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essays
critical and clinical

Gilles Deleuze

Translated by
Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco



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Great books are written in a kind of foreign language.
—Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*

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These problems mark out a set of paths. The texts presented here, and the authors considered, are such paths. Some pieces are short, others are longer, but they all intersect, passing by the same places, coming together or dividing off, each of them giving a view upon the others. Some of them are impasses closed off by illness. Every work is a voyage, a journey, but one that travels along this or that external path only by virtue of the internal paths and trajectories that compose it, that constitute its landscape or its concert.

1

Literature and Life

To write is certainly not to impose a form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience. Literature rather moves in the direction of the ill-formed or the incomplete, as Gombrowicz said as well as practiced. Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived. Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal or vegetable, becomes-molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible. These becomings may be linked to each other by a particular line, as in Le Clezio's novels; or they may coexist at every level, following the doorways, thresholds, and zones that make up the entire universe, as in Lovecraft's powerful oeuvre. Becoming does not move in the other direction, and one does not become Man, insofar as man presents himself as a dominant form of expression that claims to impose itself on all matter, whereas woman, animal, or molecule always has a component of flight that escapes its own formalization. The shame of being a man—is there any better reason to write? Even when it is a woman who is becoming, she has to become-woman, and this becoming has nothing to do with a state she could claim as her own. To become is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferenciation where one can no longer be distinguished from *a* woman, *an* animal, or *a* molecule—neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and nonpreexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form. One can institute a

zone of proximity with anything, on the condition that one creates the literary means for doing so. André Dhôtel, for instance, makes use of the aster: something passes between the sexes, the genera, or the kingdoms.¹ Becoming is always "between" or "among": a woman between women, or an animal among others. But the power of the indefinite article is effected only if the term in becoming is stripped of the formal characteristics that make it say *the* ("the animal in front of you . . ."). When Le Clezio becomes-Indian, it is always as an incomplete Indian who does not know "how to cultivate corn or carve a dugout canoe"; rather than acquiring formal characteristics, he enters a zone of proximity.² It is the same, in Kafka, with the swimming champion who does not know how to swim. All writing involves an athleticism, but far from reconciling literature with sports or turning writing into an Olympic event, this athleticism is exercised in flight and in the breakdown of the organic body—an athlete in bed, as Michaux put it. One becomes animal all the more when the animal dies; and contrary to the spiritualist prejudice, it is the animal who knows how to die, who has a sense or premonition of death. Literature begins with a porcupine's death, according to Lawrence, or with the death of a mole, in Kafka: "our poor little red feet outstretched for tender sympathy."³ As Moritz said, one writes for dying calves.⁴ Language must devote itself to reaching these feminine, animal, molecular detours, and every detour is a becoming-mortal. There are no straight lines, neither in things nor in language. Syntax is the set of necessary detours that are created in each case to reveal the life in things.

To write is not to recount one's memories and travels, one's loves and griefs, one's dreams and fantasies. It is the same thing to sin through an excess of reality as through an excess of the imagination. In both cases it is the eternal daddy-mommy, an Oedipal structure that is projected onto the real or introjected into the imaginary. In this infantile conception of literature, what we seek at the end of the voyage, or at the heart of a dream, is a father. We write for our father-mother. Marthe Robert has pushed this infantilization or "psychoanalization" of literature to an extreme, leaving the novelist no other choice than the Bastard or the Foundling.⁵ Even becoming-animal is not safe from an Oedipal reduction of the type "my cat, my dog." As Lawrence says, "If I am a giraffe, and the ordinary Englishmen who write about me are nice, well-behaved dogs, there it is, the animals are different. . . . The animal I am you instinctively dislike."⁶ As a general rule, fantasies

simply treat the indefinite as a mask for a personal or a possessive: "a child is being beaten" is quickly transformed into "my father beat me." But literature takes the opposite path, and exists only when it discovers beneath apparent persons the power of an impersonal—which is not a generality but a singularity at the highest point: a man, a woman, a beast, a stomach, a child . . . It is not the first two persons that function as the condition for literary enunciation; literature begins only when a third person is born in us that strips us of the power to say "I" (Blanchot's "neuter").⁷ Of course, literary characters are perfectly individuated, and are neither vague nor general; but all their individual traits elevate them to a vision that carries them off in an indefinite, like a becoming that is too powerful for them: Ahab and the vision of Moby-Dick. The Miser is not a type, but on the contrary his individual traits (to love a young woman, etc.) make him accede to a vision: he *sees* gold, in such a way that he is sent racing along a witch's line where he gains the power of the indefinite—a miser . . . , *some* gold, more gold . . . There is no literature without fabulation, but as Bergson was able to see, fabulation—the fabulating function—does not consist in imagining or projecting an ego. Rather, it attains these visions, it raises itself to these becomings and powers.

We do not write with our neuroses. Neuroses or psychoses are not passages of life, but states into which we fall when the process is interrupted, blocked, or plugged up. Illness is not a process but a stopping of the process, as in "the Nietzsche case." Moreover, the writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the world. The world is the set of symptoms whose illness merges with man. Literature then appears as an enterprise of health: not that the writer would necessarily be in good health (there would be the same ambiguity here as with athleticism), but he possesses an irresistible and delicate health that stems from what he has seen and heard of things too big for him, too strong for him, suffocating things whose passage exhausts him, while nonetheless giving him the becomings that a dominant and substantial health would render impossible.⁸ The writer returns from what he has seen and heard with bloodshot eyes and pierced eardrums. What health would be sufficient to liberate life wherever it is imprisoned by and within man, by and within organisms and genera? It is like Spinoza's delicate health, while it lasted, bearing witness until the end to a new vision whose passage it remained open to.

Health as literature, as writing, consists in inventing a people who are missing. It is the task of the fabulating function to invent a people. We do not write with memories, unless it is to make them the origin and collective destination of a people to come still ensconced in its betrayals and repudiations. American literature has an exceptional power to produce writers who can recount their own memories, but as those of a universal people composed of immigrants from all countries. Thomas Wolfe "inscribes all of America in writing insofar as it can be found in the experience of a single man."⁹ This is not exactly a people called upon to dominate the world. It is a minor people, eternally minor, taken up in a becoming-revolutionary. Perhaps it exists only in the atoms of the writer, a bastard people, inferior, dominated, always in becoming, always incomplete. *Bastard* no longer designates a familial state, but the process or drift of the races. I am a beast, a Negro of an inferior race for all eternity. This is the *becoming* of the writer. Kafka (for central Europe) and Melville (for America) present literature as the collective enunciation of a minor people, or of all minor peoples, who find their expression only in and through the writer.¹⁰ Though it always refers to singular agents [*agents*], literature is a collective assemblage [*agencement*] of enunciation. Literature is delirium, but delirium is not a father-mother affair: there is no delirium that does not pass through peoples, races, and tribes, and that does not haunt universal history. All delirium is world-historical, "a displacement of races and continents."¹¹ Literature is delirium, and as such its destiny is played out between the two poles of delirium. Delirium is a disease, the disease par excellence, whenever it erects a race it claims is pure and dominant. But it is the measure of health when it invokes this oppressed bastard race that ceaselessly stirs beneath dominations, resisting everything that crushes and imprisons, a race that is outlined in relief in literature as process. Here again, there is always the risk that a diseased state will interrupt the process or becoming; health and athleticism both confront the same ambiguity, the constant risk that a delirium of domination will be mixed with a bastard delirium, pushing literature toward a larval fascism, the disease against which it fights—even if this means diagnosing the fascism within itself and fighting against itself. The ultimate aim of literature is to set free, in the delirium, this creation of a health or this invention of a people, that is, a possibility of life. To write for this people who are missing . . . ("for" means less "in the place of" than "for the benefit of").

We can see more clearly the effect of literature on language. As Proust says, it opens up a kind of foreign language within language, which is neither another language nor a rediscovered patois, but a becoming-other of language, a minorization of this major language, a delirium that carries it off, a witch's line that escapes the dominant system. Kafka makes the swimming champion say: I speak the same language as you, and yet I don't understand a single word you're saying. Syntactic creation or style—this is the becoming of language. The creation of words or neologisms is worth nothing apart from the effects of syntax in which they are developed. So literature already presents two aspects: through the creation of syntax, it brings about not only a decomposition or destruction of the maternal language, but also the invention of a new language within language. "The only way to defend language is to attack it. . . . Every writer is obliged to create his or her own language . . ."¹² Language seems to be seized by a delirium, which forces it out of its usual furrows. As for the third aspect, it stems from the fact that a foreign language cannot be hollowed out in one language without language as a whole in turn being toppled or pushed to a limit, to an outside or reverse side that consists of Visions and Auditions that no longer belong to any language. These visions are not fantasies, but veritable Ideas that the writer sees and hears in the interstices of language, in its intervals. They are not interruptions of the process, but breaks that form part of it, like an eternity that can only be revealed in a becoming, or a landscape that only appears in movement. They are not outside language, but the outside of language. The writer as seer and hearer, the aim of literature: it is the passage of life within language that constitutes Ideas.

These three aspects, which are in perpetual movement, can be seen clearly in Artaud: the fall of letters in the decomposition of the maternal language (R, T . . .); their incorporation into a new syntax or in new names with a syntactic import, creators of a language ("eTreTé"); and, finally, breath-words, the asyntactical limit toward which all language tends. And even in Céline—we cannot avoid saying it, so acutely do we feel it: *Journey to the End of the Night*, or the decomposition of the maternal language; *Death on the Installment Plan*, with its new syntax as a language within language; and *Guignol's Band*, with its suspended exclamations as the limit of language, as explosive visions and sonorities. In order to write, it may perhaps be necessary for the maternal language to be odious, but only so that a syntactic creation

can open up a kind of foreign language in it, and language as a whole can reveal its outside, beyond all syntax. We sometimes congratulate writers, but they know that they are far from having achieved their becoming, far from having attained the limit they set for themselves, which ceaselessly slips away from them. To write is also to become something other than a writer. To those who ask what literature is, Virginia Woolf responds: To whom are you speaking of writing? The writer does not speak about it, but is concerned with something else.

If we consider these criteria, we can see that, among all those who make books with a literary intent, even among the mad, there are very few who can call themselves writers.

2

Louis Wolfson; or, The Procedure

Louis Wolfson, author of the book *Le schizo et les langues*, calls himself "the student of schizophrenic language," "the mentally ill student," "the student of demented idioms," or, in his reformed writing, "le jeune öme sqizofrène."¹ This schizophrenic impersonal form has several meanings, and for its author does not simply indicate the emptiness of his own body. It concerns a combat in which the hero can apprehend himself only through a kind of anonymity analogous to that of the "young soldier." It also concerns a scientific undertaking in which the student has no identity except as a phonetic or molecular combination. Finally, for the author, it is less a matter of narrating what he is feeling and thinking than of saying in exact terms what he is doing. One of the great originalities of this book is that it sets forth a protocol of experimentation or activity. Wolfson's second book, *Ma mère musicienne est morte*, will be presented as a double book precisely because it is interspersed with the protocols of his cancerous mother's illness.²

The author is American but the books are written in French, for reasons that will soon become obvious. For what the student spends his time doing is translating, and he does so in accordance with certain rules. His procedure is as follows: given a word from the maternal language, he looks for a foreign word with a similar meaning that has common sounds or phonemes (preferably in French, German, Russian, or Hebrew, the four principal languages studied by the author). For example, *Where?* will be translated as *Wo? Hier? où? ici?*, or better yet, as *Woher*. *Tree* will produce *Tere*, which phonetically becomes *Dere*