

CATHARTIC ALIENATION AND TEXTUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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Résumé : *Dans cette étude, nous avons problématisé la relation entre la conscience personnelle, la conscience textuelle et l'ambiguïté discursive à travers deux concepts anciens: la catharsis et la mimésis. Lorsque le lecteur entre dans l'état cathartique, la conscience qui lui parle dans le texte s'unit à sa propre conscience. Une communication révélée est-elle née ? Telle est la question. Ce n'est pas toute conscience textuelle qui peut engendrer une communication cathartique dans la conscience du lecteur, mais seulement le discours qui apporte au lecteur l'aliénation du monde concret et de son propre moi, comme une imitation de l'abnégation par l'oubli de soi. Une forme d'abandon de soi est ainsi produite. La conscience textuelle devient ainsi une hypostase relative et transitoire de la conscience du lecteur. Ainsi, au moment de l'aliénation cathartique, la conscience textuelle a une double manifestation, un double visage. Elle possède une identité subtile où le lecteur et le héros/voix du texte forment un couple inséparable. La conscience textuelle ne peut exister en dehors du lecteur et le lecteur ne peut recevoir la catharsis en dehors de la conscience textuelle capable de la produire. Dans cette participation/adhésion/collaboration, l'ambiguïté discursive se réduit plus ou moins jusqu'à disparaître. La communication cathartique semble être une communication révélée, mais elle ne l'est pas. C'est une mimésis. Une imitation de la communication révélée. Et la communication révélée n'est possible que par l'union avec l'Esprit Saint. La conscience personnelle devient alors une conscience révélée, lorsque le Maître intérieur, le Christ, parle en elle. La conscience textuelle, l'expérience de la communication textuelle, est cependant une mimésis, une préparation, une anticipation, une préfiguration possible de la communication révélée à travers cette suspension du moi (aliénation cathartique). Mais la conscience textuelle ne peut jamais remplacer la véritable conscience révélée. Elle peut cependant l'anticiper et aider la véritable conscience personnelle à apprendre à placer sa raison et son expérience sous le signe d'une pensée cathartique, qui va au-delà de la pensée rationnelle-empirique, mais qui n'est en aucun cas une pensée révélée, mais une pensée intuitive, empathique et spéculative.*

Mots-clés : *conscience, catharsis, mimésis, aliénation, personne.*

Hypothesis

When we talk about discursive ambiguity, we focus on language in its formal functionality and leave that *personal consciousness* that produces, organizes and orients meaning in language. We forget about the *person*, while we analyse with the utmost meticulousness

how the various structures of language are linked and unlinked, which the person creating the discourse uses to encounter the consciousness of the other – of the person receiving the discourse, so that from this encounter knowledge results. Speech outside consciousness does not exist. By focusing on *discursive ambiguity* we neglect the essential - personal consciousness and the encounter with it. We give priority to forms and we sideline or even kill the purposes of language. Discourse ambiguity is primarily a multiplication of meaning or/and a placing of meaning in a form causing uncertainty in interpretation.

But all this discursive strategy based on ambiguity is only a tool used by the personal consciousness of the author of the speech producer to evoke an inner dynamic based on hesitation, confusion, doubt, procrastination, distrust, fear, ignorance, helplessness. Ambiguity, then, may be a discursive reality. It is not an ultimate horizon, but a vehicle of personal consciousness on its way to a goal that is, in fact, never ambiguous. And the purpose of personal consciousness is always to make itself known and/or to (know) itself. Personal consciousness transfers all this inner experience into the text, into textual knowledge. There, in the text, things become much easier to discover and demonstrate than beyond it, outside it.

And for the encounter with personal consciousness, projected into textual consciousness, to acquire a content closer to the truth, it is necessary to unite, in the analysis, theological and philosophical thought with philological and historical thought. Such a strategy in interpretation is generous with *textual consciousness* and its story. It generates historical contextualization, empathetic rapprochement, spiritual debate, creative reconstruction of ideas and emotions, representations and messages. In this way discursive ambiguity is no longer an interpretive bottleneck. It is a return to the spirit of the old culture. In this way we reject concretely, without ineffective polemics the kitsch inconsistency of *distant reading* and the whole posthumanist ideology.

Textual Consciousness

A reader, whether he lives every day of his life with literature by his side, or whether he rarely brings it into the space of his consciousness, knows that from every novel and every poem, from every epic or drama, another consciousness speaks to him. This is the main reason why it is worthwhile to encounter literature, the reader thinks. From the world of literature someone speaks to you. And not just anyhow. That someone is willing to reveal to you exactly his significant story, his own understanding of things, which you find out hardly or never from real people and real events you meet throughout your life. Knowing the other, the one who speaks to you from the text, is the realm of serenity promised by literature – a promise made especially by the author of novels, epics, comedy, poetry and drama. From this perspective, literature is a kind of absolute of equality, without any axiomatic discrimination: for any reader, sophisticated or naive, literature is an alternative to real life, that alternative of knowledge that we are always seeking, alone or together, and from whose restless energy the story, the chronicle, the reminiscence, the myth, the metaphor, the millstone of ideas, the philosophy, are born.

The reader's attitude is therefore a simple act of intuitive knowledge. And the affirmation of the existence of a textual consciousness is an intuitive truth. There is a consciousness in the literary text. Some of us readers identify it with a voice, with an intangible presence or at least with another person's view of things. The question arises whether this intuitive perception is valid for all kinds of texts (from scientific description to

fictional literature; from historical and autobiographical texts to fictional and metaphorical ones) or whether it acts on the reader's consciousness only in relation to certain texts.

The answer we argue for is that the inherent sense of the presence of a speaking consciousness arises in the reader's mind only when he or she reads a text that conveys a *story* through a *narrative*. We identify these texts with all fiction and poetry, with historical, diaristic and autobiographical texts, uniting fiction with metaphor on the one hand and history with autobiography on the other, in the same space.

Why? This brings us to the difference between story and narrative, which leads us directly to the question of the existence of consciousness in the literary text. The story (*histoire* in French; *story* in English) is *mythos*, an encounter with real or fictional people, with events in their real or possible lives, capable of revealing to us the rules according to which they lead their existence, the *existential scenario* in which they project the meaning they construct in their particular relations with history and time.

The story is the product of a consciousness that puts narrative thought and allegorical thought to work, in a dosage that is unique to each story, evident also in the uniqueness of the narrative that transposes the story textually. In such texts the representation of our ideas about the reality of the world has an emotional, individual or purely narrative content, indicating through this kind of internal coherence the presence of intratextual consciousness. Surely it is possible to show that any text, from that of mathematics to that of philosophy and literature, expresses an intrinsic consciousness, for the simple reason that it is the product of a real man's reason addressing the real consciousness of the reader. But not every text can develop in every reader the certain perception of the existence of a hidden consciousness, as he gives voice to the text before his own consciousness. The perception of textual consciousness depends on the reader's ability to relate to it through reading and dialogue.

The reader of literature, however, certainly has the perception of a consciousness in the text that speaks to him. It is not due to him, but is imposed on him by the very nature of the literary text - a flow of representations that relentlessly and happily follows the narrative logic of a human mind, the mind of the author. Nor can pure lyricism escape narrative altogether, for the most *anti-narrative* image is an evocative sequence from a broad story accessible to the author at the moment of creation, and which remains to be assumed by the reader. And the human mind understands time, records events, produces knowledge, delimits what it knows from what it does not know through narrative.

When we pose the question of textual consciousness and ask what it is or how it comes into being, we understand that there is a *transfer* that is impossible to quantify firmly from the author of the text to the consciousness sedimented in the text. From this position, textual consciousness arises primarily as a *hypostasis* of the real consciousness of the real author of the text, as he reflects his own being in the rhythm and time of his own history and world through the text. But in the text the consciousness thus transferred becomes a mere latency, an assumed form. Only the mind of the other consciousness involved, of the real reader, can give life through reading and living dialogue to the consciousness present in the text. For the ordinary reader, the consciousness addressed to him from the text is at least an intuitive truth. Every literary work has an intrinsic consciousness, which is developed by its author, but which is not identified with the author's consciousness, but is alienated from the author's consciousness until it becomes autonomous, at the very moment of the work's completion and opening to the reader.

The question is what the reader does with the perception of textual consciousness. Does it accept and value it? Does it deny it, falsify it, camouflage it and disguise it in something else - in forms, above all, such as narrative functions, narrative I, lyrical I, etc., in order to no longer recognise any kind of presence of a possible consciousness? Consciousness equals the idea of responsibility. If we, the reader, accept or confess the presence of a consciousness in the living dynamics of a text that tells a story, even when it speaks in metaphors, then we know that the living centre of any text is the manifest ethic of that consciousness that I, the reader, encounter in the autonomous world of the story. Two consciousnesses cannot communicate outside the idea of ethics, for the elementary reason that each comes into the space of dialogue with its own rules of life, therefore – with its own ethics.

Literature means stories with people and their worlds – true, possible or impossible. The consciousness in the text manifests itself through fictional voices, thus evoking stories and communicating different views of the world and realities. And our minds need the fresh nourishment of unconditional encounters with different and similar people, worlds and their stories. Literature cannot disappear because it offers every reader precisely the possibility of such a free encounter. Without limitations, without technology, without censorship. The mediator of the encounter between the reader's mind and the world evoked in the book of literature is the very consciousness, as silent as it is eloquent, that exists in the literary text.

No ordinary reader, without the pretensions of a critic or hermeneuticist, without being a professor of literature, would be surprised to hear the opinion that the novel or the poem he is reading is in fact speaking to him from a consciousness painstakingly placed in the words of the text by the author of that literary text himself. The silent consciousness in the text becomes embodied and eloquent, acquiring a particular mental body, as the reader's mind metamorphoses the words into representations while reading the text. And from the representations dominant images are projected and individual voices are imposed. From the dominant images and through the individual voices, influential meanings are imposed on the reading.

The volatile imagination of the textual consciousness gains appearance and enters into the vivid and strong imagination of the real reader. The story-directed meanings, through emotions and ideas, together construct the distinct figure of a thought open to the reader. The energetic flow of images, voices, meanings and especially of thought addressing the reader's imagination and consciousness, step by step brings the reader himself closer to the silent-elusive consciousness at the core of the text.

The reader's consciousness senses the presence of the other consciousness in the text from the very first representations and perceives it as an intangible but present and powerful guide. A call to knowledge, to encounter, to dialogue. All this dynamism creates a mental micro-territory in the reader's mind and fills it with memory, emotions, ideas, the energy of possible beings – fictional beings and the relief of a world elsewhere – the fictional world. The reader accepts that his mind is inhabited, at least temporarily, by the immaterial world of the other consciousness, the evidence of which is proved by the very mental projection the reader participates in and assimilates. There is a transfer of content from the other consciousness, the consciousness in the text, to the reader's consciousness. The mind, and especially the reader's consciousness, cannot remain indifferent or neutral during this process of transfer, because it participates in an orientation given to meaning,

thought, the whole immaterial world by the other consciousness. The encounter to which the reader's consciousness is called is by no means an innocent one.

There is nothing innocent in the proximity between two consciousnesses, perhaps especially if one of them is both - immaterial, textual and fictional. There is an influence: the reader's consciousness opens its mind and relaxes fearlessly before the consciousness in the text. It takes no special precautions. The reader is most often convinced of the lack of real power of textual consciousness over his mind and reason. Moreover, the reader wants to be seduced, expects to be taken over by the fictional world of the text, with the certainty of the impossibility of a fictional consciousness such as the textual one really taking hold of his real consciousness. So the reader enters an experience of the mind that he is certain he can master. Is he wrong or not? Once the reader's mind gets caught up in the play of the call in the text, it is in fact following the adventure of another real mind, that of the author who wrote the text. Out of the adventure of the mind and consciousness of the real man – the author – is born the (fictional) textual consciousness.

The other consciousness, the consciousness in the text, acts on the reader through influence and participation. By mediating the reader-text encounter, it transfers to the reader's consciousness meanings, patterns of thought, knowledge. A certain kind of knowledge. Textual consciousness mediates a certain understanding of what is good and what is evil, expressed through the ethical imagination with which the fictional beings, the fictional voices – the world in the text addresses the mind of the reader. Therefore, textual consciousness transfers to the reader its own understanding of good and evil through the oriented content of the representations with which the ethical imagination intrinsic to the textual world works. The consciousness in the text produces a dialogue and a participatory influence on the reader's consciousness because of the ethical imagination on which any fictional world is based and which is enshrined in the thought emanating from textual consciousness in the production of representations and in the orientation of all their meanings.

Cathartic Alienation

The reader's consciousness is drawn to such an experience of participation and influence because in any encounter with the fictional worlds of literature there is the promise of *catharsis* – a revelatory emotion so powerful that it can simultaneously bring the reader liberation (from evil) and knowledge (good). *Catharsis*, therefore, has a magico-ethical power over the reader. It produces a break or pause in the continuum of the reader's concrete life, as a kind of departure elsewhere or a kind of alienation. Catharsis takes the reader to another reality, and during this journey the reader "forgets" himself, "forgets" his own existence, has a vision of another world, knows something else. A distance spontaneously accumulates and an estrangement occurs between the reader's mind/consciousness and his/her own world: the cathartic alienation created both in the consciousness of the reader and in the consciousness of the author of literature during the creation of texts and their reading, through the revelation and re-discovery of textual consciousnesses. The literary author multiplies his identity in otherness through cathartic alienation. And the reader gives mental life to fictional alterities, charging them with the personal energy of their own mind, in a very intimate collaboration of consciousnesses.

The exit from the seen and unseen territory of one's own life, the temporary leaving of that which prevents us from extracting truth and the content of the good from there, the dwelling however briefly in another kind of mental space, even when we ourselves invoke it (the case of the author of literature) and receiving its intelligence,

through creation or reading/interpretation, the perusal of the wisdom offered, meditative contemplation, from that foreign space, of our ordinary homeland (our everyday life), the hidden and silent experience of the other's life (whether inspired, but never identical to our real life) – the immaterial being in the text – frees us from our own self and makes it possible to know and love our neighbour more than most experiences in our real life, where we rarely or never forget ourselves.

Cathartic alienation means precisely alienation from the self, leaving into the unseen world of otherness evoked only by the word, so that, free of ourselves, we can read the meaning of things, the horizon of truth, from the (loving) contemplation of the other, in the purified relief of words. Therefore, the return from cathartic alienation to the homeland of our own self, of our own mind and consciousness, can bring about the revelation of our inner man, can bring about that inner vision, otherwise very difficult to gain.

When the reader experiences *catharsis*, he experiences a sequential, searing, quasi-mystical experience. Its recollection can have an initiatory influence. Reading is a very brief voluntary exile of the reader gone into the world of the other consciousness – textual consciousness. When the reader returns from fiction to reality is he unchanged? Or does the return bear the mark of an ethical influence? The particular ethical imagination developed by textual consciousness through fictional representations can guide understanding of good and evil in the real mind of the reader. Nothing is arbitrary, nothing is innocent, even in the most supposedly arbitrary fictional worlds – the worlds of the Surrealists, of the Dada experimentalists.

Ethical imagination is the expression of the understanding of good and evil, given by the consciousness in the text, the consciousness of the other, during the decisions, attitudes, actions taken, which reach my consciousness, the reader's, through the representations created by the evocative word. The consciousness in the text signals to me the presence of an *alter*, with whom I meet. And the need to read is, from this perspective, above all the need to be with the other and to be elsewhere, to suspend the present conditioning of our historical existence, of *hic et nunc*.

This produces orientations and influences in the reader's consciousness, and all of them open the mind to a knowledge that is as gentle in its manifestation as it is vibrant in its consequences. As I said earlier, for any reader the consciousness addressed to him from the text is at least an intuitive truth. Every literary work has an intrinsic consciousness, which is developed by its author, but which is not identified with the author's consciousness, but is alienated from the author's consciousness until it becomes autonomous, at the very moment of the work's completion and opening to the reader.

There is no contradiction in the fact that we remember Ulysses and admire his greatness mainly because it moves us. The most powerful influence on our minds is based on the emotion we receive from another consciousness. And when it comes to literature, the reader's consciousness interacts simultaneously with the fictional consciousnesses of the heroes or voices in the text and with the author's real consciousness. Literature, like all the other arts, is first and foremost about emotional awareness. No matter how great the ideas in a text that purports to be a poem, if it does not move the reader, it remains mere versification: an exercise in communication – perhaps an interesting one – that never becomes literature. The real consciousness of the author of a poem or story mediates the fictional voices and consciousnesses in the text through invented languages. Or, conversely and just as true, those possible consciousnesses, which I have called fictional, imagined by the real author, mediate in languages invented by him his own consciousness. Who

mediates whom in the fabric of the literary text, as the reader's mind conjures up the possible world and possible beings in the text? And again: who influences whom as I read a poem or a story?

Is my mind, the reader's mind, influenced by the mind of the real author, who speaks to me through his silent consciousness in the text, expressed in fictional consciousnesses? Or, in fact, do the possible voices and fictional consciousnesses influence my consciousness independently of the author's mind, which would have neither power nor reflection in the content of the influence? And, in this second perspective, would the creative consciousness of the real author be nothing more than a mediator, a carrier of influence, gone from the text from the very moment of its completion and permanently alienated from the possible consciousnesses to which he has led my mind? Put simply, the question would sound like this: when I read works like Homer's *Odyssey* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, when I read Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, who does my consciousness meet and who speaks to it from the text? Homer or Ulysses? Shakespeare or Hamlet? Cervantes or Don Quixote? Pasternak or Zhivago?

And yet: I can admit that once I start reading Homer's story or poem or *The Odyssey*, my mind meets both the real consciousness of the author and all the fictional-possible consciousnesses of the heroes and voices that speak to me, thanks to the real author. It would seem, at first glance, that I have constructed through the previous questions a pluri-interrogative position from which I cannot get out, because no answer can fully satisfy us. What is important, however, is something else: the very sequence of questions reinforces my conviction of the presence during the reading of a textual consciousness that lives in the word, manifests itself through the word and exists thanks to the word. Outside the word, the imminence of the existence of consciousness disappears.

Textual consciousness is inextricably linked to the dimension and manifestation of cathartic alienation, or '*voluntary exile*' in the sequential and parallel worlds evoked in literary texts, a feeble alternative to prayer and meditation, contemplation and sacrifice, massively assumed by (*post*)modern man in search of the Self through the Other. Although the ancient Greeks speak of *catharsis*, and despite the fact that moderns downplay it to the point of denying its existence, the importance that literature and its interpretation have acquired in European and post-French Revolution European and American societies is due above all to the possibility of actually experiencing cathartic alienation, in an astonishing process of transference, which humanism and the radical secularisation brought about by Enlightenment thought have promoted, justified and sometimes imposed through the customs of institutionalised education.

What is it all about? The fulfilment of man's need to get out of himself and communicate with the unseen, with the i-material, the fulfilment of man's need to escape from himself and travel into the territory of the possible, his need for the ideal, for fulfilment and for knowledge of something that will overcome and cure his own powerlessness is transferred, on the initiative of the highly influential thinkers and artists of modernity, from the act of prayer and meditation to two complementary acts – the creation of (self-)fiction through textualisation and participation in fiction through reading texts that propose fictional worlds.

Cathartic alienation is a weak alternative, as I said, to prayer and meditation because it does not force consciousness to know the inner man and never breaks the umbilical cord that connects both the author's consciousness to literature and the reader of literature to the self. The unusual value of cathartic alienation lies, however, in the impossibility of

controlling it, of regulating it, of knowing its ultimate nature. Whether it takes place in the consciousness of the author of literature or in the consciousness of the reader, it remains personal and each time unique, bearing witness to our encounter with the other, the stranger or the neighbour, even when that otherness reflects our own identity.

Cathartic Communication and Discursive Ambiguity

When the reader enters the cathartic state, the consciousness that speaks to him from the text is united with his own consciousness. Is a revealed co-communication then born? This is the question. Not every textual consciousness can engender cathartic communication in the reader's consciousness, but only the discourse that brings to the reader alienation from the concrete world and from one's own self, as an imitation of self-denial through self-forgetfulness. A form of abandonment of the self is thus produced. Textual consciousness thus becomes a relative and transitory hypostasis of the reader's consciousness. Thus, at the moment of cathartic alienation, textual consciousness has a double manifestation, a double face. It has a subtle identity where the reader and the hero/voice in the text form an inseparable couple. Textual consciousness cannot exist apart from the reader and the reader cannot receive catharsis apart from the textual consciousness capable of producing it.

In this participation/joining/collaboration, discursive ambiguity shrinks to varying degrees until it disappears. Cathartic communication appears to be revealed communication, but it is not. It is a kind of mimesis. An imitation of revealed communication. And revealed communication is only possible through union with the Holy Spirit. Then the personal conscience becomes a revealed conscience, when the inner Master, Christ, speaks in it. Textual consciousness, the experience of textual communication, is, however, a *mimesis*, a preparation, an anticipation, a possible prefiguration of revealed communication through that suspension of the self (cathartic alienation). But textual consciousness can never replace true revealed consciousness. It can, however, anticipate it and help real personal consciousness to learn to place its reason and experience under the sign of a cathartic thinking, which goes beyond rational-empirical thinking, but is by no means a revealed thinking, but an intuitive, empathic and speculative one.

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