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THE NOVELS OF ROBERT PINET

THE IMPOSSIBLE QUEST FOR TRUTH AND MEANING OF SELF

1951-1969

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Gale Harold Long, B.A., M.A.

* * * *

The Ohio State University
1972

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INTRODUCTION

When this subject matter, the novels of Robert Pinget, was first contemplated as a topic for advanced study and the research was underway, we were encouraged by a personal response received from the author.

Je vous remercie de votre lettre et de l'intérêt que vous portez à mes livres. ... J'espère vivement que vous aurrez du succès avec votre thèse et me permet de vous demander de m'en envoyer une copie lorsqu'elle sera imprimée.1

This response coupled with his sentiments expressed in an earlier interview regarding his reading public have given us the courage to continue.

Dans ma vie, la solitude a un grand rôle, mais je ne la vis pas comme on croit. La solitude est la première nécessité de l'écriture. ... Mais en revanche, l'adhésion du public, l'encouragement d'un lecteur, c'est ce qui est fantastique... La remarque d'un lecteur, c'est fantastique.2

This study will hopefully stand as a living testament of such reciprocal encouragement. Some years have passed, and we hope that M. Pinget's interest has not waned in the meantime.

Biographical material concerning the author is

---

1Letter from Robert Pinget, April 21, 1965.

deliberately sketchy as he deems such information useless in connection with a literary analysis of a writer's work. However, he graciously provided the following information in the 1965 letter.

Quant aux renseignements biographiques que vous demandez, je considère qu'ils sont inutiles dans une analyse littéraire. Les voici en bref. Né en 1919, études de droit, licence, brevet d'avocat, Beaux-Arts de Paris (j'étais également peintre), voyages en Europe, en Afrique du Nord, en Asie mineure, aux USA (invité par la Ford Foundation) et au Mexique.3

Born in Geneva, it was there that he took up his law studies; after receiving his brevet d'avocat, he left his birthplace in 1946 and settled in Paris in order to attend L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts where he pursued his interest in painting. He remained at the school for a period of four years during which time his paintings followed the principles of the school, arriving at a personal abstract method at the time of his first exhibition in 1950. Benefiting from his art studies, he spent a year in England as a professor of art and French. This love for painting was equaled during his childhood and adolescence by a profound interest in poetry. In later years some of his poetry was set to music and performed by Germaine Taillefer. Unable to express himself satisfactorily in the areas of painting or poetry alone, he turned to the medium of the novel. His first attempt at writing fiction, Entre Fantoine et Agapa, appeared in 1951. The work does not profess to be a novel

3Letter from Pinget.
but is a collection of short tales. It does suggest, however, the world which the author is to explore and includes some structural and thematic forms on which the writer will continue to build in his succeeding works. Sa voix was found in 1952 with the writing of his first novel, Mahou ou le matériau: "Et puis, un jour, ... j'ai écrit Mahu. Ce fut le coup de foudre. ...j'ai su instantanément que c'était juste. ... J'avais trouvé ma voix."^4

Although a playwright also, his output of plays has not been as great as that of his novels and some of these theatrical works are adaptations from the novels: Lettre morte (1959) is a reworking of some of the major points of the novel, Le Fiston; Clope au dossier reflects Ici ou ailleurs (1961) and La Manivelle (1960) represents a portion of the novel's preparatory work; Architruc (1961) utilizes the characters of Baga, and L'Hypothèse (1961) is related to the material of Autour de Mortin. His work in the theater has also brought him into close contact with Samuel Beckett in the field of collaboration. In 1957, he translated Beckett's radio play, All That Fall, into French (Tous ceux qui tombent); in 1960, he and Beckett translated the latter's play, Embers, into French (Cendres). Also in 1960, Beckett reciprocated by translating Pinget's play, La Manivelle, into English (The Old Tune).

^4Madeleine Chapsal, "Ça crève, ça crève," L'Express, 6-12 décembre 1965, p. 120.
In spite of the prolific literary endeavors of Pinget, to date there has been no book written devoted to his works exclusively, although, from time to time, he is included in critical discussions of the modern literary directions in France. The bulk of the critical research as regards his works lies in book reviews and some short articles or essays, the greater part of which has been undertaken in France. Foreign criticism is, for all intents and purposes, limited to England where the British publishing house, Calder & Boyars, offered successive translations of L'Inquisitoire, Mahu ou le matériau, and Baga. A limited body of American criticism concerns itself principally with L'Inquisitoire after its 1966 translation and publication by Grove Press.

Prior to 1962, a period spanning some ten years and seven novels, criticism was quite sparse. An increase of critical material dates from the latter half of 1962 after the publication of L'Inquisitoire, the novel for which the author received the Prix des Critiques. Because of this award, this work has received by far the most attention from the critics, and the succeeding novels continued to win critical consideration with the added award of the Prix Fémima for his 1965 novel, Quelqu'un. A reconsideration of his earlier works has not, unfortunately, been prompted by the popularity of these two prize-winning novels.

The limited critical evaluation of Pinget's novels
bespeaks a very definite insufficiency considering their importance and value in relation to the works which have become known as "nouveaux romans." The significance and merit of his works have been and continue to be, to some extent, overlooked. A primary explanation for this oversight is, as Pinget indicates, the tendency to regard the nouveaux romanciers as a homogeneous grouping of writers, each one pursuing the same unchanging and monotonous path to the same destination. "Ce qu'on appelle le nouveau roman? Il est né du choix d'écrivains que fait Jérôme Lindon. Cela leur donne faussement une parenté que ... je ne vois pas."5

Thus, the appellation, "nouveau roman," has been summarily linked with the works of several writers, and the importance and the originality of these authors tend at times to be overlooked due to the fact that they are designated as "new novelists."

Certain similarities exist among the nouveaux romanciers in their approach to the creation of a new form for the novel. The absence of well-defined plots, characters, and linear time and action are among the most common and most frequently noted resemblances. The principal parallelism, as Pinget states, is that of their search for a viable successor to the conventional novel, a search which is not unique to the last two decades alone.

Ils n'ont en commun qu'une même réaction contre le roman traditionnel qui ne correspondait plus à la façon de s'exprimer à présent, une même ambition de noter l'incontrôlable. Tout cela n'é il y a quarante ans, avec le surréalisme et le phénomène de l'écriture automatique.  

It is this search to discover a novel which speaks to the present that reveals the significant differences between the contemporary French writers, as each has his own unique contribution and emphasis. Therefore, it is imperative that the individual writers be considered in the light of the context and the content of their respective works, and that the designation of a work as a nouveau roman be accepted in the light of the generality implied in that appellation.

Pinget's belief that he is seeking to create a work which might be a direct expression of our times ("Chacun essaye de créer un travail qui soit une expression directe de notre temps") is a reflection of his importance in the realm of contemporary literature. The direction in which he is moving in order to originate a work that connotes such an expression illustrates his uniqueness. His natural inclination is toward that of a poet of language. "La seule certitude, c'est que je suis plus un poète qu'un romancier." It is in the domain of language that he finds the alleged

---

6Ibid.


8Yvette Romi, "Pourquoi écrivez-vous? [Interview]" Le Nouvel Observateur, 8-14 décembre 1965, p. 42.
traditional novel to be unrepresentative as an expression of our age. To attempt to imitate the language of reality out of past eras is to simulate a dead language. The veracity of his works lies in the language of today, the vernacular, which best represents and elucidates contemporary problems and anxieties.

... nous essayons d'introduire dans l'écriture des expressions modernes, la langue que parlent les gens dans les bistro, dans les usines. Quand les gens sont tête à tête, ce qu'ils se disent, si ce n'est pas brillant, porte plus de vérité sur ce qu'est la vie que la langue littéraire avec ses expressions stériles.9

Pinget's interest in the vernacular manifests an original facet of his works. His attempt to portray the popular, spoken language distinguishes his novels from those of other authors whose works, although similar to those of Pinget in many respects, are set most often in the world of the moyenne and grande bourgeoisie. The novels of Pinget, on the contrary, reveal a certain populism in his effort to portray the world as it exists for the "little man." His obsession with language also indicates a departure from the generally accepted idea of the "new novel" as une école du regard. Pinget views his literary effort as representing the école de l'oreille.10 The novelistic world of Pinget becomes a world of words, of auditory images that overwhelm and fascinate the reader; it is a world whose axiom is

9Fisson, "L'enquête sur le roman," p. 3.
10Knapp, "Interview," p. 549.
"l'oreille voit."\textsuperscript{11}

In this domain of the "seeing ear," he manifests the poet's love for words as the embodiment of a language in both their oral and aural aspects. The accumulation of language goes beyond the mere tabulation of words as such; it is the basic method of communication and, thereby, provides the revelation of the individual. Thus, a refined literary terminology cannot express the truth of the spoken language; the anguish of a human being cannot be manifested by the cultured and sterile expressions of a false reality. Language, then, becomes totally determinative and creative in and of itself and relinquishes its former passive role of simply expressing a façade of reality. "Reality" is given form by the act of speaking, by language itself. The individual and Pinget become the sum of this formulated or unformulated verbal expression. They no longer speak "in" a world in which their verbosity is but another aspect of an externalized existence; their discourse is the world, an internalized existence from which previously stable elements have disappeared. "En fait, je n'existe que sur le papier. Je ne vis que dans mes livres. ... J'aime me découvrir dans mes livres."\textsuperscript{12}


\textsuperscript{12}Jean Prasteau, "Robert Pinget est très gentil [Interview]," \textit{Le Figaro Littéraire}, 2 décembre 1965, p. 3.
exploit and convey the notion of self-discovery through an
explosion of language is an analysis of each novel in the
order in which they were published and through a division of
these works into four groups: 1) the "early" novels, in-
cluding Entre Fantoine et Agapa (1951), Mahu ou le matériau
(1952), Le Renard et la boussole (1953), Graal Flibuste
(1956), and Baga (1958), 2) the "transitional" novels, Le
Fiston (1959) and Clope au dossier (1961), 3) the "interro-
gatory" novels, composed of L'Inquisitoire (1962), Autour de
Mortin (1965), and Quelqu'un (1965), and, finally, 4) the
"new direction" novels, Le Libera (1968) and Passacaille
(1969). The novel, Passacaille, is the most recent work
treated in this study; however, Pinget continues to write
and published a short novel, entitled Fable, late in 1971
which evinces a continuation of and a progression in the
domain of the "new direction" novels.

This grouping of the novels best serves to spotlight
and to explain the unique qualities of Pinget's works and
the most significant features of his creative development as
a writer. It provides the means of examining the evolution
of the search for a personal truth within the chaotic atmos-
phere of an inexplicable reality by probing into the two-
dimensional world of the conscious and the subconscious, a
world which engenders a major conflict between reality and
fantasy in the life of the protagonist as he attempts to
deal with the mediocrity of his existence. In conjunction
with this primary quest, the grouping of the novels offers a more cogent view of the manner in which Pinget reflects on the anguish of an isolated individual struggling to find a personal meaning of self in the face of the impenetrable mystery that is his existence—an anguish that extends beyond the confines of the author-character. And finally, such a division serves to illuminate the role performed by the varying language tonalities which emphasize the continuing evolution of a search for truth. As the search progresses and intensifies, the tone of the language becomes increasingly frantic and demonstrates the protagonist's inability to handle, in a determined and determining manner, the unexplainable world and existence of which he is a part.
PART I

THE EARLY NOVELS

Entre Fantoine et Agapa
Mahu ou le matériau
Le Renard et la boussole
Graal Flibuste
Baga
CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING OF A LONG JOURNEY

**Entre Fantoine et Agapa**

*Entre Fantoine et Agapa* is the beginning of the long, sometimes difficult, often humorous, and always poetic voyage through the imaginary recesses of the mind of Robert Pinget. This collection of short tales was first published in 1951 by Jarnac; the number of first printing copies was evidently quite limited as the work was out of print soon thereafter. Its status remained so until April, 1966 when it was republished by Pinget's present publisher, Les Éditions de Minuit. Its reappearance was no doubt due to the critical acclaim and the Prix des Critiques received for *L'Inquisitoire* (1962) and to the award, Le Prix Fémina, given to Pinget in 1965 for his novel, *Quelqu'un*.

Although this work has not garnered much public attention it does contain several points of interest which show its relationship to the later works of the author; however, their importance becomes more relevant in hindsight after the reader has become somewhat better acquainted with the developments in Pinget's work during the six years following the appearance of *Entre Fantoine et Agapa*.

Pinget has divided his first work into two sections,
the first being approximately seventy-five pages of very short tales varying in length from one to three pages and the second containing dated observations, entitled "Journal." These observations continue in the same vein as the tales which precede them. They are, however, not unlike diary notations and vary in length from one to three paragraphs. As such, they contain the nuclei of tales themselves had the author wished to expand on this raw material.

The premise of this little volume is quite unlike any of the ensuing works and any further development in the works which follow would seem to be limited to a few proper names and, more important, to Pinget's idea of fantasy.

The work serves as a touchstone for the later works of Pinget through its title for Fantoine and Agapa represent the geographical location of the imaginary realm of the author. The few pages of this first work introduce the reader, unaware though he may be at the time, to some of the place names later to become so well-known with further reading of Pinget: such landmarks as le carrefour des Oublies, la rue Gou, le café du Cygne, and of particular importance, Sirancy-La-Louve. While in this first work these names may denote nothing more to the reader than bearing a certain quality of bizarreness, they will soon assume their true importance in the mythology and in the mythical kingdom of Pinget. Alongside these addresses one chances, less frequently, upon certain proper names which will join those of
the landmarks in becoming, in turn, of great importance. Only one such proper name need be noted here, that of Mahu, which lends itself to the title of the first "novel" and the work which immediately follows Entre Fantoine et Agapa. One can already see, then, the initial indices which will reappear as Pinget continues to write and which will bear a bountiful harvest through his long association with them.

While these names and addresses cannot be pointed to as being of extreme importance in this first work of Pinget, there is, it would seem, another aspect far more important and one which bears scrutinization. The republication of the work has made this facet even more apparent. Whether or not the reader has come into contact with this first work at the time of the first publication or some fifteen years later, the element of fantasy cannot be discounted. The term is used here in the broadest sense of its meaning. While the realm of fantasy is undoubtedly present in the work of any given author, since it must be an integral part of any act of creation, the fantastic of the broadest kind is especially prevalent in the early Pinget, a period covering the publication of at least his first four works after Entre Fantoine et Agapa, namely, Mahu ou le matériau, Le Renard et la boussole, Graal Flibuste, and Baga. This is not to say that fantasy disappears from the work of Pinget at this point but that it is used in a more muted and, perhaps, more limited sense.
Of what does this fantasy consist in *Entre Fantoine et Agapa*? In its most literal sense it is the imagination of every child who has ever fantasized. It is a wonderland of child-like proportions accompanied by certain moments of poignancy which only an adult can know who is in the act of reconstructing a lost innocence. It is a familiar world for those of us who reside in our contemporary televised cartoon world of talking animals and objects. It is the world of an author who believes that "l'inspiration n'existe pas. On provoque l'inconscient, on oblige la plume à bouger et ce qui en sort est souvent très déroutant."1 Disconcerting it often is in the Pingetian world of fantasy. A schema of happenings and events which do justice to the wildest imagination and which carry with it very often some not-too-subtle ideas of morality that often become lost in the helter-skelter world which surrounds us. One need only to pick at random from the table of contents to situate oneself immediately in the fantastic world of Robert Pinget, for example, the cucumber invasion begun by a single cucumber, *la coqueluche de plage*:

Il était une fois un jeune concombre, mais alors, pas du tout sympathique. Il se dorait. Il se gonflait, l'œil mi-clos, le pédoncule provoquant. Les concombresses en étaient folles. Il avait de ces

---

façons de glisser vers vous, de se frotter ...²

So persuasive was his way of doing things that he and his companions created an unstoppable invasion to the detriment of all other existing vegetables and people of the region. Not only do the bean plants dry up and the oyster plants die, but a certain Mlle Solange, performing her duty as a citizen by eating cucumbers for every meal, "devint grosse d'un concombre et accoucha."³ Not to be outdone by the cucumbers are the gourds. When the supreme Neutron (the Creator) deems the creation of the gourd unworkable, they simply create themselves. This self-creation is so all-pervasive that everything, including man and his thoughts, take on the form of roundness.

Chacun aurait pu cultiver sa manière de voir, mais les citrouilles voient rond: elles ont imposé leur vision à l'univers. Tout, dès lors, y fut prétexte à rondeur, sphéricité, orbicité, éllipsoïdicité--et les gravitations en général. L'homme n'échappa point au virus. Mais c'est encore dans ses pensées que l'homme est le plus courge. Il ne peut écrire "au commencement" sans être obsédé par "à la fin." On y arrive, grosso modo, par soudure "in termino speculationis" de l'espoir, et le tour est joué.⁴

Added to these wildly imaginative entries are other examples of man lost in a nonsensical world. Although there is no thread binding the tales together, in reading the various stories one is struck by a kind of thematic constant running

³Ibid., p. 24.
⁴Ibid., p. 27.
throughout. It is not a blatant overture on the part of the author and it is only after a considerate reading that the insignificance of man and a rational planet can be outlined. In the circularity of this cucumber-infested universe, there are the moments of human frailty and pathos—man in search of a personality in a depersonalized society. Such an example is the sculptor, Déd Surprend, whose art, volontairement balbutiant, is an acknowledged attempt not to make a statement of any kind. He lives in mortal fear of a certain caissière who seemingly has the power of life and death. The fact that she does not like his work and the existence of chance events in front of the café where she works only serve to heighten his fear. A more poignant case in point is that of M. Paul. His first name known only to himself, he is unable to find a way to make his name known to others who address him only as monsieur or vous. He finds an obstacle to all his attempts. Near the end of his resources, he is taken to court by his landlady on a minor offense. The judge rules in his favor and asks him: "Etes-vous content, monsieur Paul? --Oh, monsieur le juge! ... Monsieur le juge! ... Oh oui, monsieur le juge!" His ecstasy stems not from winning his case but from the fact that the judge recognizes him as somebody. For this little lost man "il y a pourtant un moment qu'on se connaît!"\(^5\)

The dated entries of the "Journal" would seem to be

\(^5\)Ibid., pp. 62-65.
undeveloped tales, brief notations for future narratives. Their very brevity, however, adds a pungency lacking in some of the preceding stories. The element of fantasy is more restrained in these twenty pages. It is the brief notations concerning humanity that are the most striking here. The vague shadows of future Pingetian heroes are present.

Toute leur intimité s'autopsie dans leurs yeux, même distraits. Vous marchez dans la rue au milieu d'êtres décortiqués. Ils offrent un spectacle de division psychique monstrueux. Je n'en ai presque point rencontrés pour qui le présent eût d'importance. Ils projettent tout dans le futur. Un futur fait de préoccupations actuelles et de temps révolu. Encombrés de cet impossible, ils cheminent de détresses en faillites. Ils sont hantés dangereusement par l'éternité.6

Future and eternity, two important words in the lexicon of Pinget. The heroes who are to appear are all imbued with the desire, and oftentimes the fear, of finding a future and, subsequently, a posterity. They will labor at a new creation while witnessing at the same time their own destruction. And yet, the solitude, the misery, the unhappiness, notwithstanding, they will try to preserve their individual human condition. Their future disarray and the absurdity of their worlds seem to harken back to the old parrot statue, Mathusala, a kind of mage of Entre Fantoine et Agapa. After a thousand years of wars, strife, and confusion, and after an oscillographic sampling of the statue, the translation of the sound waves sum up the Pingetian hero. "Ce-que-je-ne-comprends-pas-c'est-que-malgré-mon-

6Ibid., pp. 82-83.
désarroi-et-l'absurdité-du-monde-je-sois-encore-heureux."

A final aspect of this work which should be noted because of its importance throughout the entire book is that of humor. There are moments in any given work of Pinget when the reader is laughing aloud, when he is snickering, or when he is simply smiling quietly. Humor, which never loses its power, pervades the whole of the literary output of this author. It is seen in all its gradations from the burlesque to the "black" where the reader can find himself laughing at instead of with the character in spite of himself. For the most part, however, the humor in this collection of tales and "Journal" is of the burlesque variety. It is a humor in which the reader cannot take very seriously the imaginative ruminations of the author but at the base of which there is an underlying tone of the most serious nature. It is a simple child-like humor to which the reader reacts spontaneously and laughingly. Putting aside the few serious tales and diary entries, there is in these examples of humorous narrative the idea of laughter as an antidote against insanity. A certain sobriety can be found in a seemingly frivolous tale like that of those marvelous cucumbers which bring about the complete subservience of the human population to them. Man knocking his head constantly against mundane and absurd obstacles, engendering a kind of hollow laughter in the face of a pathetic existence. A view of an

\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 32.\]
insane world which one knows to exist but which one tries to
hold at arm's length with the last remaining weapon, laugh­
ter. Because of the use of fantasy, the framework in which
the humor is situated is often exaggerated. Thus the per­
plexity of the picnicking couple who confront the following
sign in the middle of the forest: "Interdiction d'impétrer
l'alopécie." A check with the dictionary affords them the
following information: "'Interdiction,' on sait ce que ça
veut dire. 'Impétrer,' c'est mis: 'Obtenir des pouvoirs
publics.' 'Alopécie': 'Chute ou absence totale ou par­
tielle des cheveux, des sourcils, etc.'" In the end they
can only wonder if "ça voudrait dire que c'est interdit
d'obtenir des pouvoirs publics d'être chauve? Est-ce qu'on
aurait idée de demander ça? Et pourquoi l'écrire au milieu
d'un bois?" While such an absurdity does not, perhaps,
truly exist, one cannot be sure that it is entirely impos­
sible that it might. The humor of Pinget tends often to un­
derscore the very possibility that anything is possible.
The use of this kind of fantasy humor, especially in the
early works of Pinget, serves as a shield against an un­
yielding and, at the same time, absurd reality. The fact
that the shield is only paper-thin and offers no great pro­
tection from the hard realities of life does not lessen its
momentary curative powers against a permanent insanity.

Thus we find in this first published literary

\[\text{8Ibid., pp. 33-35.}\]
endeavor of Robert Pinget some slight architectural forms on which the author will continue to build in his succeeding works. As the construction progresses these forms will be strengthened or rebuilt depending on the work at hand. However, the forms are never completely destroyed but perhaps used in a different way, in a different place in the construction of the overall edifice.
CHAPTER II

BUILDING BLOCKS

Mahu ou le matériau

Mahu ou le matériau, the second work of Robert Pin­
get, was published by Robert Laffont in 1952. This work was
the first to gain attention in France, thanks in part to
Alain Robbe-Grillet who reviewed it favorably in the liter­
ary journal, Critique, in 1954.¹ The book was later trans­
lated by Donald Watson in 1967 and published by Calder &
Boyars under the title of Mahu or the Material.

This work, somewhat in the vein of Entre Fantoine
et Agapa, is also divided into two parts, the primary dif­
ference being that Mahu is composed of two distinctly titled
parts: Part I, entitled "Le Romancier," is an attempt at
writing a novel, albeit an abortive one, and Part II, en­
titled "Mahu bafouille," is a series of autobiographical
sketches with no attempt at relating a story. Similar to
the "Journal" of Pinget's first work, they resemble jot­
tings or material in a writer's notebook for possible
future expansion.

¹Alain Robbe-Grillet, review of Mahu ou le matériau
and Le Renard et la boussole, by Robert Pinget, in Critique,
X (janvier 1954), 82-85.
The reader should note well the first chapter of Part I; the title alone, "Je t'avertis," should serve to indicate what is to follow. Considered in its most literal sense, as it should be, it is an admonition that what ensues is an attempt to reconstruct a life which may or may not have been in existence before. The reality of everything and everyone is almost immediately cast into doubt.

Voilà cette histoire je n'y comprends rien, c'est quelqu'un qui m'a dit: "Tu devrais la raconter," je ne me souviens plus qui, peut-être moi, je mélange tout le monde, ...

Donc cette histoire je la raconte mais il y a aussi Latirail, il écrit des romans. Il me dit parfois comment il fait, ça me complique beaucoup, il peut bien m'expliquer ses personnages mais moi je suis peut-être l'un d'eux quand j'y pense? Dans ma tête c'est la pagaille, il ne faut pas trop réfléchir, sur le moment on voit que je me débats avec le diable.2

These words from the mouth of Mahu give a sense of insecurity to the attempt. And rightly so, since any such effort has no guaranteed certainty attached to it. The affirmation of an existence in the world of Pinget can have a certitude only insofar as the isolated individual is concerned. That which this individual chooses to communicate is basically unimportant and borders most often on the humdrum and the nonsensical. One might argue that the information related by the "author" cannot be a transcript of reality. This, however, is the fundamental problem faced by this individual --that of discovering what is real. At this point Mahu may

well have joined the reader in the morass as he, Mahu, seem-
ingly loses the ability to control his destiny. But then how can one lose control of a destiny whose certainty is subject to grave doubts? The only absolute for a Mahu is the obligation that he must search for a destiny, real or unreal. The incomprehensibility of his personal destiny to himself is of minor importance. What is essential is that he attempts to realize a truth about himself and this very effort will allow him finally to say: "Voilà je n'ai plus rien à dire, néanmoins tout me demeure, j'ai gagné." 3

Part I, for all intents and purposes, is quite well summarized in the phrases quoted above. These lines also presage what Pinget is to formulate in his 1968 interview with Madeleine Chapsal 4, namely, that what is of consequence is the subconscious, not inspiration, even though what emerges may be disconcerting. For the writer who deals solely from the subconscious, where does reality end and fiction begin? Or perhaps, where does fiction end and reality begin? Do these two terms mean one and the same thing? Are they constantly intermingled? Can one not separate them? In reading Mahu these questions would seem to be of paramount importance for the reader. The act of subconscious writing precludes a sense of definiteness as to the boundaries of fiction and reality. In the case of this

3Ibid., p. 212.

first Pingetian hero, Mahu, the conscious and subconscious worlds are so profoundly intermingled that any attempt to separate them is, perhaps, totally wrong since the subconscious is an integral part of each individual as is the conscious. Although it may be improper for the artist to separate and differentiate between the conscious and subconscious of an individual, that very individual, in his day to day existence, insists upon such a separation; the subconscious is not permitted to intrude into the "realistic" life. Each being, through centuries of training, considers his reality, his consciousness, as being quite apart from the dream-like universe of his subconscious. Although literature today may be questioning the validity of this so-called reality, there has existed in the past a concept of what a well-ordered universe entails. It was a realm unrelated to the private nature of the subconscious. The psyche involved a world where a person could retreat in moments of stress in order to find that tranquility lacking in the "real" world. For Mahu this retreat into the subconscious indicates something more than simply finding a quiescence of the mind. Within Mahu are the beginnings of the idea that one's truth is perhaps to be found in this unexplored region. The trusting reader is no longer in the well-ordered universe of certain nineteenth century novels where he can be, if he chooses, merely a casual onlooker to or an active participant in the machinations of the novel. The
ramifications of the subconscious mind are still quite distinct in these novels. Balzac's characterization of Eugène Rastignac or Stendhal's portrayal of Julien Sorel, to name but two, present quite clearly the division still existing between the consciousness and the psyche. There resides subconsciously in these two young men a basic human quality which is overpowered by the then prevalent struggle of man and his place in society. Whether it be money or power that talks, they judge their reality as existing in the conscious world which permits them to put aside their underlying humanity. The contemporary twentieth century novelist does not send out such invitations. The reader is immediately immersed into a nebulous world that is neither wholly conscious nor wholly unconscious. One can no longer take for granted a preexistent "real" world divorced from the heretofore personal and private conclave of each individual--his subconscious. The search for meaning, for a personal truth, is no longer conducted vis-à-vis exterior, conscious relationships. This constantly elusive truth is perhaps best sought in the obscure world of fact and fiction, of the conscious and subconscious.

This question of reality and fiction weighs heavily in Mahu because everything seems to have an equal reality. Once the reader has met Mahu (the principal character? the author?), he is let loose in a world where everyone may be real or, yet again, they all may be nothing more than
figments of someone else's imagination, Mahu, himself, included. Who is Mahu? What is Mahu? These are the questions posed by Robbe-Grillet in reviewing the novel.

Mahu lui-même est-il vraiment un "témoin" de cette fantasmasgie? Ou bien en est-il le dieu? Ou tout simplement est-il, comme les autres, une des fictions au destin drôlement tragique qui hantent cette contrée, entre Agapa et Fantoine, banlieue "déraisonnable" du réel?5

The whole of Part I is the novel-within-a-novel idea carried to its extreme. Mahu, Latirail, Mlle Lorpailleur, and Sinture all claim to be novelists. In a sense they all are writing the same novel about each other. As authors they appear as characters in the novels their own characters are writing. They easily exchange identities. Are they different people or are they all the same person or are they simply different counterparts of Mahu? One could assume they are all one and the same since the events recounted in their novels are the same although each one is unaware of how he came into possession of the material. Taking such an assumption as the premise of this work—that Mahu is a kind of tandem character—it is easy to recognize the difficulty inherent in the outward projection of a subconscious world. The more or less "stabilized" characters who exist as real-life counterparts of Mahu and the "invented" characters of his imagination come to exist on the same plane of reality. This capacity of total existence of imagined beings effaces any semblance of a well-ordered reality where

5Robbe-Grillet, review of Mahu, p. 83.
conscious thoughts and acts have the upper hand. In the world of Mahu, the act of creation is very much an aspect of the imagination. All of the Mahus who reside in the psyche are given life through this imagination. Existence is now more correctly in the mind than in the eye of the beholder. The true material of life becomes so enmeshed with that of the mind that its concreteness, its consciousness becomes, in turn, questionable.

The characters created by Mahu/Latirail are the enemies of their creator since they do not react as fictional characters but, instead, take their place in "reality" alongside their author. No sooner are they invented by the author than they appear in the street or in a news item of the local paper. Did they exist before? Are they really a part of the author's memory and, in turn, then become a fictional character? In the end does memory equal fiction? Perhaps so. In any case, such creations as Bouchèze, M. Pou, and Melchior de Sassanase do exist in a sort of suspended state, a state from which they can be resurrected at the author's will into whatever personality he so desires--the same

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character or a different one.

By this time the reader must be aware that he is participating in a somewhat frivolous meditation on the uncertain boundaries existing between fact and fiction. Within this frivolity, however, there are some serious undertones. He is being taken on a grand and glorious merry-go-round ride which has no beginning and no end, an ever-accelerating ride where pretense is reality and reality could very well be nothing more than pretense. Characters and situations are so tightly interwoven that the reader is hard put to delineate where one begins and the next leaves off. These characters are

des "créations pures" qui ne relèvent que de l'esprit de création. Leur existence, au-delà d'un passé confus de rêves et d'impressions insaisissables, n'est qu'un devenir sans projet soumis de phrase en phrase aux plus extravagantes mutations, à la merci de la moindre pensée qui traverse l'esprit, de la moindre parole en l'air ou du plus fugitif soupçon. 7

Although these characters are "pure" creations, they do, in fact, form themselves

mais au lieu que ce soit chacun d'eux qui crée sa propre réalité, c'est l'ensemble qui se fait, comme un tissu vivant dont chaque cellule bourgeoise et sculpte ses voisines; ces personnages "se fabriquent" sans cesse les uns les autres, le monde autour d'eux n'est qu'une sé-cretion--on pourrait presque dire le "déchet" de leurs suppositions, de leurs mensonges, de leur délire. 8

So the story goes and thus it can only turn in rounds and knock against itself and begin again or take a parallel

7 Robbe-Grillet, review of Mahu, p. 82.
8 Ibid.
route which, in turn, reacts closely upon that part from which it has been spawned. The reality created by Mahu, with the aid of his psyche, becomes one of disorder. The well-ordered structure he seeks is not to be found among the dreams and elusive impressions which form the nucleus of the subconscious.

The narrative develops because Latirail, Mlle Lorppailleur, and Mahu are all novelists; the function of a novelist is to create stories; therefore, Latirail, Mlle Lorppailleur, and Mahu must create stories. The difficulty arises, however, when Mahu does not understand the story. Someone, perhaps he himself, has told him that he should tell the story; so, he is telling it, but one should beware because there is also Latirail who writes stories and who speaks to Mahu about them. Matters are further complicated when another "character," Sinture, appears and insists that it is he who is dictating the novel that Latirail has said he was composing. Not only are they all novelists but they may or may not be characters in the novels of the others. Thus, the first intrusion into the nonsensical world of Mahu leaves the reader with a possibility of four writers or one writer in the guise of any of the "authors" or, perhaps, only a cast of characters which is recounting the tale of an anonymous author. In any case, the constant reaction of author/character becomes further entangled with the writing of the different worlds; for example, no sooner are some
characters created than they suddenly appear in "real life." Hampered by such an intrusion into his "fictional" world, Latirail can no longer write with facility. The progress of his novel now hinges upon something more than an invented character. In order to write a realistic novel, he must have command of the reins of reality. In other words, it must be he who creates the reality of his novel. Mahu counsels him to simply change the name once again, to simply invent no matter whom, a name such as Melchior de Sassanase perhaps might be employed, one of the formidable "fictional" names thought of by Mahu himself. Latirail refuses and Mahu leaves whereupon he meets a stranger who introduces himself as Melchior de Sassanase and proceeds to tell Mahu the story of his life.

Fantasy and comedy, a comedy of doubles wherein the reader can never be sure of who is speaking or acting: Mahu-Latirail, Latirail-Mahu, Lorpailleur-Latirail, Fion-Bouchèze. One is confronted by a comedy of mistaken and exchanged identities carried to such an extreme that when the "fictional" character Bouchèze is being tried for the strangulation murder of Fion, the identity crisis is only more dismaying:

L'inculpé ne laisse pas de nous intriguer. Il semble en effet avoir de réels blancs de mémoire et glisse parfois dans ses déclarations des phrases ou des interjections dépourvues de sens, telles que: "Moi, Latirail" ou "J'écrivain," ... 9

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9Pinget, Mahu, p. 50.
On goes the carousel at a more and more dizzying pace with comic entanglement piled upon comic entanglement. Latirail wishes to write a novel about some chercheurs de poux, but because this does not ring true to him, he decides to change not the story but the characters to some chercheurs de clous. In the meantime, one of the poux of the original title now exists as M. Pou. He is sent by Sinture to Mlle Lorpailleur (who is also searching for an idea for a novel) as M. Desclous. Eventually the publication of the two novels, Les Chercheurs de clous of Latirail and Le Chercheur Desclous of Mlle Lorpailleur, is accomplished and they reside side by side on the bookstore shelf. The act of writing and publishing is thus stripped of any meaning in the conventional sense since neither is ever bought but only leafed through by the customers.

Les Chercheurs de Clous voisineront dans les librairies avec Le Chercheur Desclous. En achetant l'un on lira l'autre. Non, on se contentera de le feuilleter en librairie.\(^\text{10}\)

The lack of interest shown by the reading public for the two exemplary novels is accounted for, undoubtedly, when one considers the travail engendered by an author who attempts to transcribe reality. The infusion of reality into the framework of a world viewed as a world of fantasy makes that reality immediately suspect.

Part II finds Mahu no longer in Sirancy but in Paris

\(^{10}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 44.}\)
and this segment of the work is made up of autobiographical sketches of his life. While the reader is no longer in the "imagined" world of Part I, there is still much that remains "unreal" since here one must deal with the thoroughly unconventional and decidedly eccentric Mahu. There is no attempt at a sustained narrative, the second part being a collection of chapters or essays. Although each essay usually revolves around one central thought (which is not carried over into the succeeding chapter), there is some semblance of continuity since the reader is at all times in the mind of Mahu. Not only does the reader have a feeling of continuity due to the personage of Mahu but there is also Latirail who figured so prominently in Part I.

Just as Mahu warned the reader in the first chapter of Part I, there is a similar but more subtle warning on the title page of Part II: Mahu bafouille, talks nonsense. Nonsensical it is in the fantastic range of topics included --from the art of manipulating stilts to the art of eating while watching a belly dancer to the art of living under a false name which provokes the possibility of then having two peaux. It is a nonsensical thread of continuity also with Mahu's extremely short attention span out of which evolves a surrealist flavor which permeates the essays viewed both individually and as a whole. We are given a picture of Mahu standing apart and above the crowd watching this spectacle of humor and pathos, of consciousness and
unconsciousness, of reality and unreality, of irrationality. In sum, Pinget has given us a grand spectacle of all the multiple aspects which go into the making of mankind. Mahu, with his child-like naïveté, can still wonder about and marvel at "little" things that very quickly tend to lose their importance. Underneath the nonsense there is the serious questioning of Mahu, the searching for some rationality in what is perhaps a "fictional" world.

In the final chapter of the book, entitled "La Clé," Mahu presents the reader with some answers and, at the same time, poses a fundamental question. The reader is told that there is no longer any need to lie, that he, Mahu, lied a great deal at the beginning of the book in order to find the truth but that "la vérité n'est mûre qu'au dernier chapitre." Thus, in the last chapter the truth is "ripe" and he does not deny anything that went on before. All of his now-absent characters are the material for Mahu, the author, who is speaking. True, a few persons like Latirail and Ninette are his real friends, although it is not really they until Part II in spite of his usage of vous and even false names in referring to them. Furthermore, the fact that the first part has resulted in an aborted novel matters not since

... elle m'a servi de gammes préliminaires, ce qui n'importe ce n'est pas de bien chanter, c'est d'entendre ma voix sans la bronchite, tu sais la bronchite il y a

\[\text{11}^{\text{Ibid.}}, \text{ p. 211.}\]
What remains to him? What has he won? In a sense, the author has won his integrity. He has striven mightily to transcribe reality in Part I but he has had to lie. For the loss of reality is inevitable when transcribed; it becomes a fiction, a lie. How can an author be realistic?

Je ne suis pas ressorti à une heure, c'était une heure trente. Et maintenant c'est presque deux heures au bar-tabac. J'avais perdu une demi-heure en parlant. J'ai rogné une demi-heure pour que le début ne s'éloigne pas trop. ... Et si je continue comme ça en te disant tout, tu ne seras plus là à m'écouter. ... je rognerais des semaines, des mois, des années, ce que je gagnerai en demi-heures je le perdrai en vérité.13

The only reality, then, is that of each individual. This reality is nothing more, perhaps, than fiction if the individual is willing to accept the truth of it but it is a "real" fiction. It would seem to be a problem like the one posed earlier in this study: what are and where are the boundaries between fiction and reality, between pretense and reality? It seems to be a primary question for the whole group of nouveau roman writers.

Alain Bosquet, in an article in which he discusses the avant-garde novel and the antiroman, touches upon this point. The avant-garde novel is one which represents a given reality (story, time, characters, etc.) in which it

12Ibid., p. 212.
13Ibid., pp. 117-118.
constitutes a new scale of values. It takes known elements but upsets the accepted relationships between them. However, it is in the realm of the antiroman in which lies the central point of the Pingetian universe.

This mingling of the planes of reality and fiction in Mahu is very similar to the penetration into the world of Jorge Luis Borges as Bosquet has suggested in the aforementioned article. This becomes apparent upon viewing Mahu's own reality, at least his supposed reality, as it enters into the multiple fictional planes, as it lends support to their existence, and as it is in turn pervaded by mystery. As has been pointed out previously, the figure of Mahu-Latirail feels threatened when this imaginary world becomes "real." The fictitious beings invented by him threaten his own assumed reality and he is menaced with the atrophy of his own "real" being. In the final analysis, Mahu can only wonder about the worth of his own existence in the face of the intimidation created by his invented characters. If


15 Ibid., p. 85.
reality can be so easily assumed by these characters, their fictitious nothingness could just as easily engulf Mahu.

The "reality" of fiction is certainly a point of contention in the work of Latirail who wants to write truthfully and realistically. "Je n'écris pas des choses loufoques, j'écris des choses vraies. Dieu, que j'ai mal à la tête!" But he is rebuffed at every turn and it is Mahu who best sums up the impossibility of the attempt in talking to Mlle Lorpailleur: "Vous dites comme Latirail. Il écrit des choses vraies, ou vraisemblables, ou véritables ... C'est une marotte."17

The abortive novel of Mahu challenges the whole concept of realism and the realistic novel, and challenges the said concept from the viewpoint of the writer. What the public demanded and accepted as realism in a nineteenth century French novel was that untranscribable reality of which Borges speaks.18 It was a reality of fantasy, a reality to which the novelist was unable to relate.

C'est la sensation débilitante de "distance" qui, dans la prose romanesque, amène l'auteur véritable à conclure que s'il gagne à monter une écurie de personnages, il y perd le contact direct avec un moi étouffé entre mille je et mille on.19

16Pinget, Mahu, p. 29.
17Ibid., p. 77.
19Bosquet, "Roman d'avant-garde," p. 79.
Thus, according to M. Bosquet, there is an acknowledged fallacy when Flaubert, for example, supposedly stated: "Madame Bovary, c'est moi." Not even the self-annointed leader of the realist movement was able to overcome the distance which always separated him from himself in the novel. Once the attempt was made to portray himself, another reality, the reality of the novel itself, took charge and the character changed in nature, in age, and in sex. At the base of the work of Mahu is a serious critique of realism in the novel and the attempt to show that a true presentation of reality cannot be presumed. If one accepts Borges' premise of the alliance of fiction and reality, then the realism of any given work can be subscribed to only insofar as the reader recognizes the element of fantasy inherent in any novelistic treatment of reality. This "untrue-to-life" reality thus creates no boundaries between fact and fiction since fact can never be expressed as being more truthful than the fiction in which it is placed.

... if one's aim is realism, why not write about "real" people such as Sinture and Mahu? And, if the pretensions of the realist have any meaning, why shouldn't his "created" characters have a real existence also?20

And, indeed, why shouldn't the author's "created" characters have a real existence also? Reality does exist and yet no one can put it faithfully into words. The uncertainty of

the "real" world engenders the powerlessness of the writer's language to transmit even his own reality into a fictional framework. With Mahu, the reader can assume that this is the choice of Pinget; for as soon as it begins, the novel ends with Mahu bidding adieu to the whole lot:

Tous ces noms d'avant j'en suis débarrassé, je leur ai dit adieu. Ils m'ont demandé: "Adieu? pourquoi adieu?" Je leur ai dit: "C'est une expression de chez nous." Adieu Sinture, adieu tous, vos noms me collent aux dents. Si je vous rencontre encore je vous dirai bonjour, mais pour ce qui est de vous relancer, mon œil, débrouillez-vous, adieu.21

The advent of Mahu permits Pinget to take a first hesitant step toward the declaration: "Mahu, c'est moi." His commentary on realism shows him to be aware of that untransversable distance that existed between Flaubert and Madame Bovary. At the same time, Pinget-Mahu has shortened that distance which, in turn, allows him the freedom to dispose of his characters and their "reality" at will. One can already hear the later words of Pinget:

... les romanciers y croient, d'habitude, à leurs personnages. Ils les tiennent pour réels. Moi, je leur coupe la tête. À la fin, je les fais crever. ... Pas de progression psychologique fine, aigüe. Non, chez moi, il n'y a pas ça. Il ne s'agit que de moi.22

The phrase, il ne s'agit que de moi, includes within these few words a significance far beyond a strict reference to the relationship between author and character. It is an attempt to obliterate completely the distance existing

21Pinget, Mahu, p. 102.
22Chapsal, "Ça crève," p. 120.
between the author and himself. The contemporary search for the authentic moi in the case of Pinget and his first hero, Mahu, is a profound and intimate quest for a very personal posterity and, more importantly, a proof of one's own identity. The proof of such an existence of life itself, for this and succeeding heroes, is the act of writing or speaking. It is never for the pleasure derived from such acts but, rather, for whatever certainty can be attained from what may well be only invented reality in the final analysis. "Je n'écris pas par plaisir, mais seulement pour inventer du monde autour de moi qui m'écouterait, autrement à quoi je rime? Je suis mort."23

23Pinget, Mahu, p. 187.
CHAPTER III
INVENTION BRINGS VALIDITY TO LIVING

Le Renard et la boussole

Le Renard et la boussole is the third work of Pinget and the first to carry the label of "novel." It was published by Gallimard in 1953. This work and Entre Fantoine et Agapa are the two least known works of Pinget. One reason why Le Renard has been relatively ignored by the public and the critics may be that its very virtuosity and its conglomeration of styles and subject matter make it much more difficult reading than the earlier writings. However, compared to Mahu this novel is a more interesting work in that it is a more sustained attempt at actually writing a novel, in the conventional sense of the genre. On the other hand, it is apparent that, in spite of its density of prose, Le Renard is to carry on a basic theme already found in Mahu and one which will be found in all of the future works of Pinget: "J'ai noté quelques idées intéressantes qui m'ont occupé l'esprit, en particulier celles relatives à la vérité de ce qu'on dit."1

Again the reader is confronted with an "author,"

this time with the implausible name of John Tintouin Porridge, who may be said to be the counterpart of the earlier Mahu. Just as Mahu presented problems for the reader with his "real" and "imagined" realities, so M. Porridge will give us some trouble—\textit{nous donnera du tintouin}. He also is a half-crazed character but the Pinget reader has been familiarized with such irrationality in the author's previous works and is beginning to accept it as the norm. However, whereas this irrational realm is a constant in \textit{Mahu} and \textit{Entre Fantoine et Agapa}, in \textit{Le Renard} this same tone of irrationality is at times invaded by a definite tone of rationality. There are moments during the voyage to Israel and his travels around that country when M. Porridge does not parallel the reader's first impression of his character, which is one of inconsistency. Those portions of the novel before and after the voyage to Israel incorporate this expected personality of Porridge who then inhabits a disorderly world of which he has but a shadowy consciousness; his existence is a constant stream of recommencements and reawakenings.

The novel begins in the Pingetian manner, simply and succinctly, with the narrator telling the reader that his name is John Tintouin Porridge. Before becoming a writer and painter he had worked in a hat factory; however, the daily contact with the felt had resulted in an allergy and his doctor advised him to find other work. The only logical
alternative for such a Pingetian dilemma is to turn to the
arts where the "hero" will discover another inevitable im-
broglio: John is going to try to write a "true" story but,
following in Mahu's footsteps, he does not quite know how
to go about it.

Une vraie histoire qu'est-ce que c'est? Est-ce une
histoire qui m'arrive aujourd'hui ou hier ou il y a
longtemps, disons qu'un jour elle m'arrive je l'oublie
et je m'en souviens plus tard, ou bien doit-elle
m'arriver tous les jours et c'est mon histoire en bloc?
Si je raconte n'importe quoi sans y penser j'ai peine
à savoir le vrai.2

Once again the reader finds himself in the company of Mahu
and his temps rogné. How can an author portray truthfully
what he has to say and do it while the validity of the ac-
cepted novel form is under suspicion? The predicament faced
by Mahu has to do with truth and time also.

Je voudrais te dire tout ça immédiatement pour que ce
soit frais, pour que tu te rendes compte comment je
vis. Je t'ai dit que c'était tout à l'heure. Mais tu
vois, au fur et à mesure que je raconte ça s'éloigne,
ça s'éloigne. Bientôt ce sera hier ou avant-hier.3

The twin dilemmas of Mahu and John, then, concern something
more than just the basic and personal truths that they are
struggling to bring forth. Truth becomes so involved and
intertwined within the concept of time that they are on the
verge of destroying their individual pasts. In the case of
Mahu, it is the problem of "paring" or "trimming" time. His
temps rogné is an attempt to chip away at the immediate past

2Ibid.
3Pinget, Mahu, p. 117.
of each present moment. When the present moment loses its "freshness," its immediacy, that moment becomes something less than true for Mahu. The aging of each moment of tout à l'heure and the retreat of this present into a definite past clouds the truth of that moment with disbelief. "Au fur et à mesure il faut que je change la date parce que tu n'y croirais plus." The task for Mahu is to somehow discover a means of presenting in a narrative the truth of the now and retaining, although it is surely impossible, the current present.

Quand je te dirai "tout à l'heure" ça ne sera pas vrai puisqu'il y aura eu des années, et pourtant c'est tout à l'heure. Je suis obligé de le dire. C'est la vérité. Tu vois bien qu'on ne peut rien raconter?

The anxiety of John, insofar as time is concerned, centers not so much around the rapid disappearance of the present moment but, rather, which one of these disappearing moments is the most true. Whereas the present represents truth for Mahu, this same truth for John might be an event of today or may have been an event of yesterday or a long time ago. The importance for John is not so much the actual passage of time as it is the knowledge of an event which took place at a certain time in his life. In the case of Mahu, truth is enveloped in the presence of the moment when the event occurred. Each passing moment increases the distance in

4Ibid.
5Ibid., p. 118.
time from the actual event and, at the same time, engenders the disbelief that such an occurrence took place. In the case of John, truth is enveloped in the knowledge of the actual event at whatever time it might have occurred.

John comes face to face immediately with this challenge of what is true and how best to present it. "Quand on commence une histoire le mieux est de dire je suis né." Although this statement is the accepted manner of beginning a story, something else tries to creep insistently into the writing: "En cherchant bien, on ne m'a jamais piqué avec une longue aiguille et pourtant c'est dans ma tête, dans ma tête l'envie de dire: 'On m'a piqué avec une longue aiguille.' " Simple stories which begin with "I was born," true though that statement may be, are perhaps no truer than never having been pricked by a long needle. Simple stories depend upon the memory, a faculty of man which can never be totally reliable since "les enfances sont plus nombreuses à mesure qu'on grandit, elles se multiplient et voilà déjà une cause de confusion."6 And besides, John does not have a retentive memory but one which does not function "sans une émotion toute fraîche."7 Because of his lack of memory he would prefer to live in a world where this faculty would be excluded and where one could talk only about the events of the current day. Truth could even exist in the imaginary

6Pinget, Le Renard, pp. 8-10, passim.
7Ibid., p. 16.
pricking of a long needle. The "true" life would be one of invention.

... on inventerait, on inventerait au fur et à mesure, c'est ça la vraie vie. La naissance d'un objet, j'ai remarqué, n'a pas lieu aujourd'hui; il y a du mouvement tout autour qui l'empêche de montrer la tête, et demain tu t'aviseras qu'il existe. Par conséquent la meilleure explication des origines serait de commencer par les bruits de bouche et de glisser progressivement vers des paroles articulées jusqu'au moment où l'auditeur sans se poser aucune question participe à ton histoire. ⑧

The bruits de bouche thus begin to flow from John Tintouin Porridge as the reader is initiated into a novel which, like Mahu, will be another abortive attempt at reconstructing a reality.

The reality will not be easy to come by since John is unsure of what his own reality is. He cannot see a "real" personal future for himself as his life has become inextricably linked with his invented stories.

... je ne suis plus une personne, ce sont les autres qui disposent de mon bloc de printemps ratés, on me dit viens su-sucre et j'accours. Quel ennui de n'avoir pas d'avenir. J'ai des naissances à revendre. Je n'ex- plique pas autrement ces idées qui me viennent pèle-mêle sur mes premières années, j'en ai des millions contradictoires. ⑨

Les naissances à revendre are the many sketches of the painter, John Tintouin Porridge. It is in painting that he finds his element, where his mind finds repose and in which he can advance any hypothesis without the possibility of

⑧Ibid.

⑨Ibid., p. 13.
error. "La peinture entretient en moi la poésie, il faudrait ne pas sortir de son orbe magique."\textsuperscript{10} The thoughts of this magical sphere continue until one morning he is struck by a sentence from the Bible having to do with foxes: "Ce matin j'ai dans la tète une phrase de la Bible, quelque chose comme 'Méfiez-vous des petits renards' et il est aussi question de vignes, oui les renards dans les vignes."\textsuperscript{11} He tries to think about little foxes ferreting the vineyards. These \textit{bruits de bouche} creep progressively toward articulated words and, little by little, amidst his digressions, a spot of red color imposes itself on the painting. John is attracted to the idea of the fox and this abstract idea becomes clearer and clearer and soon takes on the form of "a" fox. Thus is fashioned the first alter ego of this painter of novels.

\textit{Pourant Renard me plait, il me ressemble, je suis un rôdeur, je grapille à la sauvette, mon langage est incohérent, mais si la vérité est tordue et que j'aie décidé de lui laisser ma peau?}\textsuperscript{12}

The Fox invents a trip to Israel after meeting an old Jew who is going to Jerusalem. The Fox asks to be allowed to follow the Jew like a dog and the Jew agrees, forming the starting point for the "novel."

\textsuperscript{10}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 21 [cf., "Prenez-nous les renards, Les petits renards qui ravagent les vignes; Car nos vignes sont en fleur." Le Cantique des cantiques 2:15 (Nouvelle Edition Revue)].

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 25.
With this idea in mind, John's thoughts are momentarily distracted elsewhere as he receives a commission to paint the Creation for an elementary school. "Tu vas nous peindre la Création, c'est pour une école de banlieue, alors surtout pas de mythologie." His "Creation" is begun with splashes of blue paint representing roads in the mountains and in the sea. The only way to take possession of a canvas is to cover it with routes which limit and organize this country. Once he has restricted his canvas country, his "Creation" becomes one of personal, imagined objects although among the objects which he selects from his imagination to depict are many which have directly influenced contemporary man's life style. His first images are motorcycles and dozens of multi-colored kangaroos with bicycle-wheel eyes. The motorcycles repose on the oversized tails of the kangaroos. To these images he adds animals and Noah's ark in the form of a vaporetto, factories, California oranges, oil wells, and the signs of the Zodiac.

While working on the painting he decides that he wants to take a vacation in order to keep alive his taste for adventure and to break away from the normal routine of his life. At this point he happens upon an advertisement offering trips to Israel for a modest fare. The idea of such a voyage had germinated long ago in his mind during his childhood and his catechism lessons. The advertisement

13 Ibid., p. 27.
offers him the possibility of rejoining and verifying the legendary and Biblical images collected in his infancy. He decides to take this voyage which for him, not being a Jew, would be "la suprême originalité." Consciously, John feels such an act is original; however, it is the only "logical" direction in which his spiritual vagaries will lead him. His abstract vision of the Fox, originally sprung from the Bible, was given concrete form through the power of his subconscious and the wandering Jew evolved and was in turn given life by the Fox. These "truths" momentarily gave way to the emergence of a new reality--his Creation lined with blue roads. Where better to ascertain the veracity of his present spontaneous imagery than along these ancient paths? His "Creation" cannot be a completed masterpiece. By its very nature it implies and, indeed, insists upon an ever-changing picture. In order to achieve a certain reality, no matter how fleeting it may be, in his creative act, he must "subject" himself to that creation, to allow the created to also act upon the creator. Just as he, through his painting, creates objects, these very objects have already shaped him and will continue to mold him into what he "truly" is and will determine what he will "truly" create. So this artistic journey becomes inevitably necessary in order to stifle his "living" and to bring into focus his "being," his truth.

The trip to Israel recalls his vision of Renard and
the Juif errant; thus, the subconscious predetermined idea of such a voyage is reinforced.

Or c'est au milieu de mes Juifs, longtemps après l'embarquement, sur le bateau, que j'ai pensé à cette histoire vieille de plusieurs mois, et j'étais maintenant avec eux, mes compagnons de mer. C'est ça que j'ai trouvé bizarre. Je n'ai pas l'habitude de croire à ce que je dis, et voilà qu'il y avait une sorte de confirmation, du présage peut-être flottait dans l'air quand j'avais parlé de Renard sur le port, ... C'est pourquoi ce Renard collé au Juif errant, ce Renard que j'aimais trouvant qu'il me ressemble s'est vu soudain à l'ordre du jour, il devenait moi sur le bateau car tout ce qui ressemble à prophétie ...

He has no choice but to include them since they are a "part" of him which he cannot deny. He might as well introduce them officially as his traveling companions "puisque sans que je les sollicite ils sont sortis tout seuls de mes brouillards et prophétiquement."

At this point the better part of the novel is given over to the voyage to Israel and, subsequently, the travels throughout that country in the person of John and his alter egos--David, Renard, and Benjamin. The Wandering Jew is given the Biblical and Judaic name of David; he is old, wise, and devout and has never seen "his" country before. Benjamin is a Jewish painter, also a "returning" exile, who is attracted to the odd couple of David and Renard and who compiles an album of sketches dealing with the adventures of these two characters. He is, undoubtedly, the alter ego of

14Ibid., p. 37.
15Ibid.
John the painter. The stage is set then for John's novel and the reader is introduced to Israel through the eyes of John and Renard whose viewpoints tend to merge together in the guise of Gentile tourists, through the eyes of David in the guise of the pilgrim Jew, and, finally, through a series of adventures in the realm of the imagination which takes the reader into the past history of Palestine. David's view of Israel relies heavily upon the words of the Bible which haunt him as he sees the places with which they are associated.

The view of Israel through the eyes of John is very touristic in nature as he travels through the countryside unable to see the living history which he expects. He is only deceived by modern and familiar cities and people who bear no outward signs of being totally different for being inhabitants of the Promised Land.

16Ibid., p. 80 [cf., "De là David monta vers les lieux forts d'En-Guédi, où il demeura, Lorsque Saul fut revenu de la poursuite des Philistins, on vint lui dire: Voici, David est dans le désert d'En-Guédi." I Sam. 24:1-2 (Nouvelle Edition Revue)].
The excursion into the realm of imagination is a voyage through Biblical times and recorded history. This journey brings the reader into contact with such characters as the Sire de Joinville, historian of the Crusades, Suleiman the Magnificent, the Saracen ruler, a Roman emperor, Mary Magdalene, known as Mama, Lazarus, and even Don Quixote and Sancho Panza who appear to have taken up residence in the Holy Land. This group of oddly assorted characters represents the verification of those names which inhabit the childhood memories of a young boy and which continue to dwell in the mind of a man who, though conditioned to the inhibited ways of society, is never able to erase the layers of memories destined to lie in the subconscious forever unless stirred up and reinvigorated by an exterior object.

Thus, the present and past come colliding together in this imaginary novel of John Tintouin Porridge, an author who cannot control the "reality" of his novel any more than his own "reality," and yet he continues in his attempt to master the uncontrollable novel whose subject matter was chosen from a vast inventory of invented material in order to escape the eternal ordinariness of "I was born," the suffocating banality of "living," as opposed to "being." For it is the novel which counts here and not the subject matter. It is the profound need to write a novel even

\[17\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 104.\]
though it is a novel which writes itself, which obeys no writer's commands. It is a risk and, most probably, a failure, but there remains the greatness of the attempt: "J'y pense, j'y pense, un livre quelle prétention dans un sens mais quelle extraordinaire merveille s'il est raté dans les grandes largeurs. Les grandes largeurs."\textsuperscript{18}

The fact that the whole affair appears like a dream is because that is exactly what it is. Life for John has become one great imaginary voyage as the boundaries of reality have become more and more blurred. This retreat into the imagination is, for the most part, a defense against the constant incapability of finding his own truth. His whole life has been a witness to his attempts to discover this elusive truth. Each attempt has ended in failure and has left him with one overwhelming emotion: "J'ai le coeur gros de commencements toujours ratés."\textsuperscript{19} Thus he has sought refuge in his subconscious where the elements of reality and fantasy tend to merge and where a certain equality tends to reign. He refuses to listen to himself, to the conscious voice which insistently repeats "I was born" for to do so would only lead him into the same error made many times before. However, the factualness of his being born will not hinder his attempts to continue since both his honor and his posterity are at stake.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 93.

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 10.
Si je m'écoutais je recommencerai par je suis né, là, maintenant. Pas par manque d'idées, par scrupule. Si je n'étais pas né. Ce serait le moyen d'y remédier à la sauvette. Qu'est-ce qui m'en empêche. Non je ne veux pas. Amour-propre. Peut-être même honneur. L'honneur de continuer.20

The final part of the novel finds John once again at home in Fantoine. He has not advanced in his search for a true story and the manner in which to write it; however, like Mahu, he has won. He has endeavored to put into focus the impossibility of the attempt to portray reality in the heretofore accepted novelistic form. Fundamentally, and again along the same line as Mahu, he has brought doubt to bear upon the very nature of reality. What is real? What is unreal? There exists no great difference between these two questions for John. In fact, it is doubtful that he would even consider such questions with any conviction. The narrative in the remainder of his work, after his return to Fantoine, shows no better control than it had previously. The narration alternates between rational description, lists of things or activities, and flights of fancy. After a circumstantial account of a day in the life of the narrator, the reader is suddenly thrust into an imaginary autopsy on Joan of Arc where again he receives another jolt--Joan is discovered to have been a man. Desperately trying to finish his novel, John appropriately selects the clutter in his room to étouffer the remaining blank pages, but even with

20Ibid., p. 82.
this description there still is more writing to be done, more words to be evoked before the pages can be filled. "Ça y est j'ai fait le tour. Il me semblait au départ en avoir pour des heures. Comme on se trompe." At this point he meets Mlle Lorpailleur who is not at all satisfied with his account of the novel and gives him this advice: "Moi si j'avais à parler des origines je commencerais par les miennes, je commencerais par: 'Je suis née'." She then proceeds to give him a series of possible beginnings for a novel, using her own life as an example, and each commencing with "I was born." The illustrations become more and more ludicrous only to finally degenerate into a cacophonous coda.

In the end the book comes full circle in its search for its origins. From the original bruits de bouche and the progression toward articulated words, the reader finds himself finally isolated on a desert island with the discordant bruits de bouche of the author whose last sentence is the same as the first: Je m'appelle John Tintouin Porridge.

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21 Ibid., p. 216.
22 Ibid., p. 221.
23 Ibid., p. 235.
CHAPTER IV

A NEW LANGUAGE, A NEW REALITY

Graal Flibuste

The fourth work and second novel of Pinget, Graal Flibuste, was first published by Les Editions de Minuit in 1956. In 1963 the same version appeared in the series Le Monde en 10/18, published by Union Générale d'Édition. Then in 1966 an édition intégrale, or complete edition, was once again published by Les Éditions de Minuit, containing sixteen new chapters.

A step from the journal of John Tintouin Porridge to that of the narrator/hero of Graal Flibuste is a big one indeed, and a welcome one. For with this step Pinget situates himself as an author to be reckoned with and writes one of his most interesting and well-known works. The reader is still very much in the world of a Mahu and John Tintouin Porridge: once again the naïve tone of a Mahu-explorer is established and the reader enters a realm of pure fantasy with, from time to time, a momentary return to "reality"; however, these moments are far fewer than in Mahu or Le Renard. The retreat into fantasy is a calculated decision on the part of the hero of Graal Flibuste.
The work begins with an untitled passage, an italicized type of prologue, in which a lonely alcoholic falls asleep in the company of his only companion, an old cat. The red-nosed man is seated at a table with a bottle, a hat on his head heavy with drink, eyes lost in contemplation as he wonders why he is there. The cat, with his monstrous too-heavy head, thinks: "Nous sommes bien assortis, ... je suis un monstre ridicule et lui un raté, ce qui revient au même." This scene which the cat has seen repeated many times may end well "si tout va bien. Mais il y a des soirs où rien ne va, où les pensées et les mouvements sont en cul-de-sac." It is a sad and pitiful scene repeated over and over again between the old man and the cat. Their relationship has reached the stage of mutual dislike and yet they are tied together by an unbreakable bond, each representing for the other a defense against the loneliness and solitude of life. When the cat moves out of his field of vision, the old man thinks he has swallowed him in the last drink of wine. Unable to see the cat, he believes himself left alone in the world. "J'ai donc avalé ce chat, se dit-il, me voilà bien seul. A l'évocation de sa solitude, l'ivrogne se met à pleurer." In spite of this sporadic sentiment on the part of the alcoholic old man, both he and the cat are, in a sense, the other's enemy. While providing each other their

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only companionship, theirs is a kind of love-hate relationship. It is a situation very reminiscent of Camus' *L'Etranger* in which a similar relationship exists between Salamano and his dog. "Ils ont l'air de la même race et pourtant ils se détestent." Camus' two societal misfits and Pinget's ridiculous monster of a cat and his alcoholic companion all experience a mutual hatred because the other one is always there, serving as an ever-present reflexion of their own abnormality. The surprise one feels at the tears of the old alcoholic, who believes he has swallowed his companion, corresponds to the sentiments of Meursault when he learns of the disappearance of Salamano's dog: "Et au bizarre petit bruit qui a traversé la cloison, j'ai compris qu'il pleurait." The bond that ties these four creatures together stems from their realization, albeit unconscious, that life extends no further than the societal castoff with whom each one resides.

The prologue devoted to the old drunkard gives no clues as to his identity nor any clear reason for Pinget's insertion of this part of the novel. Who is this man? Is he the narrator who, in his drunken stupor, will recount the fantastic voyage which is to follow? Is he, perhaps, the coachman Brindon who accompanied the narrator to the

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3 Ibid., p. 61.
land of Graal Flibuste and is now reliving his experience? It is possible that such is the case when one considers the coachman's name which might evoke the Old French word *brinde*, meaning libation. Brindon's usefulness in the land of Graal Flibuste is in direct contrast to the role of the drunkard in the prologue which may be sufficient reason, at first, to reject such a proposal; however, all men--misfits or conformists--in their "dreams" envision themselves as they would like to be rather than what they actually are so perhaps the drunkard is, in "reality," Brindon. On the other hand, he might presage Levert of Le Fiston for he thinks upon falling asleep: "Tant d'années avec cette bouteille pour une lettre qui n'est pas arrivée ..." So the reader is left to choose which explanation most suits his own "fancies."

The prologue completed, the reader is immediately thrust into the land of Graal Flibuste who is the god that reigns over the fantasyland of Le Chanchèze. At first sight it is a somber land of *désolation* and *puanteur*, populated by rats amidst whose cadavres and skeletons stands the temple of Graal Flibuste which resembles a casino. This first glimpse of the kingdom, however, is deceptive as the narrator soon learns when he is given an audience with the sultan and hires a carriage to take him to the palace. At this point he meets his erstwhile traveling companion, the

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coachman Brindon, who "avait grand allure. Massif, carré
d'épaules, une tête de dieu et de petites oreilles; la nuque
était admirable, large comme deux mains et pointillé d'acné
d'un beau noir." Thus the narrator and his coachman begin
their quixotic and surrealistic adventure through this
never-never land of papillons-singes, the bloues, the sor-
cière Vaoua, and the anémones as they make their way up to
the grande porte.

To say that the "adventures" are quixotic and sur-
realistic should indicate that, as a novel, the continuity
is not one of plot in the accepted sense of the term. There
is implied within the two personages the character duo of
Cervantes. This literary reference is found in the period
of three of Pinget's novels: Le Renard, Graal Flibuste, and
Baga. This analogy is explicit in Le Renard where David and
Renard correspond roughly to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza;
in fact, the quartet of characters actually meet during the
imaginary voyage of John Porridge and his alter egos, the
imagination of John permitting such a meeting regardless of
geographical limits. The Quixote-Panza analogy in Graal
Flibuste is of an implicit nature although it has more in-
sight than the imagined physical encounter in the previous
novel. One is able to depict in the characters of the nar-
rator and Brindon the two aspects of life symbolized by
Cervantes' two "heroes," Brindon being the "servant" who

5Ibid., p. 13.
sees things only as they are and the narrator being the "master" who sees everything glorified. Brindon's personality is that of an ordinary, "realistic" man with human faults who is fond of the creature comforts and who is ignorant of and not overly interested in any life beyond these limits. He remains, however, like Sancho Panza, loyal to his companion and capable of generous action. The resemblance between Don Quixote and the narrator is of a more superficial nature. Although Pinget has not endowed his narrator with a character of nobility, he has given him tragi-comedic qualities and has rendered him incapable of accepting his present reality. Also reminiscent of the man from La Mancha, the French traveler is, in his own way, a reformer although Pinget has chosen to direct the reformation to that of the novel itself—a work of art which, at best, can only hope to capture a passing and constantly changing moment of reality.

While the dominant and central theme is one of a voyage, the structure of the whole depends upon the discovery and description of new objects and places. With each succeeding passage the surrealistic vein of the marvelous and humorous is ever-widened, culminating in the complete unbridling of the imaginative function. The process is begun in the prologue where from the first line, the reader is slipped into the subconscious of the old man. His dreams, produced by his solitude and excessive drinking,
serve as the introduction into this surrealist's refusal and denial of his conscious existence. His solitary life is bereft of any conscious destiny. He, like Mahu and Porridge before him, is in the process of discovering and, if need be, inventing a reality for himself. His irrational voyage is the elevation of the subconscious to a position of power over the "rational" and incomprehensible world of reality. The danger inherent in the unreality engendered by the subconscious is the eventual return to "reality." The fear of such a regression underscores the constant drinking bouts of the old man and, by extension, the anxiety felt by the narrator when his dream voyage is on the threshold of ending.

A more positive surrealistic element discovered in the work is that of a kind of automatic writing. The pen of Pinget, inspired by the surrealistic powers of the subconscious, allows that unconscious mind to find expression through uncontrolled and uncensored images. *Graal Flibuste* is basically an experiment with language. The true reality of this marvelous land is the words themselves and not the things these words describe. Language is the raw material of the novel demonstrating a love for verbal invention in all its forms. As one critic has pointed out, "Graal Flibuste ... ce nom évoque une quête poétique par un pirate du
The flibuste of the narrator has to do with ordinary words which he uses in an attempt to reinvent a creation. The graal in question embodies a certain satirical significance.

Le sens de Graal Flibuste est très vague en effet. "Flibuste" est certainement une manière de tourner en dérision et de satiriser le caractère sacré du Saint Graal. Mais mon roman n'est pas volontairement une satire de la religion per se, ni une démonstration de la tendance qu'ont les gens d'adorer les fétiches, les objets matériels, etc. ... Je cherche à faire des jeux de mots, des calembours, et à écrire des drôleries. Graal Flibuste est une parodie de la langue en particulier. C'est le son des mots énoncés par les personnages qui m'importent.

One would not be completely amiss, however, to read a certain religious sentiment into the novel. Although the title of the work indicates an element of satirization concerning the sacred character of the Holy Grail, Pinget indicates that the work does not portend to be a satire of religion per se. In the literary creations of Pinget there is not only an absence of humanity but also an absence of Supreme Being. The act of the narrator in this work, his attempt to produce a new creation, by its very placement in the land of Graal Flibuste, is an effort to rectify the absence of such a god-like force in reality. This religious obsession of the narrator is evidenced by his notion of

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perfection and idealism which he seeks in this newly-created world. The work is placed not only in the land of this strange god but is also placed under his seal. There is, in the act of the narrator, a kind of religious mania to abolish all imperfection and to penetrate the mystery of life. Finally, the genealogy of Graal Flibuste himself may be stylistically compared with the Bible: one form begets another.

Prak engendra Flop.  
Flop engendra Duic.  
Duic engendra Poutousse.  
Poutousse engendra Nouille.  

..........................  
Peute engendra Peute-Peute.  
Peute-Peute engendra Cornette.  

..........................  
Tourte engendra Tarte.  
Tarte engendra Bonne-Confiture.  

The genealogy of the god, Graal Flibuste, however, goes much further than man simply begetting man. In addition to including the numerous man-like gods themselves, Graal Flibuste's divine heritage also reads like a bestiaire with the compsisal of several animal-like gods to which are added gods representative of man's ideas, passions, and emotions. "La Salamandre Tyrpa, fille du feu et de la pluie, quitta ses demeures sous-marines car elle était menacée par le Phoque." Her father, the beneficent sun, gives her a means of self-defense--the ability to spew fire on her

8Pinget, Graal Flibuste, pp. 80-81.  
9Ibid., p. 62.
enemies. She breathes this fire of vengeance on the Seal who, because of his immortality, retains only some black spots on his skin. In order to be forgiven by her, he agrees to find her a husband and returns with the Wind.

Comme il n'a pas de corps et que d'ailleurs la Salamandre brûle tout ce qu'elle touche, leur union fut toute spirituelle; mais le pouvoir de l'esprit est tel qu'ils eurent un fils, c'est le Silence. Le Silence engendra l'Idee, l'Idee engendra la Parole, la Parole engendra la Discordê.10

The birth of the goddess Discord results in an increasingly bizarre genealogy wherein Dan begets l'Icosaèdre whose twenty faces symbolize the twenty perfections to attain in order to be a just person. "L'Icosaèdre eut vingt filles, de chacune de ses faces; ce sont les Horreurs Intimes. Elles font des ravages dans les subconscients."11 From the havoc of the subconscious, the path is short to Prak, Flop, and company.

The genealogical enumeration of Graal Flibuste's past is also suggestive of Rabelais' cataloguing of Pantagruel's lineage. There is the same vein of humor and bizarreness and play on words in the two sketches. Both authors have a profound feeling for language and both give vent to this emotion through the uninhibited use of their imagination. The bloodletting of the Biblical Abel begins the long and varied genealogy of Pantagruel. The bleeding

10Ibid., p. 63.
11Ibid., p. 79.
of Abel results in the most productive year ever for crab apples. This fruit is enjoyed by all but causes, unfortunately, horrible swelling on different parts of the body. "Car aulcuns enfloyent par le ventre, et le ventre leur devenoit bossu comme une grosse tonne; lesquelz furent tous gens de bien et bons raillars." From the swelling, in others, of the legs, the shoulders, and the nose, there were also those who

croyssoient en long du corps: et de ceulx là sont venuz les geans, et par eulx Pantagruel. Et le premier fut Chalbroth,

Qui engendra Hurtaly, qui fut beau mangeur de souppes, ...

Qui engendra Athlas, qui, ...
... garda le ciel de tumber,

Qui engendra Etion, lequel premier eut la verolle pour n'avoir beu frayz en esté, ...

Qui engendra Offot, lequel eut ... beau nez à boyre au baril,

Qui engendra Grand Gosier
Qui engendra Gargantua,
Qui engendra le noble Pantagruel, mon maistre.13

Aside from these genealogical similarities and their natural facility with words, there also can be drawn a parallel between the two writers in their approach to reality. There


13Ibid., pp. 163-164.
is never any question that the reader is delving into a totally fictional world, a world which gives the impression of having been created whimsically and therefore manifests, deliberately or not, the gap existent between life as it is and how one might wish it to be.

Thus the reader finds the narrator taking leave of the stench and desolation surrounding the palace of Graal Flibuste to begin his voyage to the sultan's palace. Along the way he is to marvel at the "oiseaux-tigres ... de couleur fauve rayés de bleu, grands comme des cygnes ... poussant d'horribles rugissements, d'où leur nom." Upon his arrival at the palace he is greeted by the *papillons-singes* that "volent ou bondissent d'un massif à l'autre, leurs ailes bariolées comme des cachemires et leur queue traçant dans l'espace d'élegantes volutes." And not to be overlooked in this magic land are the *chevaux-cygnes* which

évoluent sur le bassin central en secouant leur crinière; ils font perpétuellement ce mouvement nerveux, accompagné d'un hennissement. ... Ce col ployé, ces oreilles de velours cassis, ces yeux humains qui cherchent par delà les murs la compagne impossible car ils sont châtrés. On les mange à la Sainte-Maxerde ... cuits tout entiers dans des buissons de framboises.15

Alongside these exotic creatures and many others the traveler finds himself surrounded also by a dazzling world of flora, an oasis of palms where each trunk "s'élançait à

14Pinget, *Graal Flibuste*, pp. 15-18, passim.
15Ibid., p. 20.
cinquante mètres du sol et s'épanouissait en une touffe de palmes bleues et violettes où se mêlaient des lianes fleuries de clématites safran."16 It is a veritable botanical wonderland where beauty and color run rampant but where there is also a danger:

Tous les lierres me paraissent prêts à m'étouffer, le moindre bruissement était une alerte à l'assassin. Le soir tombait. Les pommes dans le feuillage prenaient l'éclat de joyaux; elles furent bientôt incandescentes. Les grands champignons mauves s'étaient courbés jusqu'à terre, dans la position de sommeil.17 In spite of and, perhaps, even enhanced by the imagined danger, the flora and fauna remain to dazzle the eye with their surrealistic beauty, the lavandes-mouettes and the verge-douces amidst the joies-du-matin, "des sortes de soleils roses aux pétales liquides." And among the vireceintures and the rose-caques are found the sois-sois, "tubéreuses à voix humaine," and the barcarolles, "coques légères qui restent au sol mais dont la tige se dessèche et rapidement se casse, laissant la fleur vaguer de-ci de-là."18 A splendiferous botanical garden comes to life where Pinget can intermingle, blend, and fuse all of the shapes, colors, sizes, odors, textures, and sounds born out of the depths of his imagination. They come to life upon the couvertures charmantes

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16 Ibid., p. 16.
17 Ibid., pp. 75-76.
18 Ibid., pp. 177-181, passim.
des mousses d'apparence tricotée. Multicolores, elles couvrent les hectares de rocaillies. ... Des moutons y paissent et se colorent selon la teinte de leur pâture, de sorte qu'allant de l'une à l'autre ils se trouvent parfois bigarées comme ces verroteries appelés sulfures. On dit que les couvertures charmantes, lorsqu'on y fait l'amour, découplent la passion et que meurent de plaisir les amants qui se sont abandonnés à leur moelleuse invite.19

Magic, color, wonder, beauty—the reader has progressed far beyond the rather prosaic writer-painter that was John Tin-touin Porridge. Graal Flibuste gives him the writing painter. Not only the narrator's personal vision of the "Creation" but, further, his view of artistic creation and the absence of limits residing therein, a fantastic land of color, sound, and light—a sensual land wherein anything and everything are possible, a totally liberated world in which not only the world and its creatures but also its language is subject to renovation, a linguistically liberated world where language, like the creatures of this fantastic land, engenders its own surrealistic radiance.

In Pinget's earlier novel, Mahu, it is a matter of a "novelist" creating characters who are to function according to the rules of the real world, where it matters whether young girls use vinegar or Dop shampoo to wash their hair, where it matters whether the "author" is re-creating "reality," and where it matters that this "reality" is subject to change and therefore inevitably loses its validity for the reader. In Graal Flibuste, however, we find the

19Ibid., p. 180.
"novelist" creating characters who are to function in a completely new world created exclusively for them. The problem of reality and unreality no longer exists. What is real is meant to be only for a selected few. The sole impediment in an otherwise "perfect" world is Brindon who cannot fathom the mutterings of his passenger. Brindon becomes the mildly sarcastic defender of the realistic novel, preferring the vécu to the bric-à-brac, and he serves as a censor, in a manner of speaking, in his attempts to control the "novelist's" fantasies and tendencies to dart from one theme to another totally unrelated one. Through Brindon, Pinget raises the possibility that le vécu may also include some divergence and still remain valid; however, it will remain valid only for the selected few for when the narrator comes face to face with Brindon, he can only wonder sadly:

Oh Brindon, Brindon, dire que vous êtes mon public, mon seul public! N'est-il pas pitoyable que ceux auxquels on désire s'adresser nous méconnaissent et que les bien-intentionnés ne nous comprennent pas? Tout cela est triste.20

Lack of comprehension and ignorance—all that is sad, but all that is also, in the eyes of the narrator, the rocky road on which the novelist must travel. He must be true to himself, to his own reality, for in the realm of the imagination the author is sovereign; yet, he must make it accessible to his public, or does he? The risks are great if he chooses to render the reality of a Brindon:

20 Ibid., p. 83.
J'ajouterai incidemment, que seule la vérité a droit à nos suffrages. L'expression "dire la vérité" me suggérait jadis l'image d'un homme grossier, à la forte poignée de main, tranchant du tiers comme du quart; les mots droit, franc et loyal m'inspiraient la plus profonde horreur ... la vérité en ressortait méconnaissable, travestie en brutalité. Quelle confusion stupide, n'est-ce pas? La vérité si nuancée, si subtile, si diverse; prendre le parti de la vérité, c'est se livrer aux acrobaties les plus périlleuses, les plus...

Should the novelist-contortionist risk the perilous acrobatics? The answer might be found with those natives of:

Ce quartier où voisinent des édifices sans utilité, des chapelles inachevées, des gares en trompe-l'oeil, des casinos sans toit, des façades d'hôtels, ... des boulevards pour rien ...

where the truth of history, le vécu, is completely falsified, where only a semblance of Brindon's reality reigns, but where such falsity so closely parallels what is thought to be real that it is readily accepted by these natives.

They who have so recently constructed such realistic ancient ruins, complete with fictitious historical dates, seem to provide an answer. So successful are they, elevated to three stars in the tourist guide in the course of one year, that they are anxious to begin more construction, but they will have to wait, like any good realistic novelist, until it "nous permette de faire assister nos touristes à la construction même des ruines sans pour cela leur ôter de l'idée

\[21\text{Ibid., p. 83.}\]

\[22\text{Ibid., p. 89.}\]
qu'il s'agit de témoignages du passé."23 These natives seem to underscore a Baudelairian concept of the artist and reality: the work of art is essentially a work of the imagination and yet it is true and real at the same time. Thus the novelist, like these builders of a deceptive past, faces the difficulty of permitting the reader to witness the construction of the novel without removing the thought that he is witnessing the re-creation of reality. Yet, this deceit is the only possibility for the true novelist—pretense equals reality and reality, pretense.

However, at the end of the voyage the route to this deceit is blocked reality, in the conventional sense of the term, which may or may not destroy the equation of pretense and reality, dependent upon the force of the writer. We find the narrator's enthusiasm at arriving at the sea heightening in ratio to the manner in which this same sea seems to be constantly withdrawing from their approach. He asks Brindon: "Expliquez-moi pourquoi je crains d'arriver à la mer," and the coachman replies: "Parce que vous ne saurez pas comment la décrire."24 Thus the Mahu-like narrator, as did his predecessors, Mahu and Porridge, confronts the now familiar Pingetian dilemma of how to write a novel and how to please a public. Mahu simply bids farewell to his novelistic adventure and Porridge ends his adventure in

23Ibid., p. 91.
24Ibid., p. 186.
half-demented surrealistic babbling. In *Graal Flibuste*, however, Pinget becomes more optimistic with his newly discovered possibility for the narrator's adventure does not end but simply pauses in front of the grande porte which reaches to the heavens. "Elle était construite au milieu d'un espace dénué de cultures." It may be just the beginning.

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CHAPTER V

ONLY A TEMPORARY HAVEN

Baga

Pinget's fifth work and third novel, Baga, was published in 1958 by Les Editions de Minuit. An English translation, bearing the same title, was published in 1967 by Calder and Boyars of London, translated by John Stevenson.

In some ways Baga can be regarded as a continuation of Graal Flibuste. The reader is once again jettisoned into the realm of a dream world although here the meanderings are more consciously controlled and hence decidedly less colorful than those found in the preceding novel. The imagery congered up here may be termed mundane or even, in some cases, grotesque as compared to that plucked from a high-flying spirit in Graal Flibuste and the tone which Pinget sets in Baga alternates between expansion and contraction of the mind of the narrator. The world of Baga has lost the element of light-hearted fantasy which was so prevalent in the preceding novel, the extravagant and unrestrained imagination of the adventurous artist-writer having been replaced by the hallucinatory imaginings of a half-demented old king. The nature of the adventures has also been considerably altered in Pinget's latest work: whereas the
narrator of *Graal Flibuste* has succeeded in escaping into a world of complete fantasy, here the fantasy is tempered by the constant return to reality, viewed here as an inescapable stumbling block which must be dealt with as such.

A continuity between the two novels is found in the reappearance of several characters previously encountered in *Graal Flibuste*. The presence of these figures in *Baga* gives some credence to a supposition that the journey through the land of *Graal Flibuste* might very well have been only one more imaginary voyage of King Architruc. Among the members of his court are the duchesse de Bois-Suspect and the princesse de Heûm, two devotees of the orgiastic life confronted by the narrator of *Graal Flibuste*; their position at the court of Architruc is that of ladies in waiting for the concubines ("on sait qu'il n'y a pas de reine en titre"). The reader also meets again the mythical figure of King Gnar. "Il y a une caverne. Dedans, le roi Gnar. Il a un conseiller qui est un serpent. Ainsi qu'il a été dit quelque part." He appeared, in *Graal Flibuste*, as a personage in one of the many tales told to the narrator: the roi Gnar inhabited an underground cave, resembling a gigantic rabbit burrow, with his family and his friend and adviser, a

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2 Ibid., p. 92.
serpent called le Boeuf. In addition to the characters shared by the two novels, the kingdom of Architruc includes the territory of Chanchège, also the kingdom of Graal Flibuste. In Baga this region has become a point of contention between Architruc's realm and the neighboring country of Novocordie. It remains the same rat-infested land found by the narrator of Graal Flibuste and it is this infestation which leads to war between la Novocordie and Architruc's kingdom.

Although this element of similarity concerning proper names and places is in the novels of Baga and Graal Flibuste, it should be noted here that this similarity is not restricted to these two novels alone. The reappearance of characters and place names becomes a constant in the works of Pinget and a point which will be developed further in this study after the consideration of the individual novels.

Another more striking similarity is that of the two-character situation: the narrator and Brindon, Architruc and Baga. Baga serves, however, as a much more stable touchstone of reality than does Brindon. The latter takes part in the fantastic voyage of his companion serving as the coachman who makes the physical element of the voyage possible; however, his presence as a traveler in the world of fantasy causes his role as the "realist" to be not as keenly etched out as that same role played by Baga. The reality of

3Pinget, Graal Flibuste, p. 114.
Brindon is less powerful because of its subjugation to the power of fantasy whereas Baga's reality remains a separate and counterbalancing force, that is to say, an equal force which allows his companion the freedom to engage in his flights of fancy but who never lets himself be in the world of fantasy itself. The importance of reality on the scale of life is best illustrated by Pinget's choice of titles for the two works. Baga purports to be the memories of an unprepossessing king but the title is given over completely to the king's minister, Baga, the anchoring force for the king's shifting identities, the true governing hand of the kingdom, and the perpetuator of reality within the life of the king, the stabilizing force in his launches toward fantasy. Fantasy, in order to survive, needs its counterbalance, reality, since it is solely through the existence of restricting elements that these moments of liberation can be defined and appreciated as such.

The novel begins with the statement, "je suis un roi." The narrator then proceeds to modify this assertion: "Oui, un roi. Je suis roi de moi. De ma crasse. Moi et ma crasse on a un roi: Je veux dire la crasse de mon esprit car j'ai un esprit." His problem resides in that very fact -- the fact that he has a mind, a mind constantly befuddled by ideas; however, he has renounced the curetage or any

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4Pinget, Baga, p. 7.
operation which might serve to remove the foreign bodies, these ideas, from his mind. As with the other burdens of life, one finds ways of getting used to it. He reconciles himself by an almost complete withdrawal from reality where he attempts to concentrate on impressions received as contrasted to ideas imposed.

La liberté c'est l'absence d'idées. J'ai retrouvé ces machins que j'aimais, qui ne sont pas des idées. Et je les cultive. C'est des sentiments. Ou plutôt des impressions. L'impression d'être bien. L'impression de comprendre. C'est la vraie vie.\(^5\)

The ideas imposed on Architruc are the duties which society and his role as monarch require of him. It is not the life he relishes. His search for freedom entails, then, the discovery of a means of escaping from the world of ideas. "On se faisait des devoirs. Mon Dieu, les devoirs! On a visité les lieux où souffle l'esprit. Ça sent mauvais. C'est des salles bourrées de gens."\(^6\) The world of ideas is symbolized by people with whom he has never been able to communicate, in fact, with whom he has never known how to communicate.

Je ne leur ai pas donné ce qu'ils attendaient de moi, j'étais du genre passionné à froid, ça leur compliquait l'existence. Mes réactions à leurs avances n'étaient jamais celles qu'il fallait, je me souviens d'en avoir souffert, ...\(^7\)

Boredom and ignorance of life has remained with him in the

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 8.
\(^6\)Ibid., pp. 7-8.
\(^7\)Ibid., p. 69.
circulation through the rooms "stuffed" with people. His
denial of this stench-filled world is, however, not imme-
diate. "On fait semblant de ne pas sentir, au début, on
est poli." But he would like to know what is behind this
"odor" of the world of ideas, what it is that the "others"
find satisfying. For years he keeps returning to the places
where l'esprit souffle, to the life of ideas, but, in the
end, the odor repulses him completely. "On a son tabouret
dans le coin et on se bouche le nez. Pour finir on n'y re-
tourne plus. Ah, la liberté!" Freedom for Architruc is
this retreat from the world of ideas, from reality, into a
fantasy world of impressions. His withdrawal from his
duties is made possible by the presence of Baga who has
adjusted to the odors of reality. Thus, it lies in Architruc's
power to restrict his reign to his "state" of mind.
Henceforth, his kingdom will extend only as far as himself;
however, this subconscious kingdom of the mind is further
restricted as he attempts to blot out all reality. Through
his own choice he becomes the sovereign of his impressions,
all the while retaining a hold on a fragile thread attached
to Baga and reality. This slender hold on reality is one
basic difference between Architruc and the narrator of Graal
Flibuste. The fear of reality present in the narrator is
absent in Architruc since his reality, Baga, is a reliable,

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8Ibid., p. 8.
9Ibid.
stable, and constant truth.

In spite of his withdrawal from reality, Architruc insists that he is literally, not metaphorically, a king. "Ainsi lorsque je dis que je suis roi de ma crasse j'emploie une métaphore crasseuse. Ce n'est pas tout à fait une métaphore du reste car outre moi, j'ai des sujets."10 Like Baga, these subjects make up a part of reality from which he retires but, unlike Baga, they remain vague and shapeless forms due to his total disinterest in them. He does go through the motions of kingship, at the insistence of Baga, as he receives ambassadors from other kingdoms from time to time. What he does most and best, however, is sleep, a congenital malady inherited from his father who, as he grew older, was awakened only to sign papers. In the brief periods when the present king is awake, he continues to try, albeit half-heartedly, to fulfill his kingly duties but to no avail. His travels through the kingdom for the satisfaction of his subjects are unsuccessful. His role as arbiter of the laws, as justicier ambulant, is no more successful because, in his somnolent state of mind, all crimes being acts of reality blend together and become indistinguishable and consequently unjudgeable. The difficulty of such a role is compounded by his inability to look at the accused for fear of being called names by them; the validity of his existence would then be put into question if not,

10Ibid., pp. 8-9.
indeed, perhaps, even denied. Like the narrator of Graal Flibuste, there is in both heroes a fundamental aspect of cowardice in their unwillingness to face the truth of life.

The withdrawal from ideas to impressions follows a set pattern in the existence of Architruc. His dream world of impressions is always represented by an element of solitude wherein contact with others is completely lacking or, at most, minimal. Each penetration into these fantasy worlds is kindled by a factor of reality with which he is unable to cope. The desire to escape into a world of solitude is, perhaps, only natural for a king. It is a necessity for one such as Architruc who finds himself incapable of governing not only his physical kingdom but also himself.

One of the anxieties he has concerning his kingdom is the constant worry about warfare and, as it happens, a war with the neighboring country of Novocordie during which he personally leads his troops into battle. Given the uncertainty inherent in any accounting of an event by Architruc, he suggests that much of the information about the war did take place although ending in defeat rather than victory.

C'est pénible. J'ai voulu aller aussi loin que possible. Pour jouer le jeu, comme on dit. A quoi croire? A partir de quand est-ce que tout est faux? Je ne sais plus je ne sais plus. Ce sommeil, ce sommeil qui m'envahit.  

The inbred sleeping sickness of Architruc allows him

11Ibid., p. 66.
the initial penetration into the world of impressions. After the war he becomes a hermit in the forest for a little séjour d'un siècle. Similar to his other forays into fantasy, the life of a hermit offers total solitude, complete aloneness. During this period he keeps a journal and writes letters which are carried away by the wind or the chat-tigre when he places them in front of his cabin. His journal is basically an account of his daily existence in the hermitage, leaving unanswered the reasons why he chooses to live alone. Architruc is not interested in self-analysis.

Si j'analyse mes motifs d'habiter seul ils s'effritent et moi avec, donc je les laisse de côté. Ça me donne l'illusion de vivre sur du mystère comme sur un soubassement.12

To question the reason of his choice would be to endanger the fragility of his existence in the world of fantasy. Reasoning entails the existence of ideas, the very unhappiness from which he wishes to escape. "Je me dis que d'être malheureux c'est de se dire: quand je pense que. Si on ne pense pas que, on n'est pas malheureux."13 Thus the dream-like years pass until he is, in a sense, awakened by the thought of Baga--his reality. Persuaded that he is unfit for such a life, he returns to this reality. "J'ai besoin de retrouver ma chambre et Baga. J'ai besoin de savoir ce

12Ibid., p. 70.
13Ibid., p. 77.
The twin dilemmas of sterility and posterity now come to haunt the mind of Architurc. Because of his inability to father an heir, he decides to adopt an orphan, Rara, whom he tries to remake in his own image. "Je veux refaire ce garçon. Lui coller ma crasse. Qu'il me soit redevable de sa perte. Je me serai perdu deux fois." 15 The decision concerning Rara proves to be as disconcerting as was the war. Faced with the insurmountable task of rearing a child, he once again permits his malady to compensate for his inability to act in the malodorous world of ideas.

In this, his second penetration into the world of impressions in search of solitude, he finds himself a prisoner with only a guard (Baga?) in attendance. "Je me demande comment le gardien connaît Baga, il le cite dans son monologue." Listening to the monologue of his guard, he foresees the possibility of escaping and begins to construct a raft. The construction goes slowly between the hesitations of the builder who cannot decide if he wishes to leave this new life of humility. "Je continue, mais sans enthousiasme. Je me demande pourquoi je voulais partir. Cette nouvelle vie était bien aléatoire et celle que j'ai ici commence à me plaire." But just as he returned to reality

14Ibid., p. 85.
15Ibid., p. 109.
before, he will eventually do so again. Reality will once again conquer his sleep. "Indépendamment de tout ici, de la tristesse qui me gagne, une espèce de joie sans cause. Le monde n'est pas cette prison ni ma peine. Il me visite pendant mon sommeil."  

Once again with Baga he is happy for a time with his room and his morning tea. In order to occupy his time he decides to build another castle. He makes daily visits to the construction site in the company of his minister. There he and Baga seek repose one hot day in the coolness offered by the mountain shade. Thus begins his third and most bizarre penetration into the world of fantasy. He is attracted to the mountain and climbs it, leaving Baga behind. There he discovers a convent and Sister Louise. Following a daily diet of vegetables and prayers he is transformed into a woman and then a nun, annointed as Sister Angèle by Sister Louise. In his new role he keeps a diary wherein he records his falling in love with a novice, Marie. Unable to chase away such perverse feelings, Architruc is once again able to contract his expanding fancies: Sister Angèle renounces not only her sisterhood but also her womanhood, becomes a man once more, descends the mountain to pick up the course of his "normal" routine in the kingdom with Baga at his side. The novel ends with Baga bringing him his usual cup of tea the next morning.

16Ibid., pp. 111-115, passim.
It is almost as though the reader has reached the conclusion of a very conventional novel, discovering everything that has preceded was only a dream, and now he can be comforted to know that he is safe in the realm of normalcy. But in the nebulous worlds created by Robert Pinget one can never reach such a definitive conclusion. The existence of the king-hermit-nun cannot be denied for his memoirs "are" Baga and he has said that he exists in these memoirs.

The congenital malady of Architruc, his tendency toward constant sleep, furnishes a perfect escape for the flights of imagination in which he participates. The hereditary sickness permits him the same freedom as the alcoholic induced sleep of the voyageur in the land of Graal Flibuste. The resemblance is short-lived, however, as reality, in the personage of Baga, plays a much more significant role. Thanks to Baga, the king realizes that he is getting nowhere and achieving nothing in his escapist meanderings—he is even on the verge of losing his identity altogether, not only as king of the land (with his metamorphoses into a hermit, woman, and nun) but also as a writer (his letters are spirited away literally and figuratively during these periods). The end result of any permanent loss of identity as writer-king would inevitably be the sterility and the nullification which he so greatly fears; in this way reality becomes one of the basic needs for the continuance of life. Existence within the confines of complete freedom becomes
self-destructive, even suicidal and thus impossible for the cowardly Architruc. "C'est depuis mon installation solitaire que je découvre combien j'aime les autres."17 In spite of his inability to cope on a direct basis with the people who surround him, his inability to even give them shape and form, he nonetheless realizes that it is only through them that he will be able to survive, just as any writer knows that his immortalization will be brought about not by his wildest dreams themselves but solely by the acceptance of these dreams by a public that insists on being able to recognize at least something that is also a part of its world, however insignificant that it might seem, before accepting the work as valid.

In spite of or perhaps because of all his kingly absurdity, Architruc is first and foremost a writer. As the king he may exercise his power of divine right, as a man he is eternally hampered by his innate absurdity and his lack of rights. These two extremes can be reconciled only by Architruc the writer. Within the nature of the artist there is implicit this same divine right wherein the writer alone controls the creation, existence, and destruction of everything and everyone according to his whim. "Je devrais m'expliquer mais je n'ai pas envie. Je n'expliquerai rien."18 His writing insures a heritage and little matters the

17Ibid., p. 69.
18Ibid., p. 8.
significance of himself or his works. What does matter is sterility—it alone is the unbearable idea for the writer-king:

Dans un sens c'est un peu pour ça que j'entreprends cet ouvrage étant donné que mes femmes ne veulent pas d'enfants. Je pense qu'on est un peu tous les mêmes à vouloir survivre. Quand on s'est coupé toutes les branches, qu'on n'a plus que le tronc et encore, on a des réactions primitives.  

In the world of the Pingetian hero writing is the only act of survival. Whatever significance exists for the hero is there because he creates it himself. One critic has pointed out that in the early works of Pinget

... the chief character has virtually no human reality. He serves as a focal point, within the work, to organize Pinget's inescapably fascinating illustrations of the implications of artistic creation.  

It is true that Mahu and the narrator of Graal Flibuste have no reality. Theirs is a land of pure invention; however, such a thesis loses its validity with the advent of Architruc. If we are to believe him when he says that he is a true king, then we must be willing to accept as true some features in the landscape that is before us. The problem that the hero now has with this reality is how to create a viable existence out of it for himself. He chooses to write, to leave a history of that existence for whichever nephew is to succeed him on the throne. But once again we

19Ibid., p. 20.

are confronted with the tediousness of the writing process, the unfamiliarity with the routes that are to be followed, and the uncertainty of ever reaching a valid conclusion. "Tout mon temps je le perds à rédiger ces mémoires imbéciles, commencés pour laisser à mes neveux un témoignage de ma grandeur mais continus sans but."21 So the aim is pointless and nothing has changed. Or has it? He is happy to find again his customary morning cup of tea. These ritualistic hours are also a part of his memoirs—-they remain the sole constant, unwavering, dependable impression of his life. Such impressions are common to all men; in a sense, one might say that they serve as his communion with les autres. It is only through these mémoires imbéciles that he is able to transfer these feelings of his own worth as an individual and as a progenitor.

The nature of these strange memoirs is basically the appeal of a lonely man in search of love in what he considers to be a hostile and incomprehensible world of reality. Unable to and perhaps unaware of how to mount such a quest, he retreats into worlds of his own making to look for meaning in himself. Each of his metamorphoses is an attempt to find within himself that which he refuses to accept from others. The progress of this self-communion is found in his letters written from the hermitage and which are now in the possession of King Gnar. In this most solitary of

existences, he searches for his true being. "Je t'écris par amour des phrases. Tu es une phrase au fond de moi que je cherche ..."22 But just as reality cannot be without the inner man, so the inner man cannot exist alone. "Je dois vous paraître exigeant, mais étant seul dans cette forêt je voudrais pouvoir communiquer avec l'extérieur."23 He has always seemed to recognize the necessity for others and thus has never fully surrendered his tenuous hold on reality. Nor has his reality, Baga, allowed the grasp to slacken. It is quite possible that Architruc and Baga are one and the same—the interior and the exterior forming the whole person.

Je cours, je cours et sur le perron je trouve Baga! Je tombe dans ses bras. Il savait toute mon histoire. Il me dit qu'il m'attendait ces jours-ci, mon expérience ne devant pas durer plus que les autres. Au lieu d'être vexé je lui suis reconnaissant.24

So we find Architruc with a different solution than that proposed by the narrator of Graal Flibuste: life's meaning is sought unsuccessfully in the fanciful subservience to what one thinks it should be or wishes that it were. Upon his apparent final return to reality, Architruc comments on Baga's scrupulousness in continuing his "real" existence: "Comme tu as été délicat de continuer, Baga! And Baga responds: "Ce n'est pas de la délicatesse, c'est

22 Ibid., p. 104.
23 Ibid., p. 96.
24 Ibid., p. 172.
du bon sens. J'aime mieux la paix."

There is an element of "good sense" which lies dormant in Architruc most of the time. His flights of fancy are, at best, a supplementary freedom given to everyone. They offer no hope of communion with others—a necessary factor if one is to discover a personal reality. Without these "others" Architruc can never achieve a valid existence for himself or a valid heritage to leave behind to ensure his immortality. The retreat from the world into one's self can serve only as a temporary haven. The inner self, the world of fantasy, can never be an impenetrable refuge since an insidious reality, in the form of a Baga, can readily permeate the outer walls.

\[25\text{Ibid.}\]
CHAPTER VI

THEMES AND CONSTANTS

IN THE EARLY NOVELS

It would be well to look back at the early works to see in what ways they could be said to relate to each other while forming a whole, a kind of ensemble. A clear indication of such a grouping together of these first five novels may be found in a scrutinization of the major themes appearing in the works: the search for truth and the yearning for posterity using the devices of fantasy and humor which, because of their prominence, become themes in and of themselves.

Fantasy

A primary aspect of Entre Fantoine et Agapa is that of fantasy. It becomes one of the most prevalent themes comprised in these early works. The discussion concerning Entre Fantoine et Agapa stressed the fact that the fantastic tales of that first production have no bearing in the "real" world whatsoever. These tales owe their existence to pure imagination and any resemblance to reality appears to be completely incidental. The fantasy is one of fairyland
proportions wherein the imagination is permitted to expand unchecked. Since there is no question of the intrusion of reality in this fantasy land, the problem of seeking a co-existence between the worlds of fantasy and reality, a later theme seen in the succeeding novels, is absent. The brief tales are reminiscent of a kind of futuristic comedy in which the most improbable events are related. The very fact that such events seem improbable at the moment lends them, however, a certain tone of seriousness. It should be noted though that this feeling of seriousness has nothing to do with reality for there is nothing real about the events. Nevertheless, any reading of futuristic fantasy produces the impression that, given a different time, the improbabilities are not at all impossible. Thus, one smiles quietly at the outrageous goings-on but always with the haunting fear that they may be stealthfully creeping up on him. In the final analysis, Entre Fantoine et Agapa remains an exercise in fantasy for fantasy's sake. The tales may be viewed as Pinget's preparation to enter the world of fiction, his "finger exercises" of the imagination. In keeping with the nature of subconscious conditioning, he does not purport to give any valid answers to problems raised in later novels nor is he concerned with any basic questions regarding the nature of an existing reality.

The theme of fantasy in the following novels shows a marked difference. Each novel is concerned, in varying
degrees, with the validity of the two worlds of fantasy and reality, of the subconscious and the conscious. The search begins in order to discover to what extent, if any, these two worlds are compatible, whether they can exist separately within one and the same individual, and in what way such a coexistence affects his relationship with himself and with others since, at any given moment, one of the two worlds must necessarily be subjugated to the other.

Such is the case in the worlds of Mahu and Graal Flibuste. There are some striking parallels in these two works as concerns the question of truth and pretense. Both novels present a fantastic realm which serves as a means of liberation for the characters but which is, in reality, a manner of escape. For Mahu and the narrator of Graal Flibuste it is a matter of not being able to cope with the demands of reality. Their attempt to discover an alternative adds a new dimension to the choice of a fantasy world as a possible substitute. This inability to cope with their individual realities stems fundamentally from the fact that neither one is assured that he possesses a human reality. There is, in these early Pingetian characters, a kind of unspoken fear of their failure as human beings as they flounder around in impossible worlds of their own making.

Once in their respective domains of fantasy, the parallel routes begin to diverge. Mahu's basic problem is that he does not know himself, he does not know what he is.
He cannot decide if he is the author of his reality or if he is simply an invented character of another’s imagination. His "escape" then is an attempt to discover himself in his own invented reality. Since his previous existence was meaningless because of the uncertainty of what he was, he is determined now to create a definite and personal reality in an admitted fantasy world. His fantasized reality, however, becomes as unmanageable as was his prior questionable existence. Within the confines of his new world he assumes the control and the freedom of creation. He is soon shocked to learn that the inventions of his fantasy quickly appropriate a reality of their own and, what is more disturbing, a reality equal to his own. The illusory world of Mahu, then, becomes something of an infinite reflecting mirror in which one can see a myriad of Mahus. At this point he is more unsure of himself than before as each person he encounters is viewed as a warped reflection of himself. The attempt by Mahu to find a personal truth in the world of illusion fails. Cognizant of this failure, he returns to his past and uncertain existence, dispensing with his newly-invented world as easily as he created it.

The divergent path followed by the narrator of Graal Flibuste takes him into a world of fantasy by means of a decisive and deliberate choice induced by his besotted mind. Unlike Mahu the traveler in the bizarre land of Graal Flibuste endeavors to discover a "reality" of truly inhuman
proportions. The narrator, like Mahu, is determined also to find a new reality but, unlike Mahu, is tenaciously resolved to preserve the newly-created world. There seems to exist in this hero a kind of fear, as concerns his personal truth, which makes Mahu's entrance into the world of fantasy appear as a frivolous experiment. The conscious world of the narrator has been fully subjugated to the subconscious world of the imagination. There is no question in this work of any possibility of the coexistence of truth and pretense. Frail reality, in the personage of Brindon the coachman, has been decisively overpowered and superseded by the potent strength of the imagination. Among the early novels this work represents by far the deepest and most permanent penetration into the world of fantasy. The narrator has, possibly by means of alcohol, created a fantastic and surrealistic dream world in which no hint of dissatisfaction is present. Instead, there reigns in the mind of the dreamer the desolation and loneliness of his physical existence. He knows what he is, a reject of society, and he is aware of the emptiness of his life. The befogged mind of the narrator regards an invented reality as the one and only alternative to a physically and emotionally empty "true" existence. Thus he cannot, nor does he wish to, face the "sea" of reality. With the aid of his bottle he can keep looking for magic doors which open into the more vast and hidden recesses of the subconscious.
The figure of John Tintouin Porridge stands out among his confrères as representing a kind of reversal of the established order. Mahu, Architruc, and the narrator of Graal Flibuste utilize fantasy as a basis for bizarre and irrational realities. The hero of Le Renard, however, possesses a fantasy world which assumes a rationality not present in his true existence. Leading a dismal life as a maker of hats and later as a mediocre writer and painter, he enters into a fantasy world theoretically to keep his spirit of adventure alive. The penetration into this dream-like universe is basically for the same reasons as his colleagues. There does not exist in his world, however, the same element of rejection so prevalent in that of the narrator of Graal Flibuste. In reality John's life has become the irrational factor—a series of beginnings and endings in which he can no longer see a realistic continuity. He cannot find in his life enough material for an existence even when he surrounds himself with the ordinary objects present in all lives. Thus, the adventurous and imaginative voyage he takes to Israel assumes the mask of rationality personified. Behind this mask, to be sure, appear elements of the ridiculous, but the description of the Promised Land, when compared to John's personal existence, is sane and well-ordered. His return to "reality" does not come about through any personal urgency or desire on his part; at a given moment he simply finds that the end of the voyage has
been written. Upon his homecoming to an inanimated reality, he actually finds himself in a more fantastic realm than the one from which he has just departed. Faced with the nothingness of his true existence, he is last heard from as he enters into a demented and surrealistic world of disconnected thoughts and words.

The unprepossessing figure of Architruc, who is searching for his authenticity in the world of Baga, continues the thematic use of fantasy utilized by his predecessors but also predicts a new direction to be pursued by future Pingetian heroes. The basic problem encountered by Architruc is the insignificance of man and the world. Of all the heroes thus far, he is the first who seems to search for some sort of balance between the worlds of reality and fantasy. He is also the only one who possesses an evident existence—that of a reigning monarch. The role of fantasy in the world of Architruc is also of a quite different nature. His forays into the fantastic are, to a certain extent, similar to those of the narrator of *Graal Flibuste* and Mahu. They represent for the old king, as they did for the previously mentioned characters, a means of escape but the resemblance would seem to end there. The escape of Mahu is produced by the confusion about his state of being and by a desire to create a meaningful existence. The escape of the *Graal Flibuste* narrator is caused primarily by rejection of his known world and the desire to create a new and
improbable existence. In contrast, Architurc's escapes
sometimes seem forcibly induced. Plagued by a kind of
sleeping sickness, there is an aspect of inability to combat
the forays into the subconscious world. At the same time,
however, he permits the voyages without much resistance. A
marked difference in his approach to the imagination is his
unwillingness to detach himself completely from his "real"
existence. Each penetration into the realm of fantasy is
also marked by the fact that it is a freedom that he alone
possesses. Unlike the narrator of Graal Flibuste and Mahu,
he has a constant and stable reality to which he may return.
With this assurance he does return after his periodic ima-
ginary absences. It is a freedom of which Mahu and the nar-
rator are bereft since they do not possess a certain reality
needed for an equilibrium between the two worlds. It is
this very aspect—the presence and impact of reality—which
prognosticates the development of the succeeding novels;
once begun in Baga it manifests itself with increasing fre-
quency and depth with the appearance of future novels. Fan-
tasy has been tried and found wanting. It cannot compensate
for nor can it replace reality. That it has a role to play
is perhaps unquestionable but that role is yet to be deter-
mined.

Search for Truth and Yearning for Posterity

Each character of the early works is a lonely figure
in this world, a character with ill-defined or no familial
and societal relationships, who becomes stereotyped by his prevailing passion. The stereotyping assumes several forms: Mahu is equated with confusion, Porridge with boredom and banality, the narrator of Graal Flibuste with rejection, and Architruc with fear of being rejected by others. As stereotypes and yet surrounded by society, they remain isolated by unseen walls, oftentimes of their own making. Solitary in society, they also remain isolated from themselves by walls around their own truths. Yet, unlike the traditional stereotyped characters where only the end result is meaningful, here they become more than simply external appearance; their external truth is what gives rise to further development, development beyond the stereotype, as they search internally for something valid in and for themselves.

A parallel theme exists in close approximation with that of the search for authenticity. It is a theme which goes hand in hand, so to speak, with the anxiety inherent in questions of one's reality, of one's truth. It is a theme which occurs in not only these early novels but a constant which becomes progressively more endemic to the heroes of Pinget. Each character is consumed with a passion for posterity. This yearning becomes certainly as important as the desire to find one's truth. Given the circumstances of the Pingetian world, truth and posterity are quite naturally tandem themes.

To this end another thematic element is introduced
in the novels which is to become a constant in all of Pinget's work. Each hero is a writer. He will be the master of his own posterity. Haunted by eternity, his becomes an act of self-creation as he tries to satisfy his need for a future and his desire for posterity. Inherent in each attempt at creation is an element of destruction. Once each one has begun to create a personal mythology, he soon recognizes the worthlessness of the undertaking. Each hero's effort is echoed in the words of the narrator of Graal Flibuste who amuses himself by composing the preface of an imaginary book.

J'ai progressé pour ainsi dire à rebours et me voilà plus démuni qu'un nouveau-né. J'entends bien surseoir, puisque j'ai pris le parti d'écrire, à l'arrêt de mort qu'il me faudra prononcer contre moi, mais tiens à prévenir le lecteur que ce livre, à l'instar de qui le composa, diminue d'importance à mesure qu'il grossit, contrairement à l'usage ...¹

Endemic to each hero is the specter of death which shares his isolation. In a sense his posterity depends upon the distance he can maintain between himself and extinction. Thus he writes and writes, words which have no meaning but which hold finality in abeyance. So Mahu tells lies, but it is of little importance since he has won--words equal life. In this way the novel of the traveler in the land of Graal Flibuste diminishes in importance as it increases in size, but increase in size it will. And thus it goes with each hero as he pursues a meaningless mythology in his

¹Pinget, Graal Flibuste, pp. 35-36.
search for posterity.

What is actually being presented to the reader, of course, is not the inconsequential mythologies of these insignificant heroes but rather the whole question of the novel as a literary form. Throughout these early works one hero after another is confronted not only with creating a personal mythology but also with making it acceptable to the public. The narrator of Graal Flibuste decries the fact that he has only his disinterested coachman as his public. Architrucc wonders why he continues his imbecilic memoirs for a family of uncaring nephews. The modern novelist sees himself as struggling against the same unsympathetic public. The intolerant audience represented by Brindon and Baga is a public steeped in a nineteenth century bourgeois art form, an art form which had superseded classical tragedy as the vehicle best qualified to express the problems of that era—the novel.

Il a traduit alors un certain trouble dans les esprits et un besoin de définir la liberté de l'individu en face de la passion ou de la société: d'un individu sûr de lui, de ses pouvoirs et, sinon de l'ordre du monde, du moins de la possibilité d'imposer un ordre au monde.2

Pinget reacts to the situation by presenting the archetypal figures of Brindon who prefers the vécu over the bric-à-brac and Baga who continues on the narrow road of reality out of good sense and because he prefers peace of mind. In the

eyes of the modern novelist it is this very inaction against
which he is reacting as he attacks the indolence of a public
which only requires the belief that order reigns around and
in it. Thus, a segment of contemporary literature marches
forward under the banner of change to attack what has become
the epitome of nineteenth century literature--the Balzacian-
type novel. All elements of the accepted novel come under
fire: character, plot, psychology, and moral or ideological
preoccupations.

The traditional character is a being well-defined
by his social function, by a unifying passion, or by his
personality. An individual and a type, he is representative
and understandable. He remains, for the most part, master
of himself and his destiny. The new novelist regards this
traditional character as truly "fictional," as a flattering
and comforting picture of man but completely false. Char-
acters such as Mahu, Architruc, and the narrator of Graal
Flibuste are not masters of themselves or of their destiny.
Besieged by unknown forces within themselves, they are ig-
norant of who or what they are and of what the world holds
for them. If they stand out as characters, they do so by
means of their inherent weaknesses. Within each character
there is a desire, an obsessive need even, to make himself
understood by his public, by his individual world, as some-
thing more than the insignificant being that he appears to
himself. In order to refinish this negative portrait of
himself he withdraws into his psychic world. He sees his
truth of existence as inhabiting the world of his subcon-
scious.

To this end one finds the multiform character in
the literary world of Pinget. The theme of the tandem char-
acter runs throughout the early novels. For each "real"
character there are one or several alter egos who attest to
his multifaceted personality, to assist in the explanation
of his truth which exists in a self-created and, at the same
time, a self-destructing, fatuous world. The imaginative
life of each character has an always constant anchoring
thread; fragile though this thread may be, it prevents the
complete and final escape from a similarly illusory
"reality." Mahu, the narrator of *Graal Flibuste*, and Archi-
truc possess an anchor, then, in the personages of Latirail,
Brindon, and Baga who remain the representatives of an un-
explainable reality.

The fact that neither the "real" nor the "imaginary"
personality of these double characters find any definitive
answers is due, undoubtedly, to the basic philosophy of the
new novel: the unavailability of any such answers. Given
the psychology of the isolated beings who inhabit the con-
temporary world, the innate coherence of character and
milieu of the nineteenth century novel is lacking. The
modern character is no longer formed according to an order
fortified by the author. The modern novelist presents only
what he perceives and, more importantly, that which is perceived by the author/character. Fundamentally, the new novelist is the isolated individual of his novel. Hence the preeminence he accords to the "artist" who becomes the novel's theme as well as its hero amidst the setting of an abandoned and solitary world where the character underscores the impossibility of communication even with himself. His "story" unravels, self-sufficient, without beginning or end, without any order imposed from the outside and without any immediately perceptible significance. There is no longer the traditionalist's conception of plot as a logical method of operation but, rather, the complete dilution of the element to a point where, in the case of Pinget, it is used as a pretext for an explosion of language.

Language becomes the passkey of the character of the modern novel. Stripped of all the accoutrements of the traditional novel, language stands alone as the subject matter of the novel.

Le sujet du roman, ce n'est ni l'homme qui parle, ni le monde dont il parle, mais le trou que cherche à creuser l'homme dans le monde en parlant: ... La "réalité" se constitue dans l'acte de parler le monde, c'est-à-dire dans le langage. 3

The novel thus becomes a "voice" since each individual within the book is himself a conscious or unconscious voice.

The not-so-distant world of a Kyo or a Tchen, where a man

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is the sum of his acts, seems light years away from the
actual world of a Mahu or an Architruc where a man is the
sum of his expressed or unexpressed words. For Pinget, the
character or his human condition is not what matters. The
material of his novels is language.

Le français, la langue, faire vivre la langue. Jouir
de la beauté du langage. Faire passer sa spontanéité
dans la langue écrite. J'ai l'obsession constante du
langage. C'est mon matériau. S'il y a un sens psycholo-
rique dans mes romans, c'est malgré moi. Ce n'est
pas ça qui m'intéresse.4

Thus the reader is to accept that the Pingetian hero is
basically what he says he is. He is only a discourse which
he speaks. With the advent of the character/voice, the
definition of what is real has been changed. The "objec-
tive" world of a Balzac has disappeared in which the hero's
parlance was only one aspect of a well-defined and well-
ordered universe.

The great abyss which separates the traditional
novel and the new novel is that the "given" world of the
former no longer exists. The psychological patterns and
character traits of a personage created by Balzac or Mauriac
can be easily traced because the author has provided him
with a "given" world to which he reacts according to his
education, his family, his milieu--in general, to his acci-
dent of birth. The Pingetian hero faces a vague, shapeless,
and unknown world void of meaning and without the human

4Chapsal, "Ça crève," p. 121.
appurtenances of family and milieu. In this "given" atmosphere "la littérature cesse alors d'être description, évo-
cation ou analyse, pour devenir interrogation." It is no
longer the comprehensible and definable world of the tra-
ditional novel, a world of "facts" in which the author at-
ttempts to resolve moral and metaphysical problems. The un-
known world of the new novel is itself submitted to inter-
rogation.

Les problèmes moraux et métaphysiques s'effacent devant les problèmes de la connaissance et de la vision du monde: on ne peut se poser de problèmes moraux dans un monde que l'on ne connaît pas.

Humor

The role of humor in the works of Pinget assumes varying characteristics. It is perhaps the most difficult constant to ensnare in the early works. Such a statement should not be construed to mean that the humor is difficult to call forth. It simply means that it is difficult to know the "why" of the laughter that certain passages provoke. It is not a humor that can be easily catalogued or categorized since it is, to a great extent, involuntary on the part of the author. As Pinget states, the irony present in his works "... échappe à mon contrôle. Elle jaillit du tréfonds

6Ibid., p. 221.
de moi-même, je ne la constate qu'après coup." The Pingetian humor emerges subtly from the texts and, with the exception of Entre Fantoine et Agapa, it is rare to find any blatantly comical set pieces. In the early works Pinget's humor has as its fundamental basis the element of the bizarre. In fact, the author tends to equate the humorous with the bizarre. "Je ne cherche que la vérité des êtres et des choses, mais toute vérité est double, et c'est le côté humoristique ou bizarre qui m'apparaît d'abord."8

The duplicity of the humorous and the serious is much in evidence throughout the first works. One might very well postulate that it is a duplicity heavily and intentionally weighted toward the ridiculous. For what purpose? The question of purpose and the ensuing attempt to define the intent of any author can only be an arbitrary effort. However, such an effort should be made since, in the case of Pinget, the element of humor intrudes so predominantly in the early works.

The role played by the author's imagination must account for the major aspect of the "why" of the humor. Basically, it is a form of "black" humor in which the participant finds himself faced with semitragic themes reduced to the point of the ridiculous. The observer of this strange...

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8Ibid.
comical world can laugh indulgently with the assurance that he, himself, is not threatened by the bizarreness of the observed "fictional" world. However, this indulgent laughter may be nothing more than a feeble and unsuccessful attempt to evade his own truth.

The themes of self-creation and destruction are most prevalent in the novels. Since much of the material of the early works has to do with the inability to write a novel, both themes are quite relevant. The intent of Pinget, of course, is to indicate to what extent it is impossible to render a true, realistic account of life. The author who attempts such an undertaking cannot hope to succeed and the quest of an individual and transitory reality is doomed to failure. This basic assumption serves as the premise for much of the humor in these early works of Pinget. This act of the destruction of the established and accepted novel form assumes the disguise of ridicule.

The bulk of the tales and the "Journal" entries in Entre Fantoine et Agapa are, to say the least, bizarre. One of the aspects of the laughter in this small work is the handling of reality. Pinget seems to make a game of the real by taking possible novelistic themes or plot characteristics and, through a kind of surrealistic exaggeration, making them completely nonsensical.

The classic and tragic theme of matricide receives its just due in "Le Cantonnier." From the time of the
classics to the present tales have been told of the accursed nobility. In this case the curse has fallen upon the females down through the ages as each has, in turn, slain her mother. "Mais tout ça, c'est de la petite histoire."
The present heroine has been afflicted with the noble curse and in a most base, awkward, and untragic manner has committed matricide by hanging her mother. "On s'en est rendu compte aux épinards qui ne poussent plus." This noble daughter of the gods, as in any worthy tragedy, is above reproach and the law--her hair is red. Unlike her tinted-hair sisters, she has had red hair since birth. There is no doubt about this fact because "tout le monde connaît son faible pour les pompiers." Like any great tragic heroine she is subconsciously punished by the thought of her heinous crime and takes to wearing her mother's hat in order to hide her distinguishing mark of superiority. Her supreme sacrifice comes when she removes the hat to reveal her newly-dyed black hair. "Le soir elle était sous mandat." Thus, in three short pages Pinget manages to ridicule an otherwise legitimate theme of tragedy--fate striking and twisting the lives of a noble family, the members of which become powerless in the face of such an overwhelming force. As the author clarifies the above incidents, one can see how something so tragic, so serious, can be reversed so easily into the comical--and into the absurd when pushed to its extreme.

9Pinget, Entre Fantoine et Agapa, pp. 37-38.
The comedy of many of the tales is situated in this manner of presentation. As in "Le Cantonnier," examples of atrocious abuses and behavior are stated with simplicity, with an affected indifference as though this manner of comportment were the most natural and commonplace in the world. This element of simplicity in the narrative passages provides sharp contrast with the expectations of the reader and laughter becomes the natural reaction.

Other tales and journal entries of this work are a varying collection of understated and exaggerated humor. Those tales in which one finds an understated humor are all similar to "Le Cantonnier." In these examples the self-importance and pomposity of the human race is taken to task. The drama of life is reduced to the mundane and man's worries are, in the final analysis, relatively unimportant. Assembled together, many of the tales present an unflattering portrait of man beset by the problems of his own insignificant being. Individual man is very much the animal afflicted with the gourd virus discussed in our first chapter wherein everything in its roundness, even Man, has a beginning and an end "... à commencer par les bouses de vaches, les vélodromes et à finir par son propre corps qui pullule de boules."

The tales of exaggerated humor are surrealistic in nature incorporating the inhuman elements of bizarre gods and objects. As one progresses further into

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10Ibid., p. 27.
this kind of baroque augmentation of the ridiculous, there is the consternation and amazement of a person watching a woman weighing herself. Dumbfounded, he sees the needle spin around the face of the scale three times. The comedic effect of all this is further heightened by the utter lack of response on the part of the woman. Another element of the unexpected is then added to an already ridiculous situation when:

J'entendis alors, sortant de sa cage thoracique: "Aliô, ne quittez pas. Je vous branche sur Varsovie. Qui est à l'appareil. Actions 320-4, obligations... etc." Cette femme était une centrale téléphonique.11

A basic element of the humor in Entre Fantoine et Agapa is the aspect of unreality which surrounds the bulk of the tales. One does not have the impression that the subject matter has been selected and then portrayed as either good or evil, likely or even possible. Bizarre and surrealistic themes, being by nature removed from the immediate and personal sphere of the reader, make it impossible for him to relate in a concerned manner with the "characters" or objects which appear in these diverse readings. Thus, the barrier to laughter is quickly dissolved and the reader may simply enjoy the material because of this distance which exists between him and that which is being recounted.

The material of Mahu offers various comic factors

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11Ibid., p. 106.
which differ slightly from *Entre Fantoine et Agapa*, most notably in the presentation of the humor in a kind of novelistic framework. Although both works are the "raw" material of the imagination, the primary section of *Mahu* possesses a tenuous thread of continuity. In discussing the comic aspects of this work, it is necessary to follow the dictates of the author and consider the work in the light of its division into two parts.

The most notable aspect of the comical in the first section is that of comic entanglement. The general impression of these first pages is one of immense comical delusion. One is made aware of this dupery from the first page when the principal character and/or author, Mahu, admits to a complete lack of understanding regarding the events which are to follow. The creation of a novel is at once on very unsure ground. This unsure footing is, however, exactly what Pinget wishes to express. How is it possible to create a realistic novel when all about is uncertainty? The humor rests, to a great extent, on the horns of this dilemma.

The comic entanglements involve not only the "real" authors of the work--Mahu, Latirail, and Mlle Lorpailleur--but also the characters "created" by them. The characters created by these three novelists come to life as soon as they are created or simply wait in suspended form until their moment of entrance is dictated by the completely irrational action of the work. This kind of creative power
can only lead to confusion. Thus, when Latirail decides to change a character's name from Fion to Bouchèze, the poor author can only react with dismay when he reads in the local paper that his newly-named character has been arrested on the charge of strangling someone named Fion. During the trial of the so-called Bouchèze, the mock mystery is made only more ambiguous with the accused man's admission that he is Latirail.

Interspersed among the chapters of Part I concerning the actual and impossible task of writing a novel are those which represent comical ventures into the world of words. In these moments of intense verbal insanity, words destroy themselves by managing to indicate the opposite of what they claim to represent. For example, one finds the people who have to go to bed without eating: "Qui dort dine. ... L'habitude de ne pas manger se prend au sérieux. Elle se prend pour une habitude." It is everywhere that one sleeps. It is found everywhere. It fancies itself another. It begins to think: "Je suis prise si je ne prends pas. Je ne suis pas encore prise, donc prenons tous ceux qui n'ont pas encore pris l'habitude, on verra bien." It takes all those who are eating. They feel nothing and say to themselves: "C'est l'heure de ne pas manger" as if one could say "it is time not to eat" without getting into the habit. They get into the habit and they are caught--they sleep.

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12Pinget, Mahu, pp. 55-57, passim.
Il y avait deux camps, ceux qui mangeaient et ceux qui ne mangeaient pas. Maintenant il n'y a plus que ceux qui ne mangent pas et ceux qui sont mangés. C'est la même chose. L'heure de manger qui vous mange pendant que vous dormez pour ne pas manger elle vous force à dormir et vous êtes mangé par l'heure de manger, vous êtes mort.  

Such is the strange and humorous world inhabited by Mahu and his cohorts, a world in which the boundaries between the creator and the created are interchangeable, a world from which one emerges with an inability to comprehend. Thus, the reader finds himself sympathetic to Mahu as he tries to capture night sounds with his camera. "J'ai un vieux Kodak, il est posé à côté de mon lit. La nuit, quand j'entends un son, tac, j'appuie sur le déclic. Ça fait des photos toutes noires." Character, plot, and words—the three essential ingredients of a novel—also turn out to be intangible blanks for the reader of Pinget.

Part II of the work, "Mahu bafouille," indicates by its title the content of the unrelated essays of an autobiographical nature. The final pages of the work, filled with a kind of nonsensical zest, are Mahu's observations concerning life in general. These chapters in which he philosophizes, analyzes, and collects absurd stories are perhaps the material for a future novel or perhaps for many novels or perhaps simply words pulled at random from the recesses of the mind. The humor is not strident, appearing

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in these final chapters as an understated element. To have been otherwise would have defeated Pinget's purpose to present, in an uncontrived fashion, spontaneous thoughts. In Chapter 22, "Les Echasses," Mahu imagines what it would be like to go around on stilts. He would wear a long coat to cover his feet and he would cross the street against the light as the motorists would stop to look at him. A different approach to humor is seen in several examples of homilies and mundane philosophical utterings.

Lorsque tu dis "tiré par les cheveux" ça ne signifie pas que ce que tu dis est tiré par des cheveux qui lui auraient poussé, mais tout bonnement que pour le dire tu t'es bien graté la tête et au lieu que l'idée surgisse directement tu as dû la conduire encore de la racine des cheveux jusqu'à la pointe.15

And in several scatological stories collected from his friends:

Un de nos amis qui a deux enfants m'a raconté que son gamin dit un jour à sa petite sœur: "Tu sais ce que c'est des suppositoires? C'est des bonbons pour le cul.16

The humor of Le Renard et la boussole appears most prominently in the personage of the unstable and eccentric John Tintouin Porridge, especially during his imaginary voyage to Israel. In these pages which make up the bulk of the novel, it is the bewilderment of John which highlights the comical aspects of the work. Finding himself in a strange country laden with the beginnings of man's history,

15Ibid., p. 113.
16Ibid., p. 149.
he is at times more confused than ever. His accounts of
the Biblical and historical personages whom he encounters
through his alter egos, David and Renard, are studies in
comic caricatures. Interspersed among these portraits are
humorous anecdotes having little or no tangible rapport with
the narrative except that they too are the products of the
lunatic imagination of John Porridge.

The caricaturing of the historical and religious
personages reveals a kind of irreverent humor. They are
made to seem very common and ordinary as the use of humor
deflates the special aura bestowed upon them by the passing
of the ages and their various roles in history. None, not
even the Virgin Mary, are immune to the satiric thrust of
the humor. David and Renard go to a hotel where "une femme
de la maison, qui n'était pas voilée et déjà s'intéressait
à leurs personnes," sits down and engages them in conversa-
tion, a conversation in which she complains about the puri-
tanism of the soldiers practicing the ascetic morality of
Saint Louis: "... ils invoquaient tous les saints du
paradis pour imposer silence à leur chair, je suis moi-même
convertie mais tout de même, tout de même ..." Intrigued
by the fact that she was converted, David asks her name and
she responds: "Je suis la Marie-Madeleine de Béthanie, la
Mama, comme on disait." She proceeds to relate how, after
the Ascension, she fell asleep for a period of thirteen cen-
turies and awoke at this moment of the seventh Crusade to
find her name embroidered with touching but false legends. She then returned to her former profession on the advice of her confessor ("il est d'avis que mes éclats d'autrefois étaient de mauvais goût"\(^{17}\)). The entire caricaturing continues with the Sire de Joinville who solicits the favors of "la Mama" for two twenty franc pieces.

The passages of satirical humor alternate with passages of simple humor. The chevalier du Toc (Knight of Junk) who has written a "remarkable work on the soul" is being interviewed on the radio. The interview is made largely inaudible by the drilling and hammering which go on in the studio simultaneously.

Monsieur le chevalier voulez-vous nous dire Bing Brrr Brrrrzzz Brrrboumboumboum, voulez-vous nous dire ce que vous pensez de votre ouvrage.

--Euh euh Ding Ding Crrrr Crrraaa Glzzz Glzzz je pense Chtrrrbingbing, je pense qu'il est très intéress­sent, c'est-à-dire qu'il m'intéresse beaucoup ce qui ne veut pas dire Bagbagbagbagbag pour le lecteur à plus forte raison pour le lecteur aveugle car certaines nuances n'est-ce pas Pchchchchchchch à l'écriture Braille.\(^{18}\)

The interview is as unsuccessful as was Mahu's attempt to capture sounds with his camera. In the course of the interview sounds and even an occasional word are captured but with no more meaning than the black photos of Mahu. As in other instances in the work of Pinget, the logical effort toward communication rests in the hands of the most...

\(^{17}\)Pinget, Le Renard, pp. 175-176.

\(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 150.
The primary aspect of the humor of Graal Flibuste is found in the form of the novel itself. Pinget has noted that the work is a satire of the roman à épisodes. In reading this work one is reminded of distant relatives such as Rabelais, Swift, and Voltaire and a more recent parentage with Michaux. Unlike the early writers and their imaginary countries, however, Graal Flibuste does not purport to be a strict satire of the mores of a certain people or time. Pinget's work is situated in a timeless and regionless zone, a seemingly inconsequential and at times intolerable universe, sheltered from the real world, whose very excesses protect it from our afflictions.

It is the distance from the real world which makes for the interest and humor in this serialized novel. It is a world of pure invention wherein one is struck by the strangeness and freshness, where another novelty springs up on almost every page giving the reader an impression of urgency on the part of the author—he seems to be constantly trying to outdo what he has already done. Yet,


paradoxically, at the same time there are elements of reality which appear from time to time and give the fantastic voyage a rather pedestrian and utilitarian air.

Patios, salons de marbre, couloirs de cristal, jardins suspendus, et nous traversons ces splendeurs en touristes que plus rien n'étonne. Le noir s'arrête enfin devant une porte d'escarboucles et de calcédoine, incrustée de plaquettes de ciment.\textsuperscript{21}

The land of Graal Flibuste is no Voltairian Eldorado where the streets are covered with meaningless pieces of gold and precious gems; this utopia of fantasy includes its plaquettes de ciment, its tenuous rapport with reality.

The aspect of reality is a minor one, however, compared with the overpowering fantasy. It is in this realm where one finds a variety of humor as the oddities of this fantastic land make their appearance in each succeeding chapter. "Je cherche à faire des jeux de mots, des calembour, et à écrire des drôleries."\textsuperscript{22} The whole of the work is a parody of language as Pinget fills the pages with fantastic beings and plants bearing equally fantastic names (pavots-chiens, Mme Pleure-Beignet [Weeping Fritter], Jasmin the gardener whose innocent-sounding name belies his corruption and his position as the greatest organizer of partouses [orgies] in the land).

Besides the ingenious word games the humor of the work as a whole resides in the charm of discovery which

\textsuperscript{21}Pinget, \textit{Graal Flibuste}, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{22}Knapp, "Interview," p. 551.
awaits the reader in each chapter. Among the many marvelous regions traversed by the unnamed narrator and his coachman is the Country of the Wind where the inhabitants, the Anémones (windflowers), recount innumerable tales which, like the primary element of their country, are without substance. With the aid of a fâfre, a kind of one-cord mandolin, their constant joy is the recitation of their myths.

Ils sont malheureux lorsqu'ils ne les peuvent dégoiser, et nombreux sont les cas de folie dite verbeuse où le malade s'enferme un beau jour dans sa chambre pour débiter tout seul ces sortes de souvenirs collectifs; il ne sort plus de chez lui que les pieds devant, comme on dit, car il a oublié de se nourrir.23

The self-imprisoned Anémone is not disturbed until the neighbors no longer hear the mumbling emanating from his room. The door is broken down and there is the verbally-diseased story-teller, "les jambes raidies et la bouche ouverte, dans l'attitude d'un orateur paralyssé. C'est la Mort-Debout."24

Jasmin has taken Candide's maxim quite literally and cultivates a magnificent vegetable and herb garden which serves as a pretext for Pinget to cultivate his word garden. Amidst the prosaic vegetables grows the exotic louze which is used to make sachets and the fly-catching gobe-mouche. The frotte-mignon, a powerful aphrodisiac, is, however, the principal staple of the garden for Jasmin: "Je dois dire

23 Pinget, Graal Flibuste, p. 157.
24 Ibid., p. 158.
que, pour ma part, j'en fais très large usage, les partouses que chaque soir j'organise chez moi m'épuisent littéralement." The narrator cannot reconcile this innocent scene, "ce potager, cette ambiance ..." with the shameful notion of daily orgies. Soon after he witnesses the first evening of debauchery. "La honte me couvrirait le visage à évoquer les scènes auxquelles j'assistai. Ciel! me dis-je, méfions-nous désormais des gens qui cultivent leur jardin." His shame is soon dispelled, however, as he discovers that his moral strength was nothing more than disguised timidity. "Cher Jasmin, que je lui dois de reconnaissance! On ne me reconnaissait plus. Toujours le premier à proposer des jeux, toujours le dernier de m'en lasser."25 The traveler now regards his actions as the most eminently human quality of sociability, leading to a universal brotherhood.

"... comment, en conséquence, délivrer son frère du doute qui le paralyse en lui refusant le secours de tout soi-même? "Le lit, comme disait Jasmin, nous en apprend plus sur quelqu'un que les plus longs discours." Cela est vrai.26

One cannot do justice to the humor of this work simply by enumerating one or two instances in which this aspect of the novel plays an important role. It is only by reading the work that one arrives at an appreciation of the humor which is characterized by a pervasive whimsy than comedy per se. The humor of Graal Flibustre is not the Anémones or

25Ibid., pp. 131-135, passim.

26Ibid., p. 136.
Jasmin alone but, rather, every word of the novel. Just as Pinget must have derived great pleasure from the invention of this fantastic and humorous universe, so the reader derives his pleasure from the discovery of it. In such a world the *jeux de mots* and the *drôleries* are inherent.

The humor of **Baga**, embodied in the ridiculous personage of Architruc, is to play a much larger role than in the preceding novels. Pinget presents us with a schizophrenic personality whose physical appearance is as much an aberration as his mind.


With the title of king, his true kingdom is himself and he rules over it reluctantly by divine right; the State is his state of mind. Having relinquished long ago the control of his earthly kingdom to his prime minister, Baga, he exists in a restricted self-made world of dreams, familiar objects, and favorite foods. The pixilated beef-eating king (beef being the main staple of his regimen) inhabits a fanciful universe provided by his imagination with his few favorite objects and habits affording a delicate rapport with reality. His dementia is justified by passing it off as the work of fate--his father before him was struck by the same

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kind of sleeping sickness. The effect of these unconscious states is enhanced through their being interrupted periodically by certain ritualistic moments such as his meals and his morning cup of tea. "Le thé est ma coquetterie matinale." At these moments his "real" world is his "pantoufles exquises en cygne," his "fourrure de vigogne," and his plant Fifille. "Il paraît qu'elle est femelle mais ça ne se voit pas."28

The realm of his imagination offers us a glimpse of fanciful humor which becomes more and more absurd. His first venture into his private kingdom is in the guise of a hermit, a role sought after at one time or another by all men. However, the comedic effect of this withdrawal is produced by viewing the neuroses which spring forth from and because of his psychotic condition: his self-induced condition becomes increasingly unbearable because he is afraid of catching cold. He has sought shelter from the reality of his daily existence only to allow his dreams to be thwarted by other intruding figments of his imagination. When he does manage to keep his fire from being extinguished by the rain, all of its heat escapes through a hole in the cabin wall. One possible solution is to bring in yet another figment of his imagination: "Penser à quelque chose de sec."29

28Ibid., pp. 9-19, passim.
29Ibid., p. 75.
Architectuc has become a puppet of his own imagination, an imagination which carries him gradually to greater and greater lengths until he is finally transformed into a nun. The ridiculousness of the whole situation, however extreme that it may be, is brought forth through the language more than through the circumstances: "Soyez ma soeur, mon frère. --J'apprécie votre charité, ma soeur. Et je rends gloire à Dieu, créateur de la femme à son image." It is a comic portrayal of a nun filled with words of naïve piety and concupiscence, a nun whose maxim becomes chasser la mauvaise pensée when he/she meets a village girl, Marie ("c'est un signe d'En-haut, à n'en pas douter"). Unable to conquer his/her lustful ideas, this "mystical" love, "Soeur Angèle redevint peu à peu l'homme que j'avais été. Marie était horrifiée car elle avait gardé un mauvais souvenir de ses premières amours."30

In their ensemble the humor of the early novels results from the workings of the subconscious of the individual heroes. It is a subconscious world of words fighting to free themselves. This struggle of the imprisoned verbiage and its resultant liberation is the basis of all the works. Both the action and the character are born of words. The misfortune and the humor of the hero is that, in the end, he is a very prosaic character in a poetic milieu. All the

30Ibid., pp. 151-171, passim.
characters are basically mundane and dull and their adventures are even duller. It is this point of departure which affords the moments of humor. In a sense, much of the material is funny just because it is so dull. Given the drabness and the dreariness of their lives, each character employs his subconscious to the fullest extent. The imagined world of the psyche as compared to the "reality" of the character's life is humorous by the very nature of its surrealistic qualities.

The completion of Baga offers both a diminution of certain themes and constants and the beginnings of a new direction. This new course can be seen in two transitional novels which follow Baga: Le Fiston and Clope au dossier. The major themes found in the early works undergo metamorphoses or disappear, an inherency in a transitional atmosphere.
PART II

THE TRANSITIONAL NOVELS

Le Fiston

Clope au dossier
CHAPTER VII

THE TRIVIA OF AN UNCERTAIN EXISTENCE

Le Fiston

The sixth work and fourth novel of Robert Pinget, Le Fiston, was published in 1959 by Les Editions de Minuit. In 1961 two translations of this work were published: one translated by Richard N. Coe and published by John Calder of London, entitled No Answer, the other, translated by Richard Howard and published by Grove Press under the title of Monsieur Levert.

Le Fiston signals a sharp break with the preceding novels of Pinget. The imaginary flights into a world of total fantasy as seen in any one of the previous novels, Graal Flibuste and Baga especially, have suddenly disappeared and the reader settles down, perhaps with some amazement, with a novel which seems to herald a journalistic chronicling of passions and events with which he is comfortable since they are so much a part of the "conventional" novel; he seems to be once again in the world of impersonal, omniscient narrative and description. He is soon lulled into complacency by the opening pages of this "real" novel. It is as if the Brindons and the Bagas, those representa-
tives of "reality," were now in charge and have taken over the task of storytelling from their former counterparts. It is now their turn to show what can be done with that pesky task-master, reality. Thus Pinget breaks with what has gone before as his novel becomes a single character drama. The quixotic adventures of the writer-character have now been diminished to those of the solitary character.

The novel begins with an account of the death of a shoemaker's daughter. "La fille du cordonnier est morte. L'enterrement a eu lieu jeudi dernier. Il y avait la famille et quelques personnes."¹ The prosaicness of these first lines and their subject matter bring to mind the opening lines of L'Etranger:


Both Camus and Pinget have begun their works with the laconic narration of a death, ominously foreshadowing what is to come. Death as a starting point and as a conclusion results from two different attitudes: it leads Meursault to accept and defend his life as a valid and honest existence and in so doing to accept also its culmination as an

¹Robert Pinget, Le Fiston (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1959), p. 1 [The author has chosen not to number the pages of this novel. To facilitate footnote references I have numbered the pages, page 1 being the first page of the narrative.].

integral part of life. There is no struggle, no bitterness in the face of death; what little emotion is displayed might be termed fascination with a new experience—in sum, death leads him to an inner peace with himself and with the outside world as well. No such acceptance of things as they are or discovery of an inner peace is ever evidenced in a Pingetian hero. Life is a constant battle against death and the reality of life is a goal to be sought after and grasped in its truest form—life is to be ensnared in the words of the hero for in these words lie the essence of the man and his life.

Words become a problem in _L'Étranger_ also; however, the problem lies not between Meursault and his words but between his words and society. Meursault's identity as narrator and sole participant in the events to be related is immediately revealed. Nevertheless, at the same time there springs forth a discordant note between his objective presentation of a subjective situation and we are confronted with a man unable to relate to what is going on around him and one who is honest enough to accept the situation, the void, the absurdity. His general verbal restraint is necessary to convey this acceptance; viewing words as a weapon to question the situation, his taciturnity becomes the logical reaction.

Conversely, in _Le Fiston_ we find a narrator dealing with an objective situation in an objective manner, at least
at the outset, and he is far from taciturn. It promises to be an enumeration of facts by an indefinite person. The novel continues in a conventional pattern with a progressively more detailed accounting of the event in which the narrator describes the persons present, their emotions, and their actions. He then moves beyond the event as he follows these persons after the burial and the reader is given more information about their private lives, information regarding events and emotions that may or may not be related to the grief-stricken Chinze family. Along the way other people, not present at the burial but residents of the village itself, are interposed in the narrative. At this point the ever-widening view from the eye of the chronicler suddenly narrows in on a certain M. Levert who is to remain the single focal point of the story. The relation of trivia is to continue with a minutely-detailed inventory of Levert's house and land and the introduction of those making up his immediate family--his housekeeper, sister, and seven year old niece, Francine. We learn that for ten years Levert has been awaiting the return of his son to whom he writes every day. Some of the letters are simply filed away; the others, the ones he intends to mail are never posted due to his inevitable visit to the bistro on his way to the post office.

The complacency of the reader is soon to be jarred however, for once he has accepted Levert as the point of
interest of a still omniscient and neutral "journalist,"
the narrative begins to be periodically invaded by personal
phrases: the third person giving way from time to time to
the first person to relay the thoughts of a long-suffering
father as he writes to his son. The first indication of
this occurs as:

A huit heures et demie le téléphone a sonné et il est
allé répondre. Puis il s'est remis à sa lettre.
Mon cher fiston. Je recommence. La figure dé- 
faite, les lacets dénoués, le paletot flottant, la 
tignasse hirsute, l'œil pleurard, la tête vide. Cette 
prison où je suis. Ça recommence. 3

This unexpected break in the narrative serves to change the
entire bent of the story. The history is no longer that of
a certain M. Levert recounted by an impartial observer but
rather it is a letter being written by this M. Levert him-
self. He has chosen to utilize an, an anonymous voice which
belongs to no one in particular yet which can be employed
by everyone, to produce a feeling of detachment from himself
as he recounts his own facts and actions, as he presents the
case for his own defense. This an, however, is useful only
up to a certain point. It is sufficient to present a por-
trait of his exterior reality but when attempting to deal
with the reality of his emotional existence, it proves to
be inadequate. The passion encountered in the first thirty
pages of the novel is one of determination, a determination
to enumerate as many people and places as possible in order

3Pinget, Le Fiston, p. 28.
to reassemble and rediscover a fleeting memory. But a memory of the past only is brought into existence through a happening or emotion of the present. In this case we are confronted with a man in utter despair, a totally personal emotional state, one which is impossible to depict "realistically" through the third person. Whereas it is possible to place oneself above events, both past and present, strong personal emotions cannot be viewed in a detached manner unless they have long since abated. Thus we find Levert unconsciously switching to a first person narrative as he regards his "prison" and wonders why his son has left and where he is.

The prison is one of misunderstanding on the part of both father and son. Levert has given everything to an ungrateful son.

Il lui donnait des sous que l'autre buvait, il faisait repeindre sa chambre, il lui donnait des conseils. Des conseils et des sous. Le fiston ne demandait ni les uns ni les autres.4

He has given his son everything and, perhaps for this very reason, he is no longer with him. He sits surrounded by walls of his own making, unable to recall to his side that which he perhaps never possessed and yet unable, at the same time, to admit that possibility. "Sans mentir je n'ai pas grand-chose à te dire, je regrette d'avoir été si maladroit, tu ne devais pas aimer les rideaux de ta

4Ibid., p. 33.
There is in this passion dominante of Levert something reminiscent of the tribulations of Balzac's Père Goriot. The sacrifices of Goriot, like those of Levert, are sublime but the results less so. Just as Goriot abets his daughters in their adulteries, Levert leads his son to a life of an alcoholic by giving him money.

Mais Gilbert grandissait, ... il déserta la maison. Son père en perdait l'esprit, il suppliait, et le fils en profitait pour lui soutirer de l'argent. Monsieur Levert continua à gâter son fils qui finissait par le détester, il se mit à boire, l'autre buvait aussi et il leur arrivait de se rencontrer au même bar.  

In the case of both these old men paternal love has been corrupted into a passion, one which consumes and devours them to the detriment of their own being and existence. Father love has destroyed everything inside them and there is nothing left but their strange passion which manifests itself in the manner in which both Goriot and Levert have completely subjugated their own destiny to it.

... il s'était attaché à cet enfant, et quand Gilbert dut aller en classe son père souffrait avec peine son absence. Il l'attendait toute la journée, le dimanche il ne le quittait pas d'une semelle.  

In a tale marked by a pronounced forward movement, Goriot is seen principally through the eyes of others as he

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5Ibid., p. 36.
6Ibid., p. 61.
7Ibid.
slides down the social ladder. He is defined by his love and its gradual conversion into a passion, an obsession, and finally, a vice—a vice which eventually leads him to indifference toward his daughters in that they lose their identity as human beings, becoming objects in his mind, possessions to be held on to no matter what the cost to them or to himself. As he lies on his death bed he wants them brought to him—it matters not that their final kiss is insincere—it is solely their physical presence that he craves. After Goriot's death everything goes on as before, his demise affects no one and nothing; the outside world filled with excessiveness, vice, and corruption, all of which preexisted him will also survive him.

No such survival would be possible in Pinget's novel. The world in Le Fiston is there solely because Levert says it is. Should he die or even cease to write, the novel and the world would expire with him for the reader is not being presented with a generalized panoramic view of things and events but with a personal view of one man by that one man himself. As opposed to the traditional method, the morality of the son's behavior and treatment of his father and vice versa is not even considered and also the sincerity of the paternal love is put in doubt, from a conventional viewpoint, since the father never does actually try to get in touch with his son. The receipt of a letter and how Gilbert will react to it does not matter for Levert
does not hope to strike a soft spot within the son and thereby bring about a change of heart in the boy. Indeed, Levert does not even consider the possibility of his son's actual return. It is solely because he is away that Levert is able to make his presence felt. The son becomes the incentive, one might even call him the muse, which prods the old man's memory, the incentive which stirs him to wonder how best he might put down his words in order to be the most truthful, the most effective, for it is through his words that Levert acquires not only his own reality but his very existence. This love for a son brings about no progression within the novel; it exists on the same level throughout the entire work and produces no change within Levert other than stirring up the mental processes. He remains the same from the first to the final pages, a stagnation which is emphasized by the numberless pages. So we see that this paternal love serves as a pretext for the writing and for the existing of an individual whereas Balzac's treatment of the same passion serves as a pretext for moralization on the world in general.

The definitive break in the narrative—from the third to the first person—leads to the complete disintegration of the previously collected facts. Levert begins again but this time there is no longer the possibility of a neutral observer. The events already narrated are taken up again one by one, discussed, and rectified. The same
company of players is present but now persons change adventures, adventures change settings, and settings change time. Amidst these details which are modified or occasionally altered completely, the characters are not long in exchanging among themselves their adventures, their ages, and even their names. The situation of Levert himself in time and space must also be reconsidered. It would seem that ten years have passed at the turn of the page as he is visited once again by his niece who is now seventeen years old. An error of a decade? Or does the explanation perhaps lie in the words of Levert's brother-in-law: "Et son travail, il continue? c'est plus alarmant que tout le reste à mon sens, je parierais que depuis dix ans qu'il est dessus il recopie la même page." It is possible that Levert has been writing and rewriting his account of Marie Chinze's death for a decade. In any case, he now turns away from the first letter and confines himself to relating the same simple "realities," beginning anew the corrections and rectifications, the meticulous enumeration of facts and people, working at focusing on that which is escaping him--his life--attempting to escape the nothingness which is lying in wait for him. The attempts at recounting persons and places are no longer for the son's benefit but are, instead, for the amelioration and revivification of his own personal existence, an existence afflicted by self-alienation. This

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8Ibid., p. 27.
feeling which impels his effort prevents him, at the same time, from ever describing the village satisfactorily; thus, the letter will remain forever unfinished. It is the urge to live that keeps alive a son who, if he indeed ever existed, has long been forgotten beneath a pile of letters.

We are confronted with a man who has been writing and rewriting for years, filling page after page, always recopying the same passage, attempting to regain a son, to re-create a memory in order to hold on to his life.

It would seem that Levert has succeeded in finding some degree of tranquillity. But the cycle is not completed nor can it ever be completed. The termination of the letter would signify his epitaph: "Edouard Levert que Dieu a rappelé à Lui le douze douze douze mil neuf cent et des poussières." One can imagine that the same would be true should he find his long-lost son.

... Me refaire une mémoire à épeler chaque jour cet

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9Ibid., pp. 162-163.

10Ibid., p. 162.
amour de personne, toi parti de mon toit paternel, il reste, il reste cet amour de cette lettre de cette main qui écrit, je recommence mais en aurai-je la force.  

"This love of no one" is a phrase which seems to become the basis for the lament of Levert. Levert is waiting for personne which recalls Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon who are also waiting in vain. From the hope of discovering the identity of Godot to the inevitable repeated disappointments, En attendant Godot produces a feeling of uncertainty. This same feeling of uncertainty is produced in Levert's waiting for the return of a son who perhaps does not even exist. In Beckett's play Act II repeats the same pattern as Act I: nothing happens, Godot does not come, and nobody leaves. Characters switch roles and dialogue, but these variations only serve to emphasize the essential sameness of the situation. In the rambling letter of Levert the same patterns are also repeated--his constant recommencements underlining one basic situation with opposing variations. His effort culminates in nothing more than an absurd letter of unchanging change. The same actions, words, and gestures are assumed and shared by the characters "in residence" at the moment.

The exact nature of Godot is of secondary importance; the subject of the play is not Godot but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition. Similarly, the return of Levert's son

11Ibid., p. 62.
is not in itself important. The problem facing Beckett's tramps and Levert is the action of the passage of time and how best to combat the nothingness of their existence against this senseless action of time. The flow of time confronts them with the basic problems of being, the problem of the nature of the self which is constantly changing and forever outside their grasp. Godot and the son simply represent the objectives of the tramps and Levert's waiting. By sitting passively alongside the road in order to experience fully the effects of time, the tramps find themselves face to face with the meaning of the phenomenon and the illusory, meaningless changes that it brings. Levert, on the other hand, is not able to subject himself to such an experiment. He is driven to activity by a frenetic compulsion to re-create a memory. His descriptions are a strange composite: they depict details fondly remembered yet they are pulled into being in an anguished manner

par la crainte d'omettre, par malchance ou par mégarde, précisément le seul détail, la seule petite chose qui serait susceptible de retenir l'attention de l'absent, de lui faire revivre soudainement le passé, l'enfance, la vie commune, et, partant, de l'inciter à l'oubli des torts, au pardon, au retour.12

Whereas the tramps lie back and let time act on them, Levert must pass the time by acting on it. So we see that his letters to an imaginary or long-lost son or to an invented

"no one" are an active participation against the debilitating forces of time.

Levert, in his solitudinous existence, is very much like another Beckettian figure—the unnamed character of *L'Innommable*. Surrounded by a tragic sense of duty, he too is immobilized in a sense, a haunted man with a consuming passion for and a fidelity to an impossible task. While the unnamed character has been reduced to a voice, Levert has been reduced to scribbling each day page after page, recopying the same passage in an attempt to seize an existence which is fast escaping him. The manner in which Levert regards his duty of constantly writing and rewriting closely parallels the view held by the unnamed character:

*Cependant je suis obligé de parler. Je ne me tairai jamais. Jamais. ... Gens avec choses, gens sans choses, choses sans gens, peu importe. ... je suis obligé de continuer. Je finirai peut-être par être très entouré, dans un capharadum. Allées et venues incessantes, atmosphère de bazar. Je suis tranquille, allez.*

At the end of their novels the two heroes question the feasibility of continuing.

* ... il faut continuer, je ne peux pas continuer, il faut continuer, je vais donc continuer, il faut dire des mots, tant qu'il y en a, il faut les dire, jusqu'à ce qu'ils me trouvent, jusqu'à ce qu'ils me disent ... on ne sait pas, il faut continuer, je vais continuer.*

Il reste la ville proprement dite ou les toits de la

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Words are the life blood for these two men delivering seemingly endless monologues; however, their conception of these "words" differs. Whether they faithfully represent or not matters little to the unnamed character since he has no intention but to continue to speak. He assumes such a passive attitude, allowing his infinite supply of words to flow naturally, unrestricted by any barriers whatsoever, that he has been physically reduced to a voice. The result inevitably is to be a junkyard-like atmosphere filled with unrelated thoughts, objects, people, and events, all of which acquire their form because of the words; however, the greater the diversity of the mélange, the greater the breakdown of conventionally ordered thoughts and words, the greater the possibility that he will find himself in the absurdity of it all. The more words that flow forth, the greater the possibility that these words will reveal something about the nature of the source from which they glide. By committing himself to eternal movement, intranquility, he is able to find a certain degree of tranquility in the hope that he may find a form for himself within his own

15Pinget, Le Fiston, p. 167.
Levert also thrives on his untranquil mind although he is not able to lie back passively and allow the words to flow through his pen. He compulsively corrects this or that statement, feeling that the more precise his words are, the more truthful will be his letter and his life; nevertheless, he ever remains conscious of his inability to achieve his goal. He senses himself severely limited by his few points of reference which become his restrictions: his son, wife, townspeople, paysage, and, most of all, himself. He cannot visualize beyond the circle; his words are imprisoned by external obstacles. The roads do not lead beyond the town but only encircle and enclose it physically. Levert does realize the narrowness of his world but is incapable of expanding it. Everything is déjà dit. Can he continue to repeat himself? He is not able to discover tranquillity and the will to go on through the possible realization of such lofty ambitions as giving form to his being and thereby becoming aware of his own true nature as does Beckett's invisible voice. The final lines of Pinget's novel depict him as a lonely human being who runs into brick walls regardless of which direction he takes. Unable to see beyond these obstacles, he also has great difficulty seeing within them. His solitude and perhaps his drink bring about a haze.

16 The relationship between Beckett and Pinget will be discussed further in Chapter IX, the summary of Part II.
which grows darker with every passing moment. But, as
everything is gradually lost, one thing remains tangible—
his letters. Thus, he can never mail them for they alone
remain with him while everything else slips from his grasp.
For want of companionship he has revolved his daily life
around these letters, these familiar objects which can
always be relied upon to be "there." As long as they are
with him he is assured of a physical presence also. The
reader senses that Levert will make the choice between the
lesser of two evils for, although deeply discouraged by it
all, the only alternative is death. Tranquillity is pos-
sible solely through the anguish of continuing to evade what
is certain if the attempt is not made.
CHAPTER VIII

NO MORE TIME

Clope au dossier

Clope au dossier, the seventh work and fifth novel of Pinget, was published in 1961 by Les Editions de Minuit. A year earlier, in 1960, his pièce radiophonique, entitled La Manivelle, was put out by the same publisher with an accompanying translation into English by Samuel Beckett. This play revolves around the meeting on the bridge of the two old friends, Toupin and Pommard, which is to reoccur in Clope au dossier. Then, in 1962, Pinget reworked the basic material from the novel in writing his play, Ici ou ailleurs, also published by Les Editions de Minuit.

The novel focuses itself almost entirely on the day Clope fires at and kills a wild goose. Into this narrative of Clope, who remains, for the most part, an impartial observer, are brought fragments of the lives of the townspeople, himself included. In the first of the six long paragraphs that compose the work, the "event" is recorded, interspersed between a conversation between three men, Mortin, Verveine, and Philippard. As the novel opens the three are seated around a table drinking and discussing the menace
in their midst. He will have to be put away for the sake of their wives and children, for the sake of their society. "He" is then identified as Clope whose family has a history of dementia or eccentricity, and somehow he has been involved in a scandal en pleine rue, although no details are given. The roof of his house is in bad need of repair, he "traffics" in something to make a living, and only sees two or three artist friends who all drive around together in a filthy car, the woman of the group employing a language that leaves much to be desired. As if to justify these value judgments on his character, Clope immediately fires the shot and soon afterward states: "Tu vas voir qu'ils me feront des ennuis ...."¹ This shot serves as the stimulus, as the driving force behind the entire dossier which follows, however as such, holds no great importance since it could just as well have been something else that set the wheels in motion and the result would have been the same. Perhaps it is a reaction toward the judgments already handed down, perhaps it is merely an excuse to recommence his dossier, to reinvigorate his spirit, to create a starting point for another writing adventure. Such an explanation is reinforced in the final pages of the novel as Clope re-creates the moments just before the "event." He had been thinking of his dossier, whether he had said things well enough,

wondering if "il faut intervenir mais la chose à ce moment
qu'il n'aurait pas entendue serait le passage des oies c'est
pourquoi tout ensuite aurait été à reprendre ..." It is
possible that the geese just happened to be there and so
proved to be something that could intervene to give him the
strength to begin again. When the shot is fired, a flock
of geese immediately soars to the sky ("passage des oies
tant d'arbitraire à telle heure d'une matinée"), which may
give a dual significance to what ensues--fear of the un-
known, of the impossible task which lies before him, and
also a lifting of the spirit, of the creative processes.

A shot fired by a man with such a history and repu-
tation is something not to be taken lightly by the towns-
people although the nature of the victim "should" negate the
act. Indeed, the event is not even discussed during the
rest of the novel with the exception of the enumeration of
who or who does not hear the shot (although a maid, who does
hear it, is convinced that a crime has been committed but
does not associate Clope with the event). It is only in the
final paragraph that we find Clope combing the area of the
"crime" searching desperately for evidence which will clear
him of any guilt in the eyes of the townspeople.

It is Clope alone who is concerned with the "event"
after it takes place. The others go on oblivious to the

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2 Ibid., p. 127.
3 Ibid.
turmoil which is going on within his mind, oblivious even to his very existence, for they also have their own interventions which occur simultaneously with Clope's: Simone Brize drops a pot making a terrible noise; Judge Pommard is interrupted while attempting to study a brief by his wife who sounds as if she is demolishing the house upstairs; Mme Bille has just discovered the loss of an earring and is starting to look for it frantically; Jacques Cheviot and Paul, his brother-in-law, are on their way back to work after having just ordered a new counter for their shop, the thoughts of both centering solely on their purchase; a young girl dropping a coin into the hand of the one-eyed organ grinder, Toupin, is startled as she looks into his white eye and deeply embarrassed at the same time as she performs her act of charity. None have heard the shot; yet, like Clope, all of their lives have been momentarily interrupted either by an act which they initiated or by an external event that, for a moment, disturbs their equilibrium, the pace of their lives. However, contrary to Clope, these characters are soon able to pick up the thread of their existence and thereby completely erase the "intervention" from their minds.

The entire first paragraph is a montage of the townspeople--their actions, frustrations, worries, gossipings, and small talk on this particular morning. Interspersed is the reading of a dossier by the judge and also
glimpses of Clope himself—all become integral parts of this composite picture. Perhaps it might be better defined as an aural-oral collage which is from time to time interrupted by a tympan détraqué. A fairly even flow between the shifts of focal points is maintained by a minimum of punctuation and through similar words, thoughts, or sounds connecting the end of one picture and the beginning of the next.

The people upon whom Clope chooses to focus the greatest attention are those with whom he feels the greatest degree of compatibility, those with whom he would most like to be able to communicate. The third paragraph incorporates a conversation between Toupin, the organ grinder who stations himself on a bridge overlooking the town, and Pommard, father of the judge, the two having been friends during their youth. The scene serves to point out the debilitating effect of time on the memory and the inability of men to communicate on a one-to-one basis with each other. The general thoughts and concerns of the two old men are the same: their wives, children, life in the army, girls they used to know, etc. However, in expressing these thoughts, the veracity of the small details is constantly questioned by the other whose own reliability is then in turn put in doubt through ensuing contradictions. In reality, each is carrying on a stream of consciousness soliloquy initially stimulated by the sight of the other. The lack of communication is noted as Pommard asks passers-by several times for
a match but is never heard. The questions posed by the two men come around full circle and the same ones are repeated, each forgetting what he has already asked since the answer was never really heard. It is a sympathetically drawn portrait of the two old friends and of Toupin in particular. He is much less sure of himself, often hesitating, groping for details; he is more inclined to accept passively or not even to hear the corrections made by Pommard and is very much aware of his own uselessness. These human qualities coupled with his physical deformity and his station in life show him to be a solitary man aware of everything around him, dependent upon society for his existence, but yet out of touch with it. He can be compared to just another fixture on the bridge, something to be passed, looked at, but never seen.

The fourth paragraph centers around Maurice Legendre, an artist who paints everyday on the same bridge where Toupin grinds his hand-organ. Just as Clope is drawn to Toupin because of his deformity, solitude, and doubts, he also feels an affinity toward Maurice and his creative talents, impoverished though they may be. His bohemian appearance and questionable liaison with a distant cousin are tantamount to scandal in this provincial society. His compatibility with Clope is reinforced as he paints the same scene everyday, desirous of attaining perfection and truth through art.
... il peint toujours le premier platane et le petit quai et le remblai et en bas sur la berge très étroite qui est un sentier longeant l'eau la verdure ou un chaland à l'amarre et au-delà du platane le clocher et les toits de tuile brune et le ciel nuageux du printemps. 

He remains ever aware that his method inevitably seems to lead to a cul-de-sac; however, it is by virtue of his re­commencements that he is confident that his fame will one day arrive: "... il ne pourrait s'empêcher de penser qu'il serait un jour célèbre à cause justement de ces recommencements sans fin qui n'ont l'air d'aboutir qu'à des culs-de-sac." Such idealism in the midst of impossible odds is a characteristic trait of youth, especially those in the creative arts, and, no doubt, recalls to Clope his early writing days. It is perhaps because of his youth that Maurice is permitted to remain by the townspeople in spite of his non-conformity. Or perhaps he is excused because of the subject matter of his painting; he has chosen to paint a landscape, the view from the bridge, a landscape which is painted over, erased each morning to make room for a new day's view. As an artist he stands outside and above others to scrutinize their world; however, it has no impact on the lives of the townspeople since his paintings are always erased, thereby posing no threat to their own conception of themselves.

It is in the portrait of Simone Brize that the

4 Ibid., p. 90.
5 Ibid., p. 103.
presence of Clope, the narrator, is most keenly felt. He devotes two "chapters" to his depiction of her living alone with her small son, Guillaume, with only an occasional visit every three months or so from her husband, Pierrot, a cook on a cargo ship. It is suggested that Clope was, and still is, emotionally involved with Simone, albeit a one-sided relationship and one of which she is probably unaware. On the occasion of her marriage she recalls that "mêmes monsieur Clope lui avait donné ce dessous de plat qui lui venait de sa mère disait-il un tremblement dans la voix. Monsieur Clope."\(^6\) As she washes herself that day Clope sees:

Le gant de toilette suspendu au fil elle le prend elle le trempe dans l'eau tiède, elle le frotte de savon de Marseille, elle commence par la figure. Ensuite sous les bras ensuite voilà nous y sommes les seins roses brunissants du bout savourons, elle rince, ensuite ressavon du porte-savon savourons le gant de toilette elle se le passe entre les jambes voilà les cuisses ah elle les écarte, elle se baisse. Le cul à Simone. Rose grassouillet fondant \(...\)^7

The sensuous rhythm of the lines conveys the depth of the emotional ties that Clope has for Simone. It is not a lament of a man who has been denied the object of his love but rather a consummation of that love through a "real" portrait of physical intimacy.

This affection influences the narrator's portrayal of Simone's daily life in that the many frustrations that confront her are viewed as such rather than as comical

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 120.
\(^7\)Ibid., pp. 51-52.
Time has become something to be endured, rather than passed, in solitude. Interspersed with her sincere, loving baby talk are constant references to Pierrot whose absence has become the focal point around which her days and nights revolve. Her dreams of him and their life together do not prove to be a pleasurable experience for her since she is unable to retain an accurate picture of her husband either through her memory or through the photograph of the two of them beside her bed for his likeness has been impaired by the retouches on the picture. In the typical Pingetian manner, all her efforts toward re-creating a "true" memory are thwarted, adding to her anxiety. As her frustrations with her daily life mount, she has moments when she slips into her own dream world, although all of her reveries revolve around, in one form or another, her relationship with Pierrot: she imagines herself married to Jean, her former suitor and also friend of Pierrot; she dreams of a possible

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8Ibid., pp. 42-43.
marriage to her son; she imagines Pierrot's sexual experiences and then, feeling herself inadequate, not perverse enough for him, re-creates some of the things that she might do to excite him. Each time these dreams are interrupted by the cries of her son, by the cries of her reality to get on with the task of enduring the days, a reality whose grip is so tight that she is filled with guilt at the thought of trying to escape. Like Clope and Levert, Simone has a profound sense of duty and a need for self-justification. She attempts to justify her existence through her son, yet is aware that her efforts lead to a cul-de-sac. Unable or unwilling to redirect her life, she suffers the same recom­mencements, the same onerous repetitions day after day. Nevertheless, it remains a warm, sympathetic portrait of a human being whose existence is being justified through the tender words of the author. "J'ai écrit ces trente pages avec beaucoup d'amour pour elle." 

The sixth and final paragraph is Clope's soliloquy as he completes his dossier. His hopes for an acquittal by society depend upon the efficacy of his words. "Le plus gros est fait. Ils peuvent accumuler leurs preuves. Dossier placard cadenassé. L'innocence de Clope. Contrep­reuves. Du calme. Mettons la dernière main." 

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10Pinget, Clope au dossier, p. 124.
paragraphs, with the exception of an occasional tympan dé-traqué, is now lost to stacatto statements punctuated by directives from the impartial observer to calm down (du calme, du nerf). A tone of desperation is set as he realizes that he has come to the end and has no one left but himself; he must now put the final touches on the dossier—the document to prove his innocence, to justify himself in the eyes of society and, most importantly, to validate his existence for himself. These words become not only final touches on a dossier but also final touches on a life.

A mysterious intrusion is added to the novel in this final paragraph which may explain, in part, the frenetic personal tone of desperation. He is perhaps being judged not only on his eccentricity but also for a possible death of which he may be the cause: "... morte par ce coup venait de se flanquer une balle." An image of a woman arising from the dead only to soon reinter herself reoccurs.

Et de cette vapeur tout à coup sortir la femme disant je ne lave plus je suis morte est-ce que vous ne voyez pas que je suis morte et aller se coucher sur le sable qui lentement s'enfonce se refermant sur elle lentement.

It may be an apparition of his mother as several references to her are made in the final paragraph ("mère qui donnait des signes de dérangement de la tête les derniers temps," "bouquets de malades dans les hôpitaux de ma mère," "pauvre

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11Ibid., p. 126.

12Ibid., p. 131.
maman elle doit être bien seule maintenant"\(^{13}\). It is possible that the shot has recalled the undefined scandal en pleine rue of the past, a scandal perhaps concerning the death of his mother—a suicide? a murder? Now it is his action, his firing of the shot, that must be explained or the judgment, handed down by society before any consideration of his defense ("on finira par l'emmener"\(^{14}\), will be carried out. With this added element of mystery, the final pages of his dossier become more and more incoherent. The evidence calls for proof which is undoubtedly beyond his means because no one would believe him anyway. As Pierrot tells him in the play, Ici ou ailleurs, based on approximately the same situation: "Vous ne dites pas la vérité. Vous parlez d'autre chose. Vos images, vos paraboles, vos tics est-ce que je sais, on ne peut pas vous croire."\(^{15}\)

One is again reminded of Camus' L'Etranger wherein Meursault also has been prejudged by society for his nonconformity and whose sentence handed down by this society has been determined, to a great extent, by the circumstances and events surrounding the death of his mother. Both men have led solitary lives, each day's activities being patterned on those of the previous day, each finding comfort in

\(^{13}\)Ibid., pp. 127-134, passim.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 7.

sensualism, and each receiving the same judgment—death. Both make frequent references to their failure to comprehend, to their own inadequacies and confusions; however, whereas Meursault is unable to focus his attention on the outside world and is incapable of relating to others in any way due in part to his general verbal restraint, Clope has spent a lifetime listening to the world around him, noting in the most minute detail what makes each object or person unique. The discontinuity of experience revealed through Camus' use of abrupt phrasing is absent in Pinget's narrative. The unique events and words of the daily lives of the townspeople is what provides the continuity of experience within Clope's dossier as is evidenced by the minimum of punctuation and smooth transition from one person to the next. Everyone is viewed alone within a crowd, the whole having validity because of the validity of the parts; the greater the number of details that can be called forth, the greater will be the chances of re-creating and giving life to the whole.

The day of both Meursault's and Clope's firing of the gun was unusually calm.

... ce jour où tout aurait commencé. Dehors, une espèce de comment dire d'accalmie ...16

... nous sommes restés encore immobiles comme si tout s'était refermé autour de nous. Nous nous regardions sans baisser les yeux et tout s'arrêtait ici entre la

16pinget, Clope au dossier, p. 127.
mer, le sable et le soleil, le double silence de la flûte et de l'eau.  

In these pages leading up to the event, Camus drops his restrained and sober prose and abruptly alters the mood with his highly metaphorical language to convey the psychological reasons for Meursault's act. As the metaphors pile up, Meursault's hallucination increases. His deed becomes one caused by a misinterpretation of what he sees. There then occurs a transition within the character: realizing that nothing has any value except living itself, he becomes more speculative, a man without illusions, aware of the nothingness that surrounds him, and is not at all concerned with justifying his actions which will ever remain fundamentally unjustifiable.

It is perhaps because of the atmosphere of the day of the event that Clope decides to act; however, it is more of a mental atmosphere caused by something from within rather than an exterior calm; it is a psychological state provoked by something outside of the novel and so will never be determined. He simply sees the goose, aims, and fires; the act must be viewed as merely a stimulus for what is to follow. Through his dossier he is able to express his love for people and things, to relate to them in the only way possible for him, through his written words. He shows in his dossier that each individual, in his own way, is

17Camus, L'Etranger, p. 86.
isolated within society, but that this isolation can be a point of departure for communication between men. It is from this hopeful yet cautious optimism that Clope continues to write, but in the final pages his hopes are being dimmed as he sees himself forever condemned to remain an outsider. By choosing to listen and record others, he has placed himself in this exterior position which leads him to his own cul-de-sac. Society condemns him because he is an outsider, yet, the only way he is able to defend himself and justify himself is by placing himself in the very position for which he is condemned. He, unlike Meursault, is desperate as he flounders about like a madman in the final pages--he must make himself understood. However, he never shows any scorn for society; his anxiety is directed solely at himself. To a certain extent he has indeed been chastised by the townspeople and it is quite possible that upon reading his dossier, their initial pleasure at being included would turn into indignation at his bold intrusion into their private lives. "... mais oui je le connaissais pensez il m'a mise dans ses papiers ses dossiers vous savez pour la contre-preuve on finira par l'emmener."18 However, it is never explicit that they actually will go to the extreme of having him put away. Rather it is Clope who is not able to put together a solid defense on and for himself. His words are not only incomprehensible for others but for himself as

18Pinget, Clope au dossier, p. 124.
well. It is Clope who has picked up the phrase, "on finira par l'emmener," which has obsessed him to the point where he destroys his own ability to put together his thoughts in a calm, detached manner; it is Clope who has become the enemy.

The search becomes more and more distraught and the dossier becomes progressively incoherent. Tympan détraqué, du calme, du nerf—the realization that order is breaking down becomes clearer but he must reinforce his will to continue. The tympan détraqué becomes the ruin of his defense. Everything Clope has said concerning himself and the others is jeopardized. The faulty hearing on the part of everyone becomes apparent in the chaos of the final pages of the dossier. His calmness and courage disappear and he considers hanging himself. He ends up in the loft of a stable.

Ce qu'il avait fait la veille descendant vers la rivière ou continuer à fouiller, ... le dossier n'en avoir cure maintenant. Se pendre à la poutre au-dessus de la fiente. Du nerf. Sortir du pressoir aller vers l'écurie, échelle du fenil monter là-haut, ... se glisser entre les planches, ... petit coin tranquille, ...

In despair at his attempt to reconcile himself with society, he momentarily seeks refuge in a Beckettian situation where the incidents of his bodily existence become the object of his contemplation.

... blotti, dans l'ombre, ne plus sortir, ne plus bouger, écouter, respirer, écouter, ronger un os, respirer, tâter l'armoire, tâter la couverture, s'étendre, se recroqueviller, tourné vers le mur,

19Ibid., p. 132.
In this moment Clope is very close to Malone in Beckett's *Malone meurt*. The immobilized Malone finds himself enclosed in a small room, not knowing how he got there or how long he has been there. His existence revolves around this restricted universe where he forages among his personal belongings piled in a corner with the aid of a long, hooked baton. Huddled in this room, inhaling, exhaling, listening, inventorying a former and forgotten existence, he awaits the end.

The brief retreat by Clope against the danger threatening him will not be a prolonged evasion. There is not to be found in Clope, nor has it been discovered in any Pingetian character to date, the slightest evidence of what one might term a Beckettian finality. Malone and his fellow creatures are, in a sense, already lifeless when their battles begin. In contrast, life abounds in the work of Pinget and even a character such as Clope, during a moment of debilitating fear, envisages a continuing existence:

"... il faut reprendre fouiller fouiller du nerf sortir du grenier de l'abri de planches reprendre la couverture fouiller reprendre regarder."\(^21\)

\(^{20}\text{Ibid.}, p. 133.\)

\(^{21}\text{Ibid.}\)
The puzzle, as usual, is not solved, nor can it ever be, and the novel ends with the demented murmuring of Clope pleading for more time, "il faut ce dossier plus le temps non plus le temps plus le temps plus le temps plus le temps.\textsuperscript{22} As before, one has come full circle and "time" will be refound and the search will continue as long as he desires to prolong it. Imperfect and agonizing though the dossier may be, it has become his only defense against the force of time.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 135.
CHAPTER IX

THEMES AND CONSTANTS IN
THE TRANSITIONAL NOVELS

It was pointed out in the discussion pertaining to the early novels that those works basically represented acts of self-creation. They were the first steps, so to speak, in the formation of a new, individualistic hero. Each creative and self-created hero was in search of a personal truth which would ensure a future and, more importantly, a posterity. This theme, basic to the "new novelist," remains a constant in Pinget's transitional novels. The author puts us in direct contact with beings engaged in living, thinking, and acting. This action involving their existence continues to be viewed as one of self-creation. We are able to know of them only that which they choose to reveal of themselves. The revelation of each individual character shines forth from his words and thoughts. Each character is fundamentally nothing more than a sum of his parlance; it is only through his language that he achieves a human form and an existence. This existential self-formation presents the reader with an always "unfinished" character composed of preferential bits and pieces which he, the character,
selects for his own embodiment.

... nous ne sommes jamais en présence d'êtres accomplis mais en voie perpétuelle d'accomplissement, que nous suivons aveuglément ou ne voyons que tels qu'ils se voient eux-mêmes, c'est-à-dire du point de vue existentiell d'un "Je" en proie au devenir et non pas d'un "Moi" constitué en essence.¹

The changes encountered in the realm of themes and constants concerning the transitional novels are two-fold. On the one hand, certain themes relevant to the early works either disappear or are reevaluated and appear in a variant form. On the other hand, new themes, relevant to the new direction of the transitional novels are discovered. The major variant and new themes discussed in this Summary are the following: self-justification and the disappearance of fantasy, time, the solitary character, and humor.

An Antithesis: Self-destruction

Within the idea of self-creation the presence of its antithesis, self-destruction, is always felt although perhaps not explicitly stated as such in the early novels of Pinget. However, this theme seems to stand out quite prominently when these first novels are viewed in the light of the two transitional novels. There now appears a double significance attached to the meaning of self-destruction. The destruction inherent in the attempts made by Levert and Clope is what might be termed as a "natural" disintegration.

and is closely related to the element of time. Their existence includes the factor of self-destruction with the normal passage of time. But it is at this point that their effort at justification serves its purpose as each hero reacts with an attempt to re-create, reestablish, renew, and replace those moments of a continuing existence which are lost through natural causes.

The heroes of the early novels, on the other hand, seem to lack any concentrated desire to act or react against an ever-vague, distant, and disappearing existence. It is here that the second meaning of self-destruction becomes apparent. The heroes of the early novels were seen as being unable to handle, in some respects, their self-styled creation. This inability coupled with a disregard for the dominance of the time factor engenders in their actions a "permitted" or "chosen" destruction of the multi-faceted existences of which they are the authors. Because of their seemingly inexhaustible mortality—they never seem to be menaced by any thought of a definitive finality—they are able to face what for them is an expected and almost automatic destruction of each new creation.

The calmness exhibited by the heroes of the early works arising from a lack of any desire for a viable existence is in direct contrast to the frenetic atmosphere which surrounds the activities of Clope and Levert. Each hero approaches his predetermined annihilation in a placid but
different manner. Mahu abandons his undertaking without regret when he deems the effort unrealizable. His final words, "Voilà je n'ai plus rien à dire, néanmoins tout me demeure, j'ai gagné,"\(^2\) have no inflection of despair for he has conserved enough "raw" material to ensure innumerable rebirths. Porridge goes full circle in his attempt—from beginning to beginning. Unable to capture a reality among his naissances à revendre, he "ends" his search with the same possibilities for a new beginning as he had when the novel opened. The narrator of *Graal Flibuste*, in contrast with Mahu and Porridge, takes a unique position against any predetermined danger. Finding no value in creating a life for himself in a "realistic" sense, he surrounds himself, from the outset, with a camouflage of fantasy from which he never ventures forth.

*Baga*, still very much an "early" novel with its foundation in the imaginative fantasy of its predecessors, gives a first hint of a new and important theme to be discovered in the transitional novels.

---Au fait, mon président, au fait. ... Je le trouverai, je le trouverai, mais laissez-moi le temps. ... Tout dire comme ça n'est pas facile. On me demande de me justifier. ... Est-ce qu'on me demande de me justifier?\(^3\)

Architruc, during one of his dream sequences, finds himself before a judge. The appearance of this new element heralds


\(^3\)Pinget, *Baga*, p. 119.
a new problem for the succeeding heroes. No longer can the creation of self be regarded lightly. No longer can the hero retreat into a world of fantasy to escape the ravages of the real world. The insistent and insidious personality of reality is making massive inroads into the heretofore insular existences of the heroes of the early works.

**Self-justification and the Disappearance of Fantasy**

"Au fait" becomes a leitmotif which, with its introduction into the life of Architruc, continues and gathers strength in the transitional novels. Because he finds himself suddenly thrust into a confrontation with reality, Architruc can only grope blindly in search of a defense. Is he or is he not being asked to justify himself? He cannot say for sure but it is certain that his friendship with his reality, represented in the personage of Baga, has become strained. "Je le voyais dans le brouillard, penché à mon chevet, et je ne l'aimais plus. Si c'était à refaire ..." Unfortunately perhaps for Architruc, it cannot be redone. A reordering of his misty, fanciful existence is on the verge of being lost forever. Reality is sweeping away the haze of unreality. In this realm of uncertainty Architruc does not have the faintest idea of how to go about justifying himself. Should he talk about his dreams, his plans, his readings--what? Like Levert but in a more simplistic

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4Ibid.
fashion, he tries to recount his life. That which he chooses to relate in his dossier, however, is pointless for he has not yet come to understand much less accept reality. His incomprehension and confusion is furthered with each succeeding au fait emanating from the judge. "--J'ai perdu le fil. ... Ah mon président, vous en avez créé de ces choses! Quand il s'agit de tout débrouiller. ... Vous ne pouvez pas me diriger un peu?" This appeal for help indicates the primitive territory in which Architruc finds himself momentarily isolated. There will be no such appeals on the part of later heroes. In these first primary steps taken by Architruc, a judge agrees to come to his aid. "--Continuez sur l'amitié. Parlez-moi de Baga. --C'est toute ma vie à recommencer. --Recommencez." His recommencement leads to naught. Still incapable of finding a satisfactory defense, his confusion leads to anger on the part of the judge. "--Au fait, accusé, au fait. --Accusé, mon président! Comme vous y allez! On est toujours un peu coupable, mais quand même ..." The accused is unable to get to the point because he does not yet realize what and where the point is. He, in turn, becomes angry and requests to be condemned. "J'en ai marre de cette confusion. Condamnez-moi et qu'on n'en parle plus." The attempt at self-justification made by Architruc cannot succeed as he is inadequately equipped to deal with reality. His request for

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5Ibid., pp. 121-130, passim.
condemnation is nothing more than an admittance of defeat coupled with a basic lack of any desire to change his status quo. So long as he can retain his realistic counterpart in the form of the personage of Baga, he does not feel the societal pressure to justify himself.

The exhaustive self-questioning, which begins with Architruc and continues more stringently with Levert and Clope, is an attempt to face up to reality. Architruc fails and asks for condemnation because he is neither capable nor ready to face life. The same cannot be said of Levert and Clope which provides the important difference in and the progression of the theme of self-justification. The efforts of Levert and Clope represent a further exploration beyond the frontier of this virginal territory confronted by Architruc. At this point a new and persistent element appears. The intrusion of reality into the worlds of these previously insulated heroes has brought also the accompanying force of society. Deprived of their secluded cocoons of fantasy, Levert and Clope are now in the public domain and confronted with the prejudgments of their individual societies. Unlike Architruc, Levert and Clope have already been condemned but they will not assume the defeatist attitude of their predecessor nor accept the latter's dictum, "qu'on n'en parle plus." 6 They will continue to talk about their condemnation and their attempts will be plaidoyers, their speeches for

6Ibid., p. 130.
the defense after the fact.

The acts of self-justification attempted by Levert in his letter and by Clope in his dossier are the result of their realization that any possible future and posterity must be defended. The sentiment of Architruc, "tout mon temps je le perds à rédiger ces mémoires imbéciles ..."\(^7\) is no longer considered. The attitude of uselessness as regards the effort, expressed by the heroes of the early novels, changes drastically. Time is no longer lost in the pursuit of what are, perhaps, only imbecilic and banal memories. Time is now of the essence and the heroes of the transitional novels are writing to evade an encroaching solitude which accompanies their entry into reality and, at the same time, an inescapable nothingness. The fear of nothingness is especially prevalent in *Le Fiston*. As was indicated in Chapter VII, the existence of a son—real or imaginary—matters not. What does matter is Levert's battle to justify himself in the face of a nothingness which lies before and after him.

Levert is the first concrete expression of a nonentity existing in the vacuum of nothingness in the novels of Pinget. In the early works one had the impression that each character had a kind of stable and real existence which he chose to disregard in favor of a world of fantasy. This aspect of permanence, however slight, is absent in the world

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 172.
of Levert. His attempt at a re-creation and reconstitution of an existence has no beginning prior to his enunciation of that existence nor will it have any continuity should he cease enunciating his life.

Il faudrait que nous ayons l'impression que la réalité qui nous est montrée se met à proliférer et à bourgeonner à partir du commencement, par la création même de l'auteur, qu'elle se résolve et se termine avec lui; qu'il n'y ait rien eu avant, rien après ...

Nothing before, nothing after. The existence of Levert is the facts and their variants which Levert the author chooses to give us. That which he chooses to relate becomes a movement in circularity, a world obstructed by self-made walls, existing no further than the recesses of his faulty memory. Thus the enumeration and enunciation of his "life" becomes the obsession that it is as he attempts to preserve a very perishable existence.

Il numère donc, obsédé par la peur de laisser dans l'ombre un élément, peut-être essentiel, qui aussitôt périrait, ressassant perpétuellement les mêmes choses, s'acharant à fixer le fugitif, dans l'espoir insensé d'échapper au néant qui le guette, de survivre à la décomposition de la matière, et ce, par l'élaboration même d'une autre matière--des mots sur une feuille blanche-concrète en un sens, mais non moins fragile.

His self-justification resides in the problem of the fugitive of his existence. How is it possible to fixer le fugitif of a world whose meaning is never definitively

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9Ollier, review of Le Fiston, p. 533.
assured? Levert's method of arresting his meaninglessness is, of course, the constant and continuous letter which has significance only insofar as it represents an existence. The importance and the reality of his existing are not the jumbled and banal thoughts but, rather, the primordial material--the words. His existence and self-justification extend only the length and width of the sheet of paper on which he is writing. As M. Ollier indicates in the above quote, the words signify a certain concreteness but certify only a questionable existence because of their own fragility. With the possibility that an important element has been forgotten or might be related more decisively, a fear lingers--self-justification remains in doubt. Thus, he can only begin again within the precircumscribed boundaries to implement what will always remain a chance; however, probability bodes well for the old gambler. Levert's hope lies in the very nature of the prospect--a constant probability of change or transformation which ensures a continuing letter of existence.

The self-justification of Clope encompasses a twofold problem and a more immediate personal involvement than that found in *Le Fiston*. Like Levert, Clope is "different" from his fellow creatures of the surrounding society. This difference, however, has not been self-imposed as is the case with Levert who does not seem to desire strongly to be a member of society. His care for the populace extends only
as far as its physical presence is pertinent to proving his own existence. The strain between Clope and his society goes beyond mere physicality and culminates on a kind of spiritual plane. Clope, then, finds himself faced with not only a personal self-justification as to the question of his existence but also with a need for a defense to justify his remaining within a society which is on the verge of banishing him because of his idiosyncracies.

The method of self-justification chosen by Clope presages somewhat the procedure to be used by the old servant in L'Inquisitoire. Clope's dossier includes very little personal information and his defense seems to be based upon the portraits of certain townspeople which he sketches in the process of writing his dossier. It is this element of an appeal to his fellow-man which produces a marked difference when compared to Levert's defense. Levert's enumeration of people and places never deviates from the moated environment which the old recluse has constructed around himself. A personal association is never realized between Levert and his society for it is through the nature of the impersonality that he is able to constantly change and rectify the accompanying uncertainty and ensure a prolonged existence.

Clope's dossier, on the contrary, is an invitation to the society around him. Not only does it show his personal feeling of attachment for his fellow creatures but it
also announces his need for reciprocity on the part of society. The dossier stands not only as a defense against a questionable action but, more importantly, as an appeal for understanding. The shooting of the bird and the appearance of the dead woman in the garden, in spite of the possible gravity of these situations, are of secondary importance. The dossier, in all its lyricism, is a kind of love letter to society through which he hopes to vindicate himself as a man and, at the same time, to justify his existence.

The one-sided love affair with society offers little protection, however, and Clope is finally faced with the same fear which resides in Levert. In the end his appeal to society has no more stability perhaps than Levert's appeal to the questionable figure of a son. In both cases the persons in question may be nothing more than stratagems invented for purely selfish motives. Yet, whether these "inventions" are true or not, Clope, like Levert before him, will continue to use them for the same obsessive need to justify his existence. Levert will continue to write his interminable letter for to stop would signify the end of his existence. Clope can only do likewise. To admit defeat and reject his dossier would equal no existence as he, himself, realizes ("c'est toi ce dossier")\(^\text{10}\). His final words for more time denote only a momentary fatigue for he cannot afford to stop and, in the final analysis, he has nothing but

\(^{10}\text{Pinget, Clope au dossier, p. 135.}\)
The weighty presence and importance of time is a new constant which appears in the transitional novels. In the early novels one was not aware of any limiting time factor. The existence of any hero was never in doubt due to any such limitation. Mahu, Porridge, the narrator of *Graal Flibuste*, and Architruc were never hampered in their invented quests for reality by the threat of a finality. In their constant movement across the frontiers of the imagination and back to their "real" life, the element of time is of no consequence. This complete disregard of time makes of them the unsubstantial characters that they are and that they will remain. At the end of their respective journeys they remain the free-floating spirits that they were when they began the long trek. Their life was an unending sequence of moments fugitifs which appeared and disappeared without any great concern on their part.

The worlds of Levert and Clope, because of their concern for finding and keeping a viable existence, turn on a different axis. Their worlds rotate in a sphere of ever-escaping fugitive moments and their constant Sisyphean task is to seize them. They may also be likened to that other figure from Greek mythology condemned to an eternity of suffering, Tantalus, in that they are so close but yet so far from their sustenance and, in a sense, they too have a huge
stone hanging over their heads, ever ready to crush and des­
troy their words.

Clope is cognizant of this constantly changing time,
subtly indicating what takes place and the necessity for
continual recommencement in the personage of the young
painter, Maurice, who paints the same scene every day.

... il commencerait sa toile. Et Toupin de son oeil
en-dedans verrait défiler sur la toile d'abord la der-
nière des personnes qu'il aurait vues passer effacée
par l'avant dernière puis par celle d'avant et par les
autres et il les suivrait en tournant à ce moment sa
manivelle à l'envers et on se demanderait si dans un
sens Maurice et Toupin ne feraient pas la toile en-
semble, une toile en arrière peinte de ces passantes,
une autre toile dont celle-ci cette dernière-née ne
serait qu'une mauvaise copie, l'autre la vraie navi-
guant déchiquetée au-dessus des têtes puisqu'un jour
viendra où ni Toupin ni personne ne pourra n'y étant
plus dire j'étais là attentif à ce moment précis.11

So the existence continues, the painted canvas of one day
erased by the paint of the succeeding day and so on. All
that is new is each day's paint for the scene is always the
same, each being a bad copy of the preceding one. The re-
petition, the boredom, the fatigue, bad as they are, are
everything and, as Levert indicates, there is no alternative
response to one's restricted condition but to continue.

Une demi-heure d'erreur et tout est fichu. D'avance.
Je t'attends. Tu reviendras allez. Je n'ai pas digéré
ma mort, ce n'est pas vrai. Tout part en fumée. Il
n'y a que l'absence qui reste. Je suis bien fatigué
d'écrire. Qui écrit. Ce mensonge m'ennuie. Tout à re-
dire, même pas envie. Je continue, fiston. Dans
l'éther supposé superposé.12

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11Pinget, Clope au dossier, pp. 103-104.

12Pinget, Le Fiston, p. 124.
Both Levert and Clope possess a static existence which is deprived of a future or a past. In their existence the present is the past as well as the future and posterity. They are, in a sense, frozen in the immobility of the present instant which leads them into the repetitive circularity that the Pingetian universe has come to assume. Thus, they inhabit a perpetual present which develops to a certain point and then crumbles away little by little. Their immediate response is to begin again, constructing word by word, thought by thought, the same unstable edifice which is prone to the same destruction when the first tremor of doubt appears.

The Solitary Character

A final element that makes its appearance in the transitional novels is that of the solitary character. The dédoublement des personnages, the obvious dual personalities of the early works are no longer apparent at this point. The distinct duality, for example, of Mahu/Latirail, Porridge/Renard, narrator/Brindon, Architruc/Baga has been held in abeyance as we venture into the world of, in one sense, the "complete" character. Levert and Clope manifest the primitive joining, in the works of Pinget, of the conscious and subconscious beings, of imagination and reality. This theme, which will be developed at greater length in the forthcoming novels, has its first gropings in the trials and tribulations of these two personages. Neither character now
has the handy counterpart or alter ego who will take care of the business of a semi-existence in reality, permitting those previous forays into invented worlds of fantasy. As solitary characters Clope and Levert are truly isolated individuals. The isolation is, for the most part, one of choice on the part of Levert. Clope's isolation is the result of his rejection by society. By choice or through rejection—it matters little. The principal interest is that, for the first time in Pinget's works, a character is dependent upon his new-found "completeness." While there subsists two entities within Clope and Levert, the forces of the conscious and the subconscious must now work in tandem to ensure an existence. For just as existence finds its meaning in itself, so this "new" character finds his significance in himself. No longer can the two beings of the individual follow divergent but parallel routes. At this point in time the routes must come together and form a single access road leading to the meaning of the complete individual.

The emergence of the solitary character in the works of Pinget underscores an element which is indigenous to the works of several New Novelists. The name of Samuel Beckett has been advanced from time to time in this study in connection with various aspects of Pinget's work. However, the similarities and relationship between the two writers are most apparent in these transitional novels as regards their
like treatment of the solitary character. The self-sought solitude of Levert and the isolation of Clope can be viewed as having Beckettian overtones. To what extent Pinget has been consciously influenced by Beckett can only be answered by the author himself. In a 1963 interview with Denise Bourdet he touched upon his relationship with both Beckett and Robbe-Grillet.

The English translation of La Manivelle by Beckett in 1960 was not the first or only joint literary venture of the two authors. As early as 1957 Pinget translated Beckett's play, All That Fall, into French (Tous ceux qui tombent). And once again, also in 1960, Beckett's play, Embers, was translated into French by both Pinget and Beckett himself under the title of Cendres. This close cooperation within a period of a few years undoubtedly lent credence to the viewpoint of some critics that Pinget was directly influenced by Beckett—a viewpoint which remains in spite of the 1963 interview. However, it is worthwhile to note that the actual literary affinity of the two authors has been in the area of the theatre. If a direct influence can be found emanating from

from the works of Beckett, a 1969 interview would seem to limit this influence to the stage. Pinget emphasizes this point in response to a question regarding Beckett's influence on his intellectual formation and his career as a writer.

J'étais formé intellectuellement bien longtemps avant ma rencontre avec Beckett. Il n'a joué aucun rôle dans mon développement intellectuelle ou artistique. C'est un très bon ami. Cependant, il m'a beaucoup appris dans le domaine du théâtre: sa méthode de travail en particulier, l'extrême précision qu'il apporte à toutes choses avec lesquelles il rentre en contact, tout particulièrement sa mise en scène. J'ai travaillé avec et pour lui et il a travaillé également avec et pour moi.14

In the realm of the novel there exists, certainly, a parallelism and at times a confluence in the writings of Pinget and Beckett. The fact that Pinget had not read the first work of the Beckett Trilogy15 (Molloy) before his own first novel, Mahu, was published in 1952 rules out any comparison in the light of a direct influence. The element of parallelism is found, however, in several common factors existent in the works of both authors. One common denominator, already indicated, is that of the solitary character, a character afflicted with the worst physical or social infirmities. The constant, in this respect, in Beckett's work is most often that of a physical deformity which separates his "hero" from the world; in the works of Pinget one finds the prevalence of a social infirmity which is the cause of

the character's separation from society—a state of being sometimes sought by the "hero" and sometimes forced upon him by society.16

A second factor common to both writers is that of the soliloquy. Since the characters are, for whatever reason, separated from normal communication with others, making of them abnormal beings, theirs is a world of nonstop talking as they attempt to create and preserve an alternate existence. Thus language plays an important role with both writers as the effort to found a viable existence is enclosed in this continuum of language.

Finally, both authors portray within their works the situation of the writer within a novel which is in the act of writing itself. The preceding factors are combined to form what one critic refers to as the anagogical factor.

... Pingot's clearest point of contact with Beckett is also the point of departure for his own individual style. Beckett's novels, particularly the Trilogy, are "anagogical." They mirror in the texture of the narrative the situation of the writer who composes it. ... But Pingot differs from Beckett in being concerned with a much fuller range of anagogical effects. He differs from Beckett in presenting within his work not only the solipsistic personality of the author but also the full range of human relationships open to him by virtue of his relation to an audience.17

The circumstantial importance of this Beckett/Pingot

16 See Le Piston, Clope au dossier and later works, such as L'Inquisitoire (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1962) and Quelqu'un (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1965), all by Robert Pinget.

confluence notwithstanding, it is to serve only as a point of departure for the individuality of Pinget's ensuing style.

**Humor**

As has been indicated in the summary of the two transitional novels, the distance between the hero's "real" life and reality has been considerably abridged. Clope and Levert have left behind the crutch of fantasy without which Mahu and his successors were unable to survive. The almost complete assimilation of fantasy within the framework of reality and the resulting decrease in the distance between the hero and his self has notably altered the comic element also. The early works were deeply impregnated with humor of all kinds, attributable to the comic possibilities inherent in fantasy. The alteration of the humorous element in the worlds of Levert and Clope is directly relatable to the budding seriousness which their existences assume.

It was stipulated in Chapter VI that a duplicity of the humorous and the serious was present with the scales tipped in favor of humor. A reversion has taken place in the transitional novels and this same duplicity is now weighted toward the seriousness of the situation. The deprivation of fantasy diminishes the humorous possibilities and an accompanying increase in the interest toward the human condition accentuates the serious nature of these transitional works. The moments of humor now assume a pathetic
Of course the heroes in question are involved in the very uncomical business of self-justification. The existence of each one is threatened in a different manner but the seriousness of both affairs disallows a concerted and determined effort to make light of them. Although there are rare moments of humor, one has the impression that these "lapses" are unintentional on the part of the heroes involved. Life, however, does have its absurdly funny moments and these instances are present, certainly, in the worlds of Clope and Levert. Thus one can laugh sparingly at the trials and tribulations of these two solitary figures but the laughter is somewhat less than convincing. One cannot discount the pathetic nature of the observed existence which, in turn, affects the humorous point of view as regards the banality of the situation.

Basically there is nothing humorous in the tortured letter of Levert. The spare, comical aspect which is present in his story is found in the presentation of himself and the odd provincial characters who compose society. It is in the very eccentricity of these unimposing character types that one finds a glimmer of pathetic humor. On the part of the reader, given his typical human nature, the reaction is that of a kind of superiority. There is a basically comical response to the unchanging and inane pattern of existence exhibited by the creatures of Levert's society.
Levert, himself, is not immune from ridicule since he is, in spite of his self-alienation, very much a part of the same banality. The sparse humor rests in a story which becomes, fundamentally, a rather biting satire of the mores and foibles of an uninspiring and uninspired social group of individuals.

Clope's community of characters offers more visibly humorous types yet with the preservation of the pathos found in Le Fiston. All the characters are once again the same pathetic figures with their small and insignificant daily worries. The process becomes, once again, satirical even though each character is presented with more humanity than is seen in the treatment emanating from Levert. But still the fraternal feeling held by Clope cannot hide for long the vulnerability of his fellow-citizens. Not even the most minor character escapes the caricaturing pen of Clope.

Le juge Pommard. Le voilà qui sort dans son petit jardin à petits pas un petit foulard une petite sibiche un petit pet, il se dégourdit de ce sommeil lourd à côté de sa bourgeoise lourde qui avait trop mangé la veille de blanquette lourde ...

The pathetic element of the humor of the transitional novels is best seen in Clope's work summarized in his discussions revolving around Simone and Toupin, the two characters for whom he seems to feel the closest affinity. The presentation of a day in the lives of these two solitary figures indicates the sameness and the banality of daily

18Pinget, Clope au dossier, p. 34.
life where, in spite of its uncomical aspects, a residue of pathetic humor repose. The unexciting life of Simone is particularized by the long absences of her husband and the constant companionship of her small son. Since all her activities center, for the most part, around the child, her life becomes a kind of serio-comic drama of refusals to eat and bed-wetting. Her life seems to be summed up in the quantities of water necessary to clean up and after the child, for example, when he spills ink all over himself and the floor

... elle remplit la casserole d'eau et la met sur le gaz et allume le gaz. Elle prend la bouteille d'eau de Javel, elle va en verser sur le plancher, ... L'eau une fois chaude elle l'a versée dans la cuvette, elle a versé dedans de la lessive en paillettes, elle a rajouté de l'eau froide pour les lainages ... et avec le reste de l'eau chaude de la casserole et le savon elle lave la figure et les mains du petit.19

The pathetic humor is most prevalent in the characters of Toupin and old Pommard. Friends during their youth they are now both castaways of society, solitary and living in the past. The problem they face, and the root of the humor, lies in their faulty memories and a progressively dimmer past.

Eh oui le régiment monsieur Pommard vous étiez de la classe dix-neuf cent deux non. Dix-neuf cent trois dit Pommard et vous c'était donc dix-neuf cent six. Dix-neuf cent six oui dit Toupin c'est bien ça, à Clermont-Ferrand. ... Mais l'infanterie ce n'était pas à Clermont disait Pommard pas à Clermont souvenez-vous c'était la cavalerie, vous deviez être à Toulouse, ...

19Ibid., p. 54.
ça m'étonnerait bien disait Pommard la cavalerie c'était à Toulouse souvenez-vous. J'étais dans l'infanterie disait Toupin, ... l'infanterie oui je veux dire disait Pommard l'infanterie était à Clermont, c'est bien ce que je dis disait Toupin.  

The humorous element in the transitional novels translated, in its fashion, the change of tone which appears after the early works with their dominant trait of fantasy. Novels which attempt to portray an aspect or aspects of the human condition can no longer be situated in the dream-like atmosphere of a Mahu. The restriction of such a universe to the basic qualities of a reality must necessarily be accompanied by a tempering of the humorous ingredients.

The newly-explored territory of the transitional novels, by means of their commentary embodied in the themes and constants, reveals some new interests and aspects which will continue to be mined in the forthcoming interrogatory novels. This newly-discovered universe is now to be solidified in the sense that it is very much an extension of the exploration already set forth in Le Fiston and Clope au dossier.

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20Ibid., pp. 71-72.
PART III

THE INTERROGATORY NOVELS

L'Inquisitoire
Autour de Mortin
Quelqu'un
CHAPTER X

THE SUM OF THE MATERIAL

L'Inquisitoire

L'Inquisitoire, the eleventh work and sixth novel of Robert Pinget, was published by Les Editions de Minuit in 1962. An English version of the novel, The Inquisitory, translated by Donald Watson, was published in 1966 by Grove Press. After a writing career of some ten years, it was this novel which brought critical acclaim to Pinget and a literary prize, the Prix des Critiques, awarded in 1963. At this point in time Pinget was officially added to the roster of an extremely small and select band of prize-winning "new novelists." Those of the group who preceded him on the lists of literary prize recipients are Alain Robbe-Grillet, the 1953 Prix Fénéon for Les Gommes and the 1955 Prix des Critiques for Le Voyeur, and Michel Butor, the 1957 Prix Théophraste-Renaudot for La Modification and the 1960 Grand Prix de la Critique littéraire for Répertoire.

With the publication of L'Inquisitoire there simultaneously appeared a small opuscule of the novel's characters compiled by the author as he drafted his work, Nomenclature des personnes de Sirancy-la-Louvre d'Agapa et des environs mentionnés dans le procès-verbal, also published by Les Editions de Minuit.
The neologistic title of the work has offered much ground for speculation among the critics. There is no doubt that the primary vocabulary element of the neologism is *inquisition*. From that point on the secondary element is found in various words such as *interrogatoire, réquisitoire, répertoire*, and *histoire*. The most obvious combination is that of *inquisition/interrogatoire* since the work is, superficially and by dint of its form, an interrogation with the dramatic overtone of an inquisition. The reference to *répertoire* (*< L.L. repertorium [inventory]< L. repertus [discovered]*) is justified as the novel serves as Pinget's inventory or catalogue of all the characters and their preoccupations within the confines of Sirancy and Agapa that he has developed during his ten years as a writer. *Inquisition, interrogatoire, réquisitoire, répertoire, histoire*—a reading of the text enables one to make the assumption that any one or a combination or even perhaps all of the above terms play a part in the formation of *inquisitoire*. The title is the first of many neologisms, malapropisms, and puns to occur in the text (*astronogue* [*astrologue, astronome*], *vendeur de vision* [*vison*], *la peau de Sagrin [chagrin]*)). They all become devices to provoke the widest possible interpretation and speculation as to the word's exact meaning and, thereby, fulfills Pinget's desire not only to make his readers react to his words as entities in and of themselves but also to negate the validity of any
definitive statements. Such devices are also made perfectly plausible by the nature of the speaker—an uneducated deaf peasant who spends everyday at the bistro.

The form of the novel is, as the title indicates, one of questions and answers, an interrogation spanning nearly five hundred pages, all of which is being diligently transcribed by the shadowy figure of a typist in the background. As Pinget undertook the task of writing this work he stated:

... je n'avais rien à dire. Je ne ressentais qu'un besoin de m'expliquer très longuement. Je me suis mis à ma table de travail et j'ai écrit la phrase "Oui ou non répondez" qui s'adressait à moi seul et signifiait "accouchez." Et c'est la réponse à cette question abrupte qui a déclenché le "ton" et toute la suite.²

His interrogative technique goes hand in hand with his inquisitorial tone as, admittedly employing the Socratic method ("La maieutique de Socrate, en somme"³), he sets out to pry into a human soul, to question rigorously its certainties, to expose its doubts, assumptions, and fears—in essence, the Socratic goal, to know thyself. Thus, the novel becomes a long series of demands for accurate descriptions all minutely detailed, and even requests for hearsay, speculations, and assumptions. In this way Pinget searches for the "truth" of a man as it is revealed principally through his reactions to the external factors of his life.

²Knapp, "Interview," p. 554.
³Bourdet, "Robert Pinget," p. 121.
Through their manipulation of both questions and answers, the interrogators and the old man go about their futile search; nevertheless, the exposure of a final truth is inconsequential—it is the search which provides the stimulation, the expansion of the mind, and perhaps the revelation of the soul. For such a mission the author has found the interrogatory method to be effective for its limiting and expansive characteristics in that it is flexible but yet within the confines that each party may arbitrarily establish.

In attendance are an old servant and his interrogators who are interested ostensibly in the disappearance of the male secretary from the château where the old man had previously been employed. Like Clope's shot in the air and the death of Marie Chinze in Le Fiston, the disappearance of the secretary merely provides the impetus to a search for an individual truth. All three novels have been stimulated by an initial external act, an act inherently dramatic and characterized by its suddenness, its finality, and its irreversibility, an act around which a conventional novelist would develop his plot. The events leading up to the act and the effects it has on the characters would be explored in the light of the nature of the act itself. Should the event be altered, adjustments of the entire story would be most probably required. For Pinget, the "new novelist," such deeds are viewed as complete and, consequently, there
is no reason to dwell on them or to expand on them. It is the chain of reactions which evolve using the acts as mere starting points that interests Pinget. One might easily interchange these initial incidents between the three novels and the end result would remain unchanged. *L'Inquisitoire* is a search for an individual, as the interrogators state; however, that individual is, from the outset, not the secretary but the old man and the "truth" so avidly sought after is the old man's truth. The drama of the exterior act soon proves to be superficial when the painfully elaborate, vacillating, perpetual, and never-definitive flow of the narrative evolving from the interior "act" is extracted and set in motion.

The identity of the questioners is never explicitly disclosed nor can we ever be certain exactly why they have come. It is evident that some weeks or perhaps months have passed between the disappearance of the secretary and the interrogation of the servant. The nature of their identity, as with that of the old man, must be found within their remarks and the tone in which they are conveyed. The questions range from one word to two or three lines, all are in written form (*billets*, as the old man calls them, conveying a sense of announcement rather than dialogue) with the exception of three, posed ostensibly to determine the "truth" of the servant's deafness. Aside from the questions there is much prodding and goading with such statements as
"tâchez de vous souvenir," "dites tout ce que vous savez," and "à quel endroit exactement," as they at times request and at times demand a precision of detail. Paradoxically, along with the numerous demands to détailler are found an equal number to abréger which serve to expand and then contract the old man's attention so as to then expand it in another direction. However, it also points up a basic inconsistency and self-contradiction within the interrogators themselves which serves to put into question the validity of their function within the novel.

This air of incongruity is further heightened by the nature of their questions. They apparently are not equipped with even the most basic information as regards the supposed "event"—they know nothing of the château where the secretary lived, nothing of his acquaintances, employers, etc. Furthermore, they have come not to the people most likely to be able to furnish some "real" information but instead to an individual who has since severed all connection with the château and, even while living there, had little contact with the missing man. Even the town of Agapa and its surroundings seem to be unknown to the investigators and one might be relatively safe in assuming that this interview is taking place within the confines of Agapa and most probably in the bistro. Their questions often center on the château and the lives of its inhabitants, including the secretary,

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but just as often they are completely irrelevant to the "case" ("Qu'entendez-vous par légume intéressant," "Pourquoi n'y a-t-il pas de tapis dans les chambres de vos patrons," "Combien y a-t-il d'hôtels à Agapa"\(^5\)). At other times they seem to be moralists in search of *cochonneries* rather than objective investigators of facts as they "fourrent leur morale à l'endroit où il ne faut pas."\(^6\)

Pensez-vous que ce fût à cause de ses moeurs

Qu'entendez-vous par avoir sa vie en ville
Quand on habite le village il me semble que c'est clair non

Et vous trouvez normales ces sortes d'interférences\(^7\)

This mass of inconsistencies within the nature of the remarks themselves leads us to the tone of the interrogation to further delineate the nature of the questioners (we may assume that there are at least two with the reference: "Nous nous demandons ...\(^8\)\)). In the first half of the novel their questions and remarks are brusque and to the point but as the *procès-verbal* progresses, what has begun as an interrogation takes on the form of an inquisition not only because of its length but also through its intensity which builds up albeit haltingly.

Tâchez de vous souvenir des noms

\(^5\)Ibid., pp. 23-132, *passim.*

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 275.

\(^7\)Ibid., pp. 148-417, *passim.*

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 470.
Vous risquez plus que vous ne pensez ...  
Expliquez-vous  
Pensez-vous que ce soit un piège  
Pourquoi mentez-vous ...  
Veuillez quitter ce ton agressif  
Ne vous troublez pas dites oui ou non  
Etes-vous sûr  
Reprenez-vous, répondez  
Ne pensez-vous qu'une autre raison vous mette la tête à l'envers  
Il est difficile de vous croire après vos louvoiements et vos omissions continuels.  

This tone, always impersonal and direct, has other qualities: at times it serves merely as a prod to the speaker's memory, at times as a jolt, at times it has a subduing effect, and at others, it seems to be aggressively attacking the memory, the words of the old man, menacingly questioning their veracity and thereby deepening the mystery surrounding the servant and themselves as well.

This uneven tone and the inconsistencies within the remarks themselves coupled with the statement by Pinget that he addressed the first, and undoubtedly also the last, remark (both being "Oui ou non répondez") to himself, all lead one to conclude that the interrogators are the force behind Pinget, the confessed écrivain paresseux. They are, no doubt, a combination of desire and necessity, necessity to eke out a living, to get off a manuscript to his publishers. However, the underlying desire is also strong; Pinget has stated that he had been mulling over the material for five

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9Ibid., pp. 281-449, passim.  
10Bourdet, "Robert Pinget," p. 121.
years and it was merely a matter of forcing himself to sit down and write, but first he had to find the proper ton.11 This tone was discovered in the initial demand to create and it is, at times, uneven; nevertheless, this unevenness is usually in accord with the nature of the flow of words coming from the old man: when the flow is steady, there is merely a demand for overlooked details; when it becomes too profuse, there is a call to either shorten the narrative or to change the subject altogether; when it contradicts itself, the "force" takes note and asks for an explanation; when the flow of words falters or threatens to come to a complete halt, the tone becomes aggressive and at times ominous.12 The "force" of this unadmitted auto-inquisitoire acts as a positive influence on the old man. It is the reasonable aspect of his personality which attempts to control the current of thought, to restrain the imaginative power, and to maintain within narrow limits the motive of the interrogation--the search for a personal truth. It also serves to bring about a constant rise and fall of momentum within this long narrative which prevents tediousness from taking over and creates a desire to hear the old man out.

When questioned about the countless items and personages included in the novel, Pinget replied:

11Ibid.

12The important aspect of ton within the works of Pinget will be discussed at greater length in Chapter XIII.
A certains moments on lâche pied volontairement, et cela pour passer à un autre objet... Enfin quoi! avec le même objet toujours comme objectif (ou comme obstacle) on deviendrait fou! ... J'aime beaucoup mes personnages. Je suis fidèle à mes personnages. Des années en vérité, que je vis avec eux... Alors dans L'Inquisitoire j'ai fait une somme de ce petit monde, oui: comme une somme, mais bien entendu nettement subjective et absolument sentimentale...13

Thus, the reader of Pinget is reunited with such characters as Mlle Lorpailleur, Sophie Narre, Mahu, Levert, Brindon, and Architruc through anecdotes related by the old man and is introduced to so many new arrivals that the mind boggles if, for a moment, one tries to keep track of them all. Yet, as Pinget says above, without all of them one would go mad. Our minds are swarming with countless unrelated ideas, facts, and people, the majority of which pass unnoticed by our conscious mind, and should one concentrate on but one or even several, one would be termed neurotic, if not indeed psychotic or even schizophrenic. Nevertheless, the author has presented us with a somewhat different situation than that which he stated above. He has asked his character to put into words the multiplicity of images that occur, overlap, and reoccur within his mind. It is not the awesome number of people and things that pass through the narrative --for it is quite probable that a man living in the same area all of his life would have knowledge of over six hundred people, the layout of all the streets, the location of

every building, and every crevice of the château where he had spent ten years--but rather it is the awesomeness of the task of calling them forth to the consciousness and then to verbalization. It is an extreme situation which can prove overwhelming for the reader should he become preoccupied with the congestion and one which eventually becomes too exhaustive a task not only for the old man but for the writer himself. Verbalization--an unattainable goal by virtue of its magnitude, is that what Pinget is trying to convey in this novel? Superficially perhaps, but these innumerable details carry a more important significance, one which is simple yet complex. In the words of the writer:

... la vérité du livre, c'est tout simplement, c'est uniquement la découverte de l'âme du domestique. La vérité qui seule importe est celle-là: comment il comprend les choses, juge et se déjuge.14

Things, people, and places, all seen through the eyes of the old servant as he attempts to verbalize them. As he brings to life the whole of Sirancy-la-Louve, Agapa, and their populations, a single image evolves--that of the old man. It is he who provides the description, singles out what has made an impression on him as he reacts to his self-created milieu. This element of Pinget's description provides a sharp contrast to Balzacian realism. In the latter the details of the environment were established before the development of the characters. The situation preexisted the

14Ibid.
protagonist, determined the form that he would assume, and
ultimately also survived him. It was the external situation
and the effects it had on the characters that interested
Balzac who believed that in addition to an innate "charac-
ter" man was also formed by his environment. Such a theory
can be readily formulated in the personage of the naïve and
rustic provincial, Rastignac, once he is introduced into the
squalid atmosphere of the Vauquer pension. Pinget, on the
other hand, finds the internal environment more compelling
and dramatic as he demonstrates the conscious and uncon-
scious mind twisting the external conditions to its
pleasure. As the old man relates what he knows and what he
sees, his words also inevitably reveal what he does not know
or see. Through his own expression of his world, one
acquires an understanding, albeit destined to remain par-
tial, of what he "is," for it is how and what he sees,
rather than what an "impartial" observer says is there, that
provides the key to a man's soul.

One of the first aspects of the servant that becomes
apparent is his simplicity, his childlike vision of the
world.

... il y a un grand tapis dans les rouges à dessins des
oiseaux et des poissons et des petits chiens qui courent
tout le long de la bordure il y en a qui n'ont que trois
pattes

... il y a des couleurs surtout du rouge et du bleu très
bien dessiné on peut compter tous les doigts de pied
même ...
He takes note of color, the animals, and any aberration from his norm. His vision is restricted to the object in its most simple detail, however vast that detail may be. Texture, shading, harmony or contrast of style between the object and its setting, changes which occur through outside influences, such as lighting and position, are not seen. It is not a sophisticated, educated point of view but it remains, above all, human and very much alive. The intricate yet sincere and warm description of the château proffers a relationship built on solidarity and mutual acceptance, a sense of communion between the objects and the servant. The words flow easily when recalling the estate which provides a sharp contrast to those concerning its inhabitants, the messieurs.

Compared to the château and the people who frequent it, there are only minimal references to the messieurs themselves. The old man is not willing to betray their confidence out of loyalty, a loyalty arising more from his insistence that people not deviate from their station in life than from any personal attachment toward them. The only direct references made about them are general observations concerning their role as employers, i.e., they pay the extra help well; they are quick to dismiss the maids for

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15Pinget, L'Inquisitoire, pp. 114-117, passim.
overlooking the slightest detail; they do not fire the larbin in spite of his utter incompetence and presumptuous attitude, a situation which remains completely incomprehensible for the old man. The portrait of the messieurs that emerges is one based almost exclusively on assumptions, assumptions made by the reader. Ironically, the old man tells more about his former employers by not saying anything directly about them. They assume a life-style and character through the personalities of the people who frequent the château. The coterie which makes the most regular visits is made up of actors (Douglas Hotcock, Ralf Morgione, and Babette Saint-Foin among others). The most damaging evidence as to the character of the messieurs revolves around this group of personalities as indicated by the words of the ex-servant:

Pourquoi aviez-vous de l'animosité contre presque tous les amis de vos patrons
Je n'ai jamais dit ça j'ai dit qu'il y en avait certains moins bien que d'autres ...16

It is this central group that brings with it the possibilities of deviant sexual activities, drugs, smuggling, tax evasion, all of which provoke assumptions of "abnormal" behavior. But the old servant refuses to state definitively that any one assumption is true. Since he, himself, does not know the truth, he will not be pressured into dignifying the assumptions to which his own responses give rise. The

16Ibid., p. 176.
loyalty he feels for his former employers extends to his own personage as well for he too may be judged "abnormal." Thus, any assumptions concerning the "others" and himself should remain as such for "les gens font tout de suite des suppositions lorsque quelqu'un ne vit pas comme tout le monde." 17 In addition, "... on a droit à son quant-à-soi ..." 18 which should not be questioned by anyone.

The naïveté of the old man is further brought out by his inclination to believe in and be haunted by the occult. This facet of his personality is deeply embedded and colors his life and actions, covering the spectrum from the stereotyped ("... l'impair porte malheur, ..." 19) to the diabolic ("... le diable il existe, je me demande bien comment font ceux qui n'y pensent pas ..." 20). Before his employment in the château the preceding years were spent in the service of the Emmerands whose life revolved around their belief in the spiritual world. Their contact with the old man was minimal but much effort was put into the conversion of his wife, Marie. Eventually they succeeded when, after the sudden death of her son, Marie is convinced that the Emmerands are able to communicate with the dead boy. Soon Marie also dies and her husband leaves for the château but the influence of

17 Ibid., p. 160.
18 Ibid., p. 248.
19 Ibid., p. 230.
20 Ibid., p. 251.
the Emmerands is to remain.

The attraction which the ex-servant feels toward magic and superstition is understandable since it is based on the most simple and elementary train of thought: cause and effect are inextricably related and things/people that resemble each other or were once in contact with each other will continue to be spiritually tied together in spite of being physically separated. In addition, comparable to a child's game of make-believe, the old man is easily able to relate to things belonging to or representing others whereas direct confrontation with people, especially with those not on his social level, is impossible. In a world whose meaning escapes the intellectual, this simple man is able to respond with certainty that the Emmerands caused the death of his son through their desire to be able to communicate with a known dead soul and that their demise was, in turn, brought about by his sticking pins into their photographs. However, in so doing, he also has been put into direct contact with the devil and will be forever spiritually linked to him; in retaliation for the Emmerand's destruction "... ils [le diable et Mme Emmerand] vont me tuer ..."21

So strong is this impression that it affects his entire life: his is a daily battle with the devil who is everywhere. In the mind of this bistro habitué, the devil appears during the moments when he is finally and completely

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21Ibid., p. 251.
alone:

Il n'a pas tout le temps la même figure il ne vient pas tout le temps de la même façon en général avant de me coucher ..., je ne devrais pas me coucher c'est lui qui me pousse dans le lit j'ai essayé de rester debout c'est impossible, une fois couché je laisse la lumière je sais qu'il attend et tout à coup la lumière s'éteint... 22

or when he feels himself threatened, when he is compelled by the interrogation to dredge up and verbalize this constant fear:

Vous n'y croyez pas vous devriez faire attention
Attention à quoi
À lui
Pourquoi
Il est à côté de vous
Comment était-il
Votre figure 23

He is ready to see the devil at any moment when his security is threatened and this spirit of evil takes on the shape and form, usually, of the persons whom he does not like. Everything which adversely affects his life is attributed to the work of the devil and in his vapid existence ("... je n'ai plus rien à moi ... j'ai disparu de mes mains comme le verre sur la table ...") 24, this aspect of his personality has assumed nightmarish and maniacal qualities.

... le diable ... il veut qu'on soit des morts vivants on sait ces choses on n'a pas besoin des curés ils veulent qu'on les paie qu'on les paie pour nous dire l'amour de Dieu il faudrait les brûler tous les brûler

22Ibid., p. 252.
23Ibid., pp. 254-255.
24Ibid., p. 221.
brûler ces gens tout le monde brûler

The dwelling place as well as the existence of the devil is unquestioned in the old man's mind. The evil spirit dwells in Vaguemort.

Une ancienne carrière avec une ferme désinfectée [sic] personne ne veut plus y habiter c'est là qu'il vient on voit des feux la nuit, le matin il n'y a plus trace de feu et des bruits les gens disent, ...

His own existence has become a kind of Vaguemort both literally and figuratively. It is a part of the physical landscape of the region of Sirancy-la-Louve and Agapa, adhering to a Larousse definition of "vague": "terrain à proximité d'une agglomération, et qui n'est ni cultivé ni construit," a small corner of Pinget's fictional universe where, in the superstitious coloration of the old man's mind, death lurks and where one can communicate with the dead. Figuratively, there exists in the unnaturalness, the loneliness, and the menace of life a vague odor of death so that, in the mind of the old servant, Vaguemort can be found any and everywhere. When questioned about this possibility, the existence of more than one Vaguemort in the region, the old man emphasizes this personal belief.

Partout à la frontière pour nous faire tomber de l'autre côté
Pourquoi à la frontière

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25Ibid., p. 257.
26Ibid., p. 256.
Thoughts of death and his own finality haunt him in his present state of uselessness. The fact that he is no longer useful to society and, consequently, to himself leaves him with only a fading vision and a failing memory of all the yesterdays which possessed a life and a meaning. Thus, like the Pingetian protagonists who have preceded him, he is faced with the impossibility of acquiring a present meaning from the shadowy memories of a past banal existence. The misery encountered by the old man at this moment in time is not so much his current meaninglessness as it is the unsure structures on which he must construct a posterity. Ultimately, misery lies not in life, banal or otherwise, but in the memory.

... partout dans notre tête quelle misère tout ça tout le temps qui recommence pourquoi, tous ces morts autour de nous tous ces morts qu'on cuisine pour les faire parler je n'ai rien demandé, est-ce qu'il va falloir tout le temps que je recommence le soir au bistro ...

It is unfortunate but the only recourse is that misery of the mind—the ghosts and phantoms who gambol and run rampant in that misty isle and who are never as one thinks they are. Memories are nothing more than distortions, what one thinks or wants things to be rather than what they were.

... il y a beau temps que je ne me tracasse plus sur

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28Pinget, L'Inquisitoire, p. 265.

29Ibid., p. 435.
les raisons de ce qui nous arrive ..., la mémoire un temps j'aurais donné dix ans de ma vie pour la ravoir et maintenant même plus elle vous laisse comme elle vous a trouvé on en sait de moins en moins, on prend ce qui vient et on rêvasse sur des souvenirs tout faux ce qu'on aurait voulu et qu'on n'a pas eu, ...

The distress and anguish of the old man is caused by the falsity of recollection. The past is completely unreliable; the passage of time alters and deforms all aspects of life stored away in the memory. His truth, his meaning, must then be sought in the present--the immediate present--since each fleeting moment is transformed, "... on devrait dire les souvenirs c'est ce qu'on a sous les yeux maintenant oui ce qui est sous les yeux, après c'est fini."  

The impossibility of remembering truthfully and of planning a future makes the immediate impression of life all the more valuable. He can see only foolishness in the actions of his former employers who seemingly have everything necessary, i.e., money and friends, for the enjoyment of the immediate present. But they have not discovered the old man's secret and, thus, are constantly embroiled in the making of new plans, in living life at a frantic pace.

C'est comme ces messieurs avec tous leurs chichis ... ils ne pouvaient pas rester une minute seuls sans broyer du noir et ils faisaient des projets ça ferait presque rire, des projets pour vendre la maison et en racheter une ailleurs pour recommencer recommencer quoi

30Ibid., p. 474.
31Ibid., p. 301.
32Ibid., p. 303.
The old man's thoughts at this juncture in the Pingetian novel introduces a new element—the idea of the inutility of a new beginning. Up to this point the idea of recommencer has been an integral factor in the hero's outlook. The deep-seated belief in the infinite possibilities of a recommencement, of a renewal in the search for truth has been a stable and constant element. However, the present narrator has reached a point where an act of renewal or an attempt at such is as useless as is his present life. He possesses instead an attitude of carpe diem, of seizing the present moment without trying to recapture a constantly changing past or waiting for an uncertain future. To do one or the other or both is a form of suicide.

... non la vérité je pense la vérité c'est de faire ce qu'on a à faire sans rien voir et sans rien demander, aussitôt qu'on se demande on est bon pour le cimetière ... la vie elle continue par étages on ne sait plus lequel est le bon, au lieu que de travailler sans rien dire vous la fait suivre tout uniment et personne ne vous ennuiera plus quand vous serez au bout 33

The absence of a false past and an unsettled future is the ideal sought by the old man. According to him, this ideal is to be found in the present moment. Although his life is not the best possible existence, it is the only one he has and he means to live it day by day. He has no desire to hurry it along by dwelling on unreliable memories or a more hopeful future since both this retrogression and expectancy are an admittance of dissatisfaction with life.

33Ibid., p. 304.
... à croire qu'on est pressé de sortir de la vie eh bien moi je ne le suis pas vous m'entendez, malgré tout je ne le suis pas je vais bientôt retourner dans ma chambre et demain de nouveau au bistro ce qui n'est pas toujours drôle mais je voudrais que ça dure tout le temps voilà 34

This immensely lonely old man has no death wish.

His life may be meaningless or its significance may escape him, but it is livable. It is, in the final analysis, an earthly hell but not without its counterpart in the personage of the saintly M. Pierre. Near the end of the novel the old man reveals the existence of this third monsieur who also inhabits the château. This member of the triad represents for the old man the nearest thing to a vision of Heaven of which he is capable. M. Pierre, the hermit astronomer/astrologer (astronogue), resides in one of the towers of the château, removed from the world, ceaselessly observing the stars and making his calculations. Measured against the diabolism with which the old man finds himself surrounded in society, M. Pierre, secluded in his hermitage, is a saint who has managed to divorce himself from the burdens of the past and the future. He typifies for the ex-servant the disinterested day-to-day search for the truth. M. Pierre has attained the ideal sought by the old man—living each day as it comes. He recognizes a confrère in the astronomer/astrologer to whom his own position in life corresponds.

34Ibid., p. 450.
... nous voilà comme monsieur Pierre devant un autre ciel, il faudrait refaire des calculs pour vérifier ceux d'hier sinon il continue à tourner et nous on reste sur nos œufs.\textsuperscript{35}

The old man, throughout the inquisition, has been practicing the art of M. Pierre. Finding himself before un autre ciel also, he rechecks and verifies his calculations of a world with infinite possibilities. His "reality" is an ever-expanding universe similar to the one in which M. Pierre searches for a truth. The astronomical instruments used by the old man to invent, create, and explore his universe are words. Thus the château becomes larger and larger in size and the characters more and more numerous, each hidden room and each new character changing the figures of the calculation, modifying the sum, and verifying a personal truth.

The admiration which the old man feels for M. Pierre is derived from the notion that the hermit has found peace, that he has discovered a means of separating himself from the burdens of life, that he searches for his truth outside and beyond himself in the vastness of the heavens. "Monsieur Pierre et ses étoiles c'est ça oui c'est ce qui va le mieux avec le reste." The remainder is the life in which one seeks to find his truth, a truth that is incommunicable because of his close proximity to it. The truth is always just out of reach, impossible to translate because there exists "le reste ce qu'on a oublié ..." That which the

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 452.
life-style and study of M. Pierre offer to the old man, then, is the necessary distance from one's personal and hidden truth. "Je veux dire les distances qu'on a besoin chaque jour un peu plus on finira bien par comprendre ... comprendre ce qu'on a oublié."36

The end result of the inquisitoire will be without meaning. No amount of questions and answers will provide that which one has forgotten—the truth. "... je fais l'effort je le fais même trop et le vrai se trouve à côté." None of the questions and answers matter; whether one replies yes or no, true or false, does not alter the end result. Our life remains the same and no one knows the truth of it: "... la vérité est dépassée depuis longtemps elle était justement où on ne pensait pas ..."37 Once again the old man emphasizes the importance of the present. What he has said throughout the inquisition is so many words and nothing more.

... on pourrait inventer d'autres personnes n'importe lesquelles oui leur faire dire n'importe quoi ça serait pareil à ce qui s'est passé entre les vraies tous dans notre tête ils sont morts ...38

The whole cast of characters could be altered and nothing would really change. The characters are simply "another heaven" which revolves and disappears, its infinite

36Ibid., p. 487.
37Ibid., pp. 299-300.
38Ibid., p. 299.
possibilities found wanting after verification. What matters, in the final analysis, is the individual who is searching. Like the Innommable of Beckett's novel, the "others" have no bearing on one's personal truth.

Ils m'ont fait perdre mon temps, rater ma peine, en me permettant de parler d'eux, quand il fallait parler seulement de moi, afin de pouvoir me taire. J'ai cru bien faire, en m'adjoignant ces souffre-douleurs. Que maintenant ils s'en aillent, eux et les autres, de ma vie, de mon souvenir, de mes hontes, de mes craintes. Voilà, il n'y a plus que moi ici, personne ne tourne autour de moi, personne ne vient vers moi, devant moi personne n'a jamais rencontré personne. Ces gens n'ont jamais été. N'ont jamais été que moi et ce vide opaque.39

The whole affair is only a dream, the divagation of an old man who spends everyday in the bistro and who drinks too much. The nightmarish quality of the entire inquisitoire is well situated in the confines of the café where the constant imbibition opens the door of the imagination and where

... des idées vous viennent sans qu'on ait spécialement cherché, elles s'installent sans prévenir elles sont à vous et quand on y pense elles n'ont rien à voir avec ce que voudraient vous faire dire les gens bien soi-disant, tout prend de moins en moins d'importance c'est la vie qui est importante, plus qu'on vieillit plus qu'on se rend compte des choses qu'on n'explique pas et je vous prie de croire que je ne parle pas pour ne rien dire si vous réfléchissiez un peu vous ne seriez pas acharné sur des détails comme un pou sur une rogne40

Details, then, are unimportant since they can easily be invented, transformed, and refuted. The truth is never to be

40Pinget, L'Inquisitoire, p. 276.
found in details but, rather, in words, language, and tone. It is these three elements which comprise the truth of any person; his feelings and sensations are revealed in how he chooses to express himself and not in the immaterial details which serve only as a framework for un petit bout de vérité.

And so, the procès-verbal comes to a close for the day. The old man is tired, Pinget is tired, and the force behind them both fades away. For the three are inextricably linked to one another ("Vaguemort n'existe-t-il pas dans votre tête -- dans la vôtre aussi"\textsuperscript{41}). Ten years of writing has culminated in L'Inquisitoire, ten years of creating characters, of acquiring a feeling for language and its myriad forms and tones which bring it to life. This writer's ten year search has been transferred into the character of the old man who has just spent ten years in a château filled with a wealth of objets d'art, hidden crevices, and secret stairways leading to unknown destinations. They were ten relatively happy years busy with his daily chores; at the end "tout d'un coup personne rien pour me dire va ici fais ça rien qui m'oblige"\textsuperscript{42}

\ldots tenez les billets de ces messieurs même que c'étaient des ordres eh bien je les ai tous gardés je les relis le soir dans ma chambre, vous me direz que c'est bête mais ça me tient compagnie, non je n'étais pas fait pour ce tombeau ...\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., p. 265.
\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., p. 220.
\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., p. 11.
He, like Pinget, has been piling up notations which have been a source of comfort in his silent world but now he, like Pinget, desires to give them form and life. The vastness of the material and the tendentious effort are further emphasized through the lack of punctuation with the exception of an occasional comma ("... le lecteur sans eux ne peut suivre"\(^{44}\)).

Je travaillais, régulièrement tous les jours, je ne faisais que cela. ... Quand j'écrivais \textit{L'Inquisitoire}, et bien que par principe je me défendre de travailler avant de me coucher, c'était devenu une obsession et je ne dormais plus. Je rallumais constamment ma lampe, j'ai fini par ne plus l'éteindre, ça hurlait partout dans ma chambre. C'était très fatigant. Je m'en remis lentement.\(^{45}\)

Est-ce qu'on peut compter les souvenirs vous êtes fou et tout ce qui revient tout le temps tout ça qui revient on ne pourra plus dormir où est-ce qu'ils se reposent où est-ce qu'ils dorment c'est moi qui vous demande\(^{46}\)

So the ordeal ends, but in spite of the intensity of effort on the part of both the author and the character, the impression is that both are well satisfied that they undertook the task. For the old man the situation was not unlike the days when he received the \textit{billets} from the \textit{messieurs}, the days when there was much to do, "... c'est quelque chose on ne se demande pas si ça y est c'est à faire,"\(^{47}\)

\(^{44}\)Bourdet, "Robert Pinget," p. 121.

\(^{45}\)ibid.

\(^{46}\)Pinget, \textit{L'Inquisitoire}, p. 435.

\(^{47}\)ibid., p. 221.
the days when his life was directed by an outside force. Only now the force to verbalize is coming from within himself as he narrates his ten years and his present state of mind to the sound of the tapping typewriter in the background. Pinget is drawing on his ten years in order to "... éclairer une âme (enfin quoi? ça existe: une âme. Ça compte, une âme)"48.

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48Juin, review of L'Inquisitoire, p. 4.
CHAPTER XI

THE MYRIAD PERSONALITY

Autour de Mortin

The twelfth work of Pinget, Autour de Mortin, was published in 1965 by Les Editions de Minuit.¹ The novel is built around the personage of Alexandre Mortin who was introduced by the author four years earlier in his dramatic dialogue entitled L'Hypothèse published in 1961 in a collection of three plays, Ici ou ailleurs, by Les Editions de Minuit. Preceded by a short play, the bulk of Autour de Mortin takes the form of a series of radio interviews with people who claim to have known the late Mortin. These interviews are then followed by an extract from a personal journal.

In the short play which begins the work the reader is spying on a nameless character through a keyhole with the help of two accomplices who have been ordered on this mission by unknown persons for reasons which will also remain undisclosed. The object of this observation,

¹A segment of this work, the first interview with Johann, appeared prior to its publication in novel form in La Nouvelle Revue Française, 1er décembre 1962, pp. 1016-1035.
presumably Mortin, is seen in a very unstable condition as he packs and unpacks a valise, as he folds and unfolds articles of clothing, as he inserts and withdraws objects from beneath a floorboard, as he reads and rereads a postcard, cries over it, tears it up, pastes it back together, as he glances around furtively as if afraid of being spied upon, as he puts on and removes his robe several times and, finally, as he drinks something, perhaps poison, sits down, and presumably dies. It is a segment drawn up by the author which, contrasted to the remaining portion of the work, is a view of a current reaction to Mortin, unhindered by the elements of time and memory. Yet, in spite of the man standing naked before us, the view is to remain as hazy and incomplete as the interviews which are to follow which supposedly are separated from the incident by some ten years. The viewer is forced to keep changing his position in his attempts to get a complete picture of the man and his surroundings, attempts which are consistently blocked. "---Tu le vois de face? ---De trois quarts."² Filled with pauses the text prods the reader to draw his own impressions from the keyhole view of an obviously distraught man. Once the impressions have been formed, Pinget sets out to destroy and then rebuild them only to tear them down again in the ensuing pages--the more conclusions that are drawn, the

weaker their foundations will become.

The interrogators of L'Inquisitoire are at work once again although on a much more limited scale. Whereas there remain the calls to préciser and the urgings to tâcher de se souvenir, the tone established in the interviews is, for the most part, one of disinterested objectivity; however, this objectivity at times breaks down as the tales of the eight individuals progress and becomes tinged with a natural curiosity as regards the mysterious Mortin and also with a sense of sympathy for the dilemmas of some of the participants: "Vous vous êtes donc trouvée sans économies, sans rien du jour au lendemain?" The brusque and occasionally threatening tone has disappeared as have the seemingly irrelevant questions. In fact, this noticeable reversal in the attitude of the interrogators emphasizes the almost preferential treatment accorded each interviewee. Unlike the inquisitors of L'Inquisitoire those delving into the life of Mortin make an effort to avoid the cochonneries as they chastise any interviewee who reveals such information.

Simplement qu'un homme comme Alexandre Mortin pouvait avoir ses moments de faiblesse, ce qui ne signifie pas qu'on doive le considérer comme un ivrogne, c'est-à-dire comme quelqu'un qui n'a plus d'autre idéal que celui de s'enivrer, qui n'a plus de vie intellectuelle, plus de morale, plus de soin autre que celui d'oublier sa condition.

This newly-established rapport between the interrogators and

3Ibid., p. 76.

4Ibid., p. 79.
those interviewed who are viewed sympathetically is further evidenced by the fact that while the questioners are ready to concede a somewhat tarnished side to the Mortin personality, they do their utmost to protect a polished image of it.

Nous savons par les précédentes interviews et par l'oeuvre qu'il a laissée qu'il était un homme de conscience et un écrivain remarquable, un être tourmenté probablement. C'est pourquoi la qualification d'ivrogne ne nous paraît pas lui convenir.5

The menacingly implied dictum of the inquisitors in L'Inquisitoire (ne rien laisser de côté) has been discernibly tempered by the current investigators to a less intimidating axiom of éviter les jugements hâtifs.

Following the progression seen in L'Inquisitoire, the "dialogue" in Autour de Mortin continues in the vein of the quasi-monologue. An underlying and common trait often found in L'Inquisitoire was that of contradiction--inconsistencies within the responses and soliloquies without direct relationship to the problems posed. Thus, it was often necessary for the interrogators to interrupt the old man's responses and "meditations" in order to realign his thoughts in the direction of perceived patterns. In Autour de Mortin the problems of the interviewers lie in discrepancies also, although not usually within the answers of one individual. Here the incongruities lie in the relationship between the layers of information as the composite

5Ibid.
picture being drawn up becomes more and more distorted until no recognizable feature may be distinguished with any certainty as to its validity. The acquaintances not only disagree on Mortin's personality (snob vs. man of the people, gay and talkative vs. sullen and taciturn) but also on even the most elementary aspects of his life (widowed vs. never married, the inheritor of his estate). Whereas one was able to deduce a common denominator in the character of the old servant and arrive at a problematic portrait of his personality, Mortin remains forever a mystery. The multifaceted version of his "truth" is, finally, the sum of the eight individual truths of the people interviewed.

Although the forme of the works changed noticeably with the advent of the interrogatory novels, the fond has remained a constant. As has been pointed out in each work, the questions have revolved around truth and reality. The appearance of L'Inquisitoire heralded a Kafkaesque framework in which the freedom of the protagonist to act and search is severely limited. He is no longer the voyager in the fantastic land of Graal Flibuste where reality can be avoided. His fancied freedom dwindled to that of Levert and Clope who sought to justify their individual existences within an atmosphere of semi-reality. Finally he has become the old man seated before a faceless tribunal unaware of why he is being questioned and yet unable to exist without his interrogators.

Le bonhomme de M. Pinget est incapable de vivre par
lui-même. Il n'y a pour lui ni vie, ni pensée personnelles. Il se développe sur les autres en parasite psychologique, il leur dérobe des fragments d'existence pour en faire un pâté bien épais dans lequel il puisse la ration quotidienne de ragots dont il nourrit ses ressassements.  

He cannot justify himself alone. His defense is not totally within himself, within his own silence, but only can be found through others even though he stands alone and has no communion with these others. Thus, each hero grabs for his soliloquy or his dialogue in an unsuccessful attempt to find his own meaning with the tragic realization that the questioning will never come to an end. Ironically however, the never-ending interrogation is in itself a kind of victory for it reassures a certain existence and is a weapon against solitude and silence. Like the earlier Levert, for whom an end to his writing signified death, the old man in L'Inquisitoire is determined to return to the bistro and his self-interrogation the next day for, in spite of the tediousness of such an existence, it nevertheless remains a life. So also have the interviewees been beckoned out of their isolation by the broadcast which will serve as their one-way communication with the "others" and will provide them with the means and the excuse to call forth their own personal impressions so as to give form to their own existence through their past relationship with one of these "others."

Autour de Mortin, like L'Inquisitoire, is an attempt

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6Philippe Sénart, review of L'Inquisitoire, by Robert Pinget, in La Table Ronde, décembre 1962, p. 119.
to draw a portrait of a solitary being. However, the former is the reverse side of the latter. The old man, fighting the solitude created by his deafness and the loss of his position at the château, is the aggressor in the attempt to construct an existence as he manipulates the characters of his environment. Mortin, on the other hand, is the passive recipient of several realities which may or may not be true. It is he who is being juggled by those who claim to know him in their search for their own identities. As the lives of the interviewees take on substance, the existence of Mortin becomes more and more questionable.

Autour de Mortin ... C'est bâti autour du vide. Mortin n'a peut-être pas existé. Tout le monde donne son avis sur lui, une succession d'interviews. Je fais parler les autres pour découvrir l'existence de cet écrivain qui s'appelle Mortin et qui probablement n'existe pas et qui aurait pu écrire sous le nom de Mortin.  

Each stage of this construction "around emptiness," which terminates in an edifice of emptiness, is foretold by the first interviewee, Johann: "Est-ce qu'on voit assez notre bêtise chacun à vouloir crever dans son coin au lieu de faire un effort pour crever ensemble." These prophetic words sum up the difficulty inherent in the supposed search for the "real" Mortin. Time after time, interview after interview, the importance of these words are emphasized as each participant attempts to relate his own truth through

7Chapsal, "Ça crève," p. 122.
8Pinget, Autour de Mortin, p. 45.
the portraiture of an unformed model. The crevaison of each person interviewed is that of the myth of communication existing between the individual and the "others."

With each subsequent interview the solitude of the participants becomes clearer. Not only does every portrait of Mortin differ from the preceding one but the biographers themselves underline their own inconsistencies. It is a reversal of the quest of the old man in L'Inquisitoire wherein the members of the society described in that work would progress no further than did the ex-servant should they attempt to describe him. The irony of the situation in Autour de Mortin is that the endeavor to discern and describe a reality has been reduced to communication through a machine. At this point even the human presence of the interrogators is muted as the people speak to and through a microphone. The more important mechanism of person-to-person communication has broken down, as indicated again by the words of Johann when discussing the strangeness which had developed in his relationship with Mortin.

... sitôt nos repas terminés je devais m'éclipser, je le faisais volontiers pour faciliter son travail, apporter quelque chose à notre association, mais ce n'était plus qu'une comédie, la mécanique se détraquait. Apporter quelque chose en s'effaçant, quelle tristesse là ... ⁹

The seemingly impossible reparation of the mechanism of communication has resulted in the solitude and isolation of

⁹Ibid., p. 174.
each individual. The basic need for human contact remains constant but invisible walls of misunderstanding counteract any effort toward communication. Every attempt is fraught with contradictions of previous efforts and the verbal intercourse is eventually reduced to unsure and changing impressions. This reduction in person-to-person communication merely strengthens the need for such contact and, in true Pingetian fashion, the individual seeks a secondary avenue of contact—-that of the writer.

These written attempts at communication vary in form from the **carnet** of Noémie to the **articles critiques** of Latirail to the **brouillons** of Johann. The form notwithstanding, each is, in its own way, an appeal for communication between the writer and "someone," a strange and varied "dialogue" which offers no more hope than does verbal contact, "mais c'est toujours un peu de bruit, si peu que ce soit, ça vaut mieux que le silence."

Thus Noémie simply makes notations of isolated words which she hears repeated by her employer, Mortin, in her effort toward human contact. But when this **carnet** disappears, there arises the reality of the void existent between her and the others and the powerlessness of the memory to re-create previous communications and she loses the "taste" for taking note of her life, the nothingness of which has suddenly been revealed to

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her. Johann, the unpaid ex-servant, at first seeks contact merely through physical presence when verbal communication between himself and Mortin deteriorates but the physical presence of two human beings does not guarantee any communion.

C'est alors que sans raison particulière puisque notre brouille durait depuis longtemps j'ai senti tout à coup le vide, le vide je ne peux dire mieux, celui que j'avais été jusqu'alors n'y était plus, j'étais réfugié ailleurs, l'idée que je m'étais faite de notre amitié, réfugié dans ce qui n'existait plus, tout à coup j'étais seul dans cette cuisine depuis longtemps.

Like Noémie, Johann also re-creates his life through his carnets as he imagines the days of Mortin after their physical contact has been severed. However, unlike Noémie whose carnet was a source of consolation, the writings of Johann are viewed with frustration and a sense of hopelessness as he attempts to discover the reasons for the breakdown between Mortin and himself. Whereas Noémie accepted the loss of her mémoire sadly but passively, Johann attempts to destroy his frustrations by throwing them into the well only to discover that his memories still linger on to haunt him.

Toutes ces choses elles étaient encore là, là... je pouvais peut-être...

.................................

... ensuite il est mort, ce n'était plus la peine...

j'avais passé tout ce temps à me tromper... la vérité c'était qu'il était mort... qu'est-ce que je pouvais...

Noémie has come forward and has broken her silent world to


12Ibid., p. 57.
speak into the microphone; the implication is that Johann might carry his communication attempt a step further--that he, like the other Pingetian writers before him, might re-commence the never-ending struggle with the pen as he searches through his soul for the evasive reasons for his isolation.

Like the withering and unproductive garden of Mortin, the communication between individuals has also faded. The blooms of human contact are unable to flourish in the sterility of silence. Whatever initial contact had been made soon disappeared like "le massif de petits chrysanthèmes que nous avions planté cette année-là ils se fanaient, ..." Thus Johann, in attempting to communicate through his brouillons, makes an effort to plant a new garden. This garden of Mortin becomes a recurrent theme throughout the eight interviews. It is because of their common interest in plants that Johann and Mortin first meet and it is to the garden that Johann goes when he realizes that their relationship is all over; Noémie bemoans the neglected garden and wishes that Mortin would accept the neighbor's offer to put in some flowers; Passavoine complains about Mortin's inability to decide what kind of flowers are to be planted and reveals a grudge about being dismissed from the garden work; Cyrille also worked for a time as the gardener and despaired when it was not kept up

13Ibid., p. 170.
properly after his departure. There lies inherent within this idea of the garden the possibility of subduing and controlling nature, of shaping it and determining its form according to one's desire, of watching it develop and seeing the integral parts fuse into a complete whole, each one complementing the other. Johann searches for such an ideal where human contact is possible. "Ce coin que j'aimais et ne reverrais plus me donnait le désir d'un jardin idéal, sans fatigue, plein d'odeurs et de promesses tenues ..."14

The perfect garden, offered for a fleeting moment and then denied by Mortin, becomes a focal point in each character's attempt to recapture the past.

The search for the true Mortin resides very much in the Pirandellian atmosphere of the delusion of personality, the fact that each of us believes himself to appear the same to everyone else. Such is the idea conveyed by the father in Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore:

Il dramma per me è tutto qui, signore: nella coscienza che ho, che ciascuno di noi--veda--si credo "uno" ma non è vero: è "tanti," signore, "tanti," secondo tutte le possibilità d'essere che sono in noi: "uno" con questo, "uno" con quello--diversissimi! E con l'illusione, intanto, d'esser sempre "uno per tutti," e sempre "quest'uno" che ci crediamo, in ogni nostro atto. Non è vero! non è vero!15

This problem of personality is much in evidence as concerns

14Ibid., p. 178.

Mortin. The eight people interviewed in order to arrive at the truth of Mortin represent "diverse consciences." Mortin, the individual, is multiplied eight times and each time a contradictory personality appears. As evidenced by the characters of Pirandello, Mortin also has no fixed personality. "An individual is only one of the indefinite personalities, which has for the moment the upper hand over all the others."\(^16\) Which personality recounted by the eight interviewees is the real Mortin? Perhaps all of them or perhaps none of them. Laudisi, the porte-parole of Pirandello in *Così è (se vi pare)*, echoes the unasked hypotheses of the persons interviewed in Pinget's novel and presents the fundamental problem faced by the interrogators. "Che possiamo noi realmente sapere degli altri? chi sono ... come sono ... ciò che fanno ... perché lo fanno ..."\(^17\) The most that will be discovered is the impossibility of knowing the truth. The interrogators are left, finally, with eight personalities, each one purporting to be the "real" Mortin. The discovery of his existence is impeded at each turn by another insurmountable contradiction springing from the memory of each of the interviewees. In the end, one is left with the basic Pirandellian thesis: not only is it


impossible to know the truth about oneself, but it is also impossible to know it about other people. It follows then that the true identity, the "personality" of Mortin, can never be more than a doubtful one. The absence of an absolute truth makes light of the notion of the existence of a fixed personality. Each person interviewed concerning Mortin is an argument for this point. Just as the personalities of Johann or Noémie or Cyrille change when facing their interrogators or when confronted by what has been said about them by one of the others, so the identity of Mortin becomes more and more clouded in the wake of these prejudicial and fluctuating personalities. The personality, the uniqueness of each of them, like their own individual truth, is put in doubt.

Chacun est-il une véritable personne ou chacun n'existe-t-il que par ce que les autres voient? Est-il possible d'affirmer qu'un homme est un être unique, le même pour tous par conséquent--ou bien l'identité de toute personne n'est-elle pas de tous les éléments qui la constituent celui qui en semble l'essence et en même temps celui qui est le plus fragile et parfois le plus fallacieux?18

To accept the dictum of the relativity of truth as espoused by Pirandello is to accept the existence of Mortin in all its vicissitudes. Each individual identity is constituted then by what seems to be the essence of it as seen by oneself and another. But this je and this il are not

really different people. "Ce n'est pas que 'je' soit un autre, c'est que 'il' n'existe pas. Seuls existent 'ils,' même s'il s'agit d'une seule personne."19 The truth or the falsity cannot be known and is, therefore, immaterial. The importance of a single individual is found ultimately in his own created or invented version of truth. Clope and his dossier are not merely a few pages of rambling narrative wherein he attempts to prove his innocence; they also represent the "others" who are a part of his truth. The old man of L'Inquisitoire in all his hesitation and in his souci de dire le vrai is aware that his truth, his identity, is a constantly changing one not unlike the stellar universe studied by M. Pierre, the astronogue:

Ce n'est plus possible de répondre ne comprenez-vous pas quelque chose s'est passé, vous aurez beau finasser rien ne nous remettra à notre place... ... Regardez où nous sommes dans cette chambre il n'y a que nous et ce gros paquet de feuilles c'est ce qu'on a dit, mais on aurait dit le contraire que ça reviendrait au même vous et moi ici dans le fond ce qu'on espère c'est d'en sortir il faut trouver la manière, ...20

Mortin exists in the mind of ils with an identity created by each one of them. His changeable identity is true insofar as each fluctuating personality that views him is true. Like M. Pierre who must re-verify his universe each night, the identity of Mortin is remade in the light of the changing personalities of his own universe. The

19Ibid.

20Pinget, L'Inquisitoire, p. 452.
individual is always the vous et moi and the truth or the falseness of his identity lies in these two uncertain elements. At best, Mortin exists only insofar as he is a compound of Johann, Noémie, Mahu, and the whole of his society. Thus the interrogators' questions directed toward the search for Mortin can never attain their intended goal, that of a well-defined Mortin personality. Since he is different for each person, the ultimate truth, if it exists at all, remains forever hidden. Once again the Pirandellian character of Laudisi comes to mind as he confronts himself before a mirror.

Dico per me che, qua di fronte a te, mi vedo e mi tocco --tu, --per come ti vedono gli altri--che diventi? --Un fantasma, caro, un fantasma! --Eppure, vedi questi pazzi? Senza badare al fantasma che portano con sé, in sé stessi, vanno correndo, pieni di curiosità, dietro il fantasma altrui! E credono che sia una cosa diversa.21

The truth is impossible to know because each individual hides something by talking only of himself through the identity of another.

Although it is not the purpose of this study to discuss Pinget's theatre, this group of "interrogatory" works necessitates the mention of the dramatic monologue, L'Hypothèse, published a year before the appearance of L'Inquisitoire. The validity of the individual and his truth being of central interest in these works, the title of the monologue underlines the assumption inherent in the search

for truth. Mortin, also the protagonist in *L'Hypothèse*, sets the tone for the heroes of the following novels and initiates the Pirandellian atmosphere which reigns in each of them. "L'auteur, l'auteur où se trouve l'auteur."²²

The problem of knowing oneself through one's own eyes or the eyes of others is immediately posed. The hypothesis of the monologue itself is also in doubt. At first it seems to be a question of elucidating the reasons why a writer would destroy his manuscript by throwing it down a well. And yet, the hypothesis is perhaps not at all concerned with the destruction of the manuscript but rather with why the same writer would imprison his illegitimate daughter in order to make of her a scullery maid. The uncertainty of these hypotheses becomes more profound as Mortin is faced with his own image on the wall, two times larger than he. The further Mortin advances in his hypotheses, the larger and more reinforced becomes the image until it begins to speak in order to contradict Mortin by formulating the exact opposite of his hypothetical story. The Laudisi of *L'Hypothèse* finds himself overpowered by his own reflected image and now not even the individual can say that he is a clearly recognizable individual with a certain identity and form.

Thus this small dramatic monologue paves the way for *L'Inquisitoire*, *Autour de Mortin*, and *Quelqu'un*. These

works will explore further the idea of the invalidity of an individual's truth concerning the "others" of society and the more troubling idea of this same invalidity on the part of the individual himself. Among these works Autour de Mortin most readily evinces the futility of finding an individual truth.
CHAPTER XII

IN SEARCH OF SOMEONE

Quelqu'un

Quelqu'un, the thirteenth work and the seventh novel of Pinget, was published by Les Editions de Minuit in 1965 shortly after the appearance of Autour de Mortin. Quelqu'un gained wide attention after winning the 1965 Prix Fémina.

As the story opens, the narrator is perturbed and angry because one of the notes which he had taken for an inventory and personal observations on the plants in the area has disappeared. Perhaps this small piece of paper has been swept away by the maid, or possibly it has blown out the window or been thrown in the trash can, or it may have been hidden by the retarded Fonfon whom the narrator has befriended and taken into the house to perform odd jobs. In any case, the loss of this paper serves as the premise for the story as the narrator searches or pretends to search for it. The search becomes the occasion to introduce, in minute detail, the reader to the inhabitants of a provincial house and garden bought and converted into a boarding house ten years ago by two friends, Gaston and the narrator. The boarders include Vérassou, M. Perrin, the Cointets, the
Brards, Mme Apostolos, and Mile Reber. In attendance also are the cook, Mme Sougneau, and the maid, Marie.

The whole of the narrator's existence comprises this mediocre world of a shabby boarding house and even shabbier paying guests. The guests as well as the owners are failures and all, with the exception of Fonfon, are elderly. Their only consolation lies in nostalgic memories of a trite past. They and the narrator live in a world of disappearing family alliances, of uncountable nieces and first communions, of dated photographs, and inedible beefsteak. They are reflected in the squalor of the boarding house.

Quand il a fallu changer la chaudière du chauffage central, refaire des joints partout, toute la tuyauterie qui se mettait à couler, les morceaux de plancher pourris sous les linos, les linos à changer, les peintures à refaire ...

There reigns in this crumbling baraque a kind of Balzacian touch, "une espèce de pension Vauquer encore plus minable que celle du Père Goriot." It is in these decaying surroundings that the narrator will make an attempt, once again, to portray his life.

This search for meaning is not limited to a single individual, much to the chagrin of the narrator. His desire is to attain the stance of a disinterested observer, to

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1Robert Pinget, Quelqu'un (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1965), p. 49. [Two printings of this work were published: Imprimerie des Roses, October, 1965, and Emmanuel Grevin et Fils, December, 1965. The footnotes pertaining to the work in this study correspond to the December printing.]

proceed without having to resort to talking about himself personally or the boarders in his pension so as to relate "a" life in the same manner as hecatalogues his plant discoveries. However, as happens in certain traditional novels, a person cannot so easily divorce himself from his own existence. "... on est embringué dans l'existence, on ne sait pas seulement comment. Je n'ai pas l'intention d'en parler de mon existence mais probable qu'il va falloir."\(^3\)

The realization of the impossibility of thoroughly escaping from himself leads to an awareness that the same impossibility exists as regards the immediate society which surrounds him. His involvement with himself and others is there in spite of his wishes. There exists a kind of interaction and, worse yet, a certain interdependence: "... c'est la vie, il faut se supporter les uns les autres, pour mériter."\(^4\)

This unwanted interdependence prevails and there is nothing one can do to alter the situation. Thus the narrator feels himself provoked by the others to constitute his existence. Personally, he could be content with his botanical studies, a form of life whose demands are minimal. "... je peux me passer de tout le monde, je peux vivre seul. La bouffe ce n'est pas compliqué et le reste ça n'existe pas. Il n'y a que le travail qui compte."\(^5\) However subtle the demands of

\(^3\) Pinget, Quelqu'un, p. 7.
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 213.
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 7.
the "others" may be, the force, masked in contradictory terms, is gnawingly constant.

A croire qu'on ne choisit pas. Moi il y a longtemps que je le sais qu'on ne choisit pas mais il y a des gens pour vous dire que si, qu'on est responsable, qu'on est libre, un tas de foutaises ... il vous mettent au pied du mur.⁶

Confronted by the necessity to create an existence and not wishing to embroil himself personally in the account, the narrator attempts to fulfill the demand by relating one day in his banal life when he discovers the loss of this note, employing the search for this huitième de feuille as the impersonal means of accomplishing the task. Like the long-lost son in Le Fiston, the shot in Clope au dossier, and the disappearance of the secretary in L’Inquisitoire, the minuscule piece of paper serves as the impetus for the interior searching which is to follow. Much in the vein of Le Fiston, where the absent figure of the son haunts the re-creation process, the search for the piece of paper is always foremost in the mind of the narrator of Quelqu’un: "Rêpéter je cherche ce papier."⁷

In order to retrieve his note, the narrator tries to rediscover each moment of his day. He is often mistaken and so reconstructs his morning several times, each time modifying, correcting, or effacing certain facts. When he loses the thread of his story, he begins again by going back to

⁶Ibid.
⁷Ibid., p. 115.
eight o'clock in the morning when he was awakened by the maid. "Je me suis levé à huit heures ..." It was shortly after this hour that he discovered the absence of his note and the repeated references to this fact emphasize the importance he places on retaining the search for something impersonal as the premise for the discovery of his existence.

Pendant que j'y pense, je sais que je cherche quelque chose mais je ne me souviens plus quoi. J'ai l'habitude. Si ce n'est pas ce papier c'est autre chose, ça n'a aucune importance. C'est pour simplifier que je dirai ce papier. Il faut toujours simplifier, pour ne pas tomber dans la complication. Une des choses que j'ai apprises et qui rend service à l'occasion. Mais qu'on n'aime pas croire que je ne cherche plus rien, ça ne serait pas vrai et ça me ferait de la peine.

To talk about himself and to be aware that he is doing so would, in his befuddled mind, be a great complication.

Actually the lost note serves only as a touchstone of reality in his otherwise intangible universe. When losing sight of the one item which has made the day unique and real, the present day becomes so confused with the preceding ones that it is impossible for him to recall with certainty the actions and events of any particular day.

Each moment he becomes so confused that he no longer knows whether what he is relating is a recollection or simply a

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8Ibid., p. 11 [After this phrase is encountered for the first time on page 11, it is to reappear six additional times on pages 26, 39, 52, 59, 181, and 190.]

9Ibid., p. 190.
figment of his imagination. The repeated recommencements now take the search beyond the loss of a mere slip of paper. The quest becomes a necessity ("Je sens déjà qu'il va falloir que j'en parle de mon existence"\textsuperscript{10}), a necessity in that he feels compelled to find a memory of the present which, minute by minute, he is losing to the past. The basic question which he now faces is how can he believe himself, how can he believe he "is" since he finds himself incapable of reconstructing a single day of his life, the very day he is in the act of living. Yet he cannot admit that he is searching for something other than an insignificant piece of paper.

C'est ça ma bénédiction à moi, d'oublier et de perdre mes papiers. J'aurais de la mémoire, je ne perdrais rien, je ne saurais plus que faire, je m'ennuyerais comme un rat mort. Avoir tout le temps à se demander qu'est-ce que j'ai oublié, ça soutient. Et de trouver quelque chose qu'on avait oublié de chercher, quelle joie.\textsuperscript{11}

The repeated searches afford him the occasion to insert a review of his cadre, the pension and its inhabitants which comprise his existence. "Le cadre une fois posé il faut bien le remplir et c'est son existence qu'on y met, que pourrait-on y mettre. Et ça recommence exactement comme la fois d'avant, ..."\textsuperscript{12} The cadre of his life is limited to this crumbling boarding house and unproductive garden from

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 245.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 13.
which he has ventured less and less over the years. The mutual
tolerance of which he has need in order to construct his existence is, therefore, also limited to a nondescript group of boarders who all resemble the narrator in their banality. These limitations which he has placed on his day-by-day life make his task doubly difficult. Confronted by an invisible "force" to create a meaningful existence, he begins the attempt to discover himself by reaching out for those who, at one time, must have signified something in his life, who must have played a role. But,

Aucune importance. Dans le fond plus je raconte notre vie plus je trouve inutile de dire exactement ce qui se passe, exactement ce que les pensionnaires disent, de me torturer pour le dire exactement, c'est tellement plat, tellement comme tout le monde.  

The burden of banality and sameness weighs heavily on the narrator and his small society, and it becomes a great obstacle to the completion of his task. In spite of the existing tolerance, neither the narrator nor the boarders are able to help each other because they are all in the same predicament. The lives of the "others" are just as flat and meaningless as the narrator's since they are all caught up in a static and nonprogressive existence. And even if the lines of communication were open, there would be no exchange.

... pas seulement moi qui en souffrais mais les autres, parfaitement les autres. Je ne pouvais même plus leur

13Ibid., p. 211.
No one can really count on anyone else. The overwhelming need is there but, in the final analysis, "il faut être responsable tout seul."^{15}

Life in the pension is a collage of uneventful happenings within a deadening atmosphere of monotony. The degree of uniformity in the narrator's life has become so pervasive that he is, indeed, baffled when he attempts to reconstruct the events of a particular day. "Ce que je dis là est très difficile à se rappeler parce que ça se fait tous les jours. Il ne faut pas confondre les fois."^{16} It is a world comprised of indistinguishable days, months, and years in which the cast of characters and their idiosyncrasies have never altered, a world in which everything and everyone are in a state of inanimation. In this suspended state, absent of reciprocity in the form of communication, the narrator must depend upon himself to discover his life's meaning. This investigation of self is the only hope remaining to him even if the hope is not too promising. "Et

^{14}Ibid., p. 183.
^{15}Ibid., p. 195.
^{16}Ibid., p. 53.
The danger inherent in self-exploration is the reliance on memory. Without the help of others, the narrator can only attempt to fashion his existence from the uncertain shadows of a vague past. His exposé, confused in the sameness of an unchanging existence, is endangered from the beginning.

The loss of the insignificant notation and the loss of a past--both are important for him. The disappearance of the paper gives him an excuse for his search for something beyond an object. To look for an existence directly, without subterfuge, invites failure from the beginning. Such an undertaking must be cloaked in disinterest in order that the enemy is not forewarned.

17Ibid., p. 47.

18Ibid., p. 38.
Oui, j'avais fait le tour en sachant que je ne trouverais pas. Il faut oublier qu'on cherche tout en cherchant.\textsuperscript{19}

The loss of a past through a faulty memory is an added advantage. To have lost that major portion of an existence and to know that its truthful recall is an impossibility is to have an almost guaranteed assurance of a continuous survival. "Je me plains tout le temps de mon manque de mémoire mais après tout je me demande si ce n'est pas ce qui me sauve. Me sauve de quoi. De ne pas être mort."\textsuperscript{20} In the Pingetian universe, the moment of complete and total recall, the end of the search, signifies death.

This desire for perpetuity, even a miserable one, is primarily a desire for posterity. It is a desire held by every Pingetian hero. The narrator of \textit{Quelqu'un} is no different. "Je veux ma place au soleil."\textsuperscript{21} Architruc, Levert, the whole company, all are haunted by family and posterity, both elements being tenuous possibilities at best. While they all may be condemned to an individual solitude, links to mankind, imaginary or no, prevent the existence of a completely isolated being. Experiencing the suffering of solitude in the midst of others who are mere reflections of himself, this narrator searches for that "someone," anyone who can understand his desire. "Si seulement j'avais quelqu'un!"

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 75.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 228.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 31.
Quelqu'un qui lise par-dessus mon épaule, mais ça serait trop beau."22 Of course, in this incommunicable world there is no one and the plea falls on deaf ears. "Je voudrais que quelqu'un se rende compte de mon état mais je sais bien que c'est impossible. N'y pensons plus."23 In the end, neither family nor "someone" matter. One stands alone; one is responsible for oneself.

Standing alone, face to face with oneself, responsible only to oneself, quelqu'un is not quelqu'un d'autre, quelqu'un is moi. The deafness extends not only to the "others," to the exterior world, but also to the interior world of moi, the soul. It is here where the invisible "force" resides, where truth and misery coexist side by side.

Quelle misère d'avoir entrepris d'écrire ça. Se replonger dans cette matinée à vomir, dans toutes les matinées à vomir, et les après-midi, et les soirées et le reste. Mais je ne peux pas faire autrement. Je n'ai rien entrepris, ça s'est imposé.24

But this "force," this invisible inquisiteur, this seeker of truth makes itself heard in spite of the auditory impediment of the oreille déficiente. The truth clamors to be set free and is not to be refused.

Et en plus, toujours à cause de mon oreille déficiente, voilà que j'entendais ou que je croyais entendre des

22Ibid., p. 195.
23Ibid., p. 151.
24Ibid., p. 52.
réponses. S'être engagé dans ce dialogue de sourds et ne plus pouvoir s'en dépêtrer.  

The shadowy figure of the inquisiteur is once again on the scene. Unlike the interrogative force of L'Inquisiteur, the ominous figure in Quelqu'un has been noticeably fused with the figure of the narrator. The ensuing dialogue of this inquisition is no longer one of responding to questions from exterior forces; the field of dialogue is limited to self-questioning wherein the narrator inflicts upon himself the torture of the questioning. "Quelqu'un, c'est l'auto-inquisitoire, contre lequel on n'imagine plus de refuge. Le monologue se fait sans cesse interrogatif, ce qui est bien la forme la plus désespérée du dialogue." He finds himself without refuge, facing the sternest and certainly the most fearful adversary--himself. The semblance of safety, engendered by an outside force whose ceaseless and pointed questions aid in putting everything in order, is lacking. So also is eliminated the possibility of saying "je suis fatigué" and taking leave of the interrogators. Escape is impossible. Progress is impossible. Failure is inevitable. Nevertheless, the quest is necessary.

Thus this little man, enslaved in a life of formidable banality in a like universe, plunges into the uncertainty of his own being. The self-inflicted torture is not

25Ibid., p. 18.

willingly sought but, rather, as he indicated earlier, "ça s'est imposé." Because of the imposition and the compulsion of the unseen force, he has undertaken his present task. He is unsure of the source of the command but very certain that the command has been given.

Déjà au début, lors de ma première rédaction, j'avais le sentiment que je répondais. Il y avait quelque part une question vague et j'y répondais. Plus que vague et même pas une réponse, qu'on me comprenne. Pas une phrase comme où allez-vous ou qu'est-ce que vous faites. Informulé mais présent. Ou peut-être tellement mal formulé que je prenais ça pour une question? C'est possible.

An unformulated but existent demand for an unformulated but existent life--the narrator commences a tenacious struggle against these odds to discover his life. He immediately perceives that it is extremely difficult to attain what one believes to be the truth, especially when the field of exploration is oneself, as he makes an effort to write the balance sheet of one day. However, such an accounting has value only if it is precise.

Mettre les choses au point c'est ce que j'aime le mieux. Je peux dire que j'adore. La précision quelle merveille! Mais les gens ne comprennent pas. Ils croient que c'est la beauté ou la somptuosité ou Dieu sait quoi. C'est la précision. Moi ça me transporte. Trouver le mot juste, trouver exactement le mot, mais c'est divin. Je dois dire en passant que c'est souvent le mot ça ça qui est le plus précis. Il faut bien rire un peu.  

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27Pinget, Quelqu'un, p. 52.
28Ibid., p. 17.
29Ibid., p. 28.
To focus on the truth, to put everything in order—to accomplish such a demand the narrator describes the pangs of sincerity that a writer must undergo, for he is indeed a writer. His present exposé is not his first attempt at reconstructing an existence. "Dans une de mes autres vies, attention, je n'en ai jamais eu qu'une, j'entends mes autres exposés, j'ai dit que j'étais roi de ma crasse."30 This is almost a direct quotation from the opening passage of Baga. That he could be the old man who underwent a previous inquisition is seen in his harangue against the idea that he is being interrogated.

Quand on nous interroge il faut faire son possible pour répondre au mieux. Qu'est-ce que je dis, interroge. Qui m'interroge? Personne. Seigneur. Qu'on ne vienne pas me dire que je réponds à des questions. Car on l'a dit. On l'a eu dit. A propos de mes autres vies, quand j'essayais de m'en débarrasser. Il répond à des questions, voyez. Ça doit être la police. Il y a un ton policier il est obligé de répondre, on le force, on le traque.31

He will not admit that he is being forced to respond either by himself or by someone else. It is best to write as one talks, with words flowing naturally, effortlessly, in meaningless phrases and to make certain that the mot juste remains caca. The attempt to be too precise calls forth the frightful image of death which ultimately is more unbearable than the recommencement and the repetition of reconstructing one's seemingly useless existence.

30Ibid., p. 30.
31Ibid., p. 17.
J'écris ça comme ça, comme on parle, comme on transpire. Quand je dis que je ne me souviens pas de ce que j'ai dit c'est vrai mais je devrais dire écrit. Si je voulais je pourrais relire mais ça ne m'intéresse pas. Ça m'est égal de me contredire. Ce qui est dit n'est jamais dit puisque on [sic] peut le dire autrement.32

His words do not designate much of a life or being. They announce nothing or, perhaps, nothing but Nothingness. In such a world, order and precision are undoubtedly unattainable. And so it is that he feels even his desire for order and precision escaping with each passing moment and word. He is all alone and life is vanishing with time but, like his predecessors, he must continue. "Ça devient de plus en plus insipide. Mais je dois continuer quand même. C'est quand on désespère que le miracle se produit."33 He has no choice but to continue; without the words, without the exposé, there remains only that frightening Nothingness. Although the attempt at reconstructing an existence is useless, and although the attempt demolishes even his own banal life in the process, it is the one remaining hope to avert donning that final mask.

Ça se défait. Mon exposé se défait. ... Ça va faire comme les autres fois, il faudra tout recommencer plus tard. ... J'ai trop voulu être vrai, je me suis trop replongé dans notre vie, j'ai voulu trop faire, ... et total c'est la mort qui entre. Je la vois. Je la vois tout le temps.34

The pretext of searching for a bit of paper has long

32Ibid., p. 45.
33Ibid., p. 165.
34Ibid., p. 2??.
since disappeared. The botany note was simply a marginal excuse for the search of a much more important paper, the rewriting of a life. "Je commence à exposer ma vie pour essayer de m'en débarrasser et en sachant que c'est inutile. Je n'ai pas à me demander pourquoi et je continue, ça m'occupe."35 He will continue to occupy himself undoubtedly with innumerable exposés which signify, for his state of being, a series of hypotheses. Each work has been an hypothesis for a new existence. When that existence has been found wanting, be it Architruc's, Levert's, Clope's, or any of the others, he starts anew and postulates another existence. Each exposé has served as an exorcism to disentangle himself from that former life, to free his mind for the following cleansing. The only avenue open to him is, finally, his writing and so he writes and writes.

As the sole author of his myriad existences, each rebirth underlines the maniacal necessity that has inhabited every Pingetian hero--that of finding a means to avoid and to evade death at all costs. The words and memories of each exposé provide a temporary refuge. Should the words and memories fail him, "c'est la mort qui entre."36 In a previous novel, in a previous existence, Clope explained what each hero was trying to do.

35Ibid., p. 188.
36Ibid., p. 222.
Peur de mourir ils accumulent entre eux et la mort imminente comme on ferait de meubles devant une porte qui va être forcée. Un grand nombre de souvenirs leur défense contre l'intruse.  

The narrator of *Quelqu'un* has been accumulating, through several exposés, a large number of memories to put between himself and imminent death. The succeeding edifices which he has constructed have evolved into an absolute vertigo of creation. Each creation, each illusory reality, serves its momentary purpose in the battle against death and also against an inexplicable life. The latest exposé has done as much and has ended in the same failure. "Encore un soir qui tombe. Je n'en peux plus. L'exposé a foiré comme les autres mais j'ai l'habitude. A peine si je regrette."  

The past is gone and he has long since become accustomed to its disappearance. What remains is the present, the moment vivant. Like the old man of *L'Inquisitoire*, one's importance is incorporated in what one has sous les yeux. As bad as the present may seem to be, it is all that one has.

Du nerf. Il faut continuer. Replonger dans la journée de maintenant qui ne me donne que mal au coeur, envie de vomir, mais pas de mourir. Se replonger dans le mal de coeur pour pouvoir continuer, je ne peux faire que ça. Ne plus vouloir en sortir.  

So he will continue to repeat and recommence, repeat and recommence. No solutions will be discovered and nothing will

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37Pinget, *Clope au dossier*, p. 128.
38Pinget, *Quelqu'un*, p. 252.
39Ibid., pp. 222-223.
be brought into focus. Incapable of knowing what he has
done, of what he has been, he does not know what he is at
present. Nevertheless, he is assured that quelqu'un is not
equated with personne as long as he continues the search,
for in the search lies un petit futur, a future which will
be as meaningless as the present despair, yet meaningful in
that it is an assurance against death.

Like Beckett's Innommable, if the need arises, and
it always does for the Pingetian protagonist, the resources
will be found for another new creation.

The resource will continue to be used by Pinget, the author.
It is, after all, he who is searching, inventing, and
creating. During the search, beginning with Mahu, he has

40Ibid., pp. 144-145.
41Beckett, L'Innommable, p. 41.
assumed many faces. Each successive creation, each novel of "becoming," has culminated, momentarily, in this, the latest exposé. With each disclosure the "hero" (Architruc, Levert, Clope, the old servant, and the narrator in search of his "someone") has assumed a more substantive image. Now, at this point in time, every quelqu'un, past and present, merges and attests to the fact that this work is the somme of Robert Pinget himself.

Ce ne sont pas des personnages, ils sont complètement faux! Ce sont des sentiments de moi. ... Il n'y a que moi, dans tout ça, qui aie une réalité ... C'est moi, l'auteur qui cherche à trouver quelqu'un ... qui le comprenne et l'approuve, Sachant dès le départ que ce quelqu'un n'existe pas.\(^{42}\)

The search has been long and arduous for the "someone who does not come." He has renounced the search for a veritable dialogue and this exposé will not be like the others,

batifolant dans le saugrenu. Non, du terre-à-terre. Du sérieux. Déclare ce quelqu'un. ... dans l'espoir que cela lui défricherait le subconscient, lui ouvrirait des voies vers l'essentiel.\(^{43}\)

A new direction is in the offing, one which has been in the making with the advent of the transitional novels, heralding a search which is in the process of retreating more and more within the individual. Through the explorations of Clope and Levert and on to the inquisitory material, the attempt at communication with the outside world has been diminishing.

\(^{42}\)Chapsal, "Ça crève," pp. 121-122.

\(^{43}\)Bory, "La politesse du désespoir," p. 29.
"Du moment qu'il [quelqu'un] n'est pas venu de l'extérieur, je cherche à le susciter en moi. Un confident. Mais c'est foutu d'avance."

The abyss which separates him from his fellow creatures is even deeper between his own conscious and subconscious minds. Here its effects are more acutely felt as they deny any possibility of communication with himself. No sooner do his words evolve than they are contradicted and nullified by subsequent words. Instead of being foundation stones to be built and enlarged upon, his words crumble at the same time as they become more prolific. Nothing that such a confident says can ever be believed. There arises out of it all a portrait of mental confusion, of insecurity, of an author, a quelqu'un, an anyone wallowing in a pool of mediocrity unable to lift his spirit from this unavoidable stagnation but able to demonstrate thereby that he may be isolated, but he is not alone.

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CHAPTER XIII

THEMES AND CONSTANTS

IN THE INTERROGATORY NOVELS

Much of the basic foundation for the themes and constants of the interrogatory novels was laid down in the transitional novels, *Le Fiston* and *Clope au dossier*; therefore, this chapter will seek to discuss and explore in greater depth some of the same thematic material and its evolution in the group of interrogatory novels. The principal themes to be discussed include: the question of illusive and timeless reality now completely deprived of its former counterpart, fantasy, the difficult search for a personal truth in such a static reality where no escape is possible, the importance of the interrogative method, and the emphasis on tone—the latter two elements becoming visible themes at this point in Pinget's work.

**Illusive and Timeless Reality**

The three interrogatory novels represent a culmination and a possible solution to a problem which was introduced with the appearance of the character Mahu and which continued through the trials of Clope. Each work posed the
same central question: "What is the nature of reality?"
This question is undoubtedly foremost in the mind of the attentive reader of Pinget as he is led down the many paths of the labyrinth in search of a valid response. Each hero comes face to face with this basic problem, the dilemma provoked by his preoccupation with illusion and reality.

Mahu opts for complete illusion; in his invented world, illusion is reality. One need only think of Bouchèze, a character invented by Mahu, who, once created, begins walking the same streets with his inventor. Possessing no viable existence to begin with, Mahu gravitates effortlessly and naturally toward illusion.

Il fallait bien que je fasse quelque chose, tu comprends. Je les entendais tous qui se levaient pour aller au bureau. Celui qui avait le réveil se réveillait et allait réveiller les autres. Il sautait ma porte. Ma mère interdisait qu'on ouvre ma porte. Elle interdisait qu'on me réveille, elle interdisait qu'on me parle du bureau, ...\(^1\)

Initially the narrator of Graal Flibuste takes a similar departure but then seems to come to a fork in the road and elects to follow the new path which leads him into the realm of true fantasy, illusion structured surreally. For this narrator, illusion requires an intensity of purpose for it is a determination to escape reality completely. The reader need only think back to the "end" of the novel where the narrator, afraid to come face to face with reality in the form of the sea, realizing that he may

\(^1\)Pinget, *Mahu*, pp. 11-12.
not be able to "express" such an experience, prefers to gaze intensely upon a large gateway rising out of the prairie which may signal a continuation of his fantastic journey.

The hero of Baga encompasses within his character a limited protraction of the yearnings of his predecessor, the narrator of Graal Flibuste; however, illusion on the level of fantasy is tempered by the sporadic appearance of an anguished search to "be" in reality. Architruc always returns to Baga, to reality, and is content to find his usual morning cup of tea, although he does not completely discard illusion. As yet incapable of facing unequivocally his being, his reality, he employs fantasy in a limited manner as a momentary buffer zone against the unpleasantness of that reality.

With the advent of Levert and Clope, the search for a real existence begins. Through their endless writing, they attempt to recompose and recall their own lives so as to give substance and, thus, reality to their being. Victims of le temps rogné which initiated with Mahu, they cannot be certain which part of their lives is illusory and which part is real. Making use of memory as opposed to imagination in order to give validity to their existence, they try to remember everything, all the things that will signify the summa of their life once they have made their way through the maze. Memory proves to be a less reliable vehicle than the imagination: whereas inconsistencies can
easily be made an integral part of imaginary journeys, they inevitably destroy the credibility of a memory. Ever aware of their faulty vision, this awareness becomes their only truth. Unlike the heroes of the early works, they stand alone, deprived of the protective sphere of fantasy and undefended by alter egos capable of thwarting the thrust of reality. Without help from the outside, they arrive at the full realization of theiraloneness and the ensuing confusion as they attempt to reconcile themselves to the sudden dominance of reality.

The protagonists of the interrogatory novels find themselves immersed in reality. In comparison, the overtures of Levert and Clope against the intrusions of this force are mild. The present heroes are hounded mercilessly by this new-found reality and each one discovers himself "au pied du mur."2 Driven into a corner by a relentlessly questioning reality, unable to find a suitable response to an unanswerable demand, they are hopelessly stranded in a barren environment of complete individuality. They are totally alone and not at all certain that they will be capable of finding the necessary assistance within themselves. Their existence is "l'affreuse solitude des galeux et des inconsolables."3 Each in his own way is an outcast and therefore can only look within himself to find a defense

2Pinget, Quelqu'un, p. 7.
3Pinget, Autour de Mortin, p. 176.
against an invisible and unresponsive interrogative force.

Faced with the overpowering solitude that surrounds them and sensing a command to formulate an existence, they each turn toward an assumed past of memories. This act of turning back, of attempting to recall a past, is the natural reaction of the individual cut adrift in an incomprehensible and solitary reality. In order to construct a viable future it is first necessary to have laid a supporting foundation. Unfortunately, the foundation is found to be in an advanced state of disrepair. The past, due to long neglect, has crumbled away, has been deformed, and an intrinsically faulty memory cannot reerect the beginnings of the edifice.

Me souvenir me souvenir est-ce qu'on se souvient on a fait deux trois choses on n'en a vu guère plus il en reste à peine la moitié dans la tête, ces choses d'avant est-ce qu'on s'en souvient on raconte quelqu'un dans la tête pendant des années les a changées ce ne sont plus elles puisqu'elles sont encore là quand elles sont arrivées on n'essayait pas de s'en souvenir on avait d'autres soucis et quand elles nous reviennent dix vingt ans après elles ont été refaites personne ne les reconnaîtrait plus celui qui leur donne cette figure on ne sait pas qui c'est ...

The realization of the falseness of the past explodes in the conscience of the solitary being. Unable to prognosticate a real future, he is suddenly confronted by an awareness of an equally ineffectual and inexistent past. 

"... je m'inventais un petit bonheur passé tout faux, qui n'avait jamais existé." The lack of memory, his inability

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4 Pinget, L'Inquisitoire, p. 300.
5 Pinget, Quelqu'un, p. 227.
to recall truthfully a supposed and, furthermore, an accepted past, is a sizable ransom. At this point the solitude of one's existence weighs heavily upon an individual deprived of both past and future.

Parce que maintenant, de plus en plus, il m'arrive de rester bloqué sur une chaise et le temps passe. Ce qu'on appelle des absences. A tort. C'est des présences ces machins-là, des présences lourdes, des tonnes de présence.  

Without a viable ancestry and no assurance of a continued posterity, the solitary individual is left with only the present. He is, in fact, smothered in the reality of the present moment. Time passes amidst the tonnes de présence, but it is a never-changing one—a static period in which yesterday, today, and tomorrow are now. "Que ce soit aujourd'hui ou hier ou un autre jour pour moi c'est la même chose et demain ça sera encore la même chose, aucune importance, pas la moindre importance."  

His struggle, then, is one of "seizing the day," of living the perpetual present moment—an act which proves to be insufferably difficult to accomplish. Burdened with the monotony, the unchanging aspects of the present, the being of the isolated individual is solidified and the options for change diminished. Without the larger established order of past, present, and future, the individual is condemned to suffer only the questionable reality of a kind of

7Ibid., p. 188.
timelessness; an established order cannot be applied in any lesser degree, and one's life continues to evade any attempt at arranging it.

The reality in timelessness is very much the present moment which gives way to a succeeding present moment and so on. Once gone, they remain so, a part of the false and inexist-ent past. No arranging, no cataloguing, no remembrance. "La vérité c'est d'avoir sous les yeux quelque chose qu'on ne voit pas parce qu'on a autre chose à faire, c'est ça c'est de ne pas y penser ..."9

Every new moment is a rediscovery in the static world of circularity inhabited by the Pingetian hero. Each protagonist comes full circle and, upon arbitrarily terminating his search, finds himself again at the initial starting point ready to retrace the same faltering footsteps. The circular voyage is but one more exposé, one more attempt at explaining an unexplainable reality. While each subsequent new beginning seems to offer less hope, the "man of the moment" refuses to surrender. "... moie continu à

8Ibid., p. 9.
9Pinget, L'Inquisitoire, p. 303.
faire quelque chose, je m'y remets tout de suite, j'agis, il faut agir."¹⁰ He is condemned to repeat himself, always in his present reality like the old organist in the land of Graal Flibuste who

... jouait pour Dieu seul la phrase sept mille fois sept fois répétée, martelée, coupée, disséquée, fondue, reprise, comme si hasardeusement sortie de son cerveau elle devait, par le supplice qu'il s'infligeait à la redire, retourner au néant originel pour être demeurée inaudible et l'emporter dans le hoquet de son ultime variation; ...¹¹

**Individual vs. Social Truth**

The heroes of the interrogatory novels are confronted, then, with an uncertainty concerning their reality based upon memory. Memory and persons change and suddenly the remembered reality is no longer real but has become a kind of illusion. The coupling of a questionable reality with a lack of building material with which to give some substance to their existence, with which to create a viable truth, makes theirs a doubly difficult burden to carry. Because of the inadequacy of memory, they are left with but one choice—the present moment.

Reality-truth is the here and now. It is simply living and therefore inextricably linked with time. It cannot be captured for each fleeting moment becomes an illusion, never to be recalled truthfully. What is real always

¹⁰Pinget, *Quelqu'un*, p. 171.

remains just out of reach for the moment one attempts to seize it, it changes form. The narrators, beginning with Levert, continue to probe, to search for reality-truth in the ever-changing landscape of the memory without realizing that they are forming a reality-truth from illusion-memory. Yet, however often their efforts to re-create reality are thwarted, they never arrive at a point where they question the existence of reality itself; that there is a reality, there can be no doubt. The struggle for them becomes not one of whether or not there is a reality but, rather, what kind of reality will be theirs, what kind of "living" they will choose to do. The problem thus posed would seem to differentiate between an individual and a conventional or social reality. The chosen profession of the protagonists, the fact that they are writers, emphasizes the struggle which each of them faces in this regard. In their attempt to portray truthfully the "real," their point of view becomes suspect for it is necessarily an individualistic one. Thus the author ends by creating a personal impression of reality-truth which society as a whole must deny because of the singleness of its point of view. But the effort is sustained as each writer tries to reconcile the differences inherent in the struggle while maintaining, at the same time, his individuality.

Thus the question: "What is the truth (reality) of society?" Is it the same for a group of people as for an
individual? In Mahu, Latirail, in the throes of trying to write a "true" novel, has the problem brought to his attention by his wife.

-- ... Par exemple écoute ça: "Les jeunes filles de quinze ans ont les cheveux gras. Elles se les lavent au vinaigre quand elles vont au bal. Leurs danseurs ont la nausée. Parce que le vinaigre sent mauvais." Crois-tu que c'est vrai, hein! crois-tu!
-- Mon pauvre vieux, on ne se lave plus les cheveux au vinaigre! On se lave au shampooing Dop. Tu ne sais pas encore ça, toi, un romancier?
.................................
-- Ben, je vais mettre la tienne avec le shampooing Dop puisque c'est plus vrai.
-- Tu crois que ce sera intéressant? Je me demande.
Et puis le shampooing Dop, dans dix ans, tu sais ...

So the truth is once again unreal in the ever-changing social climate. Ninette, the wife, expresses succinctly the basic problem faced by the author who wishes to portray a society realistically. Latirail, like all his confrères, is unaware of the invisible cocoon that he has unconsciously woven around himself. At some unknown moment, he has made a choice to render a realistic account of his society. In order to do so, it was necessary to transcend (again unconsciously) society, to stand aside, to become uninvolved. This lack of involvement has made him a stranger to an ever-changing truth. In the last resort, truth for society is also the present.

The narrator of Graal Flibuste finds himself in a somewhat similar situation. Having decided to take his fantastic and exotic voyage to "find himself," he is questioned

12Pinget, Mahu, pp. 36-37.
at one point in the trip by his coachman, Brindon:

--En somme tout ça, à quoi ça rime?
--Quoi, tout ça?
--Notre voyage, et ce plaisir que vous prenez à noter au jour le jour. Je n'arrive pas à comprendre ce qui vous intéresse. Est-ce de voyager, est-ce de vivre, est-ce la vie des autres, est-ce d'écrire? Qu'attendez-vous de vos expériences?

Brindon, confiez-moi toujours ce qui vous tracasse; même si je ne peux vous répondre, cela m'aide à me trouver ...
-- ... vous vous cherchez? Je dois vous faire l'effet d'un sauvage, mais, ça ça me fait rire.
--Trouver ce que je suis ...
--Mais, monsieur, qui vous le dira si ce n'est moi? Ou n'importe qui d'autre? ... On est comme on est, monsieur. Il y a un homme dont ses amis disent qu'il est aimable ou qu'il est fou, ou qu'il est poète à la rigueur. Mais lui n'en sait rien. Tous ses efforts pour influencer le jugement des autres lui font du tort.13

How free is the individual to "be himself," to create his own truth within the truth of society? The words of Brindon, the social animal, would indicate that such freedom is minuscule at best. The truth of society also envelops the truth of the individual. The latter is nothing more than that which he sees in the eyes of society. His freedom is well-defined within the limits of his place in that society. The creation of a private truth cannot and will not affect or influence society.

The case of Clope brings the question to a still more personal level. His dossier is to be a defense against a society which is readying itself to exorcise a non-paying member. The threat is real and the freedom of the

13Pinget, Graal Flibuste, pp. 151-153.
individual is in jeopardy. The dossier in all its verbiage attempts to indicate those who did and did not hear the fateful shot. For the position of Clope, however, the firing of the gun is not the fundamental question. His guilt has already been decreed. Clope's flagrant crime is his individuality.

The old man of L'Inquisitoire will find himself confronted by the same obstacles as did Levert and Clope. In spite of what he says or does not say, the image of society will remain distorted. By selecting what he considers to be the "truth" of society, he can only render a portrait colored by his personal ideas and ideals. Since he leads a life considered abnormal by conventional standards, what begins ostensibly as an interrogation about an insignificant disappearance becomes, in the process, a trial of the old man himself. All the information more or less forcibly extracted from him is of secondary importance. The substance of the inquisition is not what he says but the manner in which he expresses it. The barriers of the mind cause the old man to pause and hesitate; he reveres the truth and his hesitations and refusal to make assumptions show to what extent this "truth" is evasive.

... les gens ne comprennent rien et on doit dire la vérité et ce n'est pas facile alors autant ne rien dire ... c'est la vérité je répète c'est trop difficile, si j'ai fait le prude disons si je le suis c'est que le pli est pris il y a toutes ces barrières
Like all those who have preceded him, the old man discovers that this ephemeral entity eludes him as it can only be approached through that unreliable agent, the memory. The resultant failure, however, is not one of an individual nature. Though no solution is to be found, the old man has a triumph of sorts in the very attempt he has made to find the truth. In the end, when fatigue overcomes him, he knows that the interrogation will never cease, but even with this knowledge—like Mahu and Architruce before him—he is satisfied that his daily life is still intact.

Society, on the other hand, is not so cautious as the servant; it never seems to hesitate in its pronouncements of truth and the essence of the whole affair becomes, in the end, the old man's defense of his personal truth against that of society, a society whose abrasive presence is to remain an integral and vital part of his own existence in that it enables him to experience the quickening of his soul amidst the monotony of existing.

The figure of Mortin stands out all the more prominently in this perpetual search for truth because of his absence. His "appearance" after the termination of the inquisition of the old man is the distorted reflection of a two-way mirror. The communication of truth through the personage of the old servant is now reversed as the members of

society, seated on the other side of the glass, take their
turn at seizing the unseizable--the revelation of the truth
of a single individual. The end result will be the same as
before--complete failure--although more visibly indicated.
The recorded interviews which attempt to establish the truth
of a single individual follow the same terrain traversed by
the old servant. In both cases, the final judgments are
nothing more than impressions, often false and always uncer­
tain, of the exterior of the individual being judged. Thus,
one is soon made aware of not only the impossibility of dis­
covering the hidden truth of the individual protected by a
social façade but also the impossibility of assuming the
truth of the impression. In this world of distorted re­
flexions, impression equals invention. In the final an­
alysis, the eight differing views of Mortin are nothing more
than the invented realities of eight individual members of
a social group possessing eight discordant levels of objec­
tivity. The old man in L'Inquisitoire is aware of this
fallacy in human observation in the light of his own effort
as an individual to relate the truth of his société.

... on les force à parler mais les erreurs n'ont pas
d'importance ils parleraient pareil vrai ou faux et
nous serons logés à la même enseigne quand d'autres
poseront des questions sur nous, quelqu'un leur
répondra ci ou ça ça n'y changera rien notre vie aura
été la nôtre sans qu'on en puisse rien savoir je veux
dire les autres, ...

It is not surprising, then, that Mortin is no less

15Ibid., p. 299.
than eight different men. A danger inherent in the action of invention is the accompanying uncertainty and the fundamental contradictions which arise. Given the changing personalities of everyone involved and the inferior and false mirrors which reflect these personalities, the final result is one of several contradictory impressions. This basic law of an individual's truth is seen in its totality by Johann who has set himself to the impossible task of relating the life of Mortin.

Un jour je m'apercevais que j'avais déjà dit une chose, plutôt je me demandais si je ne l'avais pas déjà écrite et je relisais tout et je trouvais que je l'avais déjà écrite d'une autre façon ... Je ne savais pas qu'elle était la bonne, ... Alors je recopiais la première chose sans corriger et je n'osais pas déchirer les autres pour si des fois elles me sembleraient plus vraies ensuite. Je gardais tout ça, pour finir je ne comprenais plus rien, c'était comme si je parlais de trois ou quatre personnes différentes ...

The impressions recorded by the "acquaintances" of Mortin accentuate, once again, the existence of a fundamental element first encountered in the personage of an earlier Mortin\textsuperscript{17}--that of hypothesis. The truth of an individual viewed by society is reduced to a series of hypotheses. The present Mortin is composed of eight hypothetical personalities, each one representing the "real" Mortin in the eyes of the individual beholder. At the same time the truth of society viewed by an individual is revealed in like fashion.

\textsuperscript{16}Pinget, \textit{Autour de Mortin}, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{17}Pinget, \textit{L'Hypothèse}.
The effort of the old servant in *L'Inquisitoire* is recalled and his quest for the truth can be viewed, after the fact, as also being constructed on a shaky foundation of hypotheses as concerns his society. As he indicates, the truth is always just out of reach, and one could invent other persons and other situations, and this new truth would be as valid as the supposed initial truth in all its fundamental uncertainty.

The anonymous personage in *Quelqu'un* stands as a refutation of the attempts of the old servant and Mortin's acquaintances. At this juncture an individual's effort to portray the truth of his society and a society's attempt to do likewise concerning the individual have been tried and found wanting. Thus, the field of exploration for the narrator of *Quelqu'un* has been narrowed to that of the inner being. The labyrinth of the soul may prove to be the ideal arena for the serpentine exploration of the Pingetian hero.

... [Pinget] ouvre au lecteur, si l'on prend la peine de se plier à sa lente démarche, un univers de cavernes où grouillent des ombres sordides, mais saisissantes, déchirantes, affreusement proches.

Indeed, one is entering into a new territory as regards the search for truth. The success of such a quest now resides in the narrow limits established by the narrator's auto-

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inquisitoire. The questionable communication envisaged through the interrogation of the old man and the members of Mortin's society has been found to be void of meaning. The confrontation now excludes all exterior elements and is centered within the narrator himself. This self-inflicted interrogation would seem to portend greater expectations than the previous attempts. After all, who should know oneself better than oneself? Momentarily there exists the possibility of a greater freedom since the inquisitor of self undoubtedly possesses the ability to recognize, when necessary, the false impressions and the contradictions existent in the views held by exterior elements as regards a given personality.

Du moment qu'on sait que j'écris comme je me parle on est prévenu. Je ne peux pas prévenir les surprises et les contradictions puisque je vais à la découverte. Je suis obligé aussi de supposer mais je ne veux pas trop le dire, ça ferait pas sérieux, et c'est pourtant une des choses qui peut m'aider le mieux. On peut compter sur ma conscience en tout cas, je ne supposerai pas n'importe quoi, toujours le plus vraisemblable. Et il n'est plus que je m'excuse maintenant, ce que je fais n'est pas facile, je risque beaucoup.20

As the narrator indicates, the task is not easy and abounds in risks. The value of this speculation should be noted as the narrator becomes progressively caught up in yet another futile attempt to discover the truth of his own person for this is not the first such venture as was noted in the preceding chapter.

20Pinget, Quelqu'un, pp. 62-63.
Mais je ne veux plus me livrer à des inventaires. Je l'ai fait autrefois avec une conscience, une patience! Dans mes autres exposés, pour m'aider à me concentrer, en espérant que ça me défricherait le subconscient, que ça m'ouvrirait des voies vers l'essentiel. Complètement inutile. Les objets ne servent à rien quand on vise à l'âme.21

Des voies vers l'essentiel consist of a repeated series of hypotheses. In this respect, no progress has been made since the search of the old servant and Mortin's acquaintances was based on a similar foundation. Working in the shadows of one's own soul has proved to be infinitely more difficult than first imagined. The clearing of the subconscious is a hopeless and never-ending task, doomed to failure. The distance between the physical being and the soul is no less impenetrable. There are, undoubtedly, additional barriers in the form of consciously or unconsciously forgotten details which obstruct the clearing of this unknown territory--oneself.

Je sens déjà qu'il va falloir que j'en parle de mon existence. Je l'ai même écrite en détail pour m'en débarrasser, pour n'avoir pas à y revenir. Je pensais que ça serait comme une sorte d'exorcisme ou de conjuration. Il y a toujours un détail qui vous a échappé et vous tombez dans le panneau à la première occasion. Vous êtes de nouveau dans votre caca, impossible d'en sortir.22

The destruction of the obstacles, although destined to failure, spurs the individual on and the intensive investigation of self continues. Whereas escape from reality through

21Ibid., pp. 22-23.

22Ibid., p. 9.
fantasy was once thought to be the answer, the auto-inquisitoire now offers more hope since it can be manipulated to provide a never-ending search.

The Interrogative Method

A theme which has more or less remained dormant throughout the early works and the transitional novels achieves a prominent position with the advent of the first interrogatory novel, L'Inquisitoire. This "new" theme is, as the title of the work indicates, that of the inquisitorial framework. Although there exists an interrogatory tone in all the preceding novels, only with the appearance of L'Inquisitoire is its importance seized as a valid theme separated from the larger theme of the search for truth. It cannot be denied that a basic interrogation has been present beginning with Mahu; the retreat of these "early" heroes into self-made worlds of fantasy is an indication of a kind of interrogation. Through these invented fantasies, the idea of searching for an alternate "reality" presumes a fundamental and, perhaps, unconscious questioning of the status quo. An element lacking in these prior confrontations with reality, however, is the fact that such questioning tends to be, for the most part, only light-hearted attempts at finding a momentary means of escape. These early heroes retain the advantage of having always at hand a ready-made, invented world of fantasy so that their mode of questioning maintains an air of superficiality.
It is the appearance of Architruc in the final novel of the early works (Baga) which introduces, in a visible manner, the initial preparation and the importance of the interrogative method. However, the profundity of the theme has yet to be discovered. Baga reveals in skeletal form a premise which is to be developed further and in greater depth with each subsequent novel. The figure of Architruc has yet to fully accept the complete disappearance of a possible fantasy world paralleling a "real" world. His reality still has the rudimentary trappings of fantasy and can be readily dispensed with when the need arises.

Levert (Le Fiston) and Clope (Clope au dossier) are representative of the transitional period of this theme although the transition of character from Architruc to Levert is a giant leap. The appearance of Levert invokes the corresponding and sudden appearance of reality. Fantasy has all but disappeared, and Levert and Clope are faced with the true beginnings of a very real interrogation. For the first time, the feelings of alienation and the need for a defense against a solitary existence are present. They are the first to recognize their isolation and ensuing compulsion to justify such an existence.

La littérature cesse alors d'être description, évo- 
cation ou analyse, pour devenir interrogation. Au lieu de traître un "sujet," elle pose la question "comment le traiter?" Le romancier n'est plus un homme qui décrit--ou qui écrit--mais qui se regarde décrire ou écrire, car c'est uniquement ainsi, en étant attentif à ses actions et à ses réactions devant la Chose à décrire, qu'il parviendra non pas à en rendre compte.
Compared to the interrogatory novels, the actions and reactions of Clope and Levert do not yet reflect the state of tension and the depth of isolation with which the later protagonists are faced. Their plaidoysers stand as the rude beginnings of an increasingly important aspect in the life of the Pingetian hero, and in comparison to those which are to follow, these pleas appear somewhat innocuous.

The opening line of *L'Inquisitoire* ("Oui ou non répondez") encompasses as great a distance between Clope and the old servant as that between Architruc and Levert. From the rather detached manner of the heroes of the transitional novels, one is suddenly thrust into an ambience of profound personal involvement.

... lorsque j'ai décidé d'écrire *L'Inquisitoire* je ne ressentais qu'un besoin de m'expliquer très longuement. Je me suis mis au travail et j'ai écrit la phrase Oui ou non répondez qui s'adressait à moi seul et signifiait Accouchez.

The accouchement which resulted in the birth of *L'Inquisitoire* postulates Pinget's use of the Socratic method to arrive at the truth of an individual. The maieutic method of Socrates comprises the bringing forth of knowledge in the mind of a person through interrogation and insistence on

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24 Robert Pinget, Préface [to Le Libera] (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1968), p. 7. [This was published separately from the novel.]
tight and logical reasoning. Socrates, whose mother was a midwife, saw himself in a similar role performing a service by bringing others' thoughts to the surface with his questionings. Under the guise of the heroes of the interrogatory novels, Pinget adopts, as did Socrates, the Delphic axiom of "Know thyself." These words, engraved on the portals of the temple of Delphi, were first thought to connote only a social meaning of knowing one's station in life and being satisfied with that position. However, Socrates saw in the words a more profound moral significance which implied a responsibility on the part of the individual to find the true meaning of himself quite apart from his social station in life.

Pinget accepts and adopts the moral definition of Socrates much in the same spirit as did the Greek philosopher. There exists, without a doubt, in Pinget's method, a measure of pessimism accrued through the ages as the struggle to gain self-knowledge has continued unabated. In spite of this pessimistic tone which hovers over Pinget's search for a personal truth, the basis and significance of the Socratic position underlies his attempt. "C'est en analysant avec le plus d'acuité possible ses sentiments et ses sensations qu'on finit par attraper un petit bout de vérité."25 In fact, Pinget takes a further step in his role as a modern author: the continual attempt to find his own

25 Juin, review of L'Inquisitoire, p. 4.
truth does not stop him but can assist the reader who is likewise searching.

Il faut lire attentivement, avec amour; alors on saisit la vérité. Mais pourquoi la vérité? Parce que c'est en disant nos angoisses, nos tracas et non en les masquant que nousarrivons à nous en débarrasser et par là à en débarrasser les autres. Un livre délie un noeud. Mais pour ça il faut que l'analyse soit poussée au maximum. Le lecteur doit faire cet effort d'analyse, alors peut-être pourrons-nous nous débarrasser de nos obsessions.26

The old servant and the narrator of Quelqu'un are outstanding examples of the use of the Socratic method. Their appearance heralds the ultimate attack of the Pin-getian protagonist to discover his personal truth—an offensive whose battleground is restricted to the inner being, the soul of the individual. The fact that the size of the field of action has been progressively diminishing and has finally been restricted to the soul of the narrator denotes a logical conclusion to the search for a personal truth. The previous attempts made in this quest, from Mahu to Clope, remain as examples of the efforts toward a conciliation of the individual with his society and as such, are more attuned to the social significance of "Know thyself." The intensive, inquisitional tone of the interrogatory works proclaims, however, the realization that the individual stands quite alone. His "meaning" resides in the innermost recesses of himself. An "exterior" force such as society

exists only insofar as it is pertinent to the fundamental and much more important "interior" force of the individual's soul.

**Tone**

"Il me semble que l'intérêt de mon travail jusqu'aujourd'hui a été la recherche d'un ton."27 These words of Robert Pinget emphasize the importance of an aspect of his work which has yet to be discussed in this study. It is with the appearance of the interrogatory novels that the significance of the ton is fully realized; it is at this juncture that tone takes precedence over all other elements of his novel.

Tout ce qu'on peut dire ou signifier ne m'intéresse pas, mais la façon de dire. Et cette façon une fois choisie, c'est là une grande et pénible partie du travail, donc préalable, elle m'imposera et la composition et la matière du discours.28

For Pinget, it is the tone which produces story, plot, character, pattern, rhythm, and all the other aspects that a reader expects to find in a novelistic work. What is said does not interest him but, rather, the way in which it is said.

Tone, in the personal lexicon of Pinget, conveys a double significance. On the one hand, it is physiological in nature, adding to the story a certain mood; on the other

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27Pinget, Préface, p. 3.
28Ibid.
hand, it is musical in nature as it affixes to the narrative a certain sound, a certain intonation of voice. These two meanings, while connoting slightly different approaches, tend to merge in the works of Pinget—a blending of *forme* and *fond* to disclose a single *réalité poétique*. This coming together of mood and sound creates the *matière*, the story itself. It is this blending that serves as the mold from which emerges the finished product. "...l'expérience m'a prouvé que c'est le moule qui à chaque ligne fait le gâteau." What emerges from the mold—the particular and sometimes peculiar tone—is made for the ear of the reader. Among the nouveaux romanciers, this concern for tone is a distinguishing mark for Pinget. It is the sound embodied in the content of each work, *la voix de celui qui parle*, which is of interest to him. "... seule capte mon intérêt la voix de celui qui parle. Notre oreille est un appareil enregistreur bien aussi puissant que notre oeil." The Nouveau Roman, which has generally been labeled as *l'école du regard*, takes on a different connotation within the works of Pinget.

Je ne fais certainemment pas partie de "l'école du regard." A la rigueur s'il fallait mettre une étiquette à mes œuvres je dirais plutôt que je fais partie de "l'école de l'oreille."

29Ibid.

30Ibid., p. 4.

31Knapp, "Interview," p. 549.
Every one of his works is a testimonial to his fascination for the written language. For Pinget, language is the material with which he has to work, and each undertaking becomes another project in the exploration of that particular area. The essential component is the language itself. The phenomenological approach to the study of tone in the works of Pinget is based on his belief that each individual is a composite of diverse tones. These different tones are recorded by the individual from childhood and consist of hereditary tones and those assimilated from books and other sources. Employing the compositely-formed tone as a starting point (that which is the individual's customary tone), Pinget's literary creations are an analysis of each of the components in the form of the novel.

Je dis la voix de celui qui parle, car le travail préalable consiste pour moi à choisir parmi les composantes de la mienne celle qui m'intéresse sur le moment et de l'isoler, de l'objectiver alors jusqu'à ce qu'un personnage en surgisse, le narra­teur lui-même, auquel je m'identifie. Voilà pourquoi on trouve le je dans tous mes livres, mais il est à chaque fois différent. 32

Thus Pinget is present in each of his works in the guise of Mahu or Architruc or Clope. Every hero represents a different component of Pinget's tone. The physiological/musical tones have varied from novel to novel as he chooses from among his tonal components the one which interests him at the moment: a naïve tone as evidenced by Mahu, an exotic

32Pinget, Préface, p. 5.
tone of wonder in the land of Grael Flibuste, a distressful and frantic tone envisaged in the personage of Levert, a tone of menace in L'Inquisitoire. These varied tones are not, however, merely simple frameworks for a novel. They comprise within themselves a more basic function--that of a kind of defensive armor against an incomprehensible reality. Each component is a possible façade that can be adapted to any given situation. The danger lies in selecting the wrong tone, the false tone.

Le ton. Ce qu'il y a de plus difficile à attraper. Un ton faux peut vous amoquer toute une vie. C'est effrayant quand on y pense. Plus qu'effrayant. Mortel. Et on se demande des fois de quoi meurent les gens. On ne peut pas l'expliquer, on ne comprend pas, on dit mystère. Ils sont morts de leur ton. Ils n'avaient pas piqué le bon au départ. Le ton. C'est vital.33

The final works to be discussed in this study are additional tonal components of the writer, Pinget. One is led deeper into the univers de caverne, into the hidden recesses of the protagonist's soul where even more sordid shadows reside. One has the feeling of having come full circle and the ending is still the same "raw material" of the beginning.

33Pinget, Quelqu'un, pp. 67-68.
PART IV

THE NEW DIRECTION NOVELS

Le Libera
Passacaille
CHAPTER XIV

A PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE

Le Libéra

The fourteenth work and ninth novel of Robert Pinget, Le Libéra, was published by Les Editions de Minuit in 1968.

The "story" contained in Le Libéra is not really one at all, but any reader who has progressed through Pinget's works to this novel would be hard pressed to find a so-called plot in any of the preceding novels, the reason being that, for Pinget, the story or anecdote is of no interest. It becomes, rather, a self-forming element which comes about of its own accord as a result of the "tone" of the work chosen by the author.

On a parlé de l'intrigue dans mes livres. Plutôt qu'intrigue je préférerais situation, laquelle m'est imposée par le ton choisi. Si une intrigue a l'air de se nouer c'est uniquement au fil du discours, qui ne peut se dérouler dans le vide. Ils se soutiennent mutuellement. Ce discours sera donc fait d'histoires. Si je dis que ces histoires ne m'intéressent pas c'est que je sais qu'elles auraient pu être autres.¹

Like the old servant in L'Inquisitoire who confessed that he could just as easily have invented other characters than

¹Pinget, Préface, p. 6.
those whom he chose to speak about, and the narrator of Quelqu'un whose exposé was simply one of many possibilities, there is always a "situation," as Pinget chooses to label it, for there must be something concrete, some reality on which to base the work.

Among the myriad viewpoints which emerge in Le Libera and to which the narrator constantly alludes, there emerges the reality of assassination that is to provide a partial basis for the situation. In contrast to previous novels where death and/or physical disappearance emerge also as the foundation for the work (Levert's son, Clope's killing of the goose, the secretary's disappearance from the château, and the death of Mortin), in Le Libera it is the concept of extermination which is solidified as its victims become unnamed abstractions. The narrator's memory accumulates the violent deaths of young boys who have been drowned, strangled, slaughtered, or crushed by trucks. Their identities in turn become blurred and eventually annihilated amidst the vagaries of the normally elemental aspects of a crime. Inherent within the idea of assassination lies the existence of an assassin whose being in this narrative remains undefined yet whose presence is threateningly echoed throughout by the old man: "... l'assassin court toujours, ..."² Abetted by the reversals of the "facts" of the

situation and the personages involved therein, the authenticity of the shadowy figure is felt with a greater sense of acuity than the townspeople who bodily inhabit the pages of the novel. Suddenly the narrator finds himself implicated in the mystery when he is accused of having played a role in the death of a four year old boy. The three certainties—death, the presence of a murderer somewhere in society, and the incrimination of the raconteur—then become enmeshed into a triangular situation with the old man serving as a possible key between the act and its executor.

Finding himself implicated in the mystery through the actions of the "mad" Mlle Lorpailleur, the defense of the narrator's "truth" will consist of reconstructing the whole drama through the gossip of the townspeople.

... [Mlle Lorpailleur] prétend que j'aurais participé de près ou de loin, que j'aurais trempé dans l'affaire du petit Ducreux, j'aurais eu des accointances avec la police d'où mon impunité. ... mon nom n'a été prononcé à l'enquête et voilà cette folle maintenant des années après et qu'on se met à jaser.3

Each person has his own version of the affair, and far from elucidating the facts, the narrator's inquiry serves only to add to the confusion by surrounding the facts with an impenetrable and seemingly definitive mystery. The versions and personages are so unceasingly changing that soon there is no certainty of the crime or crimes or of the victim or victims.

3Ibid., p. 7.
The obsession of the narrator appears to rotate on a double axis: the folie of Mlle Lorpailleur and a certain affaire Ducreux. These propositions are viewed not only as being equally important but also as being interdependent for without their constant interaction, the narrator would not have the basis from which emanates the confused and contradictory world of his anecdote.

The conditionally stated opening line of the novel, "Si la Lorpailleur est folle je n'y peux rien,"\textsuperscript{4} establishes immediately the indecisiveness which is to follow. In the eyes of the narrator, whom she has implicated in a sordid affair of ten years past, there is no question of her madness since she has been in mourning for ten years over the death of her mother.

... elle va racontant des sornettes, sa robe noire, son chapeau à crêpe, ses dents jaunes, elle a perdu sa mère il y a des années, toujours en deuil, une maniaque, ... cette manie du deuil est-ce que ça ne vous a pas quelque chose de dégoûtant, trainer ses morts partout ...\textsuperscript{5}

The narrator's reaction to the indictment is to postulate the madness of his accuser with the hope of having her confined in order to arrest the gossip of his participation in a crime. The act of confinement, however, cannot be based on public opinion but only on sufficient cause and with the consent of her family, "une soeur en Argentine, tout le

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., pp. 10-11.
Faced with this obstacle, the febrile and demented mind of the old man seeks an alternate means of ridding his life of its nemesis.

... le jour où son crêpe viendra par un coup de vent se coller contre sa figure à un tournant juste comme passe un camion ..., la Lorpailleur morte sur le coup, là, étendue sur la chaussée, ...

This retreat into the imaginative mind of the narrator has resulted in the crystallization of a death wish in which he sees her killed by a truck. The "madness" and "death" of Mlle Lorpailleur set the stage for the indefinite and variant number of contradictory affirmations that inundate the story. Her death is to be contradicted several pages later by "cinq minutes après l'accident le docteur ... a dit légère contusion à l'épaule, ..."8, a version which in turn is to be reversed when it is stated that she, not the truck, is responsible for the imaginary accident, "... elle s'est laissée tout simplement couler de son vélo lorsqu'elle a vu le camion soit par peur soit par calcul, ... elle est si mauvaise, ..."9 Thus both her death and the accident reside only in the demented mind of the narrator, but he clings tenaciously to the idea that she is mad. Of this proposition, there will be no variations. To do so would topple

6Ibid., p. 8.
7Ibid., p. 10.
9Ibid., p. 15.
the basis for his maddening, ricocheting query and would put in question his freedom of self-expression.

The hesitant revolutions of the Lorpillieur axis are repeated as regards the second point of interest—the Ducreux affair.

L'affaire Ducreux, vieille affaire, ... il y a bien une dizaine d'années, le petit Ducreux, quatre ans, a été retrouvé étranglé dans le bois ... sous un tas de feuilles, ... il était sorti le dimanche avec ses parents, ... les parents s'étaient endormis après le pique-nique...10

Such a heinous crime has not been witnessed in the area since the preceding century and the populace has been discussing it for ten years even though the parents of the dead boy have since had three additional children. The initial statement of the situation is to undergo the same shifting, changing, and modifying of facts as did the Lorpillieur situation. However, whereas the narrator's concern with Lorpillieur engenders a tone of irritation, the tone shifts significantly when he attempts to explain the boy's death. By being personally implicated in the affair, his tone takes on a maniacal quality as he heaps supposition upon supposition and contradiction upon contradiction. Agonizing over his own reputation, he seeks to counteract the gossip by revealing "abnormalities" within the boy's family.

... on avait tout supposé, un enlèvement ni plus ni moins, mais on a beau dire, il en reste toujours quelque chose, est-ce qu'il est normal de se faire

10Ibid., pp. 8-9.
étrangler son enfant, qu'est-ce qu'il y avait par
derrière, quelle sorte de gens fréquentaient les
Ducreux, non ce n'est pas normal.11

The first deformation of the facts concerning the
boy's death is then introduced: "Le petit Ducreux n'aurait
pas été enlevé."12 Not only the possibility of a kidnapping
is refuted but the manner of death is also soon to be modi­
fied, as the boy is referred to as the petit égorgé. The
child (Louis) was not strangled after all but has had his
throat slit. This initial confusion is not allowed to rest
before the framework of the whole affair is cast into doubt:
"Mais que le pique-nique était une histoire colportée par
Dieu sait qui, les Ducreux n'ont jamais pique-niqué nulle
part, ..."13

The place and manner of death cannot now be stated
with any certainty. The vacillating mind of the narrator
weaves such a web of confusion that, unsurprisingly, the de­
formed and reciprocal borrowing of the Lorplainelaur and the
Ducreux affairs collide and are further confused from one
paragraph to another. The légère contusion à l'épaule suf­
furred by Lorplainelaur earlier is now inflicted upon the
brother of the dead boy in the form of a disjointed shoul­
der.14 This confusion continues unabated as each

11Ibid., p. 13.
13Ibid., p. 18.
14Ibid., p. 21.
aforementioned fact is invalidated by a subsequent illusion. These illusions continue to such a point that the dead boy suffers his cruel fate in yet another manner.

... le petit Alfred est sorti du magasin, pour le coup sa mère s'est précipitée en bas de l'escabeau, elle a empoigné son petit, ... elle a encore devant les yeux son petit écrasé par cette voiture il y a dix ans ...15

First strangled, then slaughtered, now he has been run over by a car. At the height of this imbroglio, the affair becomes more muddled when another boy from another family is introduced: "... qu'est-ce que je dis écrasé, c'est le petit Bianle, ..."16

This glimpse of the déroulement of the early pages of the novel indicates the direction to be followed as the narrator attempts to prove his innocence. Certain affirmations appear only to be refuted in succeeding paragraphs. Louis is finally left to rest in peace only to have his drama continued in the persons of his brothers and other young boys of the village. The saga of Mlle Lorpailleur continues in the mind of the narrator as her accident involves other persons and other circumstances, although her madness remains a constant as he imagines her confinement with the accompanying shock treatments.

The device which the narrator has chosen to carry his alternant situation to its desired end is through the

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15Ibid.
16Ibid., p. 21.
repeated utilization of the conjunctions *ou* and *ou que* to introduce new paragraphs, new postulations. The new paragraph becomes the truth "of the moment," eclipsing the validity of the preceding paragraph which had previously, in its moment of prominence, overshadowed the words of an earlier statement. These never-ending alternatives are reduced to meaningless propositions in the process. The value of such a method lies in the confusion inherent in its use and the resultant annihilation of each "fact." The narrator is able to manipulate the basic situation, and in posing numerous variants, he is able to implicate whomever he desires. In so doing, it is possible for him to evade any personal incrimination by throwing suspicion on any number of different people and, indeed, the long, intricate recollection of events soon incriminates the whole of the populace.

... ce réseau de bavardage et de propos absurdes avait conditionné notre existence si bien qu'un étranger s'installant parmi nous n'y aurait pas résisté long-temps et que venu pour exercer la profession disons de boulanger il aurait infailliblement bifurqué sur celle de tueur d'enfants par exemple, sa responsabilité n'y étant pour rien, ...\(^{17}\)

Along the twisting road everyone is guilty in some measure, and as each tale is obliterated by its succeeding counterpart, so also is the guilt of that party. Since they all share a part in the crime, the converse must be true: none are guilty.

The confusion as regards the "story" has its

\(^{17}\textit{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 145.\)
parallel in the chorus of voices heard on each page. A chorus of voices or a single voice of myriad tonality? The first impression is that there exists a multitude of voices as one works through a confusing maze of suppositions and subsequent contradictions, a labyrinth of successive paragraphs of indirect discourse interrupting, overlaying, and vying with each other for prominence with, from time to time, the interjection of a single voice in direct discourse.

Qu'est-ce que je dis ...
Or je dis que la Lorpailleur est folle
Je passe sur ce qu'on dit de sa moralité là-bas ...
... l'assassin court ...
Je ne dis pas qu'elle ait trempé directement dans l'affaire ...
Vous voyez ce que je veux dire.18

This contrapuntal cantata proceeds with diminishing force as, little by little, a single and unique voice begins to emerge from the multitude--that of the narrator. It arises with a strident, frenetic tone as if being motivated by some force that has suddenly been accelerated. "Donc oui écrivez écrivez"; it evidently catches a glimpse of the way to the truth, "... ne m'interrompez pas ..."19, as it surges forward, gathering speed. The possibility of the solution to the mystery seems eminent.

Ou que ... Mortin se soit trouvé devant la pharmacie juste comme l'enfant sortait de la cour de ses parents tout seul et se soit demandé pourquoi la mère n'y

18Ibid., pp. 21-68, passim.
19Ibid., p. 188.
veillait pas, mais n'étant pas chargé de l'éducation des parents ni de la sécurité des enfants aurait et c'est là que le drame commence laissé faire laissé passer, ...

But once again the final version is evaded since it has never been a question of who assassinated whom or by what means the deed was accomplished. The importance of this long prayer-like discourse resides within the language with which it has been formed--a liturgy of la parole.

Celle du vieil homme se déroule et s'enroule, se déploie sur tous les modes, ... passe et repasse aux mêmes lieux--et souvent le même jour--comme pour se les approprier, modulant les thèmes, jouant avec les variantes, bourdonnant sans fin ...^21

Given the content of the novel with its accompanying modulations and variations and the resultant confusion, the proper names of the two obsessions of the narrator--Ducreux and Lorpailleur--reinforce a basic aspect of the liturgical oratorio. As the l'orpailleur (prospector) appeals to the truth to reveal itself, his words are found to be creux (hollow), easily disintegrated by succeeding words because of their emptiness of meaning. In the end, everything concerning the drama is perhaps only a myth. At this point the mystery, in all its vicissitudes, assumes the significance it was undoubtedly meant to have from the beginning--a mystery play dealing with the life, death, and resurrection

^20Ibid., p. 189.

of words.

Words have been the stock in trade of Pinget since our first introduction to the imaginary world of Fantoine and Agapa, but it is only at this juncture in time that the words have been counterpointed with such dehumanization. In the preceding novels, vague though it may have appeared at times, there has always been the presence of a human voice albeit often anonymous. Although a physical portrait of the medium of the human voice cannot be sketched with any certainty, there exists at all times the reader's impression of a given personage enabling him to formulate a human presence. The possibility of such an impressionistic identification does not exist in Le Libera. Not only has the plot been subjugated to the movement of the words (and thus relinquishing the motivating force which it habitually assumes in a novel), but the human presence has been annihilated by the words.

La voix qu'on entend dans Le Libera, n'a pas d'âge, pas de sexe, on pourrait dire: pas d'identité.

C'est la voix pour la voix, l'écriture pour l'écriture. Le lecteur est agrippé, pris à témoin, emporté, grisé de paroles.22

The initial pleasure one might obtain in attempting to identify characters and to situate them in relationship to one another and to the story is soon lost in an impassable

labyrinth. The fiction under consideration is created by language and, when deemed necessary, is just as easily effaced. The fiction is a voice, one without human qualities, which, like the earlier Pingetian characters, speaks in order to "be"—in order that there is a voice. The already shadowy figure of quelqu’un has been diminished to that of personne or, rather, to la voix de personne.

"... cette voix sortie d'on ne sait où non identifiée non plus, une sorte d'angoisse ou disons de malaise qui aurait gagné du terrain, ..."23

The land encroached upon by anguish and malaise is, in the final analysis, that of the novel itself. The well-defined and established order of the conventional novel, reposing on its stable foundation of plot, has disappeared. The order has been reversed, a reversal of the function of the anecdote. The "story" in the present novel has become one of the conflict between the destruction of the reality of the novel itself in its basic aspects and the destruction of the mythical reality inherent in the novel. In this land where language is sovereign, such a conflict engenders "... paroles confuses, il y a de l'écho à cet endroit mais si on ne se trouve pas juste dans ses ondes il brouille les voix plus qu'il ne les rend distinctes, ..."24 In the end, as one critic states, "le roman ... n'affirme plus rien


24Ibid., p. 44.
sinon l'impossibilité de toute affirmation."  

The confused and hollow words standing without the support provided by a human emanation, struggling for their continued existence and their meaning, undergo the same exhaustive search as did the characters of the earlier novels, and they face the same menace of a terrifying finality if additional words cannot be found. "Mais il fallait se reprendre, ... faire cet effort, se tirer du cauchemar." This voice also cannot admit defeat. After much agonizing, it realizes that it must continue, and the final unnumbered page of its text indicates an acceptance of such a task. "Plus question de finir. Une soif mais pour l'éteindre je pourrai toujours courir. Une soif oui, selon moi." Thus the Libera (Latin word signifying délivrez) of the Catholic funeral mass (Libera me, Domine ...) assumes its full significance. "... libera me de morte aeterna ... libérez-nous de ce magma d'absurdités et de contradictions, de ces propos qui n'aboutissent jamais à rien."  

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26Pinget, Le Libera, p. 76.  
27Ibid., p. 222.  
Chapter XV

A Dance of Death

Passacaille

Pinget's fifteenth work and tenth novel is entitled Passacaille and was published by Les Editions de Minuit in 1969.

The title of this polyphonic work refers to the passacaglia, slow, dignified Spanish dance music done in triple time with variations on an ostinato figure, the word being a derivative of the Spanish paso + calle, meaning a step in the street. Pinget makes use of this formula and tone to provide the framework around the persistently re-occurring theme of the encroachment of death which is visualized as though through a kaleidoscope by the people of Sirancy as they approach, move around, and withdraw from the phenomenon lying in a heap. The atmosphere is one of calmness throughout; nevertheless, the rhythmic movement about the central figure is constantly in motion, be it only performed by a change of season, weather, or the time of day.

Providing an independent yet harmonizing melody to this central figure is the narrator as he probes the recesses of his mind, the serpentine alleys of which lead...
inevitably back to myriad variations on the death theme. The murmurs and echoes that resound from the depths of his subconscious being become "... fantasmes de la nuit qui ne laissent rien intact des suggestions de la mémoire."\(^1\) A lifetime of dreams, disillusionment, despair, hallucinations, and nightmares lie in the slag heap among the refuse. He delves into the subconscious in order to root out "quelques images à débarrasser de leurs scories pour découvrir au fond de leur trame la déroute, la détresse, puis progressivement l'accalmie, ..."\(^2\) In this realm of uncertainty, the echoes and murmurs of a life constitute neither a story nor a truth but only a faisceau de bribes, comparable to the possible faisceau de paille lying on the fumier outside, a bundle of odds and ends which intersect, contradict each other, and become entangled to form the labyrinth where he has been condemned to wander by an invisible yet all-powerful force. "Que faire de ces bribes. Peu à peu s'effaçaient dans sa mémoire les traits d'autrefois, les noms, les mots, comme si l'immense vague de l'exile ..."\(^3\)

It is an exile to a world characterized by the order of its disorder.

Le calme. Le gris. De remous aucun. Quelque chose doit être cassé dans la mécanique mais rien ne

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 19.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 39.
transparaît. La pendule est sur la cheminée, les aiguilles marquent l'heure.

Quelqu'un dans la pièce froide viendrait d'entrer,

... Le gris. Le calme. Se serait assis devant la table. Transi de froid, jusqu'à la tombée de la nuit. C'était l'hiver, le jardin mort, la cour herbue. Il n'y aurait personne pendant des mois, tout est en ordre.

La route qui conduit jusque-là côtoie des champs où il n'y avait rien. Des corbeaux s'envolent ou des pies, on voit mal, la nuit va tomber.\(^4\)

Within this atmosphere of order provided by the bleak stillness of the setting and the adagio movement and rhythm of the lines, disorder is brought into play by the presence of a discordant note: "Quelque chose doit être cassé dans la mécanique." Thus the polyphonic quality of this passacaglia is introduced as a voice emerges to provide an alternate tone. The possibility of a further heightening of disorder is revealed by the inclusion of the clock which counts off the hours announcing the potential alterations brought about with the passage of time. Le calme, le gris is then transposed into le gris, le calme, and the inversion presents the melody in contrary motion to its original form. The dance is in motion. A voice speaks; someone appears, then disappears; the voice reappears: "on voit mal." The movement is slow and slight, but it is in evidence. The sterility of winter has left its impression yet with the presence of the clock arises the possibility of a progression—a germination of spring and the conceivable return of the people who have

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 7.
deserted this lonely spot. The possibilities are then transformed into actualities with the movement displayed in the fifth paragraph by the road that leads, the night that falls, and the birds that take flight. Harmonizing with the orderly beat of time in this passacaglia, there emerge the infinite variations (disorder) which spring naturally from the unfluctuating and steady initial rhythm of the scene.

Pinget proceeds with his dance of death by presenting his reader with a multitude of variations on le calme, le gris, the calmness of death within the grayness of life. The narrator is to move around in a stagnating external and internal world where the only certain order is to be found in its overwhelming disorder. All phases of life have broken down. Like the narrator of Le Libera, our present voice undertakes, with the aid of a dépanneuse (his memory), the task of rebuilding an existence consisting of rapidly deteriorating parts. He pursues variations of this disorderly order which results eventually in a kind of unpretentious madness. The hideous figure of Death stalks his every step, their two voices converging, blending, harmonizing, and then deflecting, although never so far as to lose sight completely of the other.

The possibility of any objective progression is to be thwarted at every turn by the presence of an overpowering, retrogressive subjectivity which has halted both the mechanism of life and of time. The sterility and quiescence of
the objective world is overwhelmed by the fertility and mania of the world of the subconscious. The collision of these two vastly different worlds results in the obliteration of any viable meaning of a conscious existence. The objective facts are soon lost in the attempt to grasp their significance in the dark pool of the subconscious where the voice--the mechanic--labors to repair une existence détraquée.

In order to repair this "malfunctioning" existence the voice resorts to a spoken novel-within-a-novel premise. The objective reality of a novel in the making is clearly definable from the subjective thoughts of the "author" through his manner of positing conditionally the "facts" of that reality. Such a conditionality given to the fond of the "novel" also lends credence to the assumption that the voice is attempting to rectify and restore a credible existence after the fact.

L'homme assis à cette table quelques heures avant retrouvé mort sur le fumier n'aurait pas été seul, une sentinelle veillait, un paysan sûr qui n'avait aperçu que le défunt un jour gris, froid, se serait approché de la fente du volet et l'aurait vu distinctement détraquer la pendule puis rester prostré sur sa chaise, les coudes sur la table, la tête dans les mains.

Comment se fier à ce murmure, l'oreille est en défaut.5

The man would not have been alone; a sentinel would have approached the opening in the shutter and would have seen

5Ibid., p. 8.
him; but how can one trust that murmur when one is hard of hearing. These two contrasting elements continue throughout the novel, in like fashion, with the objective "facts" of reality being combatted and destroyed by the forces of a stronger dream-like province of suspicion--the subconscious.

Discretion, attention, a failing source of information, an almost inaudible murmur interrupted by silences and by gasps, such is the subconscious world of the voice as it assumes the self-defeating task of explaining its objective existence.

The constant interplay between the conscious and the subconscious worlds results in a fusion of the two as the novel progresses, and the "author" is revealed in the act of writing his own past life.

Thus, the subconscious voice, this "alchemist of trifles,"

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6Ibid., pp. 8-9.
7Ibid., pp. 47-48.
stands to one side and views its existence. Accepting the voice as such, the context and content of the passacaglia are immersed in doubt from the beginning. A voice with all the force of pure language behind it invents an "author" with, in turn, a resultant fictional world. "Des absences oui, quelque chose de cassé, comme si ce qu'il venait de dire s'était produit en d'autre temps ou que ce n'était pas lui au moment qu'il parle."8

Leafing through the book of his past life, the voice has undertaken a work of notation en marge. This voice of the subconscious is busily at work annotating, modifying, and revising a life that should have been. But in the winter coldness of a sterile existence, the annotations, corrections, and modifications do not resound with clarity, and in the ethereal realm of the subconscious "le rêve refondait tout, bouleversait l'ordre, ..."9 With the remodeling effect of dreams comes the dissolution of the distinctness of the objective "facts." The truth of the existence remains hidden.

A sa table dans la maison froide le maître reprenant le livre notait en marge d'une phrase murmurée, on entendait mal, ténèbres, fantasmes de la nuit, l'histoire demeurera secrète, sans faille sur l'extérieur. Quelque chose de cassé dans la mécanique.10

The subjective and objective worlds, once subjugated to the

8Ibid., pp. 28-29.
9Ibid., p. 20.
10Ibid., p. 19.
fantasmes de la nuit, fuse together, forever linked in a purely imaginary realm. The remodeling effect of dreams and the upheaval of objective order lead the story-teller down the only available avenue left open to him—his imagination. The imagination of the subconscious offers him the freedom that he needs in order to explain an objective reality and the freedom that he desires in order to ameliorate the explanation.

... les détours du subconscient sont étranges mais pour expliquer quoi ou prévoir quoi, on pouvait tout supposer, grande liberté, n'était-ce pas là le domaine de la poésie, ...11

The domain of poetry, this province of complete freedom, is not without its obstacles and its dangers. There still remains the possibility of failure as designated by the silences and the hoquets of the voice of the "author." The utter sterility of his existence brings with it, quite naturally, the idea of death. The attempt at repairing a malfunctioning existence is an effort, primary in importance, of disengaging itself from a deathly environment. Death is everywhere, a persistent phantom invading every physical and physiological aspect of being, an existence of winter, night, cadavres, faulty sight and hearing, and timelessness. With this infertile faisceau de bribes, the alchemist's art of invention must unquestionably provide the material necessary for the continuance of an existence. The

11Ibid., p. 90.
voice itself is in peril for if the invention fails or is not pursued, there remains only: "Fantasmes de la nuit et d'hier et de demain, la mort au moindre défaut de la pensée comme en telle scène d'intérieur une fenêtre ouverte sur le désert, ..."  

There is, in this ever-accelerating, frantic, and despairing tone of the voice, the realization of this fact. The introduction of death, "l'homme ... quelques heures avant retrouvé mort sur le fumier ...," brings into perspective the near impossibility of formulating an existence on such a conception. The point fixe of death, ce cadavre sur le fumier, is itself subject to the debilitating influence of fantasy emanating from the subconscious. The bleeding form on the fumier may or may not be the postman, a cow, a scarecrow blown down by the wind, or the "author."  

Any attempt to make sense of these bribes soon falls into a fantastic realm of magic spells and ghosts, and the corpse becomes a horrifying "... cadavre mutilé, braguette ensanglantée." The world becomes one of somber gray days and dark, terrifying nights. "... la profusion des images tant funèbres que champêtres continuaient de le séduire disons de le bercer agréablement, ..." Just as the voice is

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12 Ibid., p. 33.
13 Ibid., p. 8.
14 Ibid., pp. 28-49, passim.
15 Ibid., p. 40.
16 Ibid., p. 78.
enclosed in its self-made prison, the region around it seems also to be caught in a perennial motionlessness. "Le calme. Le gris. ... Dehors ces brouillards d'une saison à l'autre. ... Des choses se taisent, des gens dorment."\textsuperscript{17}

The voice has altered the mechanism of time. Objective time has ceased for everyone and everything. In its place the element of subjective time has been substituted: "Sans calendrier ni passion."\textsuperscript{18} A subjective reality, 
une réalité nouvelle, hopefully preferable to an objective one, is sought in the dateless time zone which is the subconscious. The revolutions and convolutions of the present static moment allow the mechanism of the subconscious the complete freedom of timelessness. Past, present, and future coexist, "... et les jours passent sans passer, à défaut de calendrier et de passion rien ne passe, ..."\textsuperscript{19} The illusion of subconscious reality, contemplated as a purgative of a past existence of sterility, engenders, however, its own barrenness and now "deux mécanismes au ralenti."\textsuperscript{20}

The deceleration of both life and time restricts the voice to a progressively narrowing circle of action: "... me voilà emprisonné dans une situation sans avenir."\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 130.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 102.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 100.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 106.
\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., pp. 102-103.
The abundance of material in the subconscious lacks the vitality which that emanating from the voice in Le Libera possessed. The subjective solo voice of the latter work retained a greater freedom of movement than does the duet of objective and subjective realities of Passacaille.

The voice with its prayerful manifesto in Le Libera progresses a step further in a frenzied escape attempt from timelessness and encroaching death. Its frantic searching expands to encompass all possibilities with which it then constructs a pyramid of impossibilities. Unable to discover the much sought after truth, it comes very close to admitting defeat. Although at times it feels that there is no longer any question of continuing, it cannot or will not accept such a final defeat. The last page of the account is left unnumbered because to number the final page would be an admittance of its own finiteness. It retains une soif and some hope of quenching that thirst by leaving its options open to further exploration.

The range of possibilities left to the voice which is composing its slow-moving and rhythmic passacaglia has been severely contracted. The voice is reaching the outer limits, and escape seems less and less feasible. Its total subjugation to its own subjectivity has resulted in a much more arid base from which to do battle. The source of the soif has dried up somewhat. This latest account of madness ends as it began, with death and sterility still very much
in evidence. Hope for a new beginning, albeit slighter than in previous novels, is still in evidence: "Cette phrase. Pas encore trouvée."\(^{22}\) The phrase of truth remains hidden but is to be sought perhaps in the maniacal and confused words of the last will and testament of the voice—a legacy of the same objective reality.

\[\text{Je soussigné dans la pièce froide, ciguë, pendule détraquée, je soussigné dans le marais, chèvre ou carcasse d'oiseau, je soussigné au tournant de la route, au jardin du maître, vieille femme à maléfices, sentinelle des morts, satyre, simulacre, en camionnette sur ce trajet dévié par le mauvais oeil, jouet de cette farce qu'on nomme conscience, personne, je soussigné minuit en plein jour, chavirant d'ennui, vieille chouette, pie ou corbeau...}^{23}\]

\(^{22}\text{Ibid., p. 118.}\)

\(^{23}\text{Ibid., p. 130.}\)
CHAPTER XVI

THEMES AND CONSTANTS
IN THE NEW DIRECTION NOVELS

The impression of circularity in Pinget's works is much in evidence in the "new direction" novels; the more things change, the more they remain the same. Through fantasy and social reality and, now, through seeking inward, the protagonists are still overwhelmed by the same unanswerable predicaments. The search for truth continues with the abstract object of the quest apparently receding and becoming more vague. The depersonalization of the seeker reduces him to a language of a voice, and, finally, in tandem with these aspects of finality, the image of death is substantiated in all its rapacious nature.

The Specter of Truth

The search for truth in Le Libera and Passacaille becomes the most agonizing of all such quests in the works of Pinget. The search which began with Mahu, and has continued unabated with each succeeding "hero," now opens up on the emptiness of a world seemingly deprived of the existence of any truth. The stages of the search have not been static, for the protagonists have conducted the quest for their
individual truths within the worlds of fantasy, social reality, and the soul. Each world has resisted the intrusion to discover its secret. The penetration into each domain has also left its identifying mark on the search as the efforts have become progressively more frenetic.

The insouciance of the protagonists of the "early" novels characterizes their search. The ambience of fantasy detracts, deliberately or not, from the seriousness of the situation when the quest for truth swells in an atmosphere of exotic invention. The fantasies of Mahu, of Porridge, of the narrator of Graal Flibuste, and even of Architruc hold in abeyance, temporarily, the compelling necessity to establish a viable truth. Behind a veil of apparent unconcern, however, lurk the personages of Levert and Clope. The ego trips through the world of fantasy cannot continue indefinitely, and the unvoiced but insistent demand to discover the truth permeates the mist of fantasy to reveal the narrator struggling within the confines of a conscious and social reality. The letters and dossier create their own realm of fantasy within conscious reality, and the discovery of truth is once again in danger of being lost from view. Closer contact with social reality is sought, and the written search for truth yields to the rudimentary spoken search. This inquisitorial probing finds only a tenuous foothold, at best, in social reality, and the protagonist now approaches what may well be the last bastion of hope--
his own soul.

The voices of Le Libera and Passacaille have arrived at a point in time which has been slowly developing with each of their preceding counterparts. The realm of exploration has progressively narrowed once the indifference of the early Mahus was rejected. The renouncement of fantasy and the consciousness of reality, however, also heightened the possibility of failure. Thus the constriction of the field of penetration produces simultaneously an expanding aura of finality which permeates the continued efforts to ferret out the truth. The anguished voices eventually reach a point where they are "standing" face to face with failure and are cognizant of the fact. Yet, to accede to the failure of recognizing one's truth and reality would be to acknowledge death, that terrible and terrifying finality. Not one of them is willing to accept that ignoble termination and, although each one expresses this moment of reckoning, each one will begin anew to work the same terrain and reach once again the same end. Even though Levert's letters will not attain the desired result, he will continue to write and rewrite because en dehors de ce qui est écrit c'est la mort. The fatigue of the old man in L'Inquisitoire will be only a temporary holding action against the renewal of the interrogation. The narrator of Quelqu'un who sought only a day-by-day future finds that even this petit futur a crevé; nevertheless, instead of signifying the end, it is only another
recommencement. The voices of *Le Libera* and *Passacaille*, interchangeable with any and all of those before them, tread the same unwavering course.

With each successive work the thirst for truth has become more desperate and, in the process, has left behind any human qualities that it once possessed. The realization of the ephemerality of truth and the cognizance of the fact that any quest for identity leads to failure have, little by little, eroded the human personality of the protagonists. Beginning with *Le Fiston*, this depersonalization becomes more apparent and while the search continues, the protagonist's attention has shifted. With the acknowledgment that truth cannot be ensnared, the quest for reality is no longer his dominant interest. The captivating force now becomes his own voice.

Nous nous trouvons avec une parole, une parole seule qui se cherche dans le monde et parmi les autres, qui se parle et s'écoute. Il n'empêche, quelque chose s'échafaude par cette parole qui ne reconstruit pas le passé, mais creuse tenacement une étrange demeure présente.¹

The continuation of a voice is an assurance against nothingness. Although it cannot seize the past or assure a future, it is proof of a present. *Le Fiston*, *L'Inquisiteur*, and *Quelqu'un* were each strident voices in their own way. This accumulation of language reaches its apogee in *Le Libera* and *Passacaille*. The whispering voice has become

¹Gaugeard, "Demeures de la parole," p. 5.
a desperately raving one. The quest for identity, the probing for truth, reality, and innocence, matters little in the final analysis. In this realm of la voix pour la voix, what matters is nothing more than the proof of an existence. The delirious voices present in Le Libera and Passacaille pursue frantically such proof. The pseudo-attempts to reconstitute the past are presented in all their modes, themes, and variants. Episodes are repeated and contradict each other, then are abridged or come to a standstill. In the end, the deterioration of the "facts" is complete, but the voices continue unceasingly with no longer any attempt to relate the truth but serve only as a means of existing.

These verbal novels are one vast musical composition of point and counterpoint, modulation, and variation--circular works in which the words create their own work. The themes and variants that touch and crisscross and intermingle have as their function the revelation of the voice: one speaks in order that there be a voice.

Le contrepoint de ces mouvements reste assez simple dans son principe; mais dans son accomplissement, il est riche, prolique, embrouillé, minutieux, tournant--semblable, par sa circularité, à cette fameuse gravure ..., qui représente une main en dessinant une autre qui dessine la première. Mais il faut imaginer ... que l'une des mains gomme celle qui la dessine; aucune prééminence possible de la main qui dessine ce qui la détruit ou de celle qui gomme ce qui la crée. L'oeuvre sera la fin et le lieu de ce drame logique.2

So it is with the voices of Le Libera and Passacaille as they sketch a fact only to erase it in successive stages with an unrelated but similar fact. Comparable to a symphony, the parts are meaningless in themselves as each note is blended and engulfed by its predecessor which will, in turn, be likewise silenced by its successor. There remains only the effect of the ensemble, an ensemble given power and beauty through syncopation, change of tempo, modulation, and tone. The resultant dissonance within the passages is then balanced by the repeating refrains, key phrases which appear and reappear emphasizing the sameness and overall continuity in spite of its myriad variations.

Thus from the inquiry faced by the old man in L'Inquisitoire to the quest for identity of the narrator of Quelqu'un, one arrives in the verbal world of Le Libera and Passacaille. In the latter novels both the inquiry and the search are recognized for what they are: a deluded pursuit of a shadow, of an intangible something which can result only in failure and in the recognition of the mystery of existence. But the fact that there is an existence cannot be denied, and the proof is in the voice. Not what is said or even how it is said, but that something is being said.

The Voice of Language and Its Tone

Le Libera and Passacaille present prosaic reality vacillating first in one direction and then another. The voices are soon submerged in a whirlpool of "facts" wherein
a completely different reality is seen emerging, a totally imaginary reality enriched with infinite possibilities. The now familiar struggle is to continue with no change in the scenario but with a shift of attention--focusing on the words as entities in and of themselves. The "story" in these most recent novels is one of words, of primitive language whose movement engages the work on whichever road it will travel. This language leads the work through twists and turns, through innumerable variations and repetitions to its end. The spoken word is present but no longer under its traditional guise of dialogue. It has become seemingly self-sustaining with a life of its own, independent of the characters. The reverse, however, does not hold true inasmuch as the characters rely upon the words as the primary source of their being. The characters no longer exist to give vent to their individual woes, philosophies, and anecdotes but, rather, they exist at the whim of the words themselves.

This limitless freedom of language constitutes the short-lived existence of all aspects of the novel: plot, milieu, characters, thoughts, memories, and images. The language has reached the outer boundaries where it means nothing and everything. Being no longer a useful or passive tool, it is portrayed as a kind of magical being over which one's control is, at best, fleetingly existent. What has not been suspected until now suddenly becomes clear:
language is basically an enemy of each individual. He tries to employ it to his best advantage and for his own ends, yet there is, in the nature of this deceiving organism of language, the capability of presenting unwanted truths. Each Pingetian character who writes or speaks is assailed by the infidelity of his language. He sees himself for what he is and not for what he wishes himself to be because of this uncontrollable force. Snares and entrapments abound and, in the end, language cannot do what it is willed to do or what it is not in its nature to do. It cannot discover or create a non-existent truth.

The voice has not yet arrived in the domain of a language of silence, albeit haltingly progressing in that direction. Even though the attempt at finding the true self has been fruitless, the search continues. With each succeeding work, the protagonist has withdrawn more and more into himself. The voices of Le Libera and Passacaille are far beyond the role of the hero versus society or his conscious world. The phantom-like narrators of these most recent searches are probing the workings of the inner man, inspired by

... cette voix intérieure, l'approfondissement de soi-même, cette voix de moraliste. ... Qui dit qu'il faut essayer de se comprendre, comme on pourra, par les questions, par les réponses, par tout ce qu'on peut. 3

Fantasy and social reality are the barriers of a false

3Chapsal, "Ça crève," p. 121.
language, "le langage comme un moyen, capable de véhiculer un témoignage, une explication, un enseignement." The trappings of such a language are obstacles to finding the truth of self. The searching voices of Le Libera and Passacaille look to an "inner" language. The exotic inventions of fantasy and the platitudes of social reality are nothing more than a means of evading one's private and personal truth, and if the essence of man is to be found in his spontaneous words, he will not arrive at the root of his anguish through the futile and superficial searching outside his own soul. Self-comprehension does not and cannot exist beyond this habitation of personal knowledge. To ignore it is to ignore one's own truth. "Je dois dire des choses vraies et précises. Si je me laisse aller je dévie, je force la note et on tombe en pleine fantaisie. C'est mauvais, mauvais." 

The current voices do not deviate from this course and there exists the "inner" voice "dans le matin sempiternel de sa manie." This hidden personal world is one of maddening anguish, of fantasmes de la nuit, of passions inexplicables, of a voice face to face with the self. Deprived of the guise of anonymity, the terrors and passions of this innermost realm are thrust into the harsh light of

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5Pinget, Quelqu'un, p. 193.
6Pinget, Passacaille, p. 67.
reality. Uncertain of its capabilities to master this unbridled world, the voice seeks, through a delirious manipulation of language, an explanation of its heretofore hidden truth. The language of the subconscious erupts on the scene in all its tonalities of madness, despair, and fear. Cloaked in contradictions, it is an explosion of words from which the voice attempts to assemble a truth.

But once the mechanism has been set in motion, the world of words becomes unmanageable and the voice perches on the brink of madness as it sifts and sorts through the contradictions of truths and half-truths, "la clique des vieux bobards, mirages tartes et autre quincaillade dans nos caboches cahotantes."\(^7\)

In the linguistic creations of Pinget where the tonal quality of the language is of primary importance, it is necessary—for the benefit of the reader—to indicate the fact that punctuation is minimized or suppressed almost entirely in some novels. The use or disregard of "normal" standards of punctuation is closely allied to the tone of the works. The attentive reader becomes progressively more

\(^7\)Pinget, Précise, pp. 6-7.

\(^8\)Pinget, Le Libera, final, unnumbered page.
aware of punctuative deficiencies as he proceeds from one group of novels to the next. For example, as the search for truth continues and intensifies, the tone of the language becomes increasingly frantic. The unordered sensations of death, fear, and despair render punctuation not only unnecessary but also detracting from the overall effect produced by the power of the tonal qualities. Each individual is replete with such sensations and, according to Pinget, it is the role of the writer to translate these emotions through the most efficacious means available. For Pinget, the poet of language, this effectiveness is best arrived at through an unpunctuated explosion of language in which the innate freedom of emotion is not obstructed.

C'est le ton qui fait la qualité d'un langage. C'est pour cela que je cherche, que je déplace des virgules, que je construis des phrases à l'envers. ... Une phrase à l'envers ça choque, elle tire du sommeil et en cela elle est aujourd'hui plus expressive. ... Une sensation ... ça n'a pas de points ni de virgules. C'est pour cela que j'ai essayé de supprimer la ponctuation. Je l'avoue à présent: ce n'est pas possible, le lecteur ne peut pas suivre; j'en ai remis une.9

**The Specter of Death**

The prayer for deliverance of *Le Libera* and the dance of death of *Passacaille* bring into sharp focus a constant that has existed throughout the works discussed in this study—the image of death. The motif of circularity of each work has emphasized the thought of death which is

always present. The continuous recommencements and replays of the situations in order to avoid reaching or drawing a conclusion manifest a fear, sometimes unspoken, of an ultimate finality.

The fantastic element of the "early" novels deprived the image of much of its force. It remained as vague and shadowy as did the other elements of reality. The aura of fantasy softened the grave image that death will come to assume in the later works. Nevertheless, such a "truth" of existence cannot be denied for long and as the cycle of the "early" novels wanes, there appears a more substantive image of that ever-present nemesis. The presumed unconcern of Mahu has undergone a change, and a previously unvoiced desire comes to the fore—that of a viable posterity. The dualistic world of fantasy and reality has been constantly diminishing to the detriment of fantasy and Architruc, with his desire for posterity, predicts the concerns which will preoccupy Levert and Clope.

With the appearance of Le Fiston and Clope au dossier, death looms ever larger over the horizon. The opening lines of Le Fiston relate an account of a death and proceed to reveal the disappearance of a son; Clope au dossier concerns itself with a mysterious shot which, although presumably having killed a wild goose, may have been related to the demise of an old woman who has the ability to resurrect herself. The specter of death becomes the instigator of the
thought processes to evolve which will concern themselves with self-justification. This self-serving act is an attempt to evade the actual figure of death which has now invaded the scene. The unending letter of Levert and the confused dossier of Clope represent the first concerted effort to circumnavigate the ultimate finality by postulating an unfinished proof of existence.

The transition from Levert and Clope to the protagonists of the "interrogatory" novels is a slight one as regards the characters but more pronounced as regards the presence of death. The problem of discovering one's truth also becomes more questionable. Within these novels appears a new aspect of death—the death of social reality. Now that both fantasy and social reality are found to be lacking in the necessities for self-discovery and self-preservation, the figure of death becomes more menacing. It seems to be poised ready to strike the moment that the search is discontinued. The old man in L'Inquisitoire and the narrator of Quelqu'un both sense its presence stalking their every footstep. The old man sees it everywhere in the diabolic atmosphere which he has created around himself; the narrator, on the other hand, realizes that his only hope lies in the constant search and falsification of his life.

The first hesitant steps of the "interrogatory" novels into the recesses of the soul lead eventually to the voices of Le Libera and Passacaille as they plunge into the
darkness of the subconscious. In this realm where reality is completely distorted, the figure of death becomes overpowering and rapacious. As the mediocrity of life in the Pingetian universe has been accentuated, the image of death has assumed gigantic proportions. Amidst the mediocrity, death becomes the great adventure and the eventual obsession of all concerned. This obsession is especially relevant to the current voices as they appear to draw closer to an ultimate finality—the death of truth. With the rise of the possibility that the truth is undiscoverable, the search becomes increasingly maniacal, and the physical presence of death becomes more apparent. As the voices stumble from contradiction to contradiction, there is a mutilated corpse which assumes the features of the contradiction of the moment that must be circumvented. The horrendous image of death has, itself, assumed different features. The prayer for deliverance and the dance of death indicate that the ultimate finality has been found but not, however, in the form which has been supposed from the beginning. There exists no absolute finality and silencing of the voice. The voice has gone beyond a mere physical finality and has arrived at an abstract finality wherein the image of the death of truth forebodes an ever-present punishment. The voice may not be silenced, but the world in which it must now exist includes the constant chastisement that its truth will not be found.
CONCLUSION

The scope of Pinget's novels from Mahu to Passacaille has centered on the basic need and desire to discover and maintain a viable reality. The search for such a truth has been conducted in the visionary world of fantasy, in the external world of societal relationship, and in the internal world of the subconscious.

The protagonists of the early novels were the inventors of fantastic existences which served as a means of escape from a banal reality. Incapable of facing an insufferably mediocre and mysterious life, theirs was a struggle to find an individual meaning of self beyond the confines of a world and a being which they could not hope to understand. However, their moments of escape were, for the most part, as meaningless and as incomprehensible as was their "real" existence because of the basic uncertainty of their own "true" character. Their lack of comprehension of self stands them in poor stead in the search for a new reality since the ephemerality of fantasy offers only a like foundation on which to build. With the appearance of the final "early" novel (Baga), fantasy proves to be an untenable substitute as a viable existence.

The advent of the "transitional" and "interrogatory"
novels reveals a world in which "real" reality is the domi-
nant factor. Le Fiston and Clope au dossier signal the
beginnings of an evolution, as reality commences to embrace
and encroach upon the heretofore fantastic atmosphere. The
element of evasion as regards the existence and the person-
ages of the early novels changes noticeably; Levert and
Clope, the heroes of the "transitional" novels, prepare to
face their truth on its own terms. Theirs is the first
attempt to deal with the external world made up of the
"others" who might hold the key to the discovery of their
individual truth. This possibility will also prove to be
meaningless as the protagonists of the "interrogatory"
boys delves deeper into the search for a personal truth
through societal communication. Within these novels, there
is no longer any question of a possible duplicity of
fantasy/reality. The individual is now faced with the vaga-
rices of "real" life. The three works demonstrate a recipro-
cal approach to the founding of a truth as both the individ-
ual and society, in turn, attempt to discover a means to
create a viable reality.

The protagonists of the "new direction" novels, who
have now evolved into what seems to be nothing more than
bodiless voices, initiate the first penetration into what
may prove to be the last bastion of hope--the subconscious.
Fantasy and the external world have been tried and found
wanting. At this point, the individual, in his losing
battle with fantastic and societal reality, retreats within himself to discover the elusive truth of self. The evasion of reality and the subsequent confrontation of same in search of an individual truth results in the discovery of the emptiness of a world deprived of any such truth. As in the other worlds, the subconscious will also retain the secret. The voice then arrives at the realization that the ideal cannot be entrapped and its search for the nature of reality ceases. In the end, the voice continues, and the truth that it has sought so diligently has been reduced to the sound of the voice which now equals existence.

The fact that these areas of investigation yield no definitive answers serves as the premise for each of Pinget's novelistic productions--reality is basically unexplainable. Each of his unique creations stresses the impossibility of realizing a final truth as regards reality. Unable to define, describe, or analyze the unknown, his personal literature is a constant interrogation: "... le monde est une question, et littérature, pensée et vie ne sont que nos façons de poser cette question."¹

The desire to found a reality is manifested repeatedly in the guise of a "novel" wherein the circularity of time, the faceless character, and the plotless story emphasize the inability of an imagined reality to truthfully portray the unknowable and "real" reality. The conception of

¹Albérès, "Le Structuralisme," p. 221.
these elements as envisioned by Pinget results in the impairing of the very foundation upon which the "novel" reposes—the conviction and assurance that a reality can be explained. Such a fantasy is not and cannot be accepted by the nouveau romancier. The objectivity of a former time is now the subjectivity of the "modern" novelist.

The subjective novels of Pinget are, each one, a search to recognize one's mediocrity in a world of no answers.

[Mes livres] sont tout pleins de traquenards, mais c'est parce que c'est comme ça. Les gens sont tout pleins de traquenards. Mon livre est une quête très sincère, très humaine, pour arriver à ce qu'on est, à reconnaître sa médiocrité. Les gens ne veulent pas se retrouver dans leur médiocrité à eux, mettre le doigt sur elle. Je veux les y amener.²

The treatment of the world viewed through the veil of mediocrity signals a new and unique approach in the novelistic variety of the "new novel." It denotes an aspect of originality in the works of Pinget when compared to other like authors whose novels present the stratified world of the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, the works of Pinget are an attempt to capture the essence of the life of "Everyman," the forgotten individual who treads the same unchanging path, mired in a kind of mental poverty. The presence of a physical or social deformity further hinders the movement of the characters; they "exist" in a world of bistros and barren gardens, living on fading and distorted memories that

they try to resurrect over and over again to no avail. Im­
mersed in mediocrity, all the more trying since it appears as a useless and unlivable state, the passion to discover some meaning is overwhelmingly persistent. Without definitive answers and without any hope of finding a meaningful significance, the quest assumes the guise of hypothetical self-creation and self-justification. Impeded by an un­
changing and a seemingly unchangeable indifference, the attempt is reduced to making the most of an impossible situ­
atation. The search becomes more and more frantic in the pro­
cess as the ever-illusive truth--even a mediocre one--proves to be only a transitory vision. Exposé gives way to exposé as the possibility of realizing one's truth becomes dimmer and dimmer. The mediocrity remains with its unaltering ele­
ments, and if there is a truth to be found, it resides in the bodiless voice which unceasingly enumerates the pallid and formless possibilities of a valid truth.

However, the novel of each of these mentally im­
pooreried individuals is an attempt to manifest the impor­
tance of continuing the search at all costs, for the consti­
tution of a personal and viable reality lies not in render­
ing an account of an unexplainable truth but in the eternal questioning of that truth. The matériau of each novel is that interrogation.

Je compare ce que j'ai écrit aux cercles concentriques provoqués par la chute d'une pierre dans l'eau. Le centre, ce sont mes premiers écrits. Tout gravite
The revolution of the Pingetian world tends naturally toward the gravitational pull of Mahu ou le matériau. Each novel has signified an advancement of that primary gathering of material, of facts, and of personages. Each subsequent work might adopt the same subtitle, le matériau, since each one is an unfinished dossier, a collection of matière brute which the author gives us as is, all the while trying in vain to organize it. The matériau is the basis for the attempt to elucidate an already recognized inexplicable mystery. Each novel represents another exposé emanating from the nucleus provided by Mahu. The face of Mahu peers from behind each new disguise which he assumes in his continual search. And the search must continue for, although the larger and more abstract question of the nature of reality cannot be answered, the very personal and immediate searching constitutes its own reality.

The quest for a new realism is conducted without the well-defined elements of plot, character, and linear time and action. One is no longer assured of a beginning, an end, and a middle in the novel, with the resultant story accepted as being rooted in reality and as being linked with a definite past.

It is with a curved trajectory that the works of

3Romi, "Pourquoi écrivez-vous?" p. 41.
Pinget exhibit the element of time: the novel's beginning reflecting both its middle and end. The "facts" of an unimportant anecdote are repeated over and over again creating a never-ending movement of circularity, imprisoning past, present, and future within a static moment of the present. However, ambiguity is not at the heart of this erratic shifting of time; rather, it is to disclose the three planes of existence in Pinget's works: external reality, memory, and imagination. They form a single triangular entity and thereby necessitate a fusion and confusion of time and situations. The result of this inseparable trinity of human existence is an impression for the reader of simultaneously witnessing a re-creation, a happening, and an hallucination. The termination of a paragraph or a period at the end of a sentence does not signify a conclusion but merely a pause in the workings of the mind. A similar statement may be made for the closing lines of the novel: the end has not arrived for the narrator but merely a pause in order to regather strength to recommence the quest for the vocalization of his thought processes.

In conjunction with this circular concept of time, so also are many of the Pingetian characters to reappear throughout the twelve novels giving a sense of continuity to the works as a whole and, more importantly, serving to restrict the conventional idea of character by unifying them into a single personage with many variations. "Dans une de
mes autres vies, attention, je n'en ai jamais eu qu'une, j'entends mes autres exposés ..." These personages remain formless and vague shadows, distinguished only by their mediocrity. This shadowy configuration and mediocrity is a necessary ingredient for a novel directed to the portrayal of "Everyman." It is reflected in the dialogue related by the protagonist through the use of the daily language used by the man in the street and also in the lack of any insight into personal problems. There is no analysis of outside or internal difficulties; speculation on the level of gossip is the only explanation proffered for human behavior, such as the narrator's assertion in Le Libera that Mlle Lorpailleur must be mad since she is still wearing black years after her mother's death. Nevertheless, such speculation is, for the most part, rare and the dialogue is confined to a relation of what was said with no interpretation as to its possible significance or with no comment on the character of the person who has made the statement.

Things are as they are, and there is no thought given to changing the situation. Any insight to be made must originate with the reader who is forced into playing a major role in this "new novel." He must assume the position traditionally reserved for the omniscient author--that of deciphering the situation--and his possibilities for drawing a certain conclusion are as varied and infinite as were

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4Pinget, Quelqu'un, p. 30.
those available to the traditional novelist. He is restricted, however, to confining his focus upon the protagonist, for it is he and he alone who presents the situation and the dialogue between the other personages; in sum, it is a single viewpoint selected and colored by the nature of that character himself.

In spite of their shadowy physical outlines and general mediocrity, aimlessness is not a characteristic of these narrators. Their determination is to observe and listen to the minutiae around and within them, an action that becomes their engagement and one which they doggedly pursue; their inability to bring any coherent organization and harmony between the multiple elements becomes their tragedy. They realize that they are lacking something, but that something remains ever hazy and indefinite. They search for the link that will bring order to their lives as they try to reconcile and put into perspective the three levels of their existence: external reality, memory, and hallucination. There is also present a fourth element, the subconscious, which is beyond their scope but not without influence on their behavior. Each facet distorts the essence of the other, and the character's inability to accept passively the sum as one complex, indecipherable entity and his determination to separate them into "logical," meaningful elements become his fatal flaw. Pinget's characters have no fate in the conventional sense, their unalterable obsession being
their destiny--each day being no different from its predecessors, nor will it be altered in the future. It is not the distance, then, between man and the outside world which is portrayed by this "new novelist" but rather the distance evidenced between the integral parts of one man and his inability to fuse and bring them coherence and harmony.

The progression of the story in the works of Pinget is constantly negated by the circularity of time, character, and the resultant repetition of a skeletal anecdote accompanied by minor variations. The evolution of the story in a determined, forward progression is lacking. The result is an air of mystery surrounding the "facts" of the situation. There is always the persistent feeling that something more, some link to render coherence to the whole, lies beneath the superficiality of the narration. Yet, this indefinable something never rises to the surface, and there remains only the appearance of a plot which is the result of the infinitely more important element of language.

Any story which appears is there because of a collection of words that cannot exist meaningfully in a storyless environment. Nonetheless, it is this language--and not the incidental "story"--that is important. A different choice of words would have engendered a different story. Thus, Pinget's "plots" move forward as if through improvisation, the content always being at the mercy of the language, as the "words of the moment" invent, line by line,
a slightly varying story from the preceding one. Life does not evolve through preconceived notions but only progresses one step at a time--each linguistic step is likewise dependent upon the previous one for its realization. Reduced to being a device to express the unexpressable, it is only in the variation of the tone of the language that the story becomes distinguishable from other Pingetian "plots" and is able to acquire a unique but intangible form.

Given no known quantities or precedents, the Pingetian search transpires in an arena of primal language wherein the constancy of that language equals existence. The author/protagonist, surrounded by unknown factors, his own person included, only has recourse to the one element which offers him a partial reassurance, at best, of his existence--the spoken language.

A les croire, le langage serait plutôt une sorte de matériau qu'ils travaillent patiemment, avec d'innombrables soins. Pour ces gens, l'essentiel c'est le langage même. Écrire pour eux, c'est, non la prétention de communiquer un savoir préalable, mais ce projet d'explorer le langage comme un espace particulier.  

For these novelists, whose sole concern is the "problem" of language, the only reality is the speaking voice without which the world would not and does not exist. The "new novel" of language, in which language itself assumes the characteristics of character, plot, time, etc., is open to the personal interpretation of each nouveau romancier.

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5Ricardou, Problèmes du nouveau roman, p. 18.
While the content of the novels—the creation of a new realism—remains basically the same, each author has his manner of studying and elaborating this malleable force. Among the possible manipulations of the collected words, each selects a method to which he applies his personal style.

The method and style of Robert Pinget bespeak a poetics of language. "Je ne suis pas un romancier. Je suis un poète." A reading of his works proffers a sudden recognition of a lyric outpouring of unrestrained enthusiasm and love for words. He is a veritable poet of language who, out of necessity, writes his poetry in the form of a novel.

... de nos jours, la poésie ne touche plus les gens de la même façon. Alors, j'ai choisi la forme romanesque pour m'exprimer en poésie. Au lieu d'écrire un poème sur le lac, les nuages, je fais un poème qui a l'air de se construire sur une intrigue. Le roman ne m'intéresse pas: je fais semblant d'en écrire un.

The pretense of a novelistic form, then, is the point of departure for Pinget's immersion into the poetry of language. His personal study of language, however, goes beyond the mere accumulation of words as such. There are two aspects involved in the elaboration of his poetics. The first element is that of invention: words invent other words. The reader soon realizes that not only has the content altered but that its presentation has also undergone a drastic change. If he takes the time to readjust his approach, he

6Chapsal, "Ça crève," p. 120.
7Romi, "Pourquoi écrivez-vous?" p. 42.
is rewarded by the pure linguistic sensation of a work in the throes of self-creation.

The second factor in the poetics of Pinget is the tone of language. "Ce que personnellement je cherche, c'est de traduire dans l'écriture le ton de la langue. C'est le ton qui fait la qualité d'un langage." The poetic novel of language cannot exist on words alone. Invention engenders its own destruction if left unchecked without a redeeming vitality. To renew each poetic venture, Pinget sets out in search of "... un ton entre les milliards qu'a enregistrés l'oreille, ..." Pure language, then, does have some limits for it cannot help but repeat itself. Each novel is but a reflection of the preceding one without the differentiating quality of a tone.

Le ton ne peut pas être indépendant d'une histoire racontée, mais ce qui séduit le lecteur c'est toujours un ton, il ne le sait pas, il se rabat sur l'histoire. S'il est inculte, il ignore que cette histoire a déjà été racontée un million de fois, ou s'il l'est moins il ne fait pas le rapprochement entre cette histoire et beaucoup d'autres qu'il aurait déjà lues, parce qu'elles étaient dites sur un autre ton.

The poetic world of Pinget is not, however, only a gratuitous gift of the possibilities and the beauty of language. Behind the façade of poetic words lies the concerted

8Fisson, "L'Enquête sur le roman," p. 3.
9Pinget, Préface, p. 3.
effort to found a new realism which, in turn, will give to
man the ability to know as much as can be known about him-
self, about his own reality.

Qu'est-ce que je cherche? ... Traduire dans la langue
de notre époque les problèmes de notre époque. ... Dire les vérités d'aujourd'hui. Faire sentir ce que
nous sentons tous: que le passé ne nous intéresse pas,
que le futur nous fait peur et que nous voulons vivre
aujourd'hui dans le présent.11

The task is not an easy one, but it is the calling heard by
the nouveau romancier; but, it must be carried out in con-
junction with the times. The plea for help cannot be a
muted one nor can it be disguised by heretofore accepted but
false impressions. The novel can loosen the fetters of the
prisoners of a false reality if they are ready and willing
to liberate themselves.

11Fisson, "L'Enquête sur le roman," p. 3.
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