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The poet as engineer of truth: Pierre Jean Jouve

Michael G. Kelly

I.

Entering into language, according to models of various provenance and vintage, is an entry into the world of disunity, of distance, of distress. Yahweh invented the curse of Babel to punish man's pride – the bar of mutual incomprehension is the biblical answer to the mad notion of global intelligibility between human subjects. The history of the Bible itself, as a series of translation upon translation, points to the human drive to re-establish this intelligibility via the written text. It represents a myth of wholeness through language. In Lacan, developing Freud in the question of language, the entry of the child into the *ordre symbolique* initiates the demise of a subjective personal unity and with it the intelligibility to the subject of the 'self'. Language in these and other versions is a necessary, tragic alienation for those who would live socially. As lived experience this alienation has classically been expressed as a descent from some, other, Reality:

Le poète est semblable au prince des nuées
Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer;
Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher. (*L'Albatros*)

Some poets never grow up. They never 'heal' from the discovery that in language, their medium, they encounter that which can be most hostile to themselves – that is, their most intimate form of raw material. In embracing this paradox, Baudelaire understood the dignity and triumph of poetry to lie in its own gift - that by speaking the abjection of its genesis the poet could emulate if not go one better than the Christ figure, and be both the first and the last.

Poetry, among all the forms of writing, is closest to the figure of a source – a mind, a voice or a hand – and yet, in a manner perhaps definitional to itself, aspires to life as language. Poems may be transformative – transforming the lived duration of poetic

experience into the autonomous life of the poetic execution. They are, whether ‘good’ or ‘bad’, transfusional, in the sense that the poetic text is suffused with the poet’s effort to convey.

Bernard Noël, in a recently published text, articulates these features differently but to the same end. Poetry is valued here as redemptive of language, within a public discourse increasingly experienced as invidious and invasive:

[...] la poésie est le foyer de résistance de la langue vivante contre la langue consommée, réduite, univoque. La poésie est cette vitalité de la langue sans avoir besoin de l’affirmer : elle l’est naturellement, en elle-même, par sa situation, car elle est sans cesse réactivée par ce qui l’anime, et qui est source, qui est originel.

(*Où va la poésie?*, K.K. 214)

The claim exerted upon us by poetic language is understood to be founded, then, not by what it ‘says’ but by what it manages, atypically, to render. Language that is poetic manages to reconstitute the source within the social. It acts thereby against its fate, which was to imperceptibly displace the former with an (automatically) impoverished form of the latter.

Those masterful images because complete

Grew in pure mind but out of what began? (*The Circus Animals’ Desertion*)

Yeats’ ‘masterful images’ began in ‘the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.’ They are the culmination of a continuum of self, forging *grandeur* from *misère*, distinguishing both language and its source from their more nightmarish determinisms. And yet they are an aspect rather than the practical object of poetry. Insofar as mastery is important it is the master’s ability recognise and speak his truth, however unpalatable.

In the case of Pierre Jean Jouve, *mutatis mutandis*, the poetic search for this miracle alloy of self and language was also (re)began in Yeatsian squalor and disenchantment. It too has its masterful images – devices which embody the power of Jouve’s poetic work because they succeed in holding together the multiple and often contradictory

strands of his 'self'. To an extent uncommon even among poets, Jouve infused his works with a persona he regarded as his true, all the more so for being complex and highly tormented, self. This self emerges in the wake of a '*crise spirituelle*' of several years' duration, undergone by Jouve in his early thirties.

That crisis has frequently been rounded down to the trauma of a religious conversion. As described by Jouve (in particular in the artistic memoirs *En Miroir*) it seems, in its various aspects, much more like the general onset of an awareness of inauthenticity. Unhappiness with a previous literary output which he had come to perceive as derivative, divorce and a second marriage (to a psychoanalyst) in the name of 'passionate' self-discovery and an enthused if not light-hearted engagement with the teachings of said psychoanalysis, in addition to a new (and self-proclaimedly non-aligned) religious sense are all factors of the mutation undergone by the poet – the event in which the 'self' of his acknowledged poetry, in addition to his subsequent poetics, came about.

Of Jouve, Yves Bonnefoy writes:

En vérité, il y a dans la création un autre pôle que celui où s'engendrent à l'infini, hors du temps vécu, désintéressées du destin, les métonymies et les métaphores. Un pôle qui oriente *non les significations mais le sens*, lequel a sa beauté lui aussi, bien qu'aux limites de l'invisible ... Né d'un désir qu'aucune richesse de proportions ou d'images ne peut combler, parce qu'il est mémoire de la présence, on peut dire ce pôle – ce désir encore – la poésie. [Emphasis in original] (Bonnefoy 470)

The desire for 'sense' as something not necessarily inherent in the linguistic order, the experience of an inarticulate pressure behind language's strategies for holding things together, is the very scheme of Jouve's *crise*. He states elsewhere that for those active within a culture but not blessed by 'génie' (i.e. 'le plus grand nombre'), accession to the status of 'Art' is only possible by a process of 'individuation énergétique'. The completion of the human unit, the *individu* - at least in the sense of an autonomous creative judgment - is coextensive with the quality of distinctiveness. The *individu* in all its complexity is the socialised source from which sense is retrievable and as which

sense is presentable, in and around language. Authenticity, in uncovering the ‘self’ discovers both ‘sense’ and specificity. Artistic merit consists in becoming distinguishable through the truth of selfhood.

Art as the conveying of self is already, as his compatriots might say, *tout un programme*. In explicit affiliation (however) with his elective precursor Baudelaire, Jouve further underlines the special and persecuted quality of this senseful individuality:

Donner sans recevoir est le malheur des poètes. Leurs larmes vraies se perdent. [...] Comme la Prostitution du cœur mis à nu, la poésie se livre à tous sans faire autre chose que se livrer, car le plaisir n’est point en elle, seule la force. (M.C. 184)

De cet abîme où tout plonge, nature, angoisse, béatitude du sexe et crainte de la mort, désir qui lui-même s’écrase, un murmure se dégage, un souffle. Une voix s’élève, portant en grappes de douleur le nombre de ses mots. [...] Bruit éternel, une fois conçu, opéra magique, chant à travers. Les ignares nomment poésie cet amer et merveilleux gémissement. (*ibid.*, 177)

Il [Baudelaire] est une référence pour tous les moments de pire douleur. [...] Il est un réconfort partout, car s’il a pu, lui, en dépit de misère, vérole et humiliation publique, à travers le désert, pourquoi ne pourrait-on pas, même en un désert plus désert ? (*ibid.*, 217)

This freely-given individual truth is then a matter of suffering. *Larmes vraies* are the bulwarks of poetry. Voice and the words it articulates are identifiable by their pain, becoming a *merveilleux gémissement*. The *désert* of inner distress is compounded by the travesty of pariah status. Disaster and dispossession are not only the stuff inside and around the valid poetic act – they are also its shape. The *chant à travers* and the *bruit éternel* – seeming to describe prosodic qualities become transcendent – are inseparable from a particular condition of the source. One is a poet, or is poetically, because one bears the stigmata of the poet’s condition born or reborn in the shape of one whose misery, whose humanity, can become *chant*. All of the factors above add

up to a very strong presence of the normative, the idea that poetry and poets are recognisable as doing a 'right' set of things faced with the given that is their personal condition (even though to formulate it thus is stifling and diminishing).

Poetry, moreover, unlike other ways of working 'artistically' in language such as the novels which Jouve produced up to 1935, is endowed as literary object by him, in its turn, with the defiant autonomy of 'Art' proper:

Par le roman d'Hélène [*Dans les années profondes*] se produisit une chute en arrière assez vertigineuse pour que tout mouvement d'écriture fût condamné d'avance, s'il n'était voué à la seule libre Poésie qui, à aucun moment n'ayant été dans le jeu, ne devait rien à personne. (E.M. 78)

Having no concessions to make, this textual actuation of the individuated source is subject only to the judgment of that source (the poet) within a relation of dialogue. A distinction is thus drawn between poetic act and poetic product. The poet is, in Jouve's deceptively simple formulation (after Baudelaire), « un diseur de mots »:

Diseur de mots est celui qui sait établir entre ces mots le potentiel d'une charge nécessaire à l'étagement de mouvements compliqués et d'épaississements graves formant la matière mentale. (E.M.45)

But this 'doer' confesses to later experiencing alienation from the evidence of his action (that is, reading his own work in the cold light of incomplete self-recognition). This 'product' is already in some way outside the space where poetry is intelligible to the poet as the conveying of self. One consequence of this is that the poet may then be defined as one who remains constantly present to him/herself – who, in effect, is held together – through the uncertainty and anxiety of creative work (as distinct from the entity named on the spine of a slim volume):

Le travail a toujours été d'une grande dureté. [...] Au produit de ce travail je suis rapidement étranger. La page écrite, il ne reste que l'inquiétude, avec la faim de la page suivante. [...]

Les divers recours tentés pour unifier et réconcilier par pleine conscience et espérance, le poète avec lui-même, ont constamment échoué. [...]

Le seul recours efficace fut dans le *travail*. [Emphasis in original] (E.M.46 – 47)

To recapitulate: poetry and poets are distinguishable, on this view, from non-poetry and non-poets because of the choices made and evidenced in the text. Poetry is, however, an act that is free and autonomous. This act is a unifying act – it constitutes and validates the individual who has performed it for the space and duration of that activity. Thus, although at the time of crisis mentioned above it was possible to theorise language in disjunction from an ‘authentic’ subject, poetry also has a role in creating the poet – the subject whose sense it embodies. This latter position is at once similar and far-removed from that expounded by Michaux in the *Postface to Plume* (1938):

On veut trop être quelqu’un.

Il n’est pas un moi. *Il n’est pas dix moi. Il n’est pas de moi. MOI n’est qu’une position d’équilibre.* (Une entre mille autres continuellement possibles et toujours prêtes.) Une moyenne de « moi », un mouvement de foule. Au nom de beaucoup je signe ce livre. [Emphasis in original] (*Plume*, 217)

Whereas this nuancing of the self calls the status of the work into question for Michaux, Jouve would seem to insist on the validity of the achieved unity – even though this is done by the most extraordinary feat (an act of individuation). Thus it is possible to discuss the importance of ‘Art’ for Jouve both in terms of its separating and unifying function. In one sense, this makes the work of art exemplary, the intelligible epitome of being.

That this exemplarity originated in the unifying impulse of the human psyche was an idea which appealed both aesthetically and intellectually to Jouve. It is evident from some of his quasi-political writings, including these comments on the revolutionary Danton, that this unifying impulse was for him not only an identifiable force, but one capable of transcendent historical presence through individual action:

L'objet de la foi de Danton est vivant; la grandeur qu'il chérit est celle de la vérité. Point de dogme ni de théorie dans son esprit: des choses, des êtres. [...] Danton ne distingue pas entre la France et la Révolution, car tout cela c'est le Peuple, et il vit pour le peuple, il est *peuple*. [Emphasis in original] (*De la Révolution comme sacrifice*, n. p.)

Unity is the analytical construct used most readily and comfortably by Jouve - and the very drive towards unity which he associates with the basis of his identity as poet leads him to idealise history (or rewrite it as religion), and give something approaching an aesthetic reading of a set of human actions:

La France ne doit pas nécessairement faire les décapitations solennelles de la Révolution Française, mais il lui faut les accepter et les aimer en arrière, comme œuvres de son courage et de son absolutisme idéal. (*Vivre libre ou mourir* (1942); D.I. 26)

Used as an analytical tool in relation to historical complexes, 'unity' is the common currency of metaphysical sense. The supreme abstraction, it finds a principle of outward organisation even as it strongly affirms the unifying consciousness. The practice of 'unity' unfolds, critically, through the formulation and operation of 'symbols'. In writing, the created units of analysis are carried and afforded a first line of consistency by their names – irrespective of whether those names directly or indirectly lead to the locus of 'meaning', the analytical unit or the 'symbol'. Thus above, the past is anatomised under terms unifying practically boundless funds of experience and sense; symbols – in many cases images – which irradiate and draw together, such as the revolutionary scaffold or the name 'République' itself (with its panoply of subsidiary symbolic supports). These terms import 'sense' into the political discourse fully appreciative of their richness, impart foundedness to statements built around them and access the sense-producing capacities of the appropriate audience. This fixity of belief in the truth of the constructed term is what Jouve saw as the key to an understanding of Danton's character. It is also, I would argue, at the root of the system, the public establishment of the truth of the self in the potent medium of one's own order of symbols, which he hoped to vindicate in his *travail de poète*:

[...] au fond, un seul système de symboles traduit notre position dans notre univers, si cette position est sérieuse. (E.M. 88)

Translating (*traduire*) is the act of making sense for others. The ‘symbolic’ stage is thus that of established textual realities, the point at which the created self undergoes the test of the other, moving definitively beyond the inchoate or solipsistic closure of ongoing ‘poetic’ struggle. This socialising turn in the process of ‘individuation’ requires, as we have seen, that the individuating symbol fulfil a dual mandate of authenticity and intelligibility. The poet moves perilously close to being placed in a double bind: the subject and object of his act of self-creation, the speaker and his first listener, only he can say (but can he?) whether in the compromise reached he discerns a unity that he could recognise as his condition in the midst of things. What he does succeed in recognising as truth will be experienced, however, by others as ‘Art’:

Dans *Sueur de Sang*, dans *Matière Céleste*, je me plaçai sous le signe du symbole. [...] Bien des pièces ne sont que des chaînes de symboles, qui doivent vous entrer dans le corps en passant par vos mémoires. (E.M. 133)

The achieved symbol is thus the inexhaustible food to a general and diversely-experienced hunger for unity. Symbols in this view are machines of apparent reconciliation become magical building blocks. Emerging as a response to the problem of unity (psychic, verbal, artistic or political) – coextensive with the problem of sense – they foreshadow a communicative utopia of delimited personal and verbal space. That space is open to other evaluative vocabularies, including those of the poet himself. Commenting years later on his poetic objectives upon emerging from the *crise spirituelle* Jouve wrote:

J’étais orienté vers deux objectifs fixes: d’abord obtenir une langue de poésie qui se justifiât entièrement comme *chant* [...]; et trouver dans l’acte poétique une perspective *religieuse* – seule réponse au néant du temps. [Emphasis in original] (E.M. 29)

When viewed against the language of individuation discussed above both of these aspirations might appear quite self-effacing - the poet playing the role of conduit or messenger before that of self-validating source. Both however, go to the heart of Jouve's approach to the mediated self. The collection entitled *Noces*, in respect of which these objectives were stated, opens on an incantatory mode proper to the inspired convert:

- Ecris sous la dictée.

Et tous les oiseaux chantèrent plusieurs fois sur le ciel.

Et le poète était encore une fois illuminé

Il ramassait les morceaux du livre, il redevenait aveugle et invisible, il perdait sa famille, il écrivait le mot du premier mot du livre. (N.S.S.48)

This insistent writing might indeed be described as *chant*. It contains the rhapsodic urgency of one barely able to hold down the message. Rather than the poet being present in the words, the words are, suddenly, present to the poet, he is literally 'inspired' from something pre- or extra-linguistic. Two ways of being 'inhabited', or two modes for the conceptualisation of it, were central to Jouve's reinvention as a poet – the languages of psychoanalysis and of Christianity. Each provides a theory and fund of symbols, on which Jouve variously made inroads of his own. He plays on the dual registers of intimate and canonical symbolisations, in varied states of purity. Thus, at the far end of *Noces*, comes the transfixed invocation of the primary Christian symbol:

Salut vrai corps de Dieu. Salut Resplendissant

Corps de la chair engagé par la tombe et qui naît

Corps, ô Ruisselant de bontés et de chairs

Salut corps tout de jour! (*ibid.* 135)

This interpellation of the body of Christ is both 'chant' and 'proprement religieux', but it is also, critically, constructed around an institutional symbol. In *Vrai Corps* (just cited) the religious song thus becomes the song of the symbol in a particularly accessible way as it can draw upon the reliable and glossed cultural power of the

image of Christ's crucified body. But the potency of the presented symbol – at whatever level of particularity it is drawn – is placed by Jouve [in the renowned *Avant-propos* to what was his next work, *Sueur de Sang*] at the door of a quite different interpretative practice:

Dans son expérience actuelle, la poésie est en présence de multiples condensations à travers quoi elle arrive à toucher au symbole – non plus contrôlé par l'intellect, mais surgi, redoutable, et réel [...] Et par le mode de sensibilité qui procède de la phrase au vers et du mot utilitaire au mot magique, la recherche de la forme adéquate devient inséparable de la recherche du fond. (N.S.S. 143)

The dominant energy of this unconscious is symbolic. Given such origins the symbol is reaffirmed for Jouve as partaking in the texture and status of the 'real'. In this primordial terrain, symbol and poetic form conflate. Form, the main term under which the arrangement of words is discussed, is in its turn conferred with a mask, elevated to the grade of metaphysical actor:

Dans l'inconscient il n'y a qu'une limite: elle est représentée par la mort. Ainsi, ce qui intéresse par la limite la forme, est incontestablement lié à la mort. (E.M. 102)

Yet Jouve immediately shows himself to be a metaphysician with a pragmatic edge. In a transformation reminiscent of the move from writing as actualisation of self to writing as the communicative 'individuation' of the poet, the fruits of the unconscious, bearing the impression of death, pass into the conscious mind of the poet and are there subjected to the conscious poetic intervention which is the representational moment:

Le processus originel de la forme change du tout au tout en passant par les canaux de la représentation consciente. La logique veut l'utilisation pragmatique et le confort. La forme sera alors la condensation heureuse de la vie, la condensation dans le fragment d'une vie dont on peut jouir d'avantage. (*ibid.* 103)

The act of bridging between source and text, of conveying sense as individuation, can thus be seen to play on all registers of the self and of the social. Marshalling the representational and formal strengths of what he names unconscious and conscious selves, Jouve sets out to entrap life – an intense mess – in writing. He becomes a symbolic engineer of the self and, via recognition in the act of reading, of the other - in what by that process becomes ‘poetic’ language.

II.

I wish to discuss three examples of the poet Jouve as ‘symbolic’ engineer. Each corresponds to what might be called a theme in his works – which in each case coheres around a name that is also an image or a fund of images. It is in this weak sense that I understand Jouve’s insistence upon the idea of symbol and symbolic system. The ‘symbol’ comes not so much to represent something else as to condense otherwise unformulable complexes of thought and intuition. Supersaturated, they suggest rather than speak volumes. Their names become objects of contemplation, the intimation of the proximity of sense. For Jouve this weight of sense in objects is the basis of *chant* itself:

Un monde plus vrai, de dix tons plus brillant
Que le monde
Plus tiède, chaud, confiant et nourrissant
Dans l’espérance, que le sein très lourd de la vierge
Et non touché par le soleil ! ainsi mon monde
Est mon chant ô cher cœur. (N.S.S.106)

Truth is a personal world in excess. The primary excess is the capacity to hold down fundamental meanings, an excess of signifying power. One familiar human strategy is to source fundamental meanings in the features of a loved person. Jouve embodies his literally ‘significant other’ under the name *Hélène*, a kind of twentieth-century, freudianised Beatrice:

Hélène est liée aux parties les plus secrètes de mon sentiment, à plusieurs amours de ma vie, dont l'un au moins eut une fin tragique. Elle fut composée avec trois figures de femme éloignées l'une de l'autre. (E.M. 67)

Hélène first appears in the prose text *Dans les années profondes* (M.C.), where the adolescent Léonide is initiated as a poet through what he perceives or constructs as her sacrificial death in the throes of their consummatory encounter. But the would-be poet's first vision of Hélène already has her as the symbolic conduit of literary fantasy:

Je vis d'abord l'ombrelle comme un globe changeant, un peu jaune et un peu rose. J'aperçus la tache sur le velours irisé, mélancolique, des prés. Tout de suite je tremblai des pieds à la tête. Après quelque temps d'hésitation la forme parut se dégager de la matière du paysage et l'habiter [...]. (M.C. 23)

The represented human figure is a condensation of the exemplary Italian countryside. Further on, the figure is reduced to an object, symbolic to a degree verging on the fetishistic:

La robe [...] Les membres [...] Sa poitrine [...] son visage [...] L'extraordinaire était ce qui surmontait son visage; elle avait une masse, un édifice de cheveux; une chevelure, à la fois pleine comme un nid de serpents et mousseuse ou rayonnante comme du soleil [...]. Cette chevelure, toute pareille au Phénomène Futur, je ne la connaissais pas; je ne l'avais jamais vu; je ne pensais pas qu'elle pût exister. (*ibid.* 24)

Two pages further on, the depersonalisation is complete. The figure as perceived has been transformed and condensed into a kind of cosmic signifier:

Enfin la beauté, l'harmonie, l'érection du monde se terminèrent dans une illumination, qui me montra comme cause de tout cela, rayonnante ainsi que l'auréole d'un saint, à travers le vent et la chaleur, d'une substance ou argentée, ou noire, ou violette: la Chevelure. (*ibid.*25)

Death, when it arrives, is an additional, sacralising element in this process – freeing up the object as a discrete unit of sense, and facilitating the drive towards the intelligible extreme in which Jouve identifies exemplarity with truth:

Que tu es belle maintenant que tu n'es plus
La poussière de la mort t'a déshabillée même de l'âme
Que tu es convoitée depuis que nous avons disparu
[...]
Il fait beau sur les cirques verts inattendus
Transformées en églises
Il fait beau sur le plateau désastreux nu et retourné
Parce que tu es si morte ('*Hélène*' [from the collection *Matière Céleste*]
*ibid.*100)

The experience of the sacred, inextricable in the typical Jouvian manner from a problematic (a traumatic?) of the psychosexual, relies upon an evacuation of the 'human as material object'. This renders it as *matière céleste* – the perfect eloquence born in the sense of the self-evident:

Qu'il est doux
De sentir la main savoureuse du ciel
Fouiller la place vide où se trouvait le cœur
[...]
Adorable ruban que la chair se déroule
[...]
Partout d'érectiles seins puissants
Font escorte dans la pleine lumière des allusions (*ibid.*101)

The liberation of objects in their accession to the symbolic, their primary establishment as signifying surfaces to the poetic eye, allows for their permutation and superposition. One frequently-occurring example of this is the superscription of the landscape with the terminology of the (generally female) body. While the *corps-paysage* effect allows for the figured generalisation of the libidinal – the signifiers of

sexual union becoming ubiquitous – the establishment of the object as mobile unit of sense mirrors the general-truth claims of Jouve’s chosen discourse:

Erotique veut dire: qui a trait à la conjonction amoureuse pour l’unité – et non pas (petit sens) qui traduit une obsession de l’activité sexuelle. [...] Tous les drames et romans du monde reproduisent en somme un seul drame – l’intégration dans la vie d’une «scène capitale» chaleureuse et magique, compliquée d’incidents divers. (E.M. 107)

The establishment of the sacred – which, following Eliade, is at its most elementary a question of the division of space¹ – and the recognition of the human rootedness in Eros-as-drive-towards-unity can be reconciled in such rearrangements of a world become language:

Si belle la pierre blonde et reposée
Dans ces forêts insignifiantes et d’opprobre
Sous un ciel bleu l’eau sucer de la mer;
et si troué par le sein de cet air
Le clocher italien durement illustré
Car il nie l’étendue complète de terre. (N.S.S. 169)

It would however be misrepresentative of the experience of reading a collection such as *Sueur de Sang* to suggest that its treatment of sex and the sexual is constantly allegorised or scrambled (to speak of Eros is already to choose to allegorise). More commonly the body is depersonalised or anonymous, a torso or trunk over which the text chooses an itinerary from one of a number. A question which arises in reading work with this feature relates to the effect of repetition or insistence on the emblematic quality of a given object. ‘Sein’ is everywhere invoked; ‘aisselle’ can be involved here either as a kind of optional extension or as a negative pole to this – whereas convex *sein* is statuesque and pale, cavernous *aisselle* is frequently

¹ “Pour l’homme religieux, l’espace n’est pas homogène; il présente des ruptures, des cassures: il y a des portions d’espace qualitativement différentes des autres.” M. Eliade: *Le sacré et le profane*. (Ch. 1: “L’espace sacré et la sacralisation du Monde), p. 26.

associated by Jouve with 'poil', 'odeur' or 'sueur'. A symbolic treatment of the body is complicated by the inclusion of the non-localisable or fluid. The signifying power of *sang* is far less contained, more ruggedly metaphorical, than that of an external topological feature. It can denote a physical substratum, as would seem to be the case here:

Plaise à Dieu que ton cœur se guide dans l'orifice

[...]

Et que tu te souviennes des fonds saigneux ... (*ibid.*171)

Elsewhere it has a connotative overlay of suffering or / and visceral intensity, these being uppermost where Jouve merges 'erotic' and 'religious'. Although there is an argument to be made that this merging is in fact everywhere in the Jouvian text – and for Jouve the two discourses were theoretically inseparable, being coterminous in the human imperative of 'unity' in the face of death – the link is in some instances foregrounded by the use of a polyvalent imagery. Thus 'blessure', for example, localises 'sang', gathers together the surface and the internal, the sacred object of adoration and the sexual object of taboo (albeit that the semantic chain *ventre – orifice – fente* and the modulations of 'ouverture' are in fact insistent occurrences in the work). Consciously this allows Jouve to structure his mystical and social preoccupations around a vertical axe (extremity being prioritised) – thus Prostitutes are Christ-like (in addition to being abject, as in Baudelaire) through a commonality of the *blessure publique*. Jouve also cultivates the comparison between prostitute and poet (see p. 4, *supra*). The prostitute is of course that poetically satisfying compound of an abstract principle, a public function, a flesh-and-blood person and a lost cause:

Je suis la communiant des poils noirs

Le regard inhumain les soleils hébétés

J'ai traversé vingt fois sous un homme la mer

Le sol gras de la mer et le bleu et les moires (*La Putain de Barcelone*, M.C. 138)

To say as much is admittedly to subject Jouve to a *procès d'intention*. The one serious justification one could have for so doing, is that the poet himself defines his poetic

project in terms of an intellectual (or at least conscious) engagement with the unconscious. Art, which ever remained his stated objective, must on this view engage with the unconscious rather than be colonised by it. Intentionality reaches a new prominence as it explicitly acknowledges the lately-articulated challenges to it. Jouve *qua* disciple of Freud pays more attention to the primary message on the primacy of libidinal energy, than to the Freudian mechanisms whereby this energy becomes manifest through the individual subject. He might rightly argue that in confronting the physicality of Eros head-on he had forestalled the processes of sublimation which Freud purported to describe in other writers. But to what extent then are the strategies of generalisation and diffusion (not dissipation) of the erotic throughout the Jouvian symbolic universe the signs of a new sublimation – towards the underlying goal of a unified poetic vision? Perhaps this is the risk incurred with the poetic aspirations to density and absoluteness in language. It seems unavoidable so long as presence (another formulation or metaphor of these aspirations) is sought to be attained through representation. Is it that the ambition of a poetry that is both religious and vital cannot but precipitate its subject out of the ‘symbolic order’, or into compromises which look like inconsistencies?

With this reasoning again we risk too tidy a conclusion. The ‘monde plus vrai’, the excess of poetic truth of which Jouve is aware and covetous, is as much about trying to circumscribe contradiction as to resolve it. The conscious invention of a symbolic system seeks far less to be logically foolproof than to be capable of multiple readings, thereby capable of offering some greater or lesser sense to each reader engaging with them.

The Stag (*Cerf*) is the best-known of Jouve’s creations – and cornerstone as such for numerous poetic texts. Jouve makes the the compound nature of the Stag explicit, defining it as:

[...] un complexe de symboles: sexe, mort, aussi sacrifice et délivrance. [...] Il figure souvent cet état anagogique qui marie le ciel et l’enfer, avec les contradictions les plus cruelles. (E.M. 133)

If the Stag is thus in fact a plurality of ‘symbol’ as Jouve understands that term it nevertheless remains a coherent figure, an organic compression of meanings and vectors in the one signifier. It is also more than a verbal mark – summoning up an image, and visualising half-forgotten continuations around nature, majesty, sacrifice. Capitalised, it declares an expectation of conventionalised, ceremonious recognition. It demands to be read expansively as a public object, having been introduced in lower case as a compound of private significance:

Si vous cherchez le cerf, il faut vous recueillir
Pelotonné dans la chaleur de l’unité
Secrètement à genoux avant l’aube
Sans haleine dans l’épaisseur des montagnes (N.S.S. 159)

This stag concentrates the subject’s desire for death, objectifies and becomes a vessel for it – establishing its conventional credentials as *bouc émissaire*:

Bataille subtile habile de vos désirs
[...]
La balle ce sera votre ultime désir
Et tout votre destin
Projeté dans le destin sublime du cerf

Tandis que le sang très sombrement vous récompense. (*ibid.*160)

The stag is then drawn as a hypostasis of the self, a figuration of the shadow-life of the subject who experiences humanity as desire (in self-consciously psychoanalytic terms):

Le cerf naît de l’humus le plus bas
De soi, du plaisir de tuer le père
Et du larcin érotique avec la sœur,
Des lauriers et des fécales amours. (*ibid.*163)

The elusive and hunted beast, in answering the prayers to appear and be killed, is, in that anticipated moment, the frame within which conflicting registers and qualitative polarities of need find momentary unified expression. This is a symbolic and textual feat, not a logical one. There is a co-presencing as distinct from a reconciliation. The figure generating meaning, the symbol of the stag, controls the 'malgré. Poetic symbol is the space within which the proviso can be repressed:

Apparais dans un corps
Pelage vrai et
Chaud, toi qui passes la mort.
Oui toi dont les blessures
Marquent les trous de notre vrai amour
A force de nos coups, apparais et reviens
Malgré l'amour, malgré que
Crache la blessure. (*ibid.*165)

The projection of a cluster of truths onto a fragmented image, delivered in the idiosyncratic movement of the poetic lines – broken, while retaining fluidity – contrives to make of the Stag a facilitating sign; much more an ordering principle than a referential shot in the dark. The last quote above is from *Lamentations au Cerf* – which names this ordering principle in its title, but nowhere else. The stag is an addressee, an objective which allows the poem to draw itself out into a complicated but not chaotically dissonant form. This is one textual value of the symbol/locus – its generative capacity. Another is its radiating strength as oriented towards the reader. The stag functions like a figurative key to an abstract painting, a concession to a socially-ratified form of perception. But at its most transparently verbal it functions like a name for something else. The symbolic life of Jouve's truth can be seen to have emerged from a continuum of abstractions, or totalisations. Having resourced himself in some of the grand discourses on the way to a personal truth, this was not avoidable. In any case, Jouve maintained a quite rigorous division of theoretical expounding (if not vocabulary) from poetic practice. Where the two come together – that is, the non-figurative and the poetic – seem to this writer to be in what Jouve terms 'le thème Nada', on which a few concluding remarks.

Nada is, with apologies for the tautology, the *degré zéro* of Jouve's symbolising progress towards poetic truth. Jouve concretises the category absence/negation by applying the resonant foreign term, taken from a line of St. John of the Cross:

*Para venir á serlo todo
No quieras ser algo en nada*

(Translated by Jouve as : Pour parvenir à être tout / Ne cherche à être rien de rien).

Nada is an antagonistic pair:

Deux définitions du «rien»: l'absence est opposée à la négation; l'absence prend déjà le sens de «tout». (E.M. 125)

Nada becomes a way of thinking – poetically:

Nada fut une vérité intime, une vérité à travers laquelle l'on aspire, une idée qui veur devenir être. Elle était aussi [...] une idée de Poésie. Elle ne peut être maniée que dans la substance, par le jeu contradictoire de l'image à l'intérieur du poème même. Oui, la contradiction est sa sublime vie. (*ibid.* 125)

Nada is thus a disembodied symbol, a word outside language, presiding over a poetry of linked oppositions. But it is equally the symbol (scriptural or phonetic) that obliterates all of the images generated by the idea it embodies in an inclusive act of negation:

Le désir de la chair et le désir de la mort
Le désir de la fuite et celui de la terre
L'excrément des villes c'est l'amour de l'or
Le désir de la jeunesse est l'appétit du cimetière
[...]
Et roulant sur la noire paroi de vertige
De ce monde aboli : tu approches de l'Un (M.C. 131)

The truth conveyed in this poetry is a poetic truth, just as its ambitions are the canonical ambitions of poetry. Jouve unifies and contradicts – he prefers his more vivid Truth to the realities of which he partakes; that Truth is one where absolute and intelligence coincide in the mystery of presence (carnal-physical-natural-divine-symbolic). It is arrested momentarily in language, before disappearing again into the surrounding silence:

Si j'annule ce cœur il brisera sa cage
De faim! Mais c'est encore un décor de langage
Que brise ton baiser ô Sang. Et sang tué. (D.M. 38)

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