronology. The invention of new forms of punctuation, starting with Mallarmé and Apollinaire, is a constant of modern literature, in quest of other modes of writing in order to give expression to an inner voice. And recourse to neologisms is a constant practice of Joyce.⁶

There are thus few literary inventions of the twentieth century which cannot already be found in Sterne, as though he had read all the major writers of the novelistic revolution and drawn inspiration from them, without allowing himself to be unduly influenced by any one of them in particular in inventing his personal style. For what is remarkable about him is the way in which he succeeds in effecting an elegant synthesis of all the great novelists of the twentieth century, even as he takes care to maintain his independence and his singularity.

What are the problems, then, since we have acknowledged the eminently modern position of Sterne, in writing a history of literature in which he would figure, for example, after Joyce and the *nouveau roman*? Such problems are not negligible, but we should not overestimate their importance, especially given the advantages obtained thanks to this displacement of epochs.

Who, in fact, evinces any concern, among Sterne's numerous admirers, for his biography? With the exception of a few scholars, what is generally known is that he was English (he was, in fact, born in Ireland), that he exercised the profession of pastor, and that he wrote *A Sentimental Journey*, in which he recounts his wanderings in France. It will be noted that these elements are of limited interest, that they can scarcely serve to help us understand Sterne's art, and that it is consequently quite pos-

sible to do without them. And that there would be no palpable change in our appreciation of Sterne, were we to discover tomorrow that one or another of those facts as not quite accurate.

We know, moreover, that for a large number of writers of the past (and not the least important of them), biographical elements are lacking, particularly about the early years that played a decisive role in the formation of their personality, not to speak of those, like Homer and Shakespeare, of whom we don't even know whether they actually existed or rather designate a group of authors. Instead of becoming fixated on those elements that may have survived oblivion, it would be preferable to devote all our biographical energies to preserving the essential, which belongs to literary history, as opposed to event-based history.

But sacrificing those biographical elements to which we have access is, in any event, not even necessary. All those elements, and many more, can perfectly well be retained as characteristic features of the new Sterne, an inhabitant of the twentieth or twenty-first century. With the exception of a few details, in particular relating to dress, the latter has nothing to lose from being transported to his true place—at least in terms of our modernity—which is situated in a different century from the one in which historical chance inopportunely had him be born.

We may, of course, be told that claiming that Sterne is one of the greatest writers of the twentieth or twenty-first centuries in a literary textbook constitutes an error. This is hardly debatable, but solely from a historical point of view, and far less, if one pauses to think about it, than that other error that consists of presenting him as a writer of the eighteenth century, with which he has only a relation of contingency of the sort that Valéry has so effectively commented on. And a far less costly error since the latter case, which is eminently reductive, entails the risk of dissuading contemporary readers from reading him.

Put differently: the choice is not, when attempting to write literary history, between the true and the false, but between different modalities of error. That inevitability of error is a function of the essential incompatibility between event-based history and literary history. To attempt to situate oneself in one of these (with the risk, moreover, of making mistakes that are not negligible within that very regime) is inevitably to commit a major error in the other, the two histories obeying two regimes of truth that are heterogeneous and irreconcilable.

As hesitant as it may be to take a distance from event-based history and to modify its dates, a new literary history must be careful to avoid all kinds of rigidity. It should, on the contrary—and this is another way for it to distinguish itself from event-based history—resolutely opt for mobility. Such mobility, moreover, functions on two distinct levels.

If the principles of reversal and modification of dates are to be retained, it is as possibilities and not as precepts. Advocating a different chronology serves as a reminder of the toll on our understanding of literary history taken by the confusion of Sterne and Sterne or Proust and Proust. But it can in no way be a matter of imposing such a separation when the confusion between the social individual and the writer appears to deserve to be maintained.

There is a primary reason for the mobility of the new literary history. The new chronologies cannot be fixed to the extent that every new work—and even more, every important work—displaces the entirety of a constituted chronology and casts the existent literary panorama in a new light.

Why is it that that chronology never ceases to change? First of all, the progression of time causes us to discover new works, which result in a modification of the view we cast on the past, with the effect of rehabilitating some works and attenuating the force of others, which suddenly appear to be outdated. This modification of our view or gaze is, moreover, acknowledged in all conceptions of literature, whatever the representation of time that underpins them.⁷

But our theory of time emphasizes the sensitivity of literary history to the new. New works, in fact, are not satisfied with modifying our view of works of the past. They also reveal to us a certain number of concealed sources of those works as the advance of history brings them to light and causes us to reconsider—occasionally radically—their place in literary history. The gradual revelation of all the cases of anticipatory plagiarism thus allows for a reconstitution of the hidden origins of works and the possibility of reading them differently.

There is a second reason for the mobility of literary history, which is linked to the first. This new history cannot help being eminently subjective. It thus hardly seems plausible, once they accept the legitimacy of my project of separating two forms of history, that most specialists of the novel would continue to place Sterne in the eighteenth century. But nothing, of course, forbids it, in as much as the gesture of situating him in that era takes on an entirely different meaning once the freedom exists to displace him from it or keep him there.

The subjectivity of our method is thus patent and embraced as such. It is, however, no greater than that which presides over the composition of traditional literary textbooks, a study of which reveals how much they vary (depending on when they are written) in their evaluation of the quality of various authors. But those textbooks only take up the question of lines of descent in a single direction. My method is neither more mobile nor more subjective than theirs.

To say that such new temporal classifications are subjective is simultaneously to say that their composition is maximally embroiled with the unconscious of the critic. However obvious the evidence tending to indicate that Sterne drew his inspiration broadly from the modern and contemporary novel, each of us deals with a private Sterne to whom he ascribes a place that is incomparable in an autonomous literary calendar.

This new literary history would thus in no way be frozen or congealed, nor the result of an act of composition that is assured of a prior truth to be attained, if only gradually. It is more plausibly the uncertain attempt incumbent on every critic, in a form far less rigid than that of traditional literary history, to draw out, in his own time, the transitory organization of the realm of literature, along with the complex and anachronistic play of influences that determine it.

What does it mean in concrete terms to accept this twofold mobility in the writing of this new literary history?

Let us return to the example of Sterne. If I were to write a history of the novel, I, for my part, would have the greatest reticence in placing *Tristram Shandy* right before Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, which is the view of traditional literary history, excessively marked as it is by event-based history. This reticence does not entail any value judgment concerning Rousseau's masterpiece, but most of those who know the two works will admit without difficulty that it would be aberrant to respect "historical chronology" strictly in this case.

Where, then, are we to place Sterne? For my own part (but such a decision can only be subjective), I don't see how we can situate him in the nineteenth century, given how much more formally advanced he is than Romantic and realist writers. It is in the context of the crisis of the novel in the period between two centuries—illustrated by such authors as James, Proust, Joyce, or Woolf—that the question of his situation may be truly posed and that, at the same time, the real problems of dating Sterne surface.

If he is fully participant, as I would argue, in the literary modernity issuing from the crisis of the novel, Sterne cannot for all that—happily, as it turns out—be situated in literary history with absolute precision, for the two reasons I have indicated, namely, the subjectivity of the critic and the unceasing appearance of new works, which ceaselessly modify previous works.

I personally would situate him after Joyce and the stream-of-consciousness novelists, to whom he refers discreetly and who appear to have inspired him. And even if characters and plot fragments exist in his work, I would be tempted, given the number of formal innovations he owes them, to see him as an heir of the authors of the *nouveau roman*,

lost in another era. It is enough, moreover, to shift him over by exactly two centuries while conserving the essential elements of his biography to give that biography a literary coherence superior to that which it possesses at present.

We see the role of subjectivity in this attempt to assign dates, playing a role in the reading of works and in the act of selection that confers upon them this or that anticipatory value. But the emergence of every work or significant trend also modifies the situation. The argument I have just made, which would lead me to have Sterne die in the second half of the twentieth century, may have to be reconsidered if one takes into account the recent trend of *autofiction*, which might lead to yet another modification of his biography. Perhaps we are dealing, in this newly emergent genre, with one of the unknown sources of Sterne, which would make it appropriate to situate him still later, smack in the twenty-first century this time, while awaiting new discoveries.

The transformations that this new literary history imposes on the representation of literature induced by event-based history are in no way an obstacle to the customary efforts of historians of literature.

Such is also the case for biographies, which nothing in this new form of history forbids one from writing. Thus most of the information we possess about Sterne remains valid, both those elements bearing on the place and circumstances of his birth and those recounting his childhood and upbringing. This is also the case for most of his activities, such as his profession as a pastor, or his travels, and notably his celebrated journey to France. It thus becomes possible to *shelter* Sterne in our epoch, finding for him the means to live suitably in it and to adapt to its *mores*.

In brief, a complete biography of a writer can perfectly well be written while being transported to a century other than the one in which he lived, with the advantage of restoring him in his creative truth and offering him a larger audience (since he thus finds himself in the period to which he actually belongs from the point of view of literary history, and in which he is most likely to feel at ease).

No doubt certain elements of biography, such as historical background, should be avoided as much as possible, for fear of misleading the reader. And even then, it is a matter of the data of collective history, since individual history, which plays a determining role in the constitution of an individual and above all of a creator, can be transposed without difficulty to another period.

What is valid for a biography is even easier to achieve for those microbiographies known as dictionary entries. By touching only lightly on historical reality (the only elements difficult to avoid are dates of birth and death) and by restoring, on the other hand, literary reality with preci-

sion, it is possible to present the life of an author in a few lines without any major difficulty and to indicate his new place in literary history.⁸

Supple, attentive to the place of subjectivity and new discoveries, this task of writing a new literary history is by no means impossible, even if it is necessary to be more rigorous than in the writing of classical literary histories and to reflect with precision on the order in which it would be desirable to array writers.

In being willing to grant creators shelter outside of the century that witnessed their birth, it has the principal merit of respecting the literary life and the true interplay of secret influences which lie at the origin of works and which traditional history, locked into an excessively classical conception of time, is not equipped to take into account.

For a Literary History of Anticipation

In which, drawing on the example of Kafka, it will be seen how the study of the literature of the future can open up entire domains of literary research, specifically regarding the study of writers who do not yet exist.

The theory of anticipatory plagiarism would seem incomplete if it failed to extend across time, not restricting itself to reordering prior lines of descent, but contributing to illuminating those of the future.

If it is the case that creators, and specifically the greatest among them, do not hesitate to draw inspiration from future authors, it will immediately be perceived how much profit is to be derived from a genuinely anticipatory criticism, which might well inaugurate a vast field of endeavor. What is opened up to us is nothing less than the possibility of describing and commenting—with relative precision—on the principal stages of a literature that remains to be written.

It is, in fact, quite striking to observe that textbooks of literature are interested in the literature of the past or, on occasion, the present, but never (or extremely rarely) in the literature that is still to come. There is nothing surprising in this, once one reflects on the place that is occupied by a theory of sources and influences exclusively oriented toward the past and inattentive to any other form of origin. Taking such origins into account, without causing us to forget the past, should lead to a broad opening of research and literary textbooks to a description of the future.

What better name to invoke, if such be the case, in closing this study, than that of Kafka, the writer who has undoubtedly been most often associated with the phenomena of literary anticipation?

Kafka is a precursor in a threefold sense. The characterization is appropriate, first of all, because of his private life. I have had occasion, in a previous work, *Demain est écrit*,⁹ to show how his work, like that of other authors, was influenced by a certain number of biographical events which had not yet occurred but which, nonetheless, exercised identifiable effects on the writing of those who would one day experience them. I will return below to the major encounter of his existence, expanding the hypothesis I advanced in that work while attempting to illuminate the data from another perspective.

But it is not, to be sure, for his predictive abilities about his private life that Kafka is universally famous (since they had not yet been noticed at the time), but for having traced, as though he had foreknowledge of them, the lineaments of an impending collective future. For he is, in fact, frequently credited with having described in his novels, with some precision, the terrifying political future that was about to be implemented in Europe.

However selective the choice of texts and the partiality of the interpretation that allow such a link, it is undeniable that Kafka's universe, in more than a single aspect, prefigures the world of totalitarianism. Characters, whose identity is limited to a single initial and who confront absurd administrations where their rights are denied by authorities all the more disturbing in being simultaneously omnipotent and invisible, evoke rather precisely for us the victims of the two great totalitarian systems known to humanity in the twentieth century.

If Kafka managed to acquire his reputation as a precursor, it was because he disappeared at a time when it was impossible for him to have known the political systems he is assumed to have intuited. The Nazi regime was not yet in place at the time of his death and scant information concerning the Communist totalitarian regime that had nonetheless begun to illustrate his works was available. It is thus entirely justifiable to consider him as the depositary of a remarkable intuition of what was about to occur.

As in the case of the events of his private life, it thus appears legitimate to assume that his writing—comparable to a kind of seismographic apparatus—revealed itself capable of registering certain lines of force in reality, culminating in events that had not yet occurred, as though the exacerbated sensitivity of certain authors rendered them capable, even unwittingly, of grasping the anticipatory signs of what was slated to happen.

The acknowledgment of Kafka's capacity of intuition with regard to the events of his personal life and his political descriptions leaves aside, however, a third mode of anticipation, which would concern not

only the incidents of his personal life or political systems, but literary works themselves. In other words, the question of determining which political or personal events Kafka drew on for his novelistic inspiration in no way supplies an answer to another question, that of determining from which authors of the future he may have drawn, at least in part, materials crucial to his own work.

Now this question, which is asked less often than the preceding ones, is also more original. Without excluding these other inquiries, with which it plainly has much in common, it has the merit of being based on more precise grounds, since it is no longer a matter of bringing to light vague relations between texts and events, whether private or collective, but rather concrete similarities, verifiable by reading, between texts.

It is, in fact, astonishing that Kafka's capacity for anticipation is always taken into account in a political rather than a literary context—where it might well exercise considerable effects. Once one admits that Kafka borrowed elements of his work from future texts, that capacity allows us to perceive several of the major axes or authors of the literature of the future.

Such is the interest of researching future sources. In situating each author at the crux of a dual temporality, the critic's attention is no longer limited to the study of the past and is engaged, by way of what great writers have said on the subject and received from it, toward knowledge of the future.

Let us begin with works that we already know before turning to those whose presence we are able to intuit. It is striking to observe that, as is the case for our other anticipatory plagiarists, Kafka appears to be isolated in his era, as though, in dissonance with his contemporaries, he were already situated at the heart of a different age.

Once one raises the question of influences (in the desired direction) one finds oneself wondering from which subsequent writers Kafka drew his inspiration. The triple dismantling of character, dialogue, and plot by the authors of the French *nouveau roman* may well have supplied our isolated author from central Europe with a creative source. And how could one not think—without straying too far from the *nouveau roman*—of the author who would go farthest in the destruction of character and the production of undecidable texts, namely Samuel Beckett?

Without in any way wanting to superimpose or fuse authors, we may say that there is more than one point in common between the worlds of Kafka and Beckett, beginning with the extreme reduction of characters, and that this is so much the case that it is hard to believe that there was not, in one way or another, some sort of encounter between the two. Rarely, in fact, will the notion of reciprocal plagiarism have been

as well applied as in the case of these two authors, about whom one may feel—in comparing, for instance, “In The Penal Colony” and “The Lost Ones” (*Le Dépeupleur*)—that they discovered a way of bridging the temporal interval separating them in order to work together.

This first instance of plagiarism, with regard to writers of the second half of the twentieth century, should not cause us to forget a whole series of works that are proliferating today and concerning which Kafka may—at least intuitively—have had some knowledge and drawn inspiration in beginning a dialogue with their authors. I refer here to works linked to the great exterminations of the twentieth century, which depict a character lost in an apocalyptic world whose rules elude him even when his life is at stake.

Among those authors writing after the war—and thus with direct knowledge of the historical events to which Kafka could not have had access—the name of Imre Kertész stands out. The author of *Fateless* depicts a subject lost in a world of annihilation, that of the Shoah, governed by an implacable law and in which all bearings have disappeared. The proximity is such that plagiarism is barely debatable. And if anticipatory plagiarism is the most plausible hypothesis, it is because Kertész is by no means isolated in his own era, where numerous works recount similar experiences, while Kafka’s work appears to be at odds with that of other writers of his day.

But Kafka could just as well have read authors of the following generation. I am thinking here of Antoine Volodine—one of the most remarkable representatives of a form of literature known as “postgenocidal”—whose influence on Kafka might merit detailed study. Books like *Lisbonne, dernière marge* or *Dondog* are set in a world in which the catastrophe has already taken place and is all the more menacing for never being characterized with any precision. And they do away with every subject—with temporary narrators succeeding or engendering each other, destabilizing every identity. To be sure there is no assurance that Kafka plagiarized Volodine rather than the reverse. But here again the sense of dissonance—Kafka stands alone while Volodine belongs to a generation marked by totalitarianism and genocides—is a spur to seeing him as the plagiarist rather than the plagiarized.

This needed contextualization of Kafka by way of a search for some of his concealed future sources in no way, however, exhausts the question of the authors he has plagiarized. If one opens up the spectrum of influences beyond the present, searching this time for future sources of inspiration, the component of conjecture is admittedly greater than in the case of living authors, but it should not prevent us from advancing a number of plausible hypotheses.

The authors I have just mentioned are the most predictable, both in terms of formal innovation and of pessimism. Their all-too-facile identification thus goads us to look for a less obvious and more secret Kafka—and thus to seek out future sources for his work that are more difficult to perceive at present. It is, in fact, clear that if Beckett, Kertesz, and Volodine were able to play a role in the invention of Kafka's universe, they cannot by themselves account for his profound originality, and that a large part of Kafka remains inexplicable.

It may thus become possible to envisage a way of reading differently—this time from the perspective of a more distant future—that major theme of Kafka's universe, to wit: the Law in all the terrifying and undecipherable aspects it presents to human beings. This dimension of his work—which has ensured the author's fame—is certainly the most obvious one and for that reason has received the most commentary, but it is not certain that its deep origins have been completely identified, and that they are limited to the major figures I have just evoked.

What is, in fact, remarkable is that the oppressive power in Kafka is always an essentially masculine power, and not merely because it is held only by men—from *Amerika* to *The Castle*¹⁰—but because it implies in its very mode of functioning a fundamental negation of the feminine. In point of fact, although most of Kafka's heroes are men, they are lacking in virility and appear to be lost in an aggressive and brutal world with which, given their fragility and exacerbated sensitivity, they have little in common.

Yet this negation of the feminine does not appear solely in recurrent scenes of masculine domination. It is conveyed as well in the way in which women, in this world, undergo all kinds of violence, including that inflicted by the heroes themselves. Restricted to secondary tasks, constrained to perform work for men, giving or selling them their bodies, they are stripped of personality and the right to self-expression and reduced to the status of objects.

This reduction is particularly palpable in Kafka's last novel, *The Castle*, in which all the female characters—Frieda as well as Olga, Amalia, and Pepi¹¹—are cruelly subjected (in their very flesh) to the assaults of masculine power. And it is no small matter that the only woman who manages to escape from the law of men, Frieda, is constrained at the end of the book, after having lived for a while with K., to give up her freedom.

The feminine component in Kafka's work may very well have had its origin in his childhood, his psychology, or the friends he frequented. In attempting to identify literary sources, one is hard put to find among his contemporaries—at a time when there were few women writers and few more among the authors of the period that separates us from him—a

woman writer from whom he could clearly have drawn inspiration. Hence the temptation to look for the traces of one somewhere in the future.

We may, in fact, find ourselves wondering to what extent the rejection of the masculine in Kafka could not be explained, on the one hand, by the presence at his side of an unknown female workmate (alive not then, but in the future), goading him at a distance to take into account the question of feminine subjugation. A partner who would herself be a writer, whose influence would expand over time—to the point of explaining the growing purchase of the feminine and its claims on the themes and writing of his work.

What precisely might we know of that work yet to come? Though we would have to reread all of Kafka attentively in order to begin sketching the outlines of those future texts, it is enough, in order to get a glimpse, however brief, of the phantom presence of this unknown work, to extend the already evoked novelistic lines of force that insist on the devaluation of women—lines that Kafka did not allow to reach their limit—and to see the imaginary space where they ultimately coincide.

It is thus reasonable to assume, in a first approximation, that in this context it is a woman, a persecuted heroine, who lies at the center of the novelistic schema and that this feminine equivalent of Karl, Josef K., or K. resides here in fear, lost in a hostile and senseless world that is all the more disquieting in that she is the target of unceasing masculine aggression. For it is rape that is the permanent risk facing the women of this world, an act that Kafka only hints at in his novels, but which a female novelist cannot omit, since she experiences it physically as a threat.¹²

A heroine who is the subject of corporeal violence, then, but also of that other (more subtle) form of rejection whose masculine equivalent is served up to the reader by Kafka's novels and which is tied to the illegibility of the world, which ends up reducing the human being, stripped of his command of reality, to an object. Women in this alternative fictional universe clash with the same bureaucracy as Kafka's male heroes, undertake the same repetitious and senseless procedures, but the contempt with which they are treated allows us to intuit different resonances, relating to the nature of the negation to which their gender traditionally falls victim.

Might it be possible for us to take a further step in characterizing such a work and trying, for example, to imagine the circumstances in which it unfurls? Picking up, once more, on a number of anticipatory traces, I offer the hypothesis that it tells us a story symmetrical to that of *The Trial* and *The Castle*, and that what it describes for us is no longer the condition of man confronting the Law, but rather that of woman decimated by one of the contemporary totalitarian systems that deny

her, in certain countries, any right to exist. With such injustice, it is hardly likely that a great work of literature—whose outline we cannot yet clearly see—will not appear, in dialogue with that of Kafka, in order to denounce such a decimation.

Conclusion

Describing the future as precisely as possible should thus be one of the primary functions of a rational literary pedagogy, attentive to the complexity of the various curvatures of time. Such an effort in no way implies a diminished interest in the past, but rather balances its study with that of the future, while closing down all efforts to make of the latter a kind of taboo subject.

Taking into account the influence of the future might thus lead to a significant transformation of our teaching of literature. Such a pedagogy, if it is to succeed, ought to accept a number of major epistemological readjustments and allow a series of foundational notions, ones likely to bring into play new chronologies and more attentive to the specificity of literary experience, to assume the place they deserve.

Unfortunately it has not been possible, in the framework of our effort in these pages, to open more than a few paths for reflection, whereas what is called for is the constitution of genuine research teams to begin working in the original fields that an understanding of anticipatory plagiarism incites us to explore, and that can attempt to solve the innumerable questions which emerge.

There are, in fact, a considerable number of subjects for books and theses that open up lines of research once one is willing to take up the question of influence *in the other direction*, and to pose the question, with regard to all writers, not only of the place occupied in their work by those who precede them, but equally by those, already born or yet to come, who follow them.

No doubt this kind of research is rife with uncertainty, since it is difficult to distinguish, in the face of suspected resemblances, among the three possible forms of plagiarism, taking into account the additional fact that retrospective influence makes it difficult to identify cases of pilfering. But such uncertainty is also found in traditional exercises of source identification and serves as a guarantee that genuine research is being conducted, with all the difficulties of attribution customarily associated with it.

Although it is never possible to be absolutely certain in identifying future writers (and even less so in describing their works with any preci-

sion), one can, however, advance the hypothesis that these works can be apprehended via the discreet traces that they leave at present in the works to which we have access.

It is much the same as in astronomy's *black holes*, which scientists claim cannot be directly apprehended and escape both the naked eye and various perceptual apparatuses, but which can be rigorously deduced through the effects they produce on the planets and celestial bodies situated in their vicinity that bear, inscribed upon them, the marks of their presence.

The hypothesis of this essay is that a comparable situation holds for writers and works of the future, which exercise on past and present literature a kind of diffuse radiation, whose perception allows us, in scrutinizing texts with sufficient care, to intuit the new aesthetic territories toward which we are heading and whose anticipatory traces are already inscribed in the works of the present.

What we need be sensitive to are those traces of the future, learning how to listen to texts differently, while recalling that they are not inscribed in a single linear temporality, moving in a straight line from the past to the future, but rather within the movement of a dual chronology whose different temporal strata encounter and traverse each other.

UNIVERSITY OF PARIS VIII

TRANSLATED BY JEFFREY MEHLMAN

NOTES

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1 As is done by Didier Anzieu, for instance, in "Oedipe avant le complexe ou de l'interprétation psychanalytique des mythes," in *Les Temps Modernes*, October 1966, 675–715. See as well the commentary by Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Oedipe sans complexe," *Raison présente*, no. 4 (1967): 4.

2 From the children of Kronos to the daughter of Agamemnon and the children of Medea, cases of infanticide are far more frequent in mythology than of parricide.

3 "The titles of the chapters and sub-chapters of Lanson's *Histoire de la littérature française* vividly (and occasionally dramatically) express the disorder resulting from the mismatch between what one is or does, on the one hand, and the time in which one finds oneself, on the other. For many individuals and works are not in their place and fail to find it." Judith Schlanger, "Le précurseur," in *Le Temps des oeuvres: Mémoire et préfiguration* (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2001), 17.

4 The fact of wanting literary or artistic history to possess an autonomous chronology, distinct from that of "event-based" history, in no way implies that the latter be considered as a bloc with a single chronology. Here too it is a plural chronology that is called for, one that would take into account the differentiated rhythms of its different components. But the study of the temporalities of classical history is not my focus here.

5 Schlanger, "Le précurseur."

6 Accusations of anticipatory plagiarism were formulated early on against Sterne. Already in *Jacques le fataliste et son maître*, whose composition began a dozen years before the first volume of *Tristram Shandy*, Diderot wrote: "Here is the second paragraph, copied from the life of *Tristram Shandy*, unless the conversation between Jacques the Fatalist and his master preceded that work and it was Pastor Sterne who was the plagiarist, something which I do not believe, and that because of a very specific esteem for Mr. Sterne, whom I distinguish from most of the *littérateurs* of his nation, whose custom is rather frequently to rob us and then insult us." Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 25 (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 709.

7 See, for example, T. S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past." Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1950), 49–50.

8 An example: "Laurence Sterne: British novelist (Clonmel, Ireland, 1713–London, 1768). The son of a British Army officer, he pursued his studies at Cambridge and became Pastor of Sutton in the Forest, where, over a period of twenty years, he led a withdrawn life. In 1759, he published his first novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, strongly influenced by Joyce and the French writers of the *nouveau roman*, and which enjoyed a marked success. Another of his works, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768) offers precious testimony concerning life in France."

9 *Demain est écrit* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2005).

10 Brunelda is too decayed a presence to serve as a figure of power.

11 Frieda, a servant in the hotel, becomes Klamm's slave, a place subsequently occupied by Pepi after her departure, and which she rediscovers at the end of the novel. Having involuntarily seduced a man in the Castle, Amalia is constrained to live a cloistered existence and her father loses his job.

12 The painter's wife in *The Trial*, and Amalia and Frieda, in *The Castle*, are raped or threatened with being raped.