

ON THE MELANCHOLIC IMAGINARY

Melancholy is amorous passion's sombre lining. A sorrowful pleasure, this lugubrious intoxication constitutes the banal background from which our ideals or euphoria break away as much as that fleeting lucidity which breaks the trance entwining two people together. Conscious that we are destined to lose our loves, we are perhaps even more grieved to notice in our lover the shadow of a loved object, already lost. Depression is the hidden face of Narcissus: that countenance which - although it will carry him off into death - remains unperceived by him as, marvelling, he contemplates himself in a mirage. In speaking of depression, we are led once again into the swampy regions of the Narcissus myth. This time, however, we shall not be concentrating on its brilliant and fragile amorous idealization. On the contrary, we shall be concerned with the shadow cast over the fragile ego, barely dissociable from the other: a shadow cast, precisely, by the loss of this necessary other - a shadow of despair.

Rather than seeking the meaning of despair (which is evident or metaphysical), let us acknowledge that there is no meaning aside from despair. The child-king becomes irremediably sad before uttering his first words. It is being separated from his mother, despairingly, with no going back, that prompts his attempts to recuperate her, along with other objects, in his imagination and, later, in words. The semiology interested in the degree zero of symbolism is unfailingly led to pose questions to itself not only about the amorous state but also about its sombre corollary - melancholy. This entails recognizing, in the same movement, that no writing exists that is not amorous, nor can there be an imagination that is not, manifestly or secretly, melancholic.

Nevertheless, melancholy is not French. Protestantism's rigour or Christian Orthodoxy's matriarchal weight appear more sympathetic companions to the bereaved individual - when they do not invite him to a morose revelry. For the Catholic west, sadness is a sin and the wretched citizens of the 'abode of woe' are placed by Dante in the circles of hell (*The Inferno*, Canto III). Although French medievalism presents us with delicately perceived portrayals of sorrow, the Gallic tone, renascent and enlightened, belongs more to jest than to nihilism. Here Rousseau and Nerval cut sad - and exceptional - figures.

In different ways according to the religious climate, we might say that melancholy is affirmed in religious doubt. There is nothing sadder than a dead God, and Dostoevsky himself was to be troubled by the distressing image of the dead Christ in Holbein's painting, counterposed as it is to the 'truth of the resurrection'. Particularly propitious to this black, melancholic humour are

those epochs which witness the collapse of religious and political ideals: the epochs of crisis. An unemployed worker is, admittedly, less suicidal than a jilted woman. In times of crisis, however, melancholy imposes itself, lays down its archaeology, produces its representations and its knowledge. Certainly, melancholy in writing has little to do with the clinical stupor of melancholia (even if the two bear the same name in French). Beyond the terminological confusion maintained until now - what is a melancholia? what is a depression? - we find ourselves faced with an enigmatic chiasmus that will continue to preoccupy us. If loss, mourning, and absence set the imaginary act in motion and permanently fuel it as much as they menace and undermine it, it is also undeniable that the fetish of the work of art is erected in disavowal of this mobilizing affliction. The artist: melancholy's most intimate witness and the fiercest fighter against the symbolic abdication enveloping him - until death strikes and suicide imposes its triumphant conclusion upon the void of the lost object . . .

Melancholia here designates the clinical symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia that an individual displays sporadically or chronically, often in alternation with the so-called manic phase of exultation. These two phenomena (dejection-exultation), in less marked forms and in more frequent alternation, constitute the *depressive* temperament of the neurotic. While recognizing the two phenomena to be different, Freudian theory detects in both the same impossible mourning of the 'maternal' object. Question: what paternal failing makes it impossible? Or what biological fragility? Melancholia - to take up the generic term again after distinguishing the psychotic and neurotic symptomatologies - has the considerable advantage of situating the analyst's interrogation at the intersection of the biological and the symbolic. Parallel series? Consecutive sequences? Or aleatory intersection requiring specification? Or, again, another relation to be invented?

THE DEPRESSIVE: HATING OR HURT?

According to classical psychoanalytic theory (Abraham, Freud, Klein),¹ depression, like mourning, hides an aggressivity against the lost object and thereby reveals the ambivalence on the part of the mourner with respect to the object of his mourning. 'I love him/her', the depressive seems to say about a lost being or object, 'but, even more, I hate him/her; because I love him/her, in order not to lose him/her, I install him/her in myself; but because I hate him/her, this other in myself is a bad ego, I am bad, worthless, I am destroying myself.' So self-accusation becomes an accusation against the other and self-annihilation the tragic disguising of another's massacre. Such a logic presupposes, it is suggested, a severe super-ego and a complex dialectic of idealization and devalorization, both of oneself and the other: the set of these mechanisms is based upon the mechanism of *identification*. For it is indeed an identification with the loved/hated other - through incorporation, introjection, projection - that is effected by the taking into myself of an ideal, sublime, part or trait of the other. This becomes my necessary and tyrannical judge. The analysis of depression is, in consequence, conducted through a making manifest

of the fact that the self-reproach is a hatred directed against the other and, no doubt, the bearer of an unsuspected sexual desire. It is understandable that such an accession of hatred in the transference carries its own risks for the analysand as well as for the analyst, and that the treatment of depression (even of that identified as neurotic) risks schizoid fragmentation.

With the treatment of narcissistic personalities, however, modern analysts (E. Jacobson, among others²) have been led to comprehend a different modality of depression. Far from being a dissimulated assault upon another - imagined to be hostile because frustrating - sorrow would be the signalling of an incomplete, empty, and wounded primitive ego. Such a person considers himself to be not injured but stricken by a fundamental lack, by a congenital deficiency. His grief hides neither the guilt nor the failure of a secretly hatched vengeance against the ambivalent object. Rather, his sorrow could be the most archaic expression of a narcissistic wound, impossible to symbolize or name, and too precocious for any exterior agent (subject or object) to be correlated to it. For this type of narcissistic depressive, sorrow is, in reality, his only object. More exactly, it constitutes a substitute object to which he clings, cultivating and cherishing it, for lack of any other. In this context, suicide is not a camouflaged act of war but a reuniting with sorrow and, beyond it, with that impossible love, never attained, always elsewhere. Such are the promises of the void, of death . . .

IS MOOD A LANGUAGE?

Sorrow is the fundamental mood characterizing depression and even if manic euphoria alternates with it in the bipolar forms of this state, grief is the principal manifestation betraying the sufferer. Sorrow leads us into the enigmatic domain of *affects* such as anxiety, fear, or joy.³ Irreducible to its verbal or semiological expressions, sorrow (like every affect) is the *psychical representation of displacements of psychical energy* provoked by external or internal traumas. The exact status of these psychical representatives of energy-displacements remains, in the present state of psychoanalytic and semiological theories, very imprecise. No conceptual framework in the existing sciences (linguistics, in particular) has proved adequate for understanding this apparently very rudimentary representation, pre-sign and pre-language. The mood 'sorrow', set off by an excitation, tension, or energy-conflict in a psychosomatic organism, is not a *specific* response to what sets it off (I am not sad as a response or as a sign to X and only X). Mood is a 'generalized transference' (E. Jacobson) that marks *all* behaviour and all sign-systems (from motility to elocution and to ideation) without being identical to them or causing their disorganization. There are grounds for thinking that what is at play here is an archaic *energy-signal*, of phylogenetic heritage, which in the psychical space of the human being is *immediately* taken into charge by verbal representation and consciousness. Nevertheless, this taking into charge is not of the order of the cathexes said by Freud to be 'bound', admitting of verbalization, association, displacement. We might say that the representations proper to affects, and notably sadness, are *fluctuating* energy-traces. Too unstable to coagulate into signs, verbal or otherwise, activated by the primary processes of displacement and condensation, but

nevertheless dependent upon the instance of the ego, these energy-traces register across this instance the threats, orders, and injunctions of the super-ego. So the moods would be inscriptions of energy-ruptures rather than simply brute energies. They lead us into a modality of signifi⁴ance that, at the threshold of bio-energetic equilibria, secures the preconditions for, or the dissolution of, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. At the boundaries of animality and 'symbolicity', the moods - and sadness in particular - are the ultimate reactions to our traumas, our fundamental homeostatic recourse. For although it is true that an individual, when the prisoner of his moods - a being drowning in his sorrow - reveals certain psychical or ideational frailties, it is equally true that a diversification of my moods - a spectrum of sadness, a refinement of grief or mourning - is the mark of my humanity; assuredly not triumphant, but subtle, combative, and creative . . .

Literary creation is that adventure of the body and signs that bears witness to the affect - of sadness as the mark of separation and the beginnings of the dimension of the symbol, of joy as the mark of triumph, placing me in that universe of artifice and symbol which I try to make correspond, as best I can, to my experience of reality. But this testimony is one produced by literary creation in a medium entirely different from that of mood, affect being transposed into rhythms, signs, forms. The 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic'⁵ become the communicable marks of an affective reality, present, palpable to the reader (I like this book because sadness - or anxiety, or joy - is communicated to me by it) but nevertheless dominated, kept at a distance, vanquished.

Presuming that affect is the most archaic inscription of internal and external events, how does one get from there to signs? We would follow Hanna Segal's hypothesis that the infant, prompted by separation (note the necessity of a 'lack' if the sign is to arise) produces or utilizes objects or vocalizations that are the symbolic equivalents of that lacking.⁶ Subsequently, from the so-called depressive position, he tries to signify the sorrow that overwhelms him by producing in his own ego elements that, although alien to the exterior world, are supposed to correspond to that lost or displaced exteriority. We are, then, no longer in the presence of equivalences but of symbols in the proper sense of the word. To Hanna Segal's position we would add that such a triumph over sorrow is made possible by the ego's capacity to identify now no longer with the lost object but with a third instance: father, form, schema. As a precondition for a position of disavowal or of mania ('No, I haven't lost anything; I evoke, I signify: through the artifice of signs and for myself, I bring into existence that which has separated itself from me'), this identification, which may be called phallic or symbolic, secures the subject's entry into the universe of signs and of creation. The father-support of this symbolic triumph is not the Oedipal father but, indeed, the 'imaginary father', the 'father of personal prehistory' that for Freud guaranteed so-called primary identification. Later, that essential moment in the symbol's formation which is constituted by the manic position lining depression can, in the entirely different circumstances of, for example, literary creation, manifest itself in the constitution of a symbolic filiation (hence the recourse to proper names arising out of the subject's real or imaginary history, of which the subject presents himself as the inheritor or the equal).

NEW FORMATIONS

Object-depression (implicitly aggressive), narcissistic depression (logically anterior to libidinal object-relations): here affectivity comes to grips with signs - exceeding, threatening, or modifying them. Departing from this picture, the problem that interests me here could be summarized as follows: aesthetic - and, in particular, literary - creation, as well as religious discourse in its imaginary fictional essence, proposes a configuration of which the prosodic economy, the dramaturgy of characters and the implicit symbolism are an extremely faithful semiological representation of the subject's battle with symbolic breakdown. This literary or religious representation is not an *elaboration* in the sense of a 'becoming conscious' of the inter- and intra-psychical causes of moral pain. In this it differs from the psychoanalytic path that promises to dissolve this symptom. This literary (and religious) representation, however, has a real and imaginary efficacy: belonging more to the order of catharsis than of elaboration, it is a therapeutic method used in all societies throughout the ages. If psychoanalysis considers itself to be more effective than this, particularly in reinforcing the subject's ideational possibilities, it also owes itself the enrichment to be derived from an increased attention to sublimatory solutions of our crises.

I shall attempt in what follows to outline two variants of these sublimatory solutions - in Nerval and Dostoevsky.

'BLACK SUN' - PROSODY - ESOTERISM

EL DESDICHADO

*Je suis le Tenebreux, - le Veuf, - l'Inconsole,
Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la Tour abolie:
Ma seule Etolie est morte, - et mon luth constelle
Porte le Soleil noir de la Melancolie.*

*Dans la nuit du Tombeau, Toi qui m'as console,
Rends-moi le Pausilippe et la mer d'Italie,
La fleur qui plaisait tant a mon coeur desole,
Et la treille oil le Pampre a la Rose s'allie.*

*Suis-je Amour ou Phoebus? . . . Lusignan ou Biron?
Mon front est rouge encor du baiser de la Reine;
J'ai reve dans la Grotte ou nage la Syrene . . .*

*Et j'ai deux fois vainqueur traverse VAcheron:
Modulant tour a tour sur la lyre d'Orphee
Les soupirs de la Sainte et les cris de la Fee.⁷*

Gerard de Nerval interweaves with 'the black sun of Melancholy' a complicity formed of evasion and osmosis, of triumphant flight and voluptuous iniaversion, '*ElDesdickado*', which translates from the Spanish as 'the disinherited' or, rather, as 'the despairing', confesses to being 'gloomy', 'bereft', and 'unconsoled'. But he is only the funereal double of that conqueror who has 'twice traversed . . . the

ON THE MELANCHOLIC IMAGINARY

Acheron', and who is no other than the poet Orpheus. The metaphor of the 'black *Sun*' for melancholy admirably evokes the blinding intensity of an affect eluding conscious elaboration. A powerful attraction, less than a sentiment, more intense than any word or idea: the narcissistic ambivalence of the melancholic affect alone finds, in order to represent itself, the image of death as the ultimate site of desire:

To die, heavens! Why does this idea haunt me at every turn, as if my death were the only equivalent of the happiness you promise. My Death! This word does not, for that, cast a shadow in my thought. She appears to me, wreathed with pale roses, as at the end of a feast; I have sometimes dreamt that she awaited me, smiling, by the bedside of an adored woman, not in the evening but in the morning, after the happiness, the intoxication, and that she said to me . . .

O God! I know not what profound sorrow occupied my soul, yet it was nothing other than the cruel thought that I was not loved! I had seen happiness's double . . .⁸

Provoked by separation or rejection, more narcissistic than aggressive, this sorrow considers the lost other as an alter-ego, as a double: is the woman loved because she is a woman or because she is an actress, an artist like our Orpheus?

Nothing is more dangerous for people naturally given to reverie than a serious love for a person of the theatre; it is a perpetual lie, a sick man's dream, the illusion of a fool. Life clings totally to an unrealisable chimera that one would happily retain as a desire or aspiration, but which vanishes as soon as one wishes to touch the idol.⁹ [On the subject of Restif de la Bretonne]

He is to flee this sorrow to rediscover it elsewhere, in the imaginary country of journeys to the Orient, the place of fantasy and desire:

. . . there was a certain gentleness and a sort of amorous expression in this nocturnal hymn, raising itself to the heavens with that sentiment of melancholy consecrated, by the Orientals, to joy as well as to sorrow.¹⁰

. . . in all of the Egyptians' ceremonies, one recognises this combination of a plaintive joy and a plaint interspersed with joyous raptures that already, in the former world, preconditioned all the acts of their life.¹¹

Finally he believes death to be found once again in his own putting-to-death.

Two essential methods seem to present themselves to the protagonist enshrouded in gloom as ways of displacing melancholy's 'black sun'. On the one hand, there is the esoteric symbolism¹² that, in many cases, retakes, amplifies, or embellishes the traumatic or maturative moments or themes essential to the psychical economy: these become, in this context, initiatory themes. But on the other hand, and above all, the anti-depressive is the 'starred lute' - the poetic art that transposes the affect into an elliptical, lacunary prosody formed by condensation and allusion.¹³ Repetitive, often monotonous, this prosody imposes upon affective fluidity a grid as exacting in its decipherment - it presupposes a detailed knowledge of mythology and esoterism - as it is supple

and indefinite in its very allusiveness. Who are the Prince of Aquitaine, the 'only dead star', Phoebus, *Lusignan*, *Biron* . . . ? But, in the end, one can read the sonnet without knowing anything of these referents, letting oneself be seized just by the phonic and rhythmic coherence that marks a boundary relative to the free associations inspired by each word or proper name. One understands thereby that the triumph over melancholy consists as much in the constitution of a symbolic family (ancestor, mythical personage, esoteric community) as in the construction of a symbolic object: the sonnet. This construction, due to the author, replaces the lost ideal in the same movement as it turns melancholy's lugubrious shades into lyrical song incorporating 'the sighs of the Saints and the cries of Fairies'. The nostalgic object - 'my only star is dead' - is transformed into feminine voices incorporated within that symbolic anthropophagy that is the poem's composition, within the prosody created by the artist. We would interpret in a similar way the massive presence of proper names in Nerval's texts, particularly in his poems.

These proper names not only restore to him an historical or mythical filiation, they also seem to have a quasi-ritual, incantatory value. It is not their concrete referents that these names signal - with *signal* here opposed to *signify* (for the profane reader as well as, we would argue, for the hyperlucid Nerval) - as much as it is a massive, uncircumventable, unnameable presence. It is as though they were the anaphora that replaces the unique object: not the 'symbolic equivalent' of the mother but the deictic 'this' that, devoid of meaning, points towards the lost object from which, in the first place, there emanates 'melancholy's black sun' before the putting into place of the artifice of linguistic signs and, last of all, their archaeology that is the provisionally victorious poem. 'I cried for a long time, invoking my mother under the names given to ancient divinities.'¹⁴

The melancholic's past never passes. Nor does that of the poet, the permanent historian not so much of his real history as of the symbolic events which have led his body to signification or, indeed, which threaten to overwhelm his consciousness.

The Nervalian poem also has a highly mnemonic function ('a prayer to the goddess Mnemosyne', he writes in *Amelia* [p. 366]), especially in the sense of a textual commemoration of both the genesis of symbols and of one's phantasmic life. Such texts become the artist's real life - 'Here commenced for me what I shall call dream's spilling over into real life' - and consequently: 'Dating from this moment, everything at times took a double aspect' (p. 367). So, for example, in a passage from *Amelia*, one can trace the necessary concatenation of the death of the beloved woman (mother), the identification both with her and with death, the putting into place of a space of psychical solitude based upon the perception of a bisexual or asexual form and, finally, the eruption of sorrow encapsulated in the citing of Durer's *Melancholy*.

I saw before me a woman of wan complexion, with sunken eyes, whose features seemed to me to be those of Aurelia. I said to myself: 'It's her death or mine that is heralded!' . . . I wandered into a huge building, composed of several rooms. . . . A disproportionately large being - man or woman, I couldn't say - hovered overhead. . . . It resembled the Angel of *Melancholy*, of

Albrecht Durer. I couldn't help myself crying out in terror, which woke me with a start, (p. 366)

Whatever the allusions here to Freemasonry and to initiation - and perhaps in parallel to them - the text evokes (as in an analysis) archaic psychic experiences that few people attain in their conscious discourse. It seems clear that Nerval's psychotic conflicts were able to open up for him this access to the limits of language and humanity. Melancholy, in Nerval's case, is just one facet of these conflicts which also seem to encompass schizophrenic fragmentation. Nevertheless, through its pivotal position in the organization and disorganization of the psychical space, at the limit of the affect and meaning, of biology and language, of asymbolia and vertiginously rapid signification, it is indeed melancholy that dominates the representation. The creation of a prosody and of a highly symbolic text around the 'black mark' or 'black sun' of melancholy is also depression's antidote, a provisional well-being.

THE WRITING OF SUFFERING'S PLEASURES

Dostoevsky's tormented universe is undoubtedly dominated by epilepsy more than by melancholia in the clinical sense of the term.¹⁵ Whereas Hippocrates considered the two conditions to be identical and Aristotle, in distinguishing between them, saw them as comparable, current clinical practice treats them as completely separate entities. Nonetheless, we should bear in mind both the dejection that precedes or, in particular, follows the fit as it is described by Dostoevsky himself in his texts, and also, to an even greater degree, the hypostasis of suffering throughout his work. Although this lacks an immediate or explicit relation to epilepsy, it comes across as the essential trait of Dostoevsky's anthropology.

In the notebooks for *The Devils*, for example, he writes:

Fit at six o'clock in the morning (the day and almost the hour of Tropman's agony). I was not aware of it, waking up at eight o'clock with the consciousness of a fit. My head ached, my body was broken. In general, the fit's aftermath - that is, nervousness, a hazy and, in a certain way, contemplative state of mind - lasts longer now than in preceding years. Previously, this passed in three days and now not before six. In the evenings especially, when the candles have been lit, a *hypochondriac sadness, without object, like a blood-red tone* (not tint) over everything.¹⁶

Or again, he repeats 'nervous laughter and mystic sorrow' (p. 812) in implicit reference to the acedia of the monks of the Middle Ages. Or in answer to the question, how to write? 'Suffer, suffer enormously . . .'

Suffering here seems to be an 'in excess', a force, a sensual pleasure. The 'black mark' of Nervalian melancholy has given way to a torrent of passion - to a hysterical affect, as it were, whose fluid overflowing sweeps away the placid signs and quiescent compositions of 'monological' literature. This confers a vertiginous polyphony on the Dostoevskian text and imposes as the ultimate truth of Dostoevskian man a rebellious flesh that takes its pleasure in non-

submission to the Word. The sensuality of suffering's pleasure has 'nothing of the coldness, nothing of the disenchantment, nothing of that which Byron made fashionable' but, on the contrary, an 'intemperate and insatiable thirst for pleasures', 'a thirst after inextinguishable life' including 'pleasures of theft, of banditry, the sensual pleasure of suicide' (p. 1154). This exultation of a mood that can turn from suffering to an incommensurable jubilation is admirably conveyed in the novel when Kirilov describes the moments preceding suicide - or the fit:

'There are seconds - they come five or six at a time - when you suddenly feel the presence of eternal harmony in all its fullness. It is nothing earthly. I don't mean it is heavenly, but a man in his earthly semblance can't endure it. He has to undergo a physical change or die. This feeling is clear and unmistakable. . . . It is not rapture. . . . Nor do you really love anything - oh, it is much higher than love! What is so terrifying about it is that it is so terribly clear and such gladness. If it went on for more than five seconds, the soul could not endure it and must perish. . . . To be able to endure it for ten seconds, you would have to undergo a physical change . . .'

'You're not an epileptic?'

'No.'

'You will be one. Take care, Kirilov. I've heard that's just how an epileptic fit begins.'

And concerning the short duration of this state:

'Remember Mohammed's pitcher from which no drop of water was spilt while he flew round paradise on his horse. The pitcher - that's your five seconds. It's too much like your eternal harmony, and Mohammed was an epileptic. Be careful, Kirilov - it is epilepsy!¹⁷

Irreducible to sentiments, the affect is figured here with extraordinary accuracy: its intensity of energy and its status as psychical representative - lucid, clear, harmonious, to some degree outside language. Affect is not conveyed by language; or, more precisely, when referred to in language, the affect is not bound to it as is the idea. The verbalization of affects (unconscious or not) does not have the same economy as that of ideas (unconscious or not). One might say that the verbalization of unconscious affects does not render them conscious (the subject knows no more than before where his joy or sorrow comes from), but rather that it makes them operate in a twofold way. On the one hand, the affects redistribute the order of the language, so giving rise to a style. On the other hand, they display the unconscious in the characters and acts representing the most forbidden and transgressive motions of the drives. Like hysteria - which for Freud is only a 'deformed work of art' - literature is a staging of affects on the intersubjective, as on the intralinguistic, level.

It is probably this intimacy with the affect that led Dostoevsky to his vision of the humanity of man residing less in the pursuit of a pleasure or a profit ^an idea extending even to Freudian psychoanalysis despite the predominance finally accorded to a 'beyond the pleasure principle') than in the aspiration to a voluptuous suffering. Different from animosity or from fury, less tied to an

object, more turned back on to the person himself, suffering would be the threshold of consciousness proper, beyond which there is only the loss of self in the obscurity of the body. Suffering, from this perspective, is an inhibited death drive, a sadism fettered by the vigilance of conscience and turned back upon an ego rendered woeful and inactive.

My anger, in consequence of the damned laws of consciousness, is subject to chemical decomposition. As you look, its object vanishes into thin air, its reasons evaporate, the offender is nowhere to be found, the affront ceases to be an offence and becomes destiny, something like toothache, for which nobody is to blame.¹⁸

And finally, Dostoevsky gives an apologia for suffering worthy of medieval acedia, or indeed of Job:

And why are you so firmly and triumphantly certain that only what is normal and positive - in short, only well-being - is good for man? Is reason mistaken about what is good? After all, perhaps prosperity isn't the only thing that pleases mankind, perhaps he is just as attracted to suffering. Perhaps suffering is just as good for him as prosperity. Sometimes a man is intensely, even passionately, attached to suffering - that is a fact.

This definition of suffering as liberty affirmed, as caprice, is extremely Dostoevskian:

I am not here standing up for suffering, or for well-being either. I am standing out for my own caprices and for having them guaranteed when necessary. There is no place for suffering in farces for example, I know that. It is quite inconceivable in a millennium: suffering is doubt, negation. . . . Suffering - after all, that is the sole cause of consciousness. Although I declared to begin with that in my opinion consciousness is man's supreme misfortune, I know that man loves it and would not change it for any gratification.¹⁹

DOSTOEVSKY OR JOB?

Let us not be too hasty in interpreting these remarks as an avowal of masochism. Isn't it in *signifying* hate, the destruction of the other and, perhaps above all, his own putting to death that the human being survives as symbolic animal? This violence, exorbitant yet curbed, leads to the self-annihilation of the ego. From a diachronic point of view, we are here at the minimal threshold of subjectivity, before an other comes to be demarcated as the object of an amorous or aggressive assault. Now, this curbing additionally allows mastery over signs: I don't attack you, I *speak* (or I write) my fear or my pain. My suffering is the lining of my word, of my civilization. The masochistic risks of this civility are clear enough. For his part, however, the writer is able to extract a jubilation from it through the manipulation that, upon this base, he is able to impose upon signs and things.

Suffering - and its reverse, jubilation, and therefore pleasure in Dostoevsky's

sense - registers itself as the ultimate index of a rupture immediately prior to the (chronological and logical) autonomization of the ego and the other. This rupture may be bio-energetic, internal or external, or symbolic; it may be due to an abandonment, a punishment, a banishment. (The severity of Dostoevsky's father, reviled by his moujiks and, according to some, murdered by them, cannot be overemphasized.) In any case, suffering is the first, or final, attempt by the subject to affirm his particularity in the closest proximity to the threatened biological unity and to a narcissism put to the test. Similarly, this exaggeration of humour, this pretentious inflation of 'propriety' or peculiarity, states an essential truth of the psychical in the process of its constitution or decomposition, a process which takes place under the gaze of the ego ideal - under the law of an Other, already dominant although still not recognized in its omnipotent alterity.

For this very reason, the suffering to be found in Dostoevsky recalls the paradoxical adventure of Job which had, moreover, so struck the writer. In a letter to his wife (10 January 1875) Dostoevsky wrote:

I am reading the book of Job from which I derive a morbid exultation: I stop reading and pace up and down in my room, an hour at a time, almost in tears. . . . The strange thing is, Anna, that this book is one of the first to have made an impression on me . . . and, at that time, I was still almost a babe in arms.

Job, nourishing himself on sighs and groans as if they were bread and water, was, it will be remembered, a man who, prosperous and faithful to Yahweh, finds himself suddenly beset by various misfortunes - by Yahweh or by Satan? And yet here is this 'man of grief, an object of scorn - 'If one should address a word to you, will you endure it?' (Job 4: 2) - who is, in sum, sad only because he holds fast to God. That this God is pitiless, unjust to those faithful to him, and even generous to the wicked, does not lead Job to break his divine contract. On the contrary, he places his life under the constant scrutiny of God. This is a striking instance of the depressive's dependence on his super-ego-cum-ego-ideal: 'What is man that you [God] should make so much of him?' (7: 17): 'Turn your eyes away, leave me a little joy' (10: 20). And yet, Job does not credit God with his true force - 'Were he to pass me, I should not see him' (9: 11) - and God himself will be required to recapitulate all of creation before his depressive subject, to affirm his position as Legislator or as super-ego, before Job recovers hope. Does this mean the sufferer is a narcissist, a man too concerned with himself, too attached to his own importance, and too close to taking himself for an example of the immanence of transcendence? After punishing him, however, Yahweh finally favours him and raises him above his detractors: 'I burn with anger against you,' he says to them, 'for not speaking truthfully about me as my servant Job has done' (42: 7).

In the same way, suffering - this pre-eminent index of humanity - is, in the texts of the Christian Dostoevsky, the mark both of man's dependence on a divine Law and, at the same time, of his irremediable difference from it. This simultaneity of bond and fault, of fidelity and transgression, is rediscovered in the ethical order itself, where Dostoevskian man is an idiot through sainthood, a prophet through criminality.

It is inconceivable that this logic of a necessary interdependence between law and transgression could be unrelated to the fact that the epileptic fit is frequently triggered off by a strong contradiction between love and hate, desire for and rejection of the other. On the other hand, one can speculate whether the famous ambivalence of Dostoevsky's heroes,²⁰ which led Bakhtin to postulate a 'dialogism' at the base of his poetics, might not be an attempt to *represent*, through the construction of discourses and the conflicts between characters, this opposition - with no synthetic resolution - between the two forces (positive and negative) proper to the drives and desire.

Break the symbolic bond, however, and our Job becomes Kirilov, a suicidal terrorist. Merezhkovsky is not entirely wrong to see in the great writer the precursor of the Russian revolution.²¹ Certainly Dostoevsky dreads, rejects, and stigmatizes it. Nevertheless, it is he who perceives its sly advent in the soul of his suffering mankind, ready to betray the humility of Job for the manic exultation of the revolutionary who takes himself for God - such, according to Dostoevsky, being the form taken by the socialist faith of atheists. The depressive's narcissism is inverted into the mania of atheist terrorism: Kirilov is the man without God who has taken the place of God. Suffering ceases in order that death be affirmed: was suffering, then, a barrier against suicide and against death?

SUICIDE AND TERRORISM

We might recall at least two solutions, both fatal, to Dostoevskian suffering - that ultimate veil of chaos and destruction. The first is Kirilov's solution in *The Devils*. He is persuaded that God does not exist but, in adhering to the divine instance, he wishes to raise human liberty to the height of the absolute by that exemplary act of denial and freedom which, for him, is suicide. God does not exist - I am God - I do not exist - I commit suicide: such would be the paradoxical logic of this negation of an absolute divinity or paternity none the less maintained in order that I possess myself of it.

The other solution is Raskolnikov's in *Crime and Punishment*. In a manic defence against despair, he turns his hate back not on to himself but on to another, who is denigrated and denied. By his gratuitous crime, the killing of an insignificant woman, he breaks the Christian contract - 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' This signifies his denial of his love for the original object - 'Because I don't love my mother, my neighbour is unimportant to me: that permits me to eliminate him without worry.' Starting from this implicit premiss, Raskolnikov takes it upon himself to realize his hatred against an entourage and a society experienced as persecutory.

The metaphysical meaning of these patterns of behaviour is, of course, the nihilist rejection of the supreme Value which provokes, in Dostoevsky, the believer's revolt against this erasure of the transcendental. The psychoanalyst will additionally see here Dostoevsky's fascination - an ambiguous one, to say the least - with the exquisite depression itself, as much as with certain manic defences against this suffering. Both the depression and the defences, moreover, are cultivated by the writer as the necessary and antinomic linings of his writing.

That these ramparts are abject is constantly underlined for us by the abandonment of all morals, the loss of any meaning to life, or the terrorism and torture that are so common in our everyday reality. Dostoevsky, for his part, opted for adherence to a religious orthodoxy. Although violently denounced by Freud, this 'obscurantism' is, all things considered, less harmful to civilization than terroristic nihilism. So too, obviously, is the painful and perennial struggle to compose a work of art, compared with the innumerable pleasures offered by destruction and chaos.

Are religion or the mania born of paranoia the sole counterbalances to despair? Artistic creation combines and consumes them; works of art thus enable us to establish less destructive, more pleasurable relations with ourselves and with others.

As a lay discourse creating and dissolving the transference bond, psychoanalysis is an apprenticeship in living beyond despair. It offers not a manic defence against it, but rather a receptivity to it - a way of endowing despair with meaning. By consolidating it in the same way, artistic creation allows the ego to assume an existence on the basis of its very vulnerability to the other.

We could not end this overview of certain facets of depression without referring to the advances in pharmacology and in the modern biochemical understanding of melancholia's endogenous factors. There seems to be increasing acceptance of the hypothesis that it is an insufficiency of (nor)adrenalin and serotonin, or of their reception, that restricts the conductivity of synapses and *possibly* conditions the depressive state. In the star-shaped structure of the brain, however, the role of a few synapses could not be absolute. Any such insufficiency could be counteracted by other chemical phenomena and, equally, by different external effects (including symbolic ones) upon the brain - which accommodates itself to them through biological modifications. Without denying the role of chemistry in the battle against melancholia, therefore, a wide range of alternative verbalizations of the state of melancholia - and ways of overcoming it - is potentially at the disposal of the analyst. Works of art provide examples of them. Looking at religious or aesthetic discourses in relation to melancholia is not, therefore, just a way of deepening our understanding of this symptom. Through the interpretation this knowledge enables us to develop, through the most precise possible verbalization of destructive affects, it can also provide an essential therapeutic measure.

NOTES

1 Karl Abraham, 'Notes on the psycho-analytical investigation and treatment of the manic-depressive insanity and allied conditions' [1912], in *Selected Papers* (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), ch. 6; Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and melancholia' [1917], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), vol. XIV; Melanie Klein, 'A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states' [1935], in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

2 E. Jacobson, *Depression: comparative studies of normal, neurotic and psychotic conditions* (New York: International University Press, 1977).

- 3 On affect, see Andre Green, *Le discours vivant* (Paris: PUF, 1971) and Jacobson op. cit.
- 4 (Translator's note) 'Signifiante, as Kristeva uses this term . . . refers to the work performed in language (through the heterogeneous articulation of semiotic and symbolic dispositions) that enables [for example] a text to signify what representative and communicative speech does not say.' Leon S. Roudiez, introduction to Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 18.
- 5 See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
- 6 Hanna Segal, 'Note on symbol formation', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol. XXXVII, 1957, part 6.
- 7 'I am the Gloomy, - the Bereft, - the Unconsoled./The Prince of Aquitaine in the deserted Tower:/My only Star is dead, - and my starred lute/Bears the black Sun of Melancholy.
In the night of the Tomb, You who have consoled me,/Give me the Pausilippe and the sea of Italy,/The flower which so pleased my broken heart,/And the trellis where the Vine intertwined with the Rose.
Am I Love or Phoebus? . . . Lusignan or Biron?/My brow is still red from the kisses of the Queen;/I have dreamed in the Grotto where the Siren swims . . .
And twice in victory I have traversed the Acheron :/Transposing in turn on the lyre of Orpheus/The sighs of the Saints and the cries of Fairies.'
- 8 Gerard de Nerval (1808-55), letter to J. Colon, *Oeuvres completes* (Paris: 1926-32), vol. 1, p. 726.
- 9 Nerval, *Oeuvres completes*, vol. 2, p. 999.
- 10 *ibid.*, 152.
- 11 *ibid.*, 238.
- 12 Jean Richer, *Gerard de Nerval et les doctrines esoteriques* (Paris: Le griffon d'or, 1947); Georges Poulet, *Trois essais de mythologie romantique* (Paris [1966]: Corti, 1971).
- 13 See Michel Jeanneret, *La lettre perdue: ecriture et folie dans l'oeuvre de Nerval* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978).
- 14 Manuscript of *Aurelia*, Nerval, *Oeuvres completes*, vol. 1, p. 423. An English translation of *Aurelia* is published by Chatto & Windus (London: [1932] 1977). Further page references are given in the text.
- 15 Freud's canonical text on Dostoevsky (1821-81) examines the writer from the point of view of epilepsy, amorality, parricide, and gambling, and only allusively deals with the 'sado-masochism' underlying his suffering: 'Dostoyevsky and parricide' [1928], *Standard Edition*, vol. XXI. See also Ph. Sollers, 'Dostoyevski, Freud, la roulette', *Tel Quel*, no. 76.
- 16 F. Dostoevsky, *The Notebooks for 'The Devils'*, (French edn) (Paris: Pleiade), 810; emphasis added. Further references are given in the text. An English translation of this text is published by the University of Chicago Press (1968).
- 17 F. Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, trans. David Magarshack (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971 edn), 586-7.
- 18 F. Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972 edn), 27.
- 19 *ibid.*, 41.
- 20 See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press and Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
- 21 D. S. Merezhkovsky, *Tolstoy as Man and Artist, with an essay on Dostoyevsky* (New York: 1902).