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Literature of Exceptional Status, Literature Outside Exceptional Status

Critics and theories, poetics and aesthetics of the twentieth century characterise the work and literary experience in terms of expressiveness and singularity and in terms — the compatibility of this thesis with that of singularity is not clear — of its autoteleologic and autoreferential nature and of its reflexivity. The idea is that the work finds its finality in itself and does not express anything other than itself. The developments of poetics, whenever it separates the thesis of the autoteleology of the work and the principal of the autonomy of the study of this work as a verbal creation are the result of the reflexive and autoreferential dimension of the work in the twentieth century:

The autonomy of literature — that is its increasing independence which is ultimately asserted with regard to religious, political and social facts, which could be taken to be a direct command of literature — corresponds to the attempt to discover the conditions of exposition of literature itself, of bare literature, which are consequently the conditions of perception and of reading literature (Bessière 1999, 137).¹

The autonomy of the work and of literature can be asserted in many ways which are not exactly contradictory and which can eventually be mutually compatible depending on the way in which they question the literary object. The autonomy is affirmed in relation to reality, to history — it points to the fact that the work stands out against a background of discourse and history — and from the language characterisation of literature, in aesthetical terms. The linguistic reference aims at objectivity and the characterisation by autonomy allows the notation of constructive aspects of the work.

In deconstruction, the autonomy of the text as a constant scriptorial unity is indissociable from the identification of writing to infinity and to the

1 The title of each work will be translated on its first occurrence in the text. —
Translator's note.

power of language, to a *residual* that arises neither from an assignation nor from the laws of exchange (Bessière1990,55-107). Poetics enables us to think of an objectivity of writing (the poetic function is differentiated by the characterisation of literary discourse as a message turned towards itself). It operates within the limits of a jurisdiction and institution of literature which it does not question but implicitly recognises, abandoning its treatment to the history of literature (the only history poetics deals with is that of the autonomy of forms, of genres for example). A reflection on the autonomy of literature dispenses with the problem of the link between literature and history. It does so all the more easily since literary history, with the obliteration of the philosophy of history of hegelian derivation which thought of texts as a medium of cognitive scope giving access to the totality of a historical situation, is no longer itself able to say to which historical totality or particular collective history it belongs (Koselleck). This reflection does however continually come up against the question of the nature of the relationship between literature, thus linguistically characterised, and other discourses. The whole of western criticism, according to Jean Bessiere, has been for the last century, an "interrogation of the property of literature with regard to what it is not [...] if literature has a linguistic identity, what is the relationship between this identity and other linguistic identities?" (*La Littérature et sa rhétorique* 21).

There is within the scope of philosophy a means of defining literature from equality of autonomy and difference. The notations are constant even when the original hypotheses may be contradictory. They use the notion of the "foreign language" of the writer; "one speaks in one one's own language, one writes in a foreign language" is Sartre's claim in *Les Mots (Words)*. This claim should be seen in relation to this other report: "the idea that one might write to be read never occurred to me") which Deleuze takes up as much in regard to Proust as to Melville (*Bartleby*): "the masterpieces of literature form a kind of foreign language within the language in which they are written" (G. Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*). It may be supposed, as Foucault does, after Blanchot, that literature is a "word from the outside":

the "I'm speaking" only establishes its sovereignty in the absence of any other language [...] if language only has its place in the solitary sovereignty of "I'm speaking," nothing can limit its rights — neither the person it is speaking to, nor the truth of what it is saying, nor the values or representative systems which it uses; in short, it is no longer discourse and communication of meaning, but the laying-out of language in its raw being (Foucault 546-67; Bessière1999,105)

Literature, from the differentiated language which it tunnels out within language, from the utterance of itself, from the anonymity of language which is liberated and open to its own absence of limits, from a language which belongs to no one, is therefore the infinity of language. In so far as it merges with the infinity of language, no alternative to language may be given: literature is defined therefore as a difference without an identity (*Dire le littéraire* 11), a discursive exception unrelated to any commonplace.

The presentations of literature, that of poetics, of writing and deconstruction — all imply the thesis of the "prevalence of linguistics in the characterisation of literature related to the infinity of language" (*La Littérature etsa rhétorique*). Recognition of the linguistic nature of literature—which is the constant aspect of literary identification by critics and theories of the twentieth century — has two consequences. It is inseparable both from the affirmation of a linguistic necessity of literature and from the hypothesis of an uncertainty as to the characterisation of literature (cf. *Enigmatiçité de la Littérature [The Enigmaticity of Literature]*, 28 and following pages). In any case, literature is explicitly formulated as: that which ultimately eludes the hypothesis of explicit convention and already established synthesis or syntheses. In saying that, the indecipherable nature of literature in relation to discursive and aesthetic conventions as well as to what might be the thinking about literature is implied.

Literature is defined as an aporia, and as what it is not rather than what it is. It is possible that ways of thinking about literature at work in the poetics and theories of this century, their aporias, their compatibilities and incompatibilities, even the attempts to say something about the unity or the concept of literature, refer to a large extent to the poetics which belong to the periods which "challenge all systematic thought about literature" (Romanticism), which only conceive of "such a systematic thought" by "characterising this thought as indissociable from what is not literature" (either the development of the reflection on the relationships between literature and culture, literature and society) or as "a manner of negative reflection about literature" (Symbolism) (Bessière1997, 293). In *Quel Statut pour la littérature? (What Status for Literature?)* these poetics are, globally and fundamentally, interpreted in relation to what is posed as the "dominant rhetorical mechanism of modernity," instituted by Romanticism — the lack of differentiation of rhetorical poles, the equality of *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*, which may be inferred from the expressivist conception of language which makes every subjective discourse a representative discourse and which establishes the exceptional

status of literature, that which presents itself as an unavoidable "aim of generalised communication" (Bessière 2001).

These aporias can themselves be analysed in various ways. They may be related to the recognised and constant fact of the twentieth century that "the dispute about the characterisation and the recognition of literature is endless" (*La Littérature et sa rhétorique*). Pondering over the identity of literature amounts to noting that it is asserted singularly and subjectively and "that consequently, objectively, this identity becomes fluctuating" (*Enigmatidté de la littérature* 1). This amounts to accepting "the coexistence of incomparable literary works and literary worlds with contradictory references" (*La Littérature et sa rhétorique* 2). If there is no finished definition of literature (through the diversity of commentaries or the recognition of a canon), from then on literature becomes perceptible starting from the logic of the "partial object": "every scriptory realisation [...] forced to consider the book, books, language, discourse, literary experience under the dominant theme of absolute singularity [...] literature can only speak of itself in a restricted sphere" (Bessière 1992, 281). More essentially — this is one of the strongest theses defended by Jean Bessière — if theories come up against such aporias, it is undoubtedly because "the site, the object, the function of literature can no longer be exactly defined" (*La Littérature et sa rhétorique* 5), but also that the question of literature is "a false question if it is explicitly posed, as there are only two possible answers, the sovereignty of literature, the uncertainty of literature" (*Enigmatidté de la littérature* 106). These extreme theses of essentialism and contingency "give literature and the work over to chance and finally to a type of unintelligibility equally from the point of view of form as of sense. It is because of this unintelligibility that every consideration of the play engaged by the exercise of continual difference becomes vain"; "if literature were its own *objectivity*, it would be without interpretation; if it were *contingency*, it would render every attempt at interpretation and history vain" (*ibid.*, 34-35). These two extreme theses may be pushed to their limits and, in fact, be reformulated thus: "essentialism supposes the existence of a type of discourse which may be defined formally or aesthetically and which has a feature of constant openness. Contingency points to the fact that discourses may be characterised in particular by the impossibility of closure and consequently by their inability to prove anything" (*ibid.*, 31).

What Jean Bessière proposes to call *enigmatidty* is the invalidation of the exclusive notations of contingency and objectivity (Bessière). The enigmaticity is undoubtedly readable, at one level, against the background of the growing

complexity of the narrative and the increase in ambiguities about literality and the thematic realisation of the uncertainty of this reality (from Joyce to the *Nouveau Roman*, from Kafka to Borges). It arises then from the representational crisis of contemporary literature, the challenge to *mimesis* that commands recognition of the literal and renders the "letter" problematical. It is above all a means of arriving at all the consequences of the communicational and rhetorical hypotheses of the constructions of essentialism and contingency. It is also a way of implying that the linguistic reference is a reference which places the identification of literature "out of the play of the self-definition of literature in a specific rhetorical logic" (*Enigmatidté de la littérature* 78). It introduces a severe displacement of perspective in the manner of asking the question of the identification and the identity of literature:

In the recognition of its linguistic conditions, not only does literature not silence its own questioning [...] but rather [...] through its enigmatic nature, it represents the questioning and its pre-eminence over language itself [...]. The hypothesis of the recognition of linguistic conditions first implies that the exercise of writing [...], because it identifies with its linguistic conditions, is composed and extracted from every determined situation in order to present itself as definitive [...] and merged with its conditions [...]. In its self-definition, the exercise of writing defines its necessity twice: it is the exercise of its linguistic conditions; it is, in its own display and in the fictitious situation which is produced as a result, an exercise which echoes its minimal and necessary occasion, the linguistic conditions. These two notations open the way, in one instance, to the indication of autarky which the exercise of writing carries, and in the other, to the indication that this exercise is characterised not so much as a wrench from every determined situation as a partial discourse, against a background of linguistic and discursive knowledge and consequently, against a background of discourses which place themselves in relation to each other as partial discourses. [...] More essentially, if the exercise of writing is this discourse which positions itself within the play of the self-identification and recognition of its linguistic conditions, it provides itself with a place and communicability which are specific within discourses and reveals itself as the generality of communication (*ibid.*, 80-81).

In *Dire le littéraire*, J. Bessière subjects certain concepts — such as intransitivity, autonomy, and reflexivity — to analysis. From these concepts, which have been forged by theories, and within the usage which has been made of these notions, Jean Bessière has sought to distinguish their descriptive and analytical

worth and their axiological and ideological dimension, the passage from a characterisation of means to an ontology of literature (Bessière 1990). As we know, "autonomy," "intransitivity," "auto-referentiality," are far from having only served the needs of an immanent reading of texts. Poetics have theorised the preoccupations of German Iena Romanticism, those of symbolist poetry and of French and Russian futurists at the end of the nineteenth century. These poetics were, at first, case theories and remained in support of these cases through a certain number of presuppositions. The hypothesis of the functional difference, which became the essential difference, of poetical language is not the least important of these. Originally a definition of the only poetic function, literarity, ("the aim of the message as such, the stress placed, on the message for its own sake") eventually came to designate the essence of what is literary in the linguistic definitions which have been proposed for more than a century. From this presupposition, which has since been extended to include the description of literature as a whole, the well-known vulgate remains: literature is another language, which has no relation to common language, it is a language outside of communication.

From this presupposition, literary theories ultimately contributed to defining a *status* of the literary fact as *exceptional* and separate. This question is taken up afresh in *Quel Statut pour la littérature?* from a consideration of the equal rhetorical mechanism set up by Romanticism. This characterisation of the literary work and literature from the point of view of radical difference controls the manner in which literature is defined as counter-discourse, the "other" of every social discourse. Whether it is an exceptional status in relation to discourse, or *difference without identity*, the common hypothesis is that of the radical formal distance of literary discourse from ordinary discourse: the primacy of intransitivity has led to making one a "manner of antilanguage," an object which it is "impossible to attribute in any way," and in the case of the theory of acts of language, an atypical discourse characterised by the suspension of the communicational functions of ordinary discourse. It is separate because literary theory relates the autonomy to the impossibility of defining the literary work as an "order correlate" and that literature only exists in the "occasions of separation."

This essential and radical difference between literary discourse and other discourses presented the advantage of guaranteeing an identity of literature, even if it were negative: that which foils communication and its motives, undoes the forms of its contracts and of its play, cuts away the contours of its articulations. It also amounts to ascribing a critical property to it: either

literature as separate from the ordinary languages of communication, criticism of ordinary discourses and culture discourses, ideological criticism (Barthes, Derrida), criticism of communication (critical theory, negative aesthetics). The text is thus "characterised by the identification of writing with transgression as the domain of all discourses which are unacceptable to a culture" and the literary, thus positioned "outside of normativity," identified with the "separation between culture and society" (*ibid.*, 56). Literature was the "perfectly positive discourse" which "is not subject to the partitions of discourses" (*Enigmaticité de la littérature* 38), that which shows and makes necessary, the "reading of language and the totality of the conditions it imposes" (*ibid.*, 74), that which is only itself and at the same time the critical analyser of other discourses or the witness of social alienation. Deautomation, reflexivity, followed by the notation of the intransitive most frequently went with the imputation of such a critical property: "placing the literary outside of normativity, identifying it with the separation between culture and society, defining it as the product of an adversary culture, as well as the primacy of intransitivity characterises a manner of anti-language" (*Dire le littéraire* 56). This is the conclusion that even the aesthetics of the reception reaches, when W. Iser states that the location of literature is at the threshold of the dominant semantic systems of each period:

Semantic systems are generally characterised by the inevitable production of deficits because of the decisions they make. It is to these deficits that literature refers [...]. Literature compensates for the deficits in the orientation of interhuman relations which is produced by the dominant systems of the period, and which can therefore only be introduced into the everyday world by fiction. This function of literature also explains why one is always tempted to oppose fiction to reality, whereas in fact fiction is rather concerned with what the dominant systems set aside and what, consequently, they cannot introduce into the daily life that they organise. (Iser 135)

Jean Bessière shows to what extent this exceptional status of literature, while it corresponds to the image which the literature of the first modernity wished to project of itself, has remained that of & *paradoxical exceptionality*. The literary is simultaneously given as central and as outside of order, as separate from communication and as a communication situated within the Utopia of an ideal communication: "this amounts to ascribing to the literary the power to be both all discourses and outside of these discourses, as belonging to a common source and at the same time, as speaking of this source in a play of

exteriority." The same goes for narrative according to Benjamin when this narrative is "the possibility of drawing the completeness of time, that of identifying therein a rationality of the narrative which would be entirely understood [...] as a logical reading of the narrative and a concordance of time and History" (Bessière1990,137). The same goes for literature characterised by Lukacs as totalization and epic, "the initial narrative genre, the genre of the community present to itself— non-problematic" (*ibid.*, 84). The same goes for the notion of text: "the text is a common language, outside of the partitions and identities of common discourses" (*ibid.*, 319). The same goes for writing, which can be read as the "denunciation of every human construction which, invented arbitrarily, arises from a power."

The vulgate of difference and the critical dimension, which is apparently its consequence, goes along with *an omnipotence of literature*. It is necessary here to indicate the link which is always implied between the critical function of literature, which is dependent on a difference related to its situation, that of being outside of all discourses or the other of all discourses, and the sovereignty which is continually attributed to it. It is important to understand the role of model or of counter model (as alterity and pure difference, as knowledge, non-knowledge and a critical tool of knowledge) played by literature, after 1950, in France in the framework of a philosophy which was neither philosophy of language, nor philosophical aesthetics. Foucault explains that, in the work of Breton, it is not history which is in question but revolution and that the experience of writing becomes in his work that of the *anti-world*, whereas language and writing had been, until the nineteenth century transparent instruments through which the world was reflected and recomposed (Foucault 582-85). Undoubtedly, "by the identification of literature with its linguistic conditions", it is "supposed that literature is a dimension of the truth of language" (*Enigmaticité de la littérature* 77). This even asks the question of the relationships between literature and ordinary discourses, of the right of literary representation to be common representation, of the relationship between literature and non-artistic discourses. The power of literature should be understood *in its widest sense*: this is the case in the divergences between Jean Bessière's analyses and those of J.Ranciere in *La Parole muette. Essai sur les contradictions de la littérature (The Mute Word. An Essay on the Contradictions of literature)*. In Ranciere's work, both the "coherent literary principal, as the principal of exception to the language of information" and the contradiction between "the gravity of the expression and the frivolity of what is said" (Proust about *Madame Bovary*), are noted. His

conclusion, through the passage from Romanticism to Symbolism, hinges on the combat of writing and democratic literarity. As Jean Bessière remarks, J. Ranciere's thesis — that of the "failure of the democratic aim of literature" — ultimately assimilates literature and common intelligibility.² It also avoids considering the signification of the fact that the romantic poet means to speak in his own name and in a representative manner, or, against a background of the equal rhetorical device put forward by Romanticism, "that which grants the subject the right to represent, to represent himself or herself, to represent others." One might also state in other words, which are again, the words of Jean Bessière, and which put into perspective J. Ranciere's thesis on the inequality of writing, that whereas the first modernity is, in presentation terms, attached to all individuals, in terms of representation, attached to all readers; individuals and readers refer to or constitute the same community of experience. The work could therefore propose to think instead of all others, who are determined however by the human or social totality which the work supposes, implies, represents (Bessière1999,159).

Contemporary literature, on the contrary, seems to recognise that there is no work without the recognition of its alternative.

All in all, Jean Bessière discovers, contemporary hypotheses about the grounds for existence of the literary "are nothing other than hypotheses about the power of the literary — the power of which it is a part, the power it has to undo all power, the power it has to give over power-sharing and rationalities to the work today" (*Dire le littéraire* 287). The question of the sovereignty, of the power attributed to literature is continuous in its analysis and its reflection. It appears again in one of J. Bessière's latest works, *La*

2 Cf. the discussion of the theses of Ranciere by J. Bessière(2001, 12, 68, 249-50): "the ultimate paradox of the equal rhetorical device is that it renders the word sovereign and at the same time, reifies man in *logos*, since this language, which does indeed belong to man, also belongs to nature and to the world. The contemporary identification of literature with the power of language is the extreme translation of this duality: literature may be, depending on the language, without a creator, as it may also be the work of an all-powerful creator, depending on the power of language [...]. The contradictions linked to this duality are innumerable in the literary field and amount to concluding, with much inconsistency, that there is no longer a place for literature in language — Barthes — or, amount to declaring simultaneously and in a contradictory manner, the law of language and the liberation of language — de Man. The question of representance is not stated in different terms: the right to represent is the right of literature, which is indissolubly the right of the writer subject and of language. By which one might as well state the democratic vocation and the all-embracing vocation of literature, always depending on the power of language."

Litterature et sa rhétorique, where the relationship between aporetic thinking about literature and thinking on the power of literature is clearly set out:

Aporias of the thinking about literature: these aporias are, in contemporary criticism directly conditioned by thinking about the power of art, which is finally obliged, on the occasion of a tropic reading of literature, to identify this power to the lack of power of meaning, or to a lack of power of form [...]. *Aporia of representations*: the history of the literature of modernity, such as this history is usually told, is a history of the power of literature, which may become a lack of power. (13)

Hence the necessity of the notation of enigmaticity — that which accounts for the duality of literary writing as a cultural device and of its implicit inscription within these discourses: "this disjunction through which such a discourse writes, which is a part of discourses, is unique, its own totality, and yet it is exclusive from the notation of any formal distance" (*Enigmatité de la Littérature* 23). The enigmaticity, "this principal of the variation of discourses," is not important so long as the presupposition of the sovereignty and the power of literature are not called into question. It is significant as soon as this question (that is, the question asked by literature in the democratic moment when it happens, after 1800) is set.

Jean Bessière's research is inferred from the heuristic decision that consists in pushing to its ultimate consequence what is said about literature in terms of discourse and communication, often in a contradictory manner. Poetics and contemporary critical theories, as they recognise the discursive dimension of their object, cannot state precisely of which type of communication, literature and literary communication are a part. J. Bessière's research consists, then, in underlining the light these poetics cast reciprocally, their compatibilities and incompatibilities in reaching the contemporary design of a thinking about literature: whether it is:

the passage from an interpretation of the literary as beyond practical rationality and cognitive rationality — the literary is immeasurable, the literary is self-representation, it is unjustified and placeless — to the definition and practice of literature as a paradoxical fiction of the community (Bessière 1990, 297).

Even in the "situation of refusal of discourse that literary recognition supposes" (*ibid.*, 294), even in the identification of writing with a "dysfunction of discourse," with an "inadequacy of all discourse" or with its separation

from ordinary and common language, the remark that "the communicational model crosses literary theories" can be made. This is undoubtedly the case because "first modernity literature implicitly states the question of the limit of the commonplace as soon as it gives the commonplace as its other" (*La Littérature et sa rhétorique* 31). The reference to communicational theses must be understood precisely. It is not that which may be inferred from Habermas' theses ("there is the literary of conciliation, that which may be inferred from the theses of communicational community," *Dire le littéraire* 315). It envisages literature — here it is a matter of literature which is outside of exceptional status — as thinking about communication:

Thinking about communication does not mean thinking communication according to the person sending the message, the message and the person receiving it, nor does it imply a challenge to the person sending and the person receiving, which is how contemporary criticism normally questions the communicational diagram. Communication thinking which is held by the work that plays on its lack of authority and its enigmaticity is that of a letter which claims to be an explicit invitation to inferences, and therefore to be a sign of communication. Limiting its own recognition, its own interpretation, by the impossibility of a completed interpretation, the work makes this incompleteness the chance for common recognition. (*Quel Statut pour la littérature?* 91)

For the same reasons that thinking about communication is called upon, rhetoric is also called upon. This must however be clarified, since, just as there are many uses for rhetoric applied to literature, there are successive, and even opposite definitions of rhetoric (Bessière 1988, 37-50). In the works of Barthes, rhetoric implies first the *de facto* reference to a "zero degree" or a transparent state of discourse. It is the product of connotation. It is also to be found on the side of the *doxa*. "Rhetoric thus appears as the signifying face of ideology" (Barthes 1982, 40). Even when rhetoric is recognised as the "link which unites forms of language to societies," it is nonetheless identified with a discursive falsification, that of cultural peace, of the unity of languages, of the coincidence of word and listening (on the contrary, literature seems to postulate a link between the division of classes and the division of languages and seems to show, in a divided society, the mutual exclusion of languages, as well as being its own resistance to a unified culture) (Barthes 1966, 142). Barthes borrows from Aristotle the distinction between proof inside the *technè* and proof outside the *technè* and requalifies it in an opposition between discourse in the shade of power (within power) and discourse outside power

(or without power). The acritic discourse (outside power) is always that which is expressed against the *doxa*. It is, according to Barthes, a para-doxical discourse. The analysis pretexts revolutionary language, but it implicitly holds for literature and writing, a "practice of counter division of languages, an undoubtedly utopic or in any case mythical image, since it is akin to the old dream of an innocent language, the *lingua adamica* of the first romantics" ("La Division des langages" (Barthes 1973,133). Barthes goes on to claim that this is another means of appreciating the connection between rhetoric and society: "one might thus precisely treat the problem of the partition of *good literature* from other literatures, whose social importance is considerable, especially in a mass society" (*L'Analyse rhétorique, loc. cit.*).

Good literature is free from rhetoric. The opposition between the regime of texts (a distinctive trait of modern literature since 1850) and the regime of works (a distinctive trait of classical literature), between readable works and scriptible works, is here reformulated. When the reference to a transparent state of discourse and the zero degree of literature is later erased, Barthes proposes conversely to substitute the term *rhetoric* to that of *poetics* (Jakobson), "in order to avoid any restriction of poetics to poetry" but also "in order to insist on the fact that what is at issue is a language common to all genres" (*L'Analyse rhétorique, loc. cit.*) Rhetoric is sometimes that from which literature is free and sometimes the principal of composition of the whole of discourse, the means of elaboration of free language of which literature is a part. The study of rhetoric and consequently, the study of the relationships between rhetoric and literature can produce extreme differences of interpretation.

This is the case in the works of de Man. The fundamental role of metaphor and metonymy is well known, there are two central figures in structuralism: the main lines of language, the linear combination (metonymy) and the vertical selection (metaphor), proximity and resemblance, identity and difference are to be found here. The literary would seem to be returning to the redoubling of linguistic operations of selection and combination at the heart of the discursive, to the crossing over of the system of metaphor and the system of metonymy, to the tropology which may be deduced from it. In the debate about concordance or discordance and of the metaphoric order or the metonymic order which opposes P. de Man and G. Genette where Proust is concerned, J. Bessière reads the divergence of contemporary approaches to rhetoric in its relationship with literature. The *doxa* of the rhetorical reading of the literary, from a starting point of the links of linguistics and poetics, amounts to an interrogation about the conditions of the continuation of the

text, its structuring, the manner in which it proceeds *by additions of meaning*. G. Genette's analysis concludes with the primacy of the prosaic and discursive dimension of metonymy over the poetical dimension of the metaphor and underlines the coherence of the narrative: "without metonymy, there can be no sequence of memories, no story, no novel" (*Figures III*). For de Man, as we know, the metonymic order described here is not the work of the writer but of the linguist: he sees here a reduction of the figure to grammar, what he calls a rhetorisation of grammar, a figure generated by syntactic paradigms (de Man 38). The reconciliation of metaphor and metonymy reduces the tropology to a *closed system*. There is no concordance, however, between the metaphoric order and the metonymic order. There are two languages of the text that do not coincide: the construction by proximity and the construction by additions both have their own logic and are incompatible. The literary "is only discordance" which is insoluble between the grammatical structure, the rhetorical arrangement and the logical development: the metaphor is primary and at the same time it is impossible to elaborate any meaning from it (*Dire le littéraire* 187).

In the way in which deconstruction uses metaphor and rhetoric (through Proust, Nietzsche or Rousseau), in this vision of the rhetorical essence of language, the figures or the tropes are there to formulate what remains to be formulated. In so far as every language is metaphorical, however, and every metaphor is without basis or reference, language betrays its fictive and arbitrary dimension in the very way in which it tries to be persuasive. Literature is the place *par excellence* in which this ambiguity is played out. Literary texts recognise, along with their own rhetorical status, the fact that what they say differs from what they do and that their claim to knowledge and to affirmation is obtained through metaphors which render these very claims vain: "As soon as a text knows what it is saying, it can only act by trickery [...] if a text does not act, it cannot say what it knows; The distinction between the text as narrative and the text as theory also takes place within this tension" (*Allegories de la lecture* 324).

The text is the disjunction of its double power, performative and constative: "performative rhetoric and cognitive rhetoric, the rhetoric of tropes do not converge" (*ibid.*, 357). P. de Man's rhetoricity marks the discontinuity between two codes (the rhetorical resources attributed to tropes and the models of persuasion):

Considered as persuasion, rhetoric is performative; considered as a system of tropes, it deconstructs its own performance. Rhetoric is a *text* in so far as it admits two points of view which are incompatible and mutually destructive [...] The aporia between performative language and constative language is only a version of the aporia between trope and persuasion which both produces and paralyzes rhetoric and endows it thus with the semblance of a history, (*ibid.*, 167)

The unresolved tension between the performative and the constative is a source of discordance, of the undecided nature of meaning and of the impossibility of reading. The tension which any text presents between its claim to be decipherable and the obstacles which the rhetoric contradiction erects, faced with the possibility of considering it as a communicable totality, leads to undecidable meaning and to illegibility as an impossibility of submitting the work to criteria of identification and of cognitive recognition: "language inevitably undoes the possible figures of meaning" (Steiner, *Réelles presences*). Literature, in this case, does no more than theorise and report the impossibility for language of saying more than its aporia and the impasses of meaning resulting from the fact that texts violate their own logical system. Deconstruction, through the notion of writing, envisages the work as a rhetorical contradiction which undoes *every configuration of form and meaning* and prevents the text from assembling according to an overall design. Rhetoric is identified, in the essays of de Man, with "the impossibility for the literary of drawing a stable image or argument from the composite order" ("Rhetoricite et littérature," *loc. cit.*). J. Bessière takes up the argument: tropology mixes *questioning about language* and *questioning about literature*; it makes the study of literature a way of saying the generality of literature in language. It pronounces the aporia of literature, because the constatation of rhetoric remains assimilated to a *critical constatation* (language criticism doubles up as criticism of truth):

We give the name *text* to every entity which may be considered in this double perspective: as a generative grammatical system, which is open and non-referential and as a figural system which is closed by a transcendental meaning which subverts the grammatical code to which the text owes its existence (de Man 1989, 323).

For, as it continues to mark it, the constatation of rhetoric limits the question of discourse to the single question of the *reference*³.

From the rhetoricity which is specific to deconstruction, J. Bessière retains the idea that in literature, the partition between rhetoric and non-rhetoric does not hold (the idea that grammar deals with order and articulation, rhetoric deals with figures), that there is no closed rhetoric as in the French tradition, but that the deconstruction does not underline *the meaning of this constatation* (*Dire le littéraire* 188). Deconstruction pronounces the near invisibility of literature, just as it produces the hypothesis of literature; it pronounces the *absence of a message* while underlining the *communicational hypothesis* ("Choisir la fin de la recherche" ["Choosing the end of research"], *loc. at.*, 280). Rhetoricity indicates that rhetoric in literature is not limited to figures, but that it is also a means of making literature, that it puts the writer under the obligation to situate language and to indicate, either explicitly or implicitly, what play of figures is in question, what *agon* is implied: "the idea that discourse, through figured language, is never transparent, again translates the idea that it itself produces its own situation [...]. This first disparity, the object of the production of discourse, of the exercise of rhetoric, calls for a formalising of the situation of enunciation, of the writing it constitutes" ("Rhetoricity and literature", *loc. at.*). The *agon* is not the division of languages— Barthes —, of which literature is free and to which it is a witness, but the pattern of the partitions of identities according to the complexity of situations of language and the horizon of the common place: "in rhetoric, the division indicates a common field: marking differentiated identities and articulating them according to their oppositions in order to indicate in what measure the simple proximity of these identities suggests their traducibility" (*ibid.*).

The idea that there is no closed rhetoric, that writing can be without intentionality, always unfinished, "without the intention of the work and even without the intention of writing, whereby it is not aimed at others and has no message" (*Enigmaticite de la littérature* 67), that it is unaware — according to deconstruction — of the hypothesis of a message, that it is identified with "the abandon of a finality of argumentation" or with an "inability to prove anything

3 This is illustrated by the definition of fiction provided by P. de Man: "fiction has nothing to do with representation, it is rather the absence of every link— causal, coded or controlled by some other relation susceptible to systematisation— between enunciation and referent [...] fiction becomes the disruption of the referential illusion of the account" (de Man 1989, 348).

at all," that it appears as indecipherable in the eyes of discursive and aesthetic conventions, all these may be deduced from the "reduction of rhetoric to tropology," from what J. Bessière interprets as "the aestheticisation of rhetoric" which is dominant in the twentieth century:

Although, within the framework of such an aestheticisation, the tropes may be related to the setting up of semantic breaks, this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that rhetoric is identifiable with the play of the "different," or more simply, with the play of semantic or stylistic disparity. The aestheticisation of rhetoric cannot exclude the fact that the tropology takes part in an interplay that is wider than that of semantic transgression [...]. The reduction of rhetoric to tropology should not prevent us from considering that this tropology is the means and measure of the play with the plays of representation. (1999, 244)

The aestheticisation of rhetoric, the reduction of rhetoric to tropology leaves the question of the "declarative fable" that is literature entirely open. Also left open are the questions of the justification of such a "declarative force" (*Enigmaticité de la littérature* 42) and the rhetorical horizon of literature, this discourse *which presents the characteristics of constant openings* characterised by the *impossibility of its closure*, which makes it its own context and about which the hypothesis "remains, however, inseparable from the situation of such a , discourse among discourses."

The appeal to rhetoric, for Jean Bessière, means that the thinking about the self-identification of literature is at least paradoxical: whenever the theses about deconstruction, about poetics or about narratology observe the fact that literature returns to itself, they also observe that literature returns "to the closest proximity to what it is not and consequently, to what is outside it — other discourses" (*ibid.*, 75). Against deconstruction which concludes that rhetoric is contradictory and that writing and the real are radically cut off, against the vulgates of intransitivity, of tropological contradiction and of the argumentative counter-finality, it can be noted that the argumentation of writing is to be found in what may be named its *singular compromise*:

The autonomy of writing is a constructed autonomy and not an autonomy which results from the rhetorical contradiction which is inherent to any discourse, and from the absence of the real, which would inevitably be registered by language [...]. The argumentation of writing is in its *singular compromise*. The fact that language has no other finality than itself means that language, which is indeed in the world, sometimes chooses not to have current finality: it may be this interplay of constative and questioning. Recognising in

this case a rhetorical play underlines the decision which makes writing [...]. Writing is not identified with an argumentative counter-finality but with this specific argumentation which constitutes the play of questioning, where there is, furthermore, the simultaneous treatment of the constative and the performative [...] the intransitivity is not confused with a deapragmatisation [...] but evolves from the play of questioning. (Bessière 1999, 125).

The fact that the autonomy is a constructed autonomy means that rhetoric is, in reality, a "constructive and dialogic hypothesis" ("Rhétoricité et littérature," *loc. cit.*), a "construction, relative to the other and to the use that this other makes of language, relative to everything that is said or is not said" (*Dire le littéraire* 85) and that the rhetorical interpretation "amounts to asking to what extent a fragment of language — the work, the text — may be itself and an implicated part of a *commonplace*, a language which is only possible of literature" (*La Littérature et sa rhétorique* 21). Affirming rhetoric according to dialogism amounts to saying that the text is not one, but that if it derives from a communicational schema and not simply from a grammar of the utterance, it cannot be an absolute formal difference but an alterity in relation to other identities: "the text, that which preserves differences, also holds different identities and their relations. It forces itself to show the community of differences" ("Choisir la fin de la recherche" 276).

Rhetoric is not the measurement of every divergence from the figural to the literal or to a zero degree of literature, the play which may be referred to the duality of the paradigmatic order and the syntagmatic order, the reading of the rhetorical organisation of works, the means of saying a particular pragmatic choice of the literary, it is "less divergence than defect of the finality of the joinings and the relations" ("Rhétoricité et littérature," *loc. cit.*). It is the means of binding together the poetic (the theory of figures, the narration, the account), the invention (the question, the problem, the cause, that which identifies with the thing in question), the argumentative and the representations. It is that which enables us to account for the enigmaticity by the measurement of the divergences and the gaps between discourses, for the distribution of the discourses and for the community of which they are the hypothesis, that they themselves make up, from partial objects which are texts. It is *the putting into form, which is always at work in discourse* where the work is not so much motivated by its authority and its power, its force or its strength, as by its situation among other discourses, and the contextual values which are thus marked out in it. Against rhetoric as Barthes understands it, J. Bessière prefers to say:

What makes the heterogeneous a form: the composition of divergences is a composition of mutual divergences [...]. Rhetoricity is the way in which any writing continually goes back on itself, contextualises, gives as its guarantors precisely itself and any other discourse. It thus displays its own constituent division [...]. In rhetoric, the division designates a common field: marking the referenced identities and articulating them according to their oppositions to suggest how the proximity of these identities suggests a traducibility and how this traducibility is a manner of denoting any discourses and all that they imply in their disparity and their resemblance. (1999, 196).

Rhetoricity is the measurement of the play of identity and difference, of the unfinished presentations, representations and argumentations works bring with them through their presentations and representations:

This question is imperative as soon as a specific type of knowledge about discourse or which discourse implies is not understood, it is imperative as soon as discourse is itself precisely banal — a simple form of life — and the sign that there are no relations with discourse, by which we may suppose, on the subject's part a radical exteriority to discourse. The question of writing is therefore indissolubly the question of the partition made by the subject within any discourses and also the status given to this partition [...]. The interdiscursive relations and the relations between discourse and subject are indistinctly the very question of these relations — the question of the passage of one discourse to another, of the transformation of a discourse within another, the passage of discourse to subject, of subject to discourse, (*ibid.*, 153)

Resorting to rhetoric is finally recognition of the fact that "literature is not its own totality," that it is written and read "in relation to this other absent whole, in the work, the commonplace." It is "no longer possible to read the literary in relation to that which is free of rhetoric." It must enable "the rhetorical stake of literature or of what is taken to be literature" to be drawn and it must also facilitate the characterisation of a status of literature which takes into account both "a tropic practice and the recognition of the commonplace," through which "literature makes its paradox and its effectiveness as a singular and ordinary being" (*La Littérature et sa rhétorique* 3). This explains). Bessière's rhetorical reading of the first literary modernity in *La Littérature et sa rhétorique* starting from the propositions of Realism and Symbolism, and his reading of contemporary literature outside exceptional status in *Quel Statut pour la littérature?* which also examines the passage of a reflection about the totality of literature, on difference without another, to a

reflection about plausible ("vraisemblable") literature, about the "pragmatics of alterity," *about pertinence* (that is literature which, given the lesser importance of poetic rules and the continual weakening of its formal marks, must consequently affirm its pertinence in relation to the real, in relation to the other) which goes with the recognition of alterity.

Theories of the narrative and of decontextualisation illustrate the aporias of the autonomy and of the necessity of the rhetorical hypothesis as far as J. Bessière understands it. This is the reflection on the narrative which is found in *Dire le littéraire*, and extended in *Enigmaticité de la Littérature*. As J. Bessière reminds us, contemporary narratology attempts to "define a specificity of the narrative through the notation of functions, of grammar, of the organisation of actions" (*Dire le littéraire* 134). It generally holds that the narrative rearranges, reorganises, distorts, deforms or changes the chronological order of a whole or of a sequence of events in a given story. The majority of descriptions — which in G. Genette's work give rise to the analysis of anachronisms or disparities between the time of the story and the time of discourse — presuppose a possible coincidence between chronological order of a group of facts and events and the temporal display of these events in the narrative enunciation. This amounts to supposing, independently of the action of the narrative, the existence — in contradiction with anti-representational and anti-referential hypotheses on which most narratologies are based — of a real antecedent and of a determined group of events arranged in an order, or a determined and linear series: a story. This amounts to thinking about the narrative from the hypothesis of an explicit past, as a stock of information or an available datum. It also explains the dualism inherent in most theories of the narrative (whenever they distinguish between deep structure and surface manifestations, story and narrative, fable and subject, story and discourse) and the fact that the narrative is most often presented as a *deferred relation*.

This understanding of the narrative as a double structure, the deferred account of a past itself available and the importance awarded to its coherence (in the reading of its anachronisms) deliberately ignore the heterogeneous and the rhetoric in which the narrative is caught up, the fact that it organises place and sets up relationships with what it is not: "the highlighting of the paradox which constitutes the narrative is a way not to deal with what appears to be a difference, History itself, which may be individual history" (*Quel Statut pour la littérature?* 121). It is the consequence of the paradoxical manner in which narratology understands *discourse*, communication and rhetoric, whenever it postulates a narrator but makes the narrative a text without subject, operating

thus according to the "near obliteration of the reference to the enunciation" (*Dire le littéraire* 159). We encounter here de Man's remarks about grammatisation and rhetoric. The narrator without whom the narrative could not exist holds the status of a simple grammatical pronoun: narratology does not take into account the rhetorical function endowed on this subject. Although it concludes that there can be no narrative without a narrator, it does not make the designation of a narrator a prerequisite; the pragmatic presupposition of every narrative account — which corresponds to the communication^ hypothesis which is a the basis of narratology — only indicates that whenever there is a narrative, there must indeed be someone narrating. No fixed role, however, corresponds to this pragmatic presupposition:

The narrator may be situated anywhere on the line from the fictional character on the one hand to the simple unspecified narrator-author on the other [...]. In most cases, the narrator remains utterly indeterminate, except in so much as (s)he is the enunciator of what is enunciated: this is case by definition for all anonymous narratives where there is no fictionally constituted narrator (for example in popular tales) [...]. Narratology absolutely distinguishes the question of the communicational existence of the narrator from that of its status as a figure. (Schaeffer 573-74)

This is also why the narrative account of narratology remains a grammar of anachronisms. It implies the dissociation of the utterance, of the enunciation and of the subject of the enunciation, in other words, the elimination of the operations of the speakers in particular circumstances, of time, of place. The narrative in narratology is a discourse which is not apparently a spoken act (hence the difficulties, while characterising the literary discourse as a message, in indicating what the sender and the addressee are). As Jean Bessière remarks, the primary interrogation about narrative is not the one formulated by narratology which concludes that the narrative is "an archetypology of narration, of action and of the semanticism of that which narrates an action" (*Dire le littéraire* 133). The problem is not the necessity of the notation of the story and of the diegetic universe, the identification of the narrative with a genealogy and a discourse of legitimacy, with a machine which *regulates the temporal irresolution* and which means that it can be read following the order of the constative (*ibid.*, 147). The rhetoric of the narrative is not in the internal composition and syntactic construction of the narrative. The question it asks is not only that of its origin, power, legitimacy, coherence, persuasion, play of

anachronisms, plausibility, but rather how the discrepancy, which accounts for its singularity, between this narrative and other narratives is negotiated. It is not enough to note the infinite diversity of narratives or — symmetrically — their variants (the variants of a single narrative, variants on the model of the myth, of an ethnographic narrative or of a tale). It is important to say that the narrative is always relative to a subject, to the manner in which an identity is constructed by negotiating with other alterities, that the narrative recognises different modes of functioning governed by pragmatic rules which are themselves dependent on "forms of life," that the appropriation of language by an "I" also has the function of establishing the other relative to this "I" and of setting up an articulation of position:

The question of narrative is not therefore in this instance that of the representation of the action, nor that of the antecedent world it implies, nor that of the world it projects, but that of the inferences every representation of action carries. (Bessière 2001, 186)

From then on, articulating *semiotics, narration and enunciation*, as J. Bessière proposes, amounts, in fact, to setting aside the definition of the relations and transformations which produce the narrative in order to focus thinking on the articulation of the "enunciative creative subject" and the "modalising constraints." If the narrative and its order are always a question of identity or are related to identity, we must retain the lesson of M. Blanchot's analyses (in the opposition that Blanchot establishes between the novel and the narrative account): the narrative is open and does not attempt to project that which is finished. Just as there is neither story nor past before the narrative, nor can there be narrative identity — Ricoeur — before the undertaking to narrate. Narratology operates the recovery of grammar and rhetoric, of information and communication. The narrative is not, however, a "language of information" but a language of "the interval of information" and "the act of narrating the variable of repertoires and parts of available repertoires" (*Dire le littéraire* 152).

In other words the narrative, "because of the exercise of intelligibility and the enigmatic," cannot exclude the "commonplace" (*Enigmatiçité de la littérature* 188). The narrative activity contains its "own aptitude to draw the public space of the narrative" (*Dire le littéraire* 153) and rhetoric signifies that the narrative "can only be said in the plural and without decidable truth" (*ibid.*, 160). We must turn here to the continuation of the reflection exposed in *Enigmatiçité de la littérature*. From an interpretation of the dialogism of Bakhtine,

against the analysis of the narrative in terms of a complete whole and of internal and closed rhetoric,]. Bessière concludes that the narrative "is fully itself [...] and that it is the image of any narrative":

It becomes a region of the *doxa* of the narrative, it is in relation to any other narrative in an anaphoric position, always open to the sounds of other narratives and to the way in which these literary and non-literary narratives have played with fable and the subject, with narratability, with the reliability of the narrator. (*Enigmaticité de la littérature* 54)

The consequence of this is that the narrative is not entirely analysable "in terms of the finality of its action — narrating, that it must also be analysed as a game of suspension — that which is in the chain of narratives and breaks it. It intervenes between the reader and the background of narratives" (*ibid.*, 54). In other words, if everything narratology says about immanence, about narratability, about the play of the subject and the fable and about their ambivalences guarantees the intelligibility of the narrative, this intelligibility is not however distinguished from "the alternative that the latter constitutes in relation to another narrative, and in relation to its other whole which is its own conditions, as the narrative is also its own conditions" (*ibid.*, 56). Far from being the totality or the whole it appears to be, every narrative only constitutes itself in relation to *another ever-possible narrative*:

Whenever the play of perspectives, of the points of view in a narrative, are evoked, a technique is no doubt noted, the relativism that the narrative recognises is no doubt indicated. More essentially, one remarks that perspective and points of view, even if they are incompatible, are combinable in the narrative without this combination abolishing the specificity of the points of view. This technical notation is the notation of the minimal condition of the interferential play. The play of perspectives is a means of figuring the alterity of the work. It only takes a change in perspective, in point of view, to suggest the question of the pertinence of the presentations of the narrative, at a particular point in the narrative. It is here that the need to connect together the ultimate function of perspectivism is felt - its composite nature implies the metarepresentation through which the work, which is only itself, is related to what it is not, to what is foreign to it, all worlds, the reader, the reader's world. (Bessière 1999, 163)

The narrative "can indeed speak of all forms of life; it is detached however from all discourses as a partial discourse, since it is only a particular

composition of forms of life and, consequently, such a form of life" (*Enigmaticité de la littérature* 192). Or again, concerning *Bartleby* by Melville:

The narrative is only the statement that consists in noting that the possibility of incomprehension is constant faced with any form of life and that it is a component of the acceptance of this form of life. One may therefore say that the narrative is not *necessary* — it does not present an action that is the necessary consequence of some cause —, and that it ultimately plays, not on radical strangeness, but on differences. The passage from radical strangeness to difference — *Bartleby* is different in that he stops writing — is possible by the play of enigmatisation, which supposes that forms of life are quotable — they are, since they correspond to a particular use of language, following a particular context from which it is indissociable. (Bessière 1999, 194)

Contemporary debates on contextualisation and decontextualisation bear witness both to "the communicational incompleteness of literature" and to interrogations about the identity and the difference of literary work, its problematic relationship with the commonplace. The thesis of contextualisation and of decontextualisation justifies the literary work from two types of references — "the first which refers to that of autonomy, the other refers to the communicational schema." This thesis is, even from this point of view, paradoxical: it "supposes the radical singularity of the work, it does not however exclude the hypothesis of a context."⁴ In the perspective of the communicational schema, decontextualisation supposes that every text has a recognisable ability to communicate. The work is, however, also identified, from decontextualisation, as a constant separation and isolation:

The decontextualised work presents a double question: by its decontextualisation, by its alterity; by the paradox that makes it up: that it makes its own context through its own metaphoric and metonymic orders; that it indicates a break with regard to the context through these same orders which are so many ways of placing the emphasis on the work itself.

Decontextualisation is another way of stating the autonomy of the work: "the literary is therefore this autonomy of discourse that is a result of decontextualisation" (*Dire le littéraire* 57). In so far as decontextualisation places the work in a kind of "counter-argumentative game," it forbids a place being attributed to the work:

4 I refer globally here, except where other references are indicated in the text, to J. Bessière, "Notes sur la décontextualisation" (1998).

Counter-argumentative means that in the hypothesis of decontextualisation, the work can be the object, at least initially, of no argument shared by a group, a community, which, for this group or this community, accounts for the work following a description which refers to this work, this group, this community.

At the same time, the reference to autonomy and to the work considered for itself, makes us read decontextualisation "as that which paradoxically defines a situation of the work, a situation entirely characterised by the duality between [its] own necessity and every context." Assimilating the work to a de pragmatized and decontextualised discourse is an answer to the question of the indetermination of the communicational foundation of literary works and away effacing up to "the complexity of language, symbolic, cultural situations and exchanges." The contradictions and aporias linked to the notation of decontextualisation can, here too, be approached and reinterpreted in rhetorical terms. The same goes for the way in which contemporary criticism, as J. Bessière reminds us, from decontextualisation and contextualisation, defines the work as a "play of synecdoche" in relation to a source context or in relation to a reception context. The implicit or explicit reference to synecdoche (the work as a sample of lexical, discursive, generic semiotic codes) adds a rhetorical type reference to the decontextualisation approaches. This reference implies that "it is always possible to add places to the work." The synecdoche names a part instead of the whole that integrates it. The hypothesis of synecdoche is that "the work gives a part of the code for the whole code, but this whole code which can therefore be read in its part, makes the work this autonomous fact which may be carried over to other contexts or other codes." Hence decontextualisation and contextualisation may be read as "a fact of relation and a fact of difference": the literary work is indeed "made of a common language and a common codification"; it is readable out of context.

J. Bessière adds this element to the usual approaches to decontextualisation: that decontextualisation may only be read "according to the indissociable temporal and spatial displacement" and aiming at a deferred communication "does not exhaust the stake of decontextualisation." Because of the fact of writing (the literary work, because it is written, always supposes a deferred reading), what can be said about decontextualisation is that, in pragmatic terms:

the singular work is always a caesura in the realised and contemporary context of its composition and is therefore an appeal to the means of recognition in an indifferent context and a play on proximity.

From decontextualisation, it is also possible to conclude in aesthetic terms that literature — and here we make reference to Realism — "does not manage to make the vision of the world, proposed by a subject who is absent from the world, the vision of the present of this world and of its future [...]. Literature cannot say its story" (*La Littérature et sa rhétorique* 186). Finally we may note the necessity for the play of decontextualisation as defined by the difference the work and all contexts make. It is this which marks to what extent decontextualisation identifies with, and does not identify with, the relation of a message and with the single play of the producer and receptor of the message: "literature of the modernity transforms into a poetic principal, the principal of man's delay in relation to his own world, to his own story, to his own present, and to the world, history, the present of literature" (*ibid.*, 187). All these theses — the theses about omnipotence and power or lack of power of literature, of its self-identification, of the contextualisation and decontextualisation, of difference and alterity — may be read in relation to the evolution of literature in the last century and in relation to the widening of its territory by the inclusion of literatures which do not belong to the western tradition. The self-identification of literature is a means of arriving at the *indifferentiation* of literature. This indifferentiation is readable in cultural terms, and is itself a way of concluding and reformulating the double hypothesis of historical avant-gardes: *the literalisation of society* (poetry is everywhere), *the socialisation of literature* (poetry should be made by everyone)⁵. These two hypotheses are complementary: the socialisation of literature and the arts (that is their generalisation outside of the institution which leads to an inversion of the finality attributed to art by Symbolism: the world does not end in a beautiful book), and the literalisation of society. These two hypotheses signify that literature is no longer to be stated *specifically* and that the question of its status is no longer a question, that it is a *specific usage of language which shouldn't break from common language*. Poetry must be made for all: there is to some extent "dissolution of literature" by its generalisation. This generalisation is made without recourse to the notation of an opposition between literary discourse and ordinary discourse, creation and absence of creation. Neither the obscurity

5 On the literalisation of society and the socialisation of literature, cf. J. Bessière 1999, 143-49).

of words (as in Symbolism) nor the power of some artistic piece of writing (as in Romanticism) are to be supposed. So that the hypothesis of a socialisation of literature carries with it: 1) the end of a fetishist position towards composed and written discourse (*written poetry*, say both Futurism and Surrealism), its *de-sublimation* and its *desacralisation* (poetry as a superior separate language); 2) the taking into account of an indifferenciation of discourses (Apollinaire uses collage to integrate the newspaper and Mallarmé's "universal reporting" into the poem); 3) the refusal of transcendence of communication as defined by aesthetical writing. This double hypothesis, means that a *representation of literature* is left behind. Every discourse remains singular, without this singularity being a *literary singularity*, without discourse being treated as literary (Breton indicates that the automatic message has, "outside of all aesthetical considerations, worth as a very sufficient human document," and he makes writing a quantitative fact). With the literalisation of society and the socialisation of literature, the movement of indifferenciation between literary discourse and ordinary discourse is posited. If poetry is everywhere as the Surrealists claim, literature does not have to be specified: "it is not different from other types of writing — whether they are said to be literary or non-literary" (*Enigmaticité de la littérature* 105-06).

The constatation that literature is no longer to be specified, that art can be interrupted, that the artist is not necessarily the one who does the work of an artist, is not in contradiction with the insistence, by Jean Bessière on the importance of the *persona*, on the *figure* of the person writing: "stating the literalisation and socialisation of literature is stating just that, and also that as a result, literature is something that survives" (*ibid.*, 146). Against the different *doxas* relative to the impersonality of discourses, to the death of the author, to the anonymity of the text, to the infinity of writing or, in so far as the narrative is concerned, to the multiplication of points of view — theses that all amount to excluding "the possibility of subjectivation" —, the reflection on the rhetoric of literature retains the idea that it is not possible "to do without the enunciation and the figure that literature gives it" and that noting "the interpretation that is the literary supposes the presentation of the figure of the writer." In other words, "the figuration of the constant identity of the person who sets out to produce the linguistic interpretation of language and who, by this interpretation is figured in such a way" (*Dire le littéraire* 11). If literature is the appropriation of language by man (*La Littérature et sa rhétorique* 186), then it can omit the gesture of "figuring man as capable of appropriating any discourse" (*ibid.*). If thinking about literature is only "thinking about the way

it negotiates commonplaces mmonplace" (*ibid.*, 13), then "the free position of the subject is to be found in the recognition of the various representations, of the common places they comprise and in the recognition of the tropic use of these commonplaces in relation to each other, in the negotiation of distances that this use allows, in the figure of the enunciator which is precisely interpretable in itself by these representations" (*ibid.*). Literature supposes the singular writing of a writer and the relationship between this writing and the commonplace. Because the writer knows how to represent invention and personal remarks, the play of the figure allows the "setting up of the literary procedure." Jean Bessière thus makes this remark about the heteronymic poetry of Fernando Pessoa and Valéry Larbaud:

It is remarkable [...] that this play of the persona is characterised from a definition of the poet as a name or a character who has no counterpart, that is who has no presentation, no belonging [...]. There are representations of the poets, under proper names, which are not their own, or under figures which are identifiable in a singular manner [...] without these representations being singularly attributable to the poet. (2001, 147-48)

The reference to the figure of the writer does not indicate a return to the possibility of reading the author, to a status of the work that is according to the design of the authority or power of literature. "Figure" must again here be understood in rhetorical terms —; it signifies the fact that there is no language without enunciation, the necessity of situating this enunciation by the "figure of the subject in the work" (*ibid.*, 56) or the "explicit quotation of the subject" (*ibid.*, 58) and a manner of showing that there is no contradiction between the enunciative singularity and any writing:

The writer's identity is emerging. He cannot know himself as such since he is the agent of a play of difference and identification. He is the figure of the enigmatic nature of writing — cleaved in the exercise of his exposition and, consequently, in the exercise of compromise. (Bessière1999, 112)

The reminder of the *persona*, of the figure — that of the singular conditions of the setting up of the literary procedure — must also be understood in *Quel Statut pour la littérature?* as an "internal criticism" of the literature of exceptional status such as it is today defined by the social sciences, anthropology or cultural studies (Ricoeur, Auge, Rorty) when they note in a contradictory manner the *narrative dimension of all existence and fiction without a*

nameable author or substitute the question of the function of literature for that of its *characterisation* (*Quel Statut pour la littérature?* 60) (Auge 1998, 48-53). If it is true that "the indication of the paradox of any writing — a paradox which is indissociable from the indication of the socialisation of literature and the literalisation of society — arranges writing in a resemblance to common discourses" (*Enigmaticité de la littérature* 197), it is nonetheless the case that literature is "discourse instituted as a special object, according to a relative autonomy, which may be associated with a play of complete resemblance with common discourses, and which does not make it, for all that, the representative of all common discourses" (*Quel Statut pour la littérature?* 92). In the anthropology of contemporary worlds which gives as its object culture as text, literature is a cultural ritual. It is related to meaning as a stake of every ritual system, a component of alterity and identity, in a "social sense," that is, "the whole of instituted and symbolic relations (that are therefore admitted and recognised) among each other" (Auge 1994,114). Cultural studies and the anthropology of contemporary worlds answer the question of the *raison d'être* of literature indirectly, by the prevalence of the narrative dimension which "does not only concern literary narratives, but also narratives that fringe each individual space of time, each life in the process of being lived and being said" (Auge 1998,72). The distance of narrative and fiction from myth and religion is-also an indirect answer ("it is through fiction that the myth emerges", "fictional narratives hold myths at a distance, although it is in these myths that their origin is to be found," *ibid.*, 64-65).

In this cultural interpretation of literature, there is "no break in characterisation, nor in function between literature considered from a strictly aesthetic point of view, and literature identified with the expression of the social group" (*Quel Statut pour la littérature?* 58). There is no longer a "specific mode of literary enunciation" and literature stops being a game of alternative discourses:

Literature is no longer a question of identity. It is the question of the fact of literature, which introduces the question of the recognition of literature [...]. The answer to the question Why literature? concludes in a remarkable way that narrative and fiction are prevalent in the methods of the social sciences, in society itself. This is particularly the case for literary narrative and fiction, as distinct from mythical narrative and fiction. [...] This statement forces us to read literature, its narratives, its fictions, as a kind of vast inclusion of all social representations, under the authority of literature which does not need to be defined in any other way. Literature is, in this way, authorised to deliver its

narratives, its fictions as exemplary of our communities and social sciences are thus able to find models of interpretation within it. Literature is held to be one with social practises and with the methods of social sciences. It therefore constitutes a vast commonplace and no longer, therefore, needs to be specifically thought [...]. We come back here to the notation of the lack of alternative [...]. This is another way of indicating the lack of situation which seems characteristic of literature. Whatever its realisations, literature cannot be situated because it is at one with the social whole [...]. The power of literature, thus recognised, ensures that it is, by definition, always pertinent [...]. The interpretation that literature constitutes makes the pertinence of all literature [...]. It is a commonplace that is not open to debate since it is the figure of the unity of the social whole. The lack of genre or of characterisation of literature is functional: it means that the question of the partition of discourses does not need to be asked. (Bessière2001, 61-62)

That literature includes all things, that it is one with the social whole (which, starting from the notation of the prevalence of the narrative dimension of every existence, amounts to saying nothing about the question of invention) leads to the conclusion that literature no longer carries a specific question, that it is without question, if it is not the question of its right:

Where there is the most explicit suppression of the constitution of literature, of the work and of the conditions in which they may be both the figure of a place, a moment, and yet represent another place entirely, another moment entirely. This means that the suppression of all that is problematic, of every "other" of literature, (*ibid.*, 67)

Literature is no longer read as a literary realisation, but as a social realisation: every narrative, any narrative has an exemplary value in relation to culture. In the cultural vision proposed by anthropology and cultural studies, the question of the autonomy of literature ceases to be asked. Nothing is said about the formal identity of the work. Literature is a ritual of our culture just like other rituals. It does not ask to be interpreted in order to be known, but to be recognised. It falls within the field of the history of culture: literature is a document of culture. As soon as there is no longer room for the category of the work, we revert to the duality and the "reciprocal closure" of the document and the monument that has made literature specific since Romanticism:

As a monument, the work becomes something that has no meaning that is pertinent for our practises; the fact that it is also a document bears witness to the fact that it can participate in what we usually say, in our ways of expressing ourselves, in our linguistic repertory that is widened as a consequence. (Bessière2001,48)

If it is true that the social sciences insist on a reading of "the implications of the equality of the rhetorical mechanism, inherited from Romanticism" (*ibid.*, 62), we must then, in conclusion — too rapidly, unfortunately — arrive at the analyses of literature of exceptional status and literature outside of exceptional status which are presented by J. Bessière in *Quel Statut pour la littérature?* Starting from Romantic thinking about *the equality of the rhetorical mechanism* and the differentiation of rhetorical poles (*cf. supra*), J. Bessière maintains that a double-sided definition of the literary object can only be produced. That is, that of the reference and inconsequence of discourse in deconstruction, that of the examination of literary discourse and ordinary discourse, and the formal characterisation and the lack of a formal situation in the work (*ibid.*, 7). This definition is not analysed for itself notably because, implicitly and explicitly, exceptional status and the power of literature are associated with the double-sided presentation of the literary object: "[the power of literature is in] being itself, being a part of all discourse, being, by this duality the possible criticism of all discourse and of many things" (*ibid.*, 8). Romanticism defines the work as a "monument":

Literature is, however, conceived as its own unity and its own model [...] and therefore what survives in time and in cultures. It is like the sign of itself, intransitive. It exhibits this status as the sign of itself and eludes all attempts to integrate it in an interpreting discursive order. (Bessière2001, 65)

It would, then, seem important to move away from the exceptional status of literature pronounced by Romanticism. This is what cultural studies do in a contradictory manner, by widening or by rejecting the concept of literature, while preserving, for the texts they choose, the critical dimension associated with the concept of literature and exceptional status. If, indeed, this move is important, we must then be attentive to the analyses — which undo the poetic, aesthetic, and historical partitions instituted by criticism — proposed in *Quel Statut pour la Littérature?* These analyses concern the reading of two paths and two statuses of literature, two constructions of the place of literature, two types of literature corresponding to two functions of literature. These

functions are: that of exceptional status which is the result of the rhetorical mechanism set up by early German Romanticism (*the equal treatment of ethos, logos and pathos*); and that of a literature which takes up these questions but displaces them by means of genres that appear at the same time as the equal mechanism of Romanticism is constituted: the fantastic, science fiction, the detective novel, heteronymic poetry.

In literature of exceptional status, "an 'other' of literature, with which it might enter into play is not expressly supposed." Poetics, from Romanticism to literature for literature's sake, without forgetting Realism, sets out "the question of the relationship of literature with its object starting from literature." Hence a characterisation of literature according to its discourses, its genres, and the linguistic constraints that result: "literature excludes itself from every order of representation or discourse that has not something of the nature of the power of language." It presents itself as "the interpreter of its own representations." As literature is itself and its own difference, since "recognising literature as a starting point is recognising literature's right according to the right made by language," "the exceptional status of literature is exclusive of the design in the work, of a pragmatics of alterity and of the figuration of such pragmatics by literature" (*ibid.*, 81).

In literature without exceptional status, literature is no longer characterised according to the rights of literature and language but "according to its invention and according to the right this invention makes." To undo the exceptional status of literature, "consists therefore in reformulating the question of the right to representation, and displacing the thematic of the power of the field of language to the fields of every act, of time, of History, even of reality" (*ibid.*, 129). The displacement of literature "outside of what is its power" operates "by provocation to the recognition of alterity." Literature outside of exceptional status that J. Bessière locates in literary genres — the fantastic, science fiction, the detective novel, heteronymic poetry — which are born in the nineteenth century, just when the rhetorical mechanism of Romanticism is being set up, "present, represent that which has no representative in reality." It is possible to:

arrange literature explicitly according to that which, by definition, cannot belong to any representation. It is also possible to note the improbable future, the present that corresponds to no presentation or representation, the anonymous author who does not correspond to any identification if it is not identification following a necessary inquiry. Hence the realisation of science fiction, the fantastic, the detective novel. (Bessière2001, 88)

The question of the relationship between literature and the object is dealt with going "from the object to literature, attributing to this object, however, a specific status — that of not being presented, of not being presentable" (*ibid.*, 96-97). Literature outside exceptional status does not ask the question of denotation or non-existent denotation; it affirms the artificial nature of its object and fiction:

In an exemplary manner, that which most arises from the invention of literature — presenting something that has neither presentation, nor representation in actuality — testifies neither to the authority of literature, nor to its own mediation. This invention made by literature establishes the fact that the worlds presented by literature are not constituted and are not read essentially as recontextualisations, in literature, of presentations or representations of this world. (Bessière2001, 90)

This means that literature is defined on the one hand "from a refusal to identify literature with a questioning of reality," on the other, starting from "the fable of this questioning." In this second paradigm:

The work reaches common representations, those of common communication, those that make the pertinence of this communication. It thus constitutes a pragmatic of alterity, in so far as, through its enigmaticity, it contains the right of all its readers and their common representations even when these readers are neither quoted nor figured. Making literature an explicit reflection about communication, and the display of such thinking, prevents the work from being constituted according to the double evidence of itself and what is outside itself, in an interpretative game that makes literature the substitute or the representative of the common aspect that is supposed by common discourses. There are, therefore, literary genres and types of work that are conditioned by this thinking. (Bessière2001, 91)

The hypothesis and the exposition of the two paradigms of literature, the two constructions of the place of literature, are valuable in themselves. They are also valuable in relation to the dominating themes of the criticism that identifies literature, and the communication made by literature from its exceptional status alone. They also make possible, against the thinking of intransitivity, of self-reference, of representation and non-representation, to no longer identify and confuse the *exception* of literature and the *distinction* of literature:

The latter is continually instituted as its difference from other discourses, other discursive forms, other symbols, by itself or by what is not literature, and which exists, however, according to its own "decidable" and the "decidable" of other discourses [...]. It is the linguistic presentation of a dilemma: that discrepancy leads back to what is common, that transgression leads back to convention, without what is common and convention being only identified with the "decidable." (Bessière2001, 212-13)

In order to carry on and be recognised, literature can set itself apart from exceptional status.

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