

GEORGE
STEINER

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ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE
AND TRANSLATION

GEORGE STEINER

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reportage being in this instance an intricate hybrid of typology and dramatic maximization, involves the whole question of Greek views on the authority of language over or 'toward' reality. How are we to legislate on these views, who know only conjecturally some of the lexical equivalents for the words used?¹ Thus the elucidation of what was meant, implied, concealed, inferentially omitted, equivocated on 'in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions' (Austin's defining rubric for the truth or falsity of an utterance), can never be reduced to a single, stringently verifiable method. It must remain a selective, highly intuitive proceeding, at the very best self-conscious of its restricted and, in certain regards, fictional status. It hinges, in Schleiermacher's phrase, on the 'art of hearing'.

But the dilemma is not only semantic. There can, as Rudolf Bultmann has shown in his study of the Gospels, be no 'presupposition-less readings' of the past. To all past events, as to all present intake, the observer brings a specific mental set. It is a set programmed for the present. 'A la vérité,' writes Marc Bloch, 'consciemment ou non, c'est toujours à nos expériences quotidiennes que, pour les nuancer, là ou il se doit de teintes nouvelles, nous empruntons en dernière analyse les éléments qui nous servent à reconstituer le passé: les noms mêmes dont nous usons afin de caractériser les états d'âmes disparus, les formes sociales évanouies, quel sens auraient-ils pour nous si nous n'avions d'abord vu vivre des hommes?'² The historian's perception of past tenses, his own personal usage of them, are generated by a linguistic set 'in' and 'of' the present. Except in mathematics and, perhaps, in formal logic—the issue is

¹ This is the central problem of hermeneutics. In *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen, 1960), pp. 370–83, H.-G. Gadamer argues the problematic status of all historical documentation at a level which is, philosophically, a good deal deeper than that touched on by Skinner. His conclusion is lapidary, 'Der Begriff des ursprünglichen Lesers steckt voller underschauten Idealisierung' (p. 373). Oddly enough, Gadamer does not point out how drastically Heidegger—who is so clearly the source of the current hermeneutic movement—commits errors of arbitrary recreation in his definitions of the supposedly 'true, authentic' meaning of key terms in early Greek philosophy. Cf. in particular Heidegger's *Einführung in die Metaphysik* of 1935 and 1953. See Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston, Illinois, 1969) for an admirable introduction to the literature.

² Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire, ou métier d'historien* (Paris, 1961), p. 14.

controversial—there are no non-temporal truths. The articulation now of a supposed past fact involves an elaborate, mainly subconscious network of conventions about the 'reality-contents' of language, about the 'real presence' of past time in the symbolic practices of language, and about the accessibility of memory to grammatical coding. None of these conventions is susceptible of final logical analysis. When we use past tenses, when we remember, when the historian 'makes history' (for that is what he is actually doing), we rely on what I shall call from hereon, and throughout the discussion of translation, *axiomatic fictions*.

These may well be indispensable to the exercise of rational thought, of speech, of shared remembrance, without which there can be no culture. But their justification is comparable to that of the foundations of Euclidean geometry whereby we operate, with habitual comfort, in a three-dimensional and mildly idealized space. They are axiomatic, but need not be either inevitable or absolute. Other spaces are possible. Other co-ordinate systems than that of the past-present-future axis are conceivable. And even where we work from and within our particular axiomatic fictions, border-areas of paradox, of significant singularity, will turn up. This likelihood is crucial to a study of language and of mind. Certain grammars do not entirely 'fit', and we are brought up sharp against local or arbitrary assumptions in what may have seemed until then to be 'natural' moves. The edge of paradox in our uses of the past tense, aptly rendered in Augustine's phrase *praesens de praeteritis* (the past is ever present) can never be wholly resolved. There is a level on which Hume's demonstration that 'our past experience presents no determinate object' (*Treatise*, II. xii), remains valid and persistently challenging. It directs us towards that duality of relation through which language happens in time but also, very largely, creates the time in which it happens.

It may be, to use Kierkegaard's distinction, that doubts about the past tense are 'aesthetic'. The status of the future of the verb is at the core of existence. It shapes the image we carry of the meaning of life, and of our personal place in that meaning. No single individual or even culture can produce a comprehensive statement of the notions of futurity. Each of the relevant branches—an ontology of the future,

on a short lead. Like Dostoevsky's 'Legend of the Grand Inquisitor', Canetti's fable points to the necessary kinship of freedom and uncertainty. The moral is plain. But the largesse with which we dispose of 'futures' in common life and language also has its haunting aspects. I wondered as a child whether the plethora of forward-flung utterances about tomorrow and tomorrow did not, as might a sorcerer's spell, pre-empt the open future? Did those many proud verbs of conjecture, expectation, intent, and promise not waste the available store of time? Were men always so prodigal, or were proto-grammars parsimonious, advancing only very gradually into the future tense, as we enter the water when it is morning and cold?

No one knows. The prehistory of languages, meaning primarily a theoretic construction of proto-languages through comparative analyses of existing phonetic and grammatical forms, hardly reaches to 4000 B.C.¹ The fact that young children begin by using verbs unmarked by tense may or may not tell us something regarding the genesis of language itself. Clearly, we have no history of the future tense.

Part of that history would be philosophic. It would comprise the views which metaphysicians, theologians, logicians have held regarding the grammatical and formal validity of future forms. It would be, at many points, a history of the problem of induction. Limiting itself purely to Western thought and to the most obvious names, such a record would include Aristotle, the Stoics, Augustine, Aquinas, Ockham, and Malebranche. It would study the argument on time in Leibniz, Hume, Kant, and Bergson. Presumably, it would review the discussions on the reality and logical structure of tense-propositions by C. S. Peirce, Eddington, McTaggart, Frege, and C. D. Broad. On each of these philosophic positions, and on the historical and formal relations between them, the literature is vast and often technical.²

There are few questions concerning the logic and substantive

¹ Cf. Mary R. Haas, *The Prehistory of Languages* (The Hague, 1969), pp. 13-34.

² A useful selection of articles and bibliography may be found in J. T. Fraser (ed.), *The Voices of Time* (New York, 1966), and Richard M. Gale (ed.), *The Philosophy of Time* (London, 1968).

association and propinquity that makes up all normal mental life. The sober force of Hume's model impressed itself on the main tradition of Western thought. Even where it reacts against it, the Kantian device of spatial-temporal categories, the assertion that time and our necessary experience of time as directed sequence are 'buried in the depths of the human mind', can be seen as a deepening and 'centralization' of Hume's psychology. Kant's moralism, however, does carry further. His brief tract of 1794, *Das Ende aller Dinge*,¹ expresses the uncanny but innate compulsion of man to reflect on 'last things'. The concept is lofty and dark, but closely meshed with human understanding: 'Der Gedanke . . . ist furchtbar erhaben; zum Theil wegen seiner Dunkelheit, in der die Einbildungskraft mächtiger, als beim hellen Lichte zu wirken pflegt. Endlich muss er doch mit der allgemeinen Menschenvernunft auf wundersame Weise verwebt sein. . . .' The idea of 'an end of time', as it is foretold in Revelation 10, has 'mystical truth' but no intelligibility. Nevertheless, the urge of the mind to meditate on futurity and the logic of internal sequence that gives future forms to predicative statements have their great moral significance. The extension of causality to future consequence, together with the rational conceit—it may be no more than that—of a finality to human affairs is, says Kant, indispensable to right conduct. Futurity is a necessary condition of ethical being. Beyond that we need not speculate, 'denn die Vernunft', in Kant's haunting phrase, 'hat auch ihre Geheimnisse'.

Whether these 'secrets of reason' would comprise Bergson's *élan vital* is a moot point. What is certain is the extent to which modern logicians have reacted against the rhapsodic blur of Bergson's intuitive-vitalist theory of inner duration. When applied to the future, the laws of identity, excluded middle, and non-contradiction seemed to carry with them fatalist consequences. Bergson's evolutionary subjectivism, on the other hand, had once more focused attention on the pivotal role of time in mental operations. But it offered little solid ground for choosing between alternative schemata, some of them wholly solipsistic, of time-flow. The development of many-valued logics, allowing not only 'true' and 'false' markers but a whole range

¹ I am grateful to Prof. Donald McKinnon of Cambridge University who drew my attention to this text, as to a number of others referred to in this section.

of indeterminate, neuter, and potential aspects, has been an attempt to clarify the issues. McTaggart's celebrated proof that time is unreal first appeared in 1908; Bergson's *Évolution créatrice* a year later. Refutations of McTaggart and critiques of Bergson are at the source of the development of modern 'tense-logic'. The questions asked are old. What logical validation can be found for statements of future contingency? What is the status of 'always'? Is it possible to devise a consistent logical system embodying the assertion that time will have an end?¹ What is new is the rigour and formal power of the calculus of tenses. For the first time the unstable factor of futurity is formalized in a strict modal logic. I am not competent to judge of the results—though some are of obvious wit and poetic suggestion. All I would emphasize is the alertness of 'tense-logic' to the profoundly problematic nature of language when it speaks about tomorrow. Even at its most meta-mathematical, 'tense-logic' focuses unmistakably on the shaping strangeness of man's ability to make statements concerning 'sea-battles that will be'.

Far more difficult to establish than the history of the analytic, formal treatments of futurity is the history of actual human 'futures' and optatives. As I noted before, we have no such history and only problematic notions of what its documentation and evidence would be like. Yet the probability that substantive changes have taken place in the psychological and social conventions governing the future tense, in the ways in which different cultures have articulated inductive or premonitory speech-acts, is very strong. It declares itself in literary texts, in ritual, in a comparative study of idiomatic forms. We neither experience nor phrase anticipatory, stochastic, projective conditions of statement as did the Ionians of the sixth century B.C. But how, even by the most scrupulous reference to philology, is one to recapture a 'past future', given the fact that concepts of futurity are determined by and determinant of numerous social, historical, religious variables in the relevant speech community? Again there is

¹ For an examination of McTaggart's 'proof' cf. G. Schlesinger, 'The Structure of McTaggart's Argument' (*Review of Metaphysics*, XXIV, 1971). The best history of 'tense-logic' and the most thorough investigation of the issues involved are to be found in the two books by A. N. Prior, *Past, Present, and Future* (Oxford, 1967), and *Papers on Time and Tense* (Oxford, 1968).

the dilemma of circularity, language being used to make explicit and translate earlier or deep-buried linguistic reflexes. All I would indicate are some of the obvious pivots and synapses to be looked for by a putative historian of future forms in certain Western grammars (that qualification being itself severely restrictive).¹

Futures play a major role in the 'tenseless' syntax of Old Testament Hebrew. Timeless but enunciated in time, the words of God mesh closely yet also strangely with the understanding of a people itself committed to a special, eschatological time-scale. Early on, a critical distinction seems to have been drawn between two orders of foresight. None, prescribes Deuteronomy 18:10, is to employ divination or be 'an observer of times' (cf. Leviticus 19:26). As the parable of Balaam makes emphatic, it is because the Law prohibits soothsaying that 'there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel'. The necromancer, the witch at Endor claim to decipher God's hidden purpose instead of reading His manifest will. The relation of the genuine prophet (*nabi*) to the future is, in the classic period of Hebrew feeling, unique and complex. It is one of 'evitable' certitude. In as much as he merely transmits the word of God, the prophet cannot err. His uses of the future of the verb are tautological. The future is entirely present to him in the literal presentness of his speech-act. But at the same moment, and this is decisive, his enunciation of the future makes that future alterable. If man repents and changes his conduct, God can bend the arc of time out of foreseen shape. There is no immutability except His being. The force, the axiomatic certainty of the prophet's prediction lies precisely in the possibility that the prediction will go unfulfilled. From Amos to Isaiah, the true prophet 'does not announce an im-

¹ Ideally, a history of 'past futures' would begin with prehistory. Neanderthal burial practices and the probable evolution of the incest taboo point to an early, evident concern with actual and symbolic projection into future time. The whole question of the accuracy and sophistication of the time-sense of prehistoric cultures is currently under discussion. Some evidence seems to indicate a formidable degree of mathematical and symbolic prevision. Cf. A. Thom, *Megalithic Lunar Observatories* (Oxford, 1971). Such prevision could have far-reaching linguistic consequences. But as in the case of certain possibilities raised by Mayan hieroglyphs, the evidence remains conjectural and probably beyond rigorous assessment.

mutable decree. He speaks into the power of decision lying in the moment, and in such a way that his message of disaster just touches this power'.¹ The abrupt, time-retracting motion of argument in Chapter 5 of Amos is characteristic. Israel shall rise no more, 'there is none to raise her up'. But simultaneously, on a plane of total potentiality which intersects human time, the prophet speaks the Lord's promise: 'Seek ye me, and ye shall live.' Thus 'behind every prediction of disaster there stands a concealed alternative.'² It is from the inspired duplicity of the prophet's task that the tale of Jonah derives its intellectual comedy.

A deep shift begins with Isaiah and the use of the word *teudah* meaning 'testimony'. It is in Isaiah 11 that the Messianic prophecy 'which hitherto stood in the full reality of the present hour and all its potentialities, becomes "eschatology"'.³ Henceforth the optative, future indefinite character of the Messianic promise is stressed. The Redeemer is latent in the historic choices of man, he is the evolving consequence as much as the agent of man's return to God. After the disaster at Megiddo in 609 B.C., God's will, says Buber, becomes an enigma. Jeremiah is a *bachun* ('watch-tower') who seeks to resolve that enigma through moral perception. Now human grammar interacts directly, creatively with the mystery of God's speech. The 'watchman's' call has a vital but also externalized function: Jeremiah 'has to say what God does'.⁴ He does not foretell so much as he glosses. Hence Jeremiah's unprecedentedly 'equal', parallel dialogue with God. Ezekiel marks the close of the original prophetic tradition, He stands on the borderline between prophecy and apocalypse, between open message and hermetic code. The elements of riddle and image in his foresight are nearly Persian or Hellenic.

But in its initial forms the prophetic literature of the Old Testament expresses a unique apprehension of the relations of time and the word. Complete adherence to the Covenant, a rigorous observance

¹ Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York, 1949), p. 103. Throughout this section I have drawn also on Ernst Sellin, *Der alttestamentliche Prophetismus* (Leipzig, 1912), C. A. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion* (London, 1922), and Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial* (New York, 1969).

² Buber, op. cit., p. 134.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

conflicts between oracular foresight and scientific prediction.¹ As philosophic and scientific investigations develop, they seek to distinguish their own mechanisms of inference and syllogistic projection from the art of the diviner. The latter springs from archaic and pathological impulse. In the *Phaedrus* Plato discriminates between four species of divinely-occasioned madness. Just beneath the urbanities of divination lie more ancient modes of ecstatic prophecy. The Greeks knew that prophetic shamanism points back to a twilight zone between gods and men, a metamorphic time in which mantic agencies flowed unchecked into the open, perhaps incompletely defined consciousness of mortals. As Dodds points out, early Indo-European speech forms retain the association of prophecy with madness.²

From these currents of visionary possession and foresight through induction stems a distinctive free fatalism. Much of Greek drama and of the Greek theory of history is founded on the tensions which occur between realized necessity and meaningful action.³ More vividly than any other cultural forms, Greek tragedy, Thucydidean history embody a coexistence, a dialectical reciprocity between that which is wholly foreseen and yet shatters the mind. We *know* what will happen to Agamemnon when he enters the house, each instant of the *agon* has been announced and prepared for. We *know* precisely what Oedipus will discover—in a crucial sense he too has known all along. Yet with each narration or performance of the fable our sense of shock is renewed. The tragic vision of Greek literature turns on this deep paradox: the event most expected, most consequent on the internal logic of action, is also the most surprising. Conceive of the strange, subtle nausea which would come over us if Agamemnon sprang back from the net, if Oedipus heeded Jocasta and stopped asking. Freedom—the will to launch the Sicilian expedition when every portent and pulse of instinctual clairvoyance spells disaster—is the correlate of necessity. The final exchanges between Eteocles

¹ Cf. Cornford, pp. 133-7.

² Cf. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (University of California Press, 1951), Chapter III.

³ Cf. William Chase Green, *Moirai: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought* (Harvard, 1944). Chapter XI contains a well-documented account of the strain of fatalism in different forms and periods of Greek thought.

and the Chorus in the *Seven Against Thebes* are a perfect instance of free fatalism. Eteocles' knowledge that death waits for him at the seventh gate does not void his action; it gives it the dignity of meaning. Men move, as it were, in the interstices, in the lacunae of misunderstanding left by the oracle; or in a space of necessity made coherent, made logical by foresight. It is an extraordinarily complex psychological and syntactic framework. It may well be more consonant than any other we know with the actual grain of things.

From it derive Stoicism and a braced gaiety in the face of the unknown, of the inhuman. Anyone seeking to render key passages in Aeschylus or Heraclitus knows that the particular idiom of freedom within inevitability, of the optative interacting with the necessary, can be no more than approximated in any other speech. Cicero's version, in the *De Divinatione* and *De Fato* already lacks the tense paradoxality of the Greek source. Probably Yeats comes nearest, in 'Lapis Lazuli':

They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.

Clearly early Christianity benefited from a widely diffused mood of eschatological and apocalyptic expectancy. At almost no place or level of Mediterranean and Near-Eastern society were there not strong currents of millenarian fantasy. Virgil's all too often invoked annunciation in the Fourth Eclogue, seems in fact to have expressed a widespread truth of feeling:

ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas;
magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo.
iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna;
iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.

(Now, at last, the season of the prophetic song of the Sibyl of Cumae has come. Now the great cycle of the centuries begins anew. Now the Virgin returns, and the reign of Saturn. Now a new generation descends from the lofty heaven.)

'The world's great age begins anew'; through the resurrection of the god, through cleansing fire, through personal initiation into the

mysteries of eternal life. How literal were these awaitings? What pressures did they bring to bear on actual social behaviour? We know something of extreme sectarian visions, of withdrawals from a world soon to end, of a making ready for the great noon by zealot communities and Mithraic cults. For a good many Jews and Christian Jews the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem marked a hinge of time. But almost from the outset, and notably in the Fourth Gospel and in Revelation, a symbolic eschatology overlies literal psychological, historical sentiment. We cannot recapture what may have been rapid or profound mutations in time-sense, in the grammars of temporal statement among the first Christians and initiates in the mystery religions. Evidence suggests that there was a relatively brief spell during which Christ's coming was regarded as imminent, as an event occurring in time but bringing time to a stop. As normal sunrise persisted, this anticipation shifted to a millenary calendar, to the numerological and cryptographic search for the true date of His return. Very gradually this sense of speculative but exact futurity altered, at least within orthodox teaching, to a preterite. The Redeemer's coming had happened already; that 'pastness' being replicated and made present in each true sacrament. Even the most lucid of modern Christologists can do little more than state the paradox: 'So it seems we must say that for the early Church the coming of Christ was both present and future, both at once.'¹ Such coterminous duality could fit no available syntax. The event, formidably concrete as it was held to have been, 'lies outside our system of time-reckoning'. The mystery of the transubstantiative rite, enacted in each mass, has its own tense-logic. It literally bodies forth, says Dodd, a 'coming of Christ which is past, present and future all in one'.²

These sovereign antinomies and suspensions of the common

¹ C. H. Dodd, *The Coming of Christ* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 8.

² Ibid. Cf. also Ernst von Dobschütz, 'Zeit und Raum im Denken des Urchristentums' (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, XLI, 1922), and two important articles by Henri-Charles Puech, 'La Gnose et le temps' (*Eranos-Jahrbuch*, XX, 1951) and 'Temps, histoire et mythe dans le christianisme des premiers siècles' (*Proceedings of the VIIth Congress for the History of Religion*, Amsterdam, 1951). A stimulating but highly compressed analysis of early Christian doctrines of time and future, with particular reference to St. Irenaeus and the latter's influence on St. Augustine, will be found in Mircea Eliade, *Le Mythe de l'éternel retour: archétypes et répétition* (Paris, 1949).

grammar of tense recur in fundamentalist and chiliastic movements throughout Western history. Repeatedly, conventicles, *illuminati*, messianic communities have proclaimed the imminent end of time and striven to act accordingly. The *paniques de l'an mille*, analysed by Henri Focillon, the Adamite visionaries of the late Middle Ages, the men of the Fifth Monarchy in seventeenth-century England, the 'doom churches' now proliferating in southern California, produce a similar idiom. There is no day after tomorrow. The promise of Revelation is at hand: 'there shall be time no longer'. From a sociolinguistic point of view, it would of extreme interest to know the extent to which such convictions actually reshape speech habits. But hardly any evidence is available. The history of visionary sects is made up principally of the distorting testimony of their destroyers. Only tantalizing scraps remain. Reportedly, the Old Believers in Russia, seeking martyrdom and immediate ascent into the kingdom of God, used the future tense of verbs sparingly, if at all.¹

There is an abundant literature concerning the new linearity and open-endedness of felt time brought on by Galilean and Newtonian physics.² Newton's religious scruples inhibited him from drawing temporal inferences clearly implicit in his celestial mechanics. But his successors, notably Buffon, did not flinch from the immensities of time allowed, indeed required by a mechanistic, evolutionary model of the earth and of the solar system. A palpable spaciousness animates late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century natural philosophy, a confidence that there are in fact worlds enough and time for even the most forward-vaulting of sensibilities to draw deep breath. It is no longer the containment by the crystalline and concentric, still vivid in Kepler, nor a Pascalian terror of the void, which characterizes the new cosmography, but a logic of infinite sequence. We hear its bracing note as early as 1686, in the poetry of vast spaces, of ordered eternity, in Fontenelle's discourse *Sur la pluralité des mondes*. Kant's astronomical speculations, set down in the *Allgemeine Natur-*

¹ I owe this arresting detail to a personal communication from Prof. James Billington of Princeton University.

² Cf. in particular A. Koyré, *La Révolution astronomique* (Paris, 1961), and *Études newtoniennes* (Paris, 1968). For general background, cf. Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (New York, 1965).

geschichte und Theorie des Himmels during the 1750s, conjoin divine determinism with the largesse of an unbounded future: 'The infinity and the future succession of time, by which Eternity is unexhausted, will entirely animate the whole range of Space to which God is present, and will gradually put it into that regular order which is conformable to the excellence of His plan.' In Newtonian-Kantian co-ordinates, time and number without end are a necessary derivation from the Creator's presence: in the word 'presence'—still more in *Gegenwart*—a temporal and spatial constancy are fused. Limit time and, as Newton plainly observed, you must limit the authority of natural law and God's initiatory omnipotence.

Yet, strictly considered, the belief in 'an infinity and future succession of time by which eternity is unexhausted' did not last long. For some inquiring spirits at least, it cannot have survived intact Sadi Carnot's *Réflexions sur la puissance motrice du feu et les moyens propres à la développer* of 1824. In a preliminary way (which Clapeyron's *Mémoire* of 1834 was to make mathematically more rigorous) this monograph formulated the entropy principle. Here is set out, not in terms of apocalyptic speculation or metaphoric conjecture but with an almost elementary ease of algebraic-mechanical deduction, the first of a number of related theories of irreversibility in the flow of energy. The arrow of time is directional. The true condition of the universe is one of thermodynamic processes approaching equilibrium and, therefore, inertness. Past the zero point and the cessation of any energy-yield from the motion of particles there can be no 'time'. Given a statistical framework of sufficient comprehensiveness, it can be shown that the grammar of the future tense is end-stopped, that entropy reaches a maximum at which the future ends. Even if it is regarded as no more than a statistical and idealized paradigm, applicable only where the microscopically discontinuous nature of matter enters the picture, the Clausius-Carnot principle is, surely, one of the extraordinary leaps of the human mind. The ability to conceive of a calculable finish to the energy exchanges in one's own cosmos must draw on some of the subtlest, most proudly abstractive of cerebral centres. Few texts go further than Carnot's treatise, severely technical as it is, to instance the singular dignity and risks of human thought.

What effect had the statement of the Second Law of Thermodynamics on sensibility and speech at large?

The 'interior history' of the entropy concept and of its relations to contemporary philosophic and linguistic consciousness is difficult to make out.¹ The 1849 *Account of Carnot's Theory* by W. Thomson (Lord Kelvin) did a good deal to disseminate the analytic treatment of irreversibility. The word 'entropy' however, and the extrapolation of the notion of thermal or heat death to include the whole universe, are due to a paper by Clausius in the *Annalen der Physik und Chemie* for 1865. This paper contains the famous sentence 'die Entropie der Welt strebt einem Maximum zu'. It is not clear at all whether the extension of the Second Law to the entire cosmos is mathematically or empirically valid. Boltzmann's refutations of Clausius, in his work on the theory of gases, has, in turn, been found inadequate. But one need look only at the strident rejections of entropy by Engels and of

¹ There is no adequate history of the philosophic and psychological implications of the formulation of the entropy principle. F. Auerbach's *Die Königin der Welt und ihre Schatten* (Jena, 1909) and B. Brunhes's *La Dégradation de l'énergie* (Paris, 1909) represent influential popularizations of the concept of universal heat death. Hans Reichenbach's *The Direction of Time* (University of California Press, 1956) contains acute insights into the logic of entropy. Volume II of J. T. Merz's, *A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh and London, 1927) is still useful in regard to the general historical context of thermodynamic theory. Background material and a summary of the latest cosmological aspects of the Second Law may be found in Wilson L. Scott, *The Conflict Between Atomism and Conservation Theory 1644-1860* (London and New York, 1970), and in F. O. Koenig, 'The History of Science and the Second Law of Thermodynamics', in H. M. Evans (ed.), *Men and Moments in the History of Science* (Seattle, 1959). The most complete, rigorous formulation of the Clausius-Carnot law and of its mechanical implications can be found in G. N. Hatsopoulos and J. H. Keenan, *Principles of General Thermodynamics* (New York, 1965). Whether all energy transformations will 'eventually come to an end', or whether, as Boltzmann argued, we live in a universe of 'different times' separated by immense spaces, obviously remains a moot point. Recent astrophysical considerations and Planck's principle that the evolution of any system can be shown to represent an increase of entropy if the system is incorporated into a more comprehensive system that is sufficiently large, strongly suggest that the whole will run down even if certain parts show a downgrade of entropy. 'Although this principle leads to the unwelcome consequence that someday our universe will be completely run down and offer no further possibilities of existence to such unequalized systems as living organisms, it at least supplies us with a direction of time: positive time is the direction toward higher entropy' (Reichenbach, op. cit., p. 54).

the concept of 'universal heat death' by Soviet textbooks on thermodynamics to realize that issues of the utmost political, philosophic force are involved.

My question is narrower. Has the notion of a thermal death of the universe, of 'our' universe at least, affected the psychological tenor and linguistic conventions of uses of the future tense? Are the uses of futures in Western speech after Carnot and Clausius in some degree terminal or 'full-stopped'? The common-sense rejoinder that the remote immensities of time envisaged in theoretic speculations on entropy cannot press on a sane imagination, that magnitudes and statistical generalities of this order have no felt meaning, is only partly convincing. Eschatological images of a comparable distance and abstraction did influence patterns of feeling and idiom at earlier points in history. There are moods in which indistinct immensity takes on a concrete insistence. I can recall the queer inner blow I experienced when learning, as a boy, that the future thermodynamics of the sun would inevitably consume neighbouring planets and the works of Shakespeare, Newton, and Beethoven with them. As in Canetti's parable, the crux is one of distinct perception. Events a billion years off are fully conceptual in mathematical calculation and in language, but lie outside any zone of imaged, sensorily analogical apprehension. What then of ten million years, of half a million, of five generations? The quality of grasp, of registered impression, will be specific to different cultures and professional millieux. The quotient of substantive association in an astrophysicist's or geologist's consciousness of great time spans is obviously larger than that normal to an insurance actuary. The temporal horizons of Mayan civilization seem to have exceeded by far, and by deliberate expansion those available to other Central American cultures. Studies of Indo-European philology and of early Indian arithmetic point to a particular fascination with immensely extended numerical series and time projections.¹ But whatever the degree of individual and cultural diversity, there is a time-point, a location of thermal death, at which the threat of maximal entropy *would* assume reality for the general run of consciousness. The uses of futures of verbs *would* alter or take

¹ Cf. Karl Menninger, *Number Words and Number Symbols* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1969), pp. 102-3 and 135-8.

on a stylized, propitiatory cast of fiction, as perhaps they ought to have done already after Carnot. Condemned men probably bring complex idiomatic attenuations to any discourse on the 'day after tomorrow'. From a psycho-linguistic and socio-linguistic point of view, as well as in the perspective of cultural history, it would be valuable to know a good deal more than we do about the 'cut-off points' in future imaginings for different societies and epochs. There is more than wit to Lévi-Strauss's proposal that the science of man is an *entropologie*.¹

Even these cursory examples should suggest that the shapes of time are entrenched in grammar. The use of projectable predicates on which the validity of induction depends 'is effected by the use of language and is not attributed to anything inevitable or immutable in the nature of human cognition'.² The coiled spring of cause and effect, of forward inference, of validation through recurrence, indispensable to the ordered motion of feeling, is inseparable from the fabric of speech, from a syntax of the world as the latter 'has been described and anticipated in words'.³ On this issue poets, formal logicians, and casual common sense are at one.

The difficulty arises when we ask whether and to what degree actual linguistic practice determines or is determined by underlying

¹ There have recently been fascinating conjunctions between entropy and language or, more exactly, between thermodynamics and information theory. The notion that information can be treated as 'negative entropy' originates in the work of Leo Szilard and Norbert Wiener. It has been developed since, notably by Léon Brillouin in *Science and Information Theory* (New York, 1962), and *Scientific Uncertainty and Information* (New York, 1964). The attempt to refute the well-known paradox of Maxwell—a decrease in entropy brought about without any apparent input of work—by treating information or knowledge as a species of energy, is suggestive. But it remains exceedingly difficult to grasp, let alone quantify. The Einsteinian concept of the transformation of mass into energy is one thing; the analogous transformation of knowledge, of 'bits of information', into energy, is quite another.

² Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (London, 1954), p. 96. Cf. the critique of Goodman by S. F. Barker and P. Achinstein, 'On the New Riddle of Induction' (*Philosophical Review*, LXIX, 1960), and Goodman's rejoinder in 'Positionality and Pictures' (*The Philosophy of Science*, ed. P. H. Niddich, Oxford, 1968).

³ Goodman, *op. cit.*, p. 117. Cf. G. H. von Wright's discussion of alternative 'time-grammars' in *Time, Change and Contradiction* (Cambridge, 1969).

time-schemes. Are logicians, such as Nelson Goodman, right in assuming that all languages embody time in the same way or, more exactly, that every natural language can accommodate any conceivable temporality? Or does evidence point rather towards the well-known image, put forward in the late 1860s by Friedrich Max Mueller, the orientalist and ethnolinguist, of 'petrified philosophies' and psychologies of time buried in and specific to different grammars? Is the chronological scale of human history sufficient to register, at anything deeper than levels of idiomatic fashion, genuine and differentiated changes in man's time sense?

Most empirical investigation (it remains meagre) has borne on Biblical Hebrew and classical Greek. C. von Orelli's *Die hebräischen Synonyma der Zeit und Ewigkeit genetisch und sprachvergleichend dargestellt* of 1871 marks the beginning of methodical attempts to relate grammatical possibilities and constraints to the development of such primary ontological concepts as time and eternity. It had long been established that the Indo-Germanic framework of threefold temporality—past, present, future—has no counterpart in Semitic conventions of tense. The Hebrew verb views action as incomplete or perfected. Even archaic Greek has definite and subtly discriminatory verb forms with which to express the linear flow of time from past to future. No such modes developed in Hebrew. In Indo-European tongues 'the future is preponderantly thought to lie before us, while in Hebrew future events are always expressed as coming after us'.¹ But how, if at all, do these differences relate to the contrasting morphology and evolution of Greek and Hebrew thought, of the Biblical as against the Herodotean code of history? Is the convention that spoken facts are strictly contemporaneous with the presentness of the speaker—a convention which, as Kierkegaard saw, is crucial to

¹ Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (London, 1960), p. 51. Boman's treatment of individual texts and etymologies is fascinating, but his thesis suffers from considerable anthropological and hermeneutic naïveté. The assumption that one can 'translate' the semantics of ancient Hebrew and Greek speech modes into our own, the proposition that the 'idiosyncrasy of a nation or family of nations, a race, finds expression in the language peculiar to them', cannot be taken for granted. It is just these points that require demonstration. Cf. also the analysis of Hebrew 'temporalities' in John Marsh, *The Fulness of Time* (London, 1952).

to speak the present absence of God. None to articulate a child's discovery of his own unreplicable self. None to persuade the beloved that there has been neither longing nor trust like this in any other time or place and that reality has been made new. Those seas in our personal existence into which we are 'the first that ever burst' are never silent, but loud with commonplaces.

The concept of 'the lacking word' marks modern literature. The principal division in the history of Western literature occurs between the early 1870s and the turn of the century. It divides a literature essentially housed in language from one for which language has become a prison. Compared to this division all preceding historical and stylistic rubrics or movements—Hellenism, the medieval, the Baroque, Neo-classicism, Romanticism—are only subgroups or variants. From the beginnings of Western literature until Rimbaud and Mallarmé (Hölderlin and Nerval are decisive but isolated forerunners), poetry and prose were in organic accord with language. Vocabulary and grammar could be expanded, distorted, driven to the limits of comprehension. There are deliberate obscurities and subversions of the logic of common discourse throughout Western poetry, in Pindar, in the medieval lyric, in European amorous and philosophic verse of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But even where it is most explicit, the act of invention, of individuation in Dante's *stile nuovo*, in the semantic cosmography of Rabelais, moves with the grain of speech. The métier of Shakespeare lies in a realization, a bodying forth more exhaustive than any other writer's, more delicately manifold and internally ordered, of the potentialities of public word and syntax. Shakespeare's stance in language is a calm tenancy, an at-homeness in a sphere of expressive, executive means whose roots, traditional strengths, tonalities, as yet unexploited riches, he recognized as a man's hand will recognize the struts and cornices, the worn places and the new in his father's house. Where he widens and grafts, achieving reaches and interactions of language unmatched before him, Shakespeare works from within. The process is one of generation from a centre at once conventional (popular, historically based, current) and susceptible of augmented life. Hence the normative poise, the enfolding coherence which mark a Shakespearean text even at the limits of pathos or compactness. Violent,

idiosyncratic as it may be, the statement is made from inside the transcendent generality of common speech. A classic literacy is defined by this 'housedness' in language, by the assumption that, used with requisite penetration and suppleness, available words and grammar will do the job. There is nothing in the Garden or, indeed, in himself, that Adam cannot name. The concord between poetry and the common tongue dates back at least to the formulaic elements in Homer. It is because it is so firmly grounded in daily and communal speech, taught Milman Parry, that a Homeric simile retains its force. So far as the Western tradition goes, an underlying classicism, a pact negotiated between word and world, lasts until the second half of the nineteenth century. There it breaks down abruptly. Goethe and Victor Hugo were probably the last major poets to find that language was sufficient to their needs.¹

Rimbaud's *lettres du voyant* were written in 1871. They do no less than proclaim a new programme for language and for literature: 'Trouver une langue;—Du reste, toute parole étant idée, le temps d'un langage universel viendra!' The first version of Mallarmé's 'Sonnet allégorique de lui-même' is dated 1868; the *Éventails* poems followed in the 1880s and 1891. With them Western literature and speech-consciousness enter a new phase. The poet no longer has or aspires to native tenure in the house of words. The languages waiting for him as an individual born into history, into society, into the

¹ The causes of this breakdown lie outside the scope of the argument. They are obviously multiple and complex. One would want to include consideration of the phenomenology of alienation as it emerges in the industrial revolution. The 'discovery' of the unconscious and subconscious strata of the individual personality may have eroded the generalized authority of syntax. Conflicts between artist and middle class make the writer scornful of the prevailing idiom (this will be the theme of Mallarmé's homage to Poe). 'Entropy' effects could be important: the major European tongues, which are themselves offshoots from an Indo-European and Latin past, tire. Language bends under the sheer weight of the literature which it has produced. Where is the Italian poet to go after Dante, what untapped sources of life remain in English blank verse after Shakespeare? In 1902, Edmund Gosse will say of the Shakespearean tradition: 'It haunts us, it oppresses us, it destroys us.' But the whole question of the aetiology and timing of the language-crisis in Western culture remains extremely involved and only partly understood. I have tried to deal with certain political and linguistic aspects of the problem in *Language and Silence* (1967) and *Extraterritorial* (1971).

expressive conventions of his particular culture and milieu, are no longer a natural skin. Established language is the enemy. The poet finds it sordid with lies. Daily currency has made it stale. The ancient metaphors are inert and the numinous energies bone-dry. It is the writer's compelling task, as Mallarmé said of Poe, 'to purify the language of the tribe'. He will seek to resuscitate the magic of the word by dislocating traditional bonds of grammar and of ordered space (Mallarmé's 'Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard'). He will endeavour to rescind or at least weaken the classic continuities of reason and syntax, of conscious direction and verbal form (Rimbaud's *Illuminations*). Because it has become calcified, impermeable to new life, the public crust of language must be riven. Only then shall the subconscious and anarchic core of private man find voice. Since Homer, literature, the utterance of vision, had moved with the warp of language. After Mallarmé nearly all poetry which matters, and much of the prose that determines modernism, will move against the current of normal speech. The change is immense and we are only now beginning to grasp it.

One consequence is an entirely new, ontologically motivated, order of difficulty. The whole question of 'difficulty' is more startling, nearer the heart of a theory of language, than is ordinarily realized. What is meant by saying that a linguistic proposition, a speech-act—verse or prose, oral or written—is 'difficult'? Assuming the relevant language is known and the message plainly heard or transcribed, how can it be? Where does its 'difficulty' lie? As Mauthner's critique shows exhaustively, it is merely an evasion to affirm that the 'thought' or 'sentiment' in, behind the words is difficult. The words themselves, the linguistic fact, are the sole demonstrable locus of difficulty. Language articulates sense; it is intended to externalize and communicate meaning. In what ways can it fail to do so, and which of these ways can, possibly be construed as intentional?¹ The topic is large and logically opaque. I want to touch here only on its historical-formal aspect, with special reference to the private language argument.

One is given to understand that there are 'difficult' passages in

¹ Cf. G. Ryle, 'Systematically Misleading Expressions' (*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, XXXII, 1932).

poem allows a kind of orbit or cluster of possible responses, tangential readings, and 'splintered echoes'. The meanings of Celan's verse are not ambiguous or hermetic in the sense in which these terms may be used of a riddling Petrarchan sonnet by Maurice Scève and a metaphysical conceit in Donne. Though they are incisive at any given moment of full response—when the echo is made whole—the meanings are also indeterminate, provisional, susceptible of constant reorganization (the crystal revolves to show a new ordering of living form). These subversions of linearity, of the logic of time and of cause so far as they are mirrored in grammar, of a significance which can, finally, be agreed upon and held steady, are far more than a poetic strategy. They embody a revolt of literature against language—comparable with, but perhaps more radical than any which has taken place in abstract art, in atonal and aleatory music. When literature seeks to break its public linguistic mould and become idiolect, when it seeks untranslatability, we have entered a new world of feeling.

In a short, uncannily dense lyric, Celan speaks of 'netting shadows written by stones'. Modern literature is driven by a need to search out this 'lithography' and *écriture d'ombres*. They lie outside the clarity and sequent stride of public speech. For the writer after Mallarmé language does violence to meaning, flattening, destroying it, as a living thing from the deeps is destroyed when drawn to the daylight and low pressures of the sea surface.

But hermeticism, as it develops from Mallarmé to Celan, is not the most drastic of moves counter to language in modern literature. Two other alternatives emerge. Paralysed by the vacuum of words, by the chasm which has opened between individual perception and the frozen generalities of speech, the writer falls silent. The tactic of silence derives from Hölderlin or, more accurately, from the myth and treatment of Hölderlin in subsequent literature (Heidegger's commentaries of 1936–44 are a representative instance). The fragmentary, often circumlocutionary tenor of Hölderlin's late poetry, the poet's personal collapse into mental apathy and muteness, could be read as exemplifying the limits of language, the necessary defeat of language by the privacy and radiance of the inexpressible. Rather silence than a betrayal of felt meaning. Or as Wittgenstein wrote of

his *Tractatus*, in a letter to Ludwig Ficker dated, it is thought, late October or early November 1919: 'my work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part which is the important one.'

The classic statement of the paradox is Hofmannsthal's 'Letter of Lord Chandos' of 1902. The young Elizabethan nobleman has been fired by poetic and philosophic dreams, by the design of penetrating art and mythology to their hidden, Orphic centre. The whole of natural creation and of history have seemed to him an articulate cipher. But now he finds that he can scarcely speak and that the notion of writing is an absurdity. Vertigo assails him at the thought of the abyss which separates the complexity of human phenomena from the banal abstraction of words. Haunted by microscopic lucidity—he has come to experience reality as a mosaic of integral structures—Lord Chandos discovers that speech is a myopic shorthand. Looking at the most ordinary object with obsessive notice, Chandos finds himself entering into its intricate, autonomous specificity: he espouses the life-form of the wheelbarrow in the garden shed, of the water-bug paddling across the ocean of the pail. Language, as we know it, gives no access to this pure pulse of being. Hofmannsthal's rendition of this paralysing emathy is cunning:

Es ist mir dann, als geriete ich selber in Gärung, würfe Blasen auf, wallte und funkelte. Und das Ganze ist eine Art fieberisches Denken, aber Denken in einem Material, das unmittelbarer, flüssiger, glühender ist als Worte. Es sind gleichfalls Wirbel, aber solche, aber solche, die nicht wie die Wirbel der Sprache ins Bodenlose zu führen scheinen, sondern irgendwie in mich selber und in den tiefsten Schoss des Friedens.

We shall come back to this description of a matrix of thought more immediate, more fluid and intense than is that of language. Stemming from a writer who was steeped in music, the notion of introspective vortices, 'leading' to foundations deeper, more stable than those of syntax, is of great interest. Clearly, however, no earthly language can rival this vehemence of vision and repose. Chandos seeks a tongue 'of which not a single word is known to me, a tongue in which mute objects speak to me and in which I shall one day, perhaps, and in the grave, have to give account of myself before an un-

The darkness of the heart
No, this is the language of the heart, i.e.
the self word AGAINST OBJECT *that pain not speak to itself* 185

known judge'. So far as the natural world goes, it is the language of total privacy or of silence.

The disasters of world war, the sober recognition that the finalities of lunacy and barbarism which occurred during 1914–18 and the Nazi holocaust could neither be adequately grasped nor described in words—what is there to *say* about Belsen?—reinforced the temptations of silence. A good deal of what is representative in modern literature, from Kafka to Pinter, seems to work deliberately at the edge of quietness. It puts forward tentative or failed speech-moves expressive of the intimation that the larger, more worth-while statements cannot, ought not to be made (Hofmannsthal came to speak of the 'indecenty of eloquence' after the lies and massacres of world war). An entry in Ionesco's diary summarizes the ironic, crippled posture of the writer when words fail him:

It is as if, through becoming involved in literature, I had used up all possible symbols without really penetrating their meaning. They no longer have any vital significance for me. Words have killed images or are concealing them. A civilization of words is a civilization distraught. Words create confusion. Words are not the word (*les mots ne sont pas la parole*). . . . The fact is that words say nothing, if I may put it that way. . . . There are no words for the deepest experience. The more I try to explain myself, the less I understand myself. Of course, not everything is unsayable in words, only the living truth.

No writer can arrive at a more desolate conclusion. Its philosophic implications, the 'negative creativity' which it has exercised in recent literature, are of great importance. An *Act Without Words*, Beckett's title, represents the logical extreme of the conflict between private meaning and public utterance. But so far as a model of language goes, silence is, palpably, a dead end.

There is a second alternative. So that 'words may again be the word' and the living truth said, a new language must be created. For meaning to find original untarnished expression, sensibility must shake off the dead hand of precedent as it is, ineradicably, entrenched in existing words and grammatical moulds. This was the programme set out by the Russian 'Kubofuturist', Alexei Kručenyx, in his *Declaration of the Word As Such* (1913): 'The worn-out, violated word "lily" is devoid of all expression. Therefore I call the lily *éuy*—

and original purity is restored.' As we have seen, this notion of a language made pure and veritable again as the morning light has a theological provenance. But it springs also from a specific historical conjecture prevalent in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Considering the innocent finality of Hebrew poetry and of Greek literature, the paradox of freshness combined with ripeness of form, thinkers such as Winckelmann, Herder, Schiller, and Marx argued that Antiquity and the Greek genius in particular had been uniquely fortunate. The Homeric singer, Pindar, the Attic tragedians had been, literally, the first to find shaped expression for primary human impulses of love and hatred, of civic and religious feeling. To them metaphor and simile had been novel, perhaps bewildering suppositions. That a brave man should be like a lion or dawn wear a mantle of the colour of flame were not stale ornaments of speech but provisional, idiosyncratic mappings of reality. No Western idiom after the Psalms and Homer has found the world so new.

Presumably, the theory is spurious. Even the earliest literary texts known to us have a long history of language behind them.¹ What we notice of the formal building-blocks in even the most archaic of Biblical passages and what we understand of the formulaic composition of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* point to a lengthy, gradual process of selection and conventionality. No techniques of anthropological or historical reconstruction will give us any insight into the conditions of consciousness and social response which may have generated the beginnings of metaphor and the origins of symbolic reference. It could be that there was a speaker of genius or manic longing who first compared the magnitude of his love to that of the sea. But we can observe nothing of that momentous occasion. Nevertheless, factitious as it is, the model of a lost *poiesis* has a powerful negative influence. It spurs on the intuition, widespread after the 1860s, that there can be no progress in letters, no embodiment of private and exploratory vision, if language itself is not made new.

¹ The most recent anthropological and linguistic hypotheses put at c. 100,000 years ago the emergence of 'characteristically human speech'. The breakthrough would coincide with the last Ice Age and the manufacture of new types of elaborate stone and bone implements. Cf. Claire Russell and W. M. S. Russell, 'Language and Animal Signals', in N. Minnis (ed.), *Linguistics at Large* (London, 1971), pp. 184-7. Our earliest literatures are very late forms.

This making new can take three forms: it can be a process of dislocation, an amalgam of existing languages, or a search for self-consistent neologism. These three devices do not normally occur in isolation. What we find from the 1870s to the 1930s are numerous variants on the three modes, usually drawing on some element from each.

Nonsense poetry and prose, nonsense taxonomies, and nonsense alphabets of many sorts are an ancient genre often active just below the surface of nursery rhymes, limericks, magic spells, riddles, and mnemonic tags.¹ The art of Edward Lear and of Lewis Carroll, however, is probably cognate with the new self-consciousness about language and the logical investigations of semantic conventions which develop in the late nineteenth century. An obvious force and sophistication of psychological conjecture lie behind Lewis Carroll's disturbing assertion that nonsense languages, however esoteric, would be totally understandable to 'a perfectly balanced mind'. As Elizabeth Sewell points out, the dislocations of normal vocabulary and grammar in nonsense have a specific method. The world of nonsense poetry concentrates 'on the divisibility of its material into ones, units from which a universe can be built. This universe, however, must never be more than the sum of its parts, and must never fuse into some all-embracing whole which cannot be broken down again into the original ones. It must try to create with words a universe that consists of bits.'² None of these bits can be allowed to engender external references or accumulate towards a final manifold. In other words: nonsense-speech seeks to inhibit the constant polysemy and contextuality of natural language. The grammar of nonsense consists primarily of pseudo-series or alignments of discrete units which imitate and intermingle with arithmetic progressions (in Lewis Carroll these are usually familiar rows and factorizations of whole numbers).

The idiom of Jabberwocky, says Miss Sewell, aims at 'making no

¹ Throughout this section I am drawing on the great study by Alfred Liede, *Dichtung als Spiel: Studien zur Unsinnspoesie an den Grenzen der Sprache* (Berlin, 1963). The best analyses of the language of nonsense with special reference to English may be found in Emile Cammaerts, *The Poetry of Nonsense* (London, 1925), and Elizabeth Sewell, *The Field of Nonsense* (London, 1952).

² Elizabeth Sewell, *The Field of Nonsense*, pp. 53-4.

direct connection for the mind with anything in experience'. On closer inspection, however, this does not turn out to be the case. Eric Partridge's witty gloss on the four new verbs, ten new adjectives, and eight new nouns in *Jabberwocky* shows how near these coinages lie to the resonance of familiar English, French, and Latin constituents.¹ It is not enough to adduce some 'half-conscious perception of verbal likeness'.² That perception is more often than not immediate and inescapable. Hence the fact that the feats of the Dong and of the Snark can be and have been brilliantly translated into other tongues.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
 All mimsy were the borogroves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe

haunts us by analogy. Thoroughly familiar phonetic associations and sequences from English ballads lie in instant, explicit reach. In Celan's terms, the echoes are not 'splintered' but knit in mildly unexpected ways.

From the point of view of the renewal of language, there lies the weakness of the whole undertaking. The material is too pliant, the translation too immediate. It draws too readily on counters of feeling and of imagery long-established in the sound-associations of English or any other public speech. The best of Lear, in particular, is Victorian, post-Blakeian verse delicately out of focus, as is a solid shape when the air beats about it, blurring it faintly, on a hot day.

'I said it in Hebrew—I said it in Dutch—/ I said it in German and Greek—' proclaims Lewis Carroll in 'The Hunting of the Snark', 'But I wholly forgot (and it vexes me much) / That English is what you speak!' There has been poetry made of this oversight. Bilingual and multilingual poetry, i.e. a text in which lines or stanzas in different languages alternate, goes back at least to the Middle Ages and to contrapunctal uses of Latin and the vulgate. The minnesinger Oswald von Wolkenstein composed a notorious *tour de force* incor-

¹ Cf. Eric Partridge, 'The Nonsense Words of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll' in *Here, There and Everywhere: Essays upon Language* (London, 1950).

² Elizabeth Sewell, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

*Ceres, Persephone, Eve, sphere
earth, bitter our apple, who at the last will hear
that love-cry?*

A good measure of the prose in *Finnegans Wake* is polyglot. Consider the famous riverrounding sentence on page one: 'Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, has passencore rearrived from North Armorica. . . .' Not only is there the emphatic obtrusion of French in *triste, violer, pas encore* and *Armoric* (ancient Brittany), but Italian is present in *viola d'amore* and, if Joyce is to be believed, in the tag from Vico, *ricorsi storici*, which lodges partly as an anagram, partly as a translation, in 'passencore rearrived'. Or take a characteristic example from Book II: 'in deesperation of deispiration at the diasporation of his diesparation'. In this peal a change is rung on four and, possibly, five languages: English 'despair', French *déesse*, Latin *dies* (perhaps the whole phrase *Dies irae* is inwoven), Greek *diaspora*, and Old French or Old Scottish *dais* or *deis* meaning a stately room and, later, a canopied platform for solemn show. In Joyce's 'nighttalk' banal monosyllables can knit more than one language. Thus 'seim' in 'the seim anew' near the close of 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' contains English 'same' and the river Seine in a deft welding not only of two tongues but of the dialectical poles of identity and flux.

Joyce represents a borderline case between synthesis and neologism. But even in *Finnegans Wake*, the multilingual combinations are intended towards a richer, more cunning public medium. They do not aim at creating a new language. Such invention may well be the most paradoxical, revolutionary step of which the human intellect is capable.

We have no real history of these enigmatic constructs. They turn up in the apocrypha of heresy trials, alchemy, and occultism. The inquisitor will report or the heretic profess the use of a secret, magical idiom impenetrable to the outsider. The orthodox investigators—Gottfried von Strassburg denouncing the great poet Wolfram von Eschenbach for his resort to *trobar clus*, the secret diction of the courts of love, the pursuers of Paracelsus—assign a Satanic origin to the hidden words. The initiate, such as the early prophets of the

Mormon Church, on the other hand, claims angelic inspiration or a direct Pentecostal visitation by 'words robed in fire'.¹ In the nature of the case, the evidence is either puerile or lost.

The same is, on the whole, true of the new and private tongues invented by individuals for their own singular use. But it is probable that many writers, certainly since Rimbaud and Mallarmé, have at some point and, perhaps, to an intense degree, shared Stefan George's wish 'to express themselves in a language inaccessible to the profane multitude'. In George's own case, the thirst for hermeticism was compelling. He made an orphic exercise of his personal life and art so far as modern circumstance would allow. His language-artefacts include at least two poems in a *lingua romana* made up of transparent elements drawn from French, Spanish, and Italian.² Pursuing his search for untainted purity and originality of statement, George constructed an entirely secret speech. Reportedly, he translated Book I of the *Odyssey* into this 'neology'. If George's disciples are to be trusted,³ the master had this translation destroyed before his death lest vulgar scholarship ransack its secrets. The tale is, very likely, a *canard*, but the theoretic design of deepening and renewing the authority of a classic text by 'translating it forward' into a language hitherto unknown and itself innocent of literature, is astute and suggestive. Two somewhat haunting verses of this alleged translation survive. They are embedded in 'Ursprünge', a poem which deals, appropriately, with the persistence of antique, necromantic energies under the ascetic surface of early Christianity:

Doch an dem flusse im schilfpalaste
Trieb uns der wollust erhabenster schwall:
In einem sange den keiner erfasste

¹ For the theological and social problems posed by claims to direct instruction in Divine or angelic speech during, for example, the seventeenth century, cf. L. Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans église* (Paris, 1969).

² For examinations of Stefan George's views on a synthesis of romance languages and classic German to renew the vitality of European poetry, cf. H. Arbogast, *Die Erneuerung der deutschen Dichtersprache in den Frühwerken Stefan Georges. Eine stilgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Tübingen, 1961), and Gerd Michels, *Die Dante-Übertragungen Stefan Georges* (Munich, 1967).

³ The story is told by both Ernst Morwitz and Friedrich Gundolf in their memoirs of George.

lies less in what was accomplished (the very notion of 'finish' being in question) than in a purity of need and disinterestedness of creative and collaborative impulse. The slapstick and formal inventions of Hugo Ball, Hans Arp, Tristan Tzara, Richard Huelsenbeck, Max Ernst, Kurt Schwitters, Francis Picabia, and Marcel Duchamp have a zestful integrity, an ascetic logic notoriously absent from a good many of the profitable rebellions that followed.

Many instigations, themselves fascinating, lie behind the Dada language-routines as they erupt at the Cabaret Voltaire in 1915. It seems likely that Ball chose the name of the cabaret in order to relate Dada to the Café Voltaire in Paris at which Mallarmé and the Symbolists met during the late 1880s and 1890s. For it was Mallarmé's programme of linguistic purification and private expression which Ball and his associates sought to carry out.¹ The notion of automatic writing, of the generation of word groups freed from the constraints of will and public meaning, dates back at least to 1896 and Gertrude Stein's experiments at Harvard. These trials, in turn, were taken up by Italian Futurism and are echoed in Marinetti's call for *parole in libertà*. The crucial concept of 'randomness' (*Zufall*) applied to language referred itself not only to Mallarmé's *Igitur* but to the 'trance poetry' attempted by the Decadent movement of the 1890s. The techniques of *collage* in the plastic arts show a parallel development with Dada verse and had a direct influence on Arp's treatment of language. Sound-poetry and *poésie concrète* were very much in the air; witness Kandinsky's *Klänge* published in Munich in 1913. The Zürich milieu at the time was rootless and polyglot. German, French, Italian, Spanish, Rumanian, and Russian were current in and around the Dada circle. The idea of syncretism and of a personal *patois* lay close at hand.

Yet these several strains would, I believe, have remained loose and modish but for the shock of world war. It was from that shock and its implications for the survival of human sanity that Dada derived its morality. The 'neologies' and silences of Ball, of Tristan Tzara, of Arp have affinities of despair and nihilistic logic with the exactly contemporaneous language-critiques of Karl Kraus and the early Wittgenstein. 'We were seeking an elemental art', recalls Hans Arp,

¹ Cf. R. Döhl, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

effort because the structure of the idiom in fact reproduces and re-enacts the natural articulations of thought.

The 1660s produce a spate of linguistic blueprints. Some, such as J. J. Becher's *Character, pro notitia linguarum universali* (1661), and Kircher's own *Polygraphia Nova et Universalis* of 1663 are, as Cohen points out, no more than 'systems for ciphering a limited group of languages on a unitary pattern'. They are merely an *inter-glossa* and auxiliary shorthand for the sciences. But other schemes were of fundamental interest. Dalgarno's *Ars Signorum, vulgo Character Universalis et Lingua Philosophica* (1661) did not fulfil the promise of its title, but spurred John Wilkins to produce his *Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* seven years later. Bishop Wilkins was a man of genius and his project foreshadows many elements in modern logistic theory.

Although Leibniz's *de Arte Combinatoria* dates back at least to 1666, and although Leibniz's early linguistic thought is probably more indebted to the German Pietists and to J. H. Bisterfeld than it is to any other source, Wilkins's influence on Leibniz's life-long search for a universal combinatorial grammar of communication and discovery is unmistakable.¹ That search, which is still discernible in the *Collectanea etymologica* of 1717, bore obvious fruit in Leibniz's epistemology and mathematics. It added to European awareness of Chinese. But it did not achieve that *mathesis* of unambiguous denotation and discovery which the seventeenth century and Leibniz himself had intended. 'It was clearly a mistake to think that the same language could serve adequately both as an unspecialized international auxiliary and also as a scientific terminology.'²

Modern universalists have sought to avoid this mistake. The artificial languages proposed since J.-M. Schleyer's Volapük (1879) and the Esperanto of L. L. Zamenhof (1887) are auxiliary *interlinguae* calculated to expedite economic and social intercourse and meant to

¹ L. Couturat's treatment of Leibnizian linguistics in *La Logique de Leibniz* (Paris, 1901) remains authoritative. Cf. also Hans Werner Arndt, 'Die Entwicklungsstufen von Leibniz's Begriff einer Lingua Universalis' in H.-G. Gadamer (ed.), *Das Problem der Sprache* (Heidelberg, 1966). A useful survey of the topic as Leibniz found it is contained in Paolo Rossi, *Clavis Universalis. Arti mnemoniche e logica combinatoria da Lullo a Leibniz* (Milan and Naples, 1960).

² J. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

mate—of what we as individuals, as participants in a particular milieu and family of remembrance are trying to say.

This is not to diminish the importance of the public elements of language, of the drive towards clarity and consensus. These also are deeply-rooted constants in the evolution of speech and, as I want to indicate in a moment, their role has, if anything, become greater in the course of history. The entire business of translation, the current search for universals in transformational generative grammars, express a fundamental reaction against the privacies of individual usage and the disorder of Babel. If a substantial part of all utterances were not public or, more precisely, could not be treated as if they were, chaos and autism would follow.

Again we are dealing with an indispensable duality, with a dialectical relation between 'congruent opposites'. The tensions between private and public meaning are an essential feature of all discourse. The hermetic poem lies at one extreme, the S.O.S. or the road-sign at the other. Between them occur the mixed, often contradictory and in some degree indeterminate usages of normal speech. Vital acts of speech are those which seek to make a fresh and 'private' content more publicly available without weakening the uniqueness, the felt edge of individual intent. That endeavour is inherently dualistic and paradoxical. But if we listen closely, there will not be a poem, not a live statement from which this 'contradictory coherence' is absent.

4

Lastly, I want to consider a fourth duality or 'contrastive set', that of truth and falsity. The relations of natural language to the possible statement of truth and/or falsity seem to be fundamental to the evolution of human speech as we know it, and they alone, I believe, can direct us towards an understanding of the multiplicity of tongues. To speak of 'language and truth' or of 'language and falsity' is, obviously enough, to speak of the relations between language and the world. It is to inquire into the conditions of meaning and of reference and into the conditions which make reference meaningful to the individual and the interlocutor. Again translation—the transfer from one designative coherence to another—is the representative,

because particularly visible, case. In another sense, questions about language and truth imply the whole of epistemology and, perhaps, of philosophy. In numerous philosophic systems, such as Platonism, Cartesianism or the critiques of Hume and of Kant, the topic of the status and representation of truth is the central issue. It would be instructive, though also reductive, to divide philosophies into those for which truth and falsity are elemental substances or properties, and those for which falsity is, as G. E. Moore held, only untruth, a privation or negation of truth.

Yet though the problem of the nature of truth and many of the metaphysical and logical moves made when the topic is discussed are as ancient as systematic philosophy itself, it can be said that the theme enters a new phase at the close of the nineteenth century. And it is a phase intimately related to the study of language. The modern style of inquiry stems from several sources. It is partly a reaction, ethical in its severity, against the seemingly *solipsistic*, unworriedly eloquent metaphysics which had dominated European philosophic argument from Schelling to Hegel and Nietzsche. The new direction also derives from a re-examination of the foundations of mathematics. To put it in a crassly schematic way: the turn of the century witnessed a change from an 'outward', hypostatized concept of truth—as an absolute accessible to intuition, to will, to the teleological spirit of history—to a view of truth as a property of logical form and of language. This change embodied the hope that a strict formalization of mathematical and logical procedures would reveal itself as a transcription, idealized no doubt but none the less reproductive, of the mechanics of the mind. This is why a somewhat *naïve mentalism* continues to turn up in some of the most neutral, anti-metaphysical, or anti-psychological of modern logistics and analytics.

The history of 'the linguistic turn' is itself a broad subject. Even if we consider only the argument on 'truth', we can make out at least four main stages. There is the early work of Moore and Russell, then of Russell and Whitehead, with its explicit background in the logics of Boole, Peano, and Frege. There are the attempts to establish semantic definitions of 'truth' made by Tarski, by Carnap, and by the Logical Positivists during the 1930s, attempts carried forward, in a highly personal vein, by Wittgenstein. A third focus is provided by

'Oxford philosophy' and, most notably, by the 1950 debate on 'truth' between Austin and P. F. Strawson and the extensive literature to which this exchange gave rise. There is a current phase strongly coloured by structural linguistics and of which Jerrold J. Katz's 'The Philosophical Relevance of Linguistic Theory' (1965) is a representative statement.¹ But even these very general partitions blur the facts. The example of Frege, of Russell, and of Wittgenstein cuts across different postulates and methodologies. Quine does not fit readily into any chronological rubric but his work on reference and on imputations of existence is among the most influential in the whole modern movement. Key figures—Wittgenstein is the salient instance—changed their positions in the course of work. Biographically and in point of substance, moreover, individuals and schools (more accurately, 'collaborative styles') overlap. There is something like an 'Austin mannerism' in much of recent analytic and linguistic philosophy even where Austin's conclusions may be challenged or not directly apposite.

It is also legitimate to think of the development of modern views on truth in terms of the difference between a formal model of language and a focus on natural language. This, in substance, is the distinction I have been emphasizing in this study. In his useful historical survey, Richard Rorty sees the essential differentiation as one between Ideal Language and Ordinary Language philosophers.² Very roughly put, the Ideal Language philosopher holds that genuine philosophical problems are muddles caused by the fact that 'historico-grammatical syntax' (the ways in which we actually speak) does not dovetail with 'logical syntax'. Such a syntax 'underlies' natural language; it can be reconstructed and made visible in a formal paradigm. This is the view of the early Russell, of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, of Carnap and of Ayer. It is the philosopher's job to look

¹ The key articles are reprinted in a number of anthologies. The following are of particular use: Max Black (ed.), *Philosophical Analysis* (New Jersey, 1950); A. J. Ayer et al., *The Revolution in Philosophy* (London, 1956); R. R. Ammerman (ed.), *Classics of Analytic Philosophy* (New York, 1965). In the following discussion I have relied mainly on the two series of *Logic and Language* ed. by A. N. Flew (Oxford, 1951 and 1953), and on Richard Rorty's collection, *The Linguistic Turn* (University of Chicago Press, 1967).

² Cf. Rorty's Preface, op. cit.

at philosophical problems in the framework of a rigorously constructed metalanguage in which all philosophic propositions will turn out to be statements about syntax and interpretation. Problems that do *not* turn out to be syntactic and relational in this unambiguous sense are pseudo-dilemmas or archaic bugbears. They spring from the regrettable fact that normal speech and traditional ontology have the habit of muddling words and using what Ryle calls 'systematically misleading expressions' ('God exists' can be shown to be only a 'so-called existential statement' in which 'existent' is only a bogus predicate and that of which, in grammar, it is asserted is only a bogus subject).

The Ordinary Language approach is formulated in Strawson's critique of Carnap and his followers. Agreed that philosophical dilemmas have their source 'in the elusive, deceptive modes of functioning of unformalized linguistic expressions'. But how can we construct an ideal language without first describing accurately and exhaustively the procedures and confusions of ordinary discourse? If such description is possible, it may by itself resolve the perplexities and opaqueness thrown up by natural speech. A meta-linguistic model *may* be of some help—it externalizes, it 'profiles' the area of confusion—but it cannot do the job of normative elucidation. Similarly Austin held that there was not much point in reforming and tightening common usage until we know far more exactly what that usage is. Ordinary language may not be 'the last word', but it offers an immense terrain for us to get on with.

These contrasting approaches and the numerous 'mixed', intermediary strategies deployed by linguistic philosophers lead to different images of the shape and future of philosophy. It may be that all serious philosophy will be, in Wittgenstein's phrase, a kind of 'speech therapy', attending to, mending the infirmities of ordinary language and the spurious but vehement conflicts they provoke. Linguistic philosophy might, however, lead to a Copernican revolution of its own, substituting for the Kantian model of the *a priori* of cognition a new understanding of the internalized constraints, of the abstract orderings which make language itself possible. It would thus fulfil the long dream of a universal philosophic grammar. Conceivably empirical linguistics will develop to the point at which it can

provide non-banal formulations of the nature of truth and of meaning (this is clearly implied in the aims of Chomsky and of 'deep structuralists'). Finally, as Rorty puts it, linguistic analysis may do so thorough a job of exorcism that we might 'come to see philosophy as a cultural disease which has been cured'.

Two points emerge. Linguistic philosophy comprises a substantial part of twentieth-century philosophy, particularly in England and the United States. It has put the investigation of formal or empirical grammars at the centre of logic, of epistemology, and of philosophic psychology. But it has viewed language in a special way (Rorty suggests the covering term 'methodological nominalism'). In so doing it has not only edged several branches of traditional philosophy away from professional respectability, i.e. aesthetics, theology, much of political philosophy. It has also distinguished itself sharply from other ways of conceiving and feeling language. This distinction, with its scarcely concealed inference of vacuity in the other camp, applies to Husserl, to Heidegger, to Sartre, to Ernst Bloch. Consequently, there is historical and psychological justification for setting 'linguistic philosophy' apart from 'philosophy of language' (*Sprachphilosophie*). This separation is damaging. It is doubtful whether Austin's well-known prognostication can be realized so long as the gap remains: 'Is it not possible that the next century may see the birth, through the joint labours of philosophers, grammarians and numerous other students of language, of a true and comprehensive *science of language*?'

'Truth' makes up a ubiquitous but also distinct topic in modern linguistic analysis.¹ Several schemes have been put forward. What we find in Moore, in Russell's early teachings on logical atomism and propositions, and in the *Tractatus*, is a correspondence theory. Language is in some way a one-to-one picture of the world,

¹ I have based my discussion on George Pitcher (ed.), *Truth* (New Jersey, 1964), and Alan R. White, *Truth* (London, 1970). I have made use also of the following: P. F. Strawson, 'On Referring' (*Mind*, LIX, 1950); Paul Ziff, *Semantic Analysis* (Cornell University Press, 1960); A. J. Ayer, *Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* (London, 1963); Rita Nolan, 'Truth and Sentences' (*Mind*, LXXVIII, 1969); Ronald Jager, 'Truth and Assertion' (*Mind*, LXXIX, 1970); R. J. and Susan Haack, 'Token-Sentences, Translation and Truth-Value' (*Mind*, LXXIX, 1970).

Carnap's strategy is less clear but also more suggestive as there runs through it a constant inference of possible extension from constructed languages to natural language and to the classification of the actual sciences.

Severe critiques have been made of each of these theories. In turn, these critiques lead to new approaches. Drawing on F. P. Ramsey's device of 'logical superfluity' ('true that *p*' is only another, redundant way of saying 'it is a fact that *p*'), Strawson has rejected the idea that propositions are 'like' the world. His approach deals with many sentences that are meaningful and intelligible without saying anything either true or false. There are, Strawson insists, numerous grammatical predicates which are satisfactory in themselves but have no application now or here. The relation being explored is that between 'all John's children are asleep' and the possibility, of which the speaker may be ignorant, that John has no children.

Other views on 'truth' have continued in the field. There is a pragmatic tradition associated with the doctrines of Pierce, William James, and F. C. S. Schiller. Its common-sense flavour is illustrated by the title of Schiller's best-known paper: 'Must Philosophers Disagree?' published in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* for 1933. Elements of this approach and a genius for disconcerting instances characterize the logic of Quine. There is the linguistic empiricism or materialism of the Marxists with its stress on 'what is out there'.¹ But no less than in other branches of recent philosophic investigation, it is the analytic positions which have been the most influential and actively pursued. The matter of truth has been one of the relations between 'words and words' more often than between 'words and things'.

This mode of discussion has been going forward for over half a century. The layman, so far as he is able to follow even the general outlines of an exceedingly cloistered, frequently meta-mathematical debate, will be struck by several aspects. The literature contains a wealth of closely observed grammar. Whatever the future status of Anglo-American linguistic philosophy *qua* philosophy, the techniques of scrupulous 'listening to language' on which it is based and

¹ Cf. I. S. Narski, 'On the Conception of Truth' (*Mind*, LXXIV, 1965) with its references to Lenin and sanguine conclusion that 'truth is a progress'.

There is no escape from this 'duplicity' so long as analyses of assertions, statements, propositions or belief in regard to 'truth' are divorced from any interest in the psychology and sociology of cognition. Only such interest will support Strawson's legitimate demand that the question to be asked is: 'How do we use the word "true"?'

But the restrictiveness of the analytic linguistic approach may lie even deeper. 'Any satisfactory theory of truth', declared Austin, using a term of which he was in other contexts chary (what *is* a 'theory of truth'?), 'must be able to cope equally with falsity.'¹ None of the accounts of truth given by modern linguistic philosophy seems to me to fulfil this requirement. Yet I believe that the question of the nature and history of falsity is of crucial importance to an understanding of language and of culture. Falsity is not, except in the most formal or internally systematic sense, a mere miscorrespondence with a fact. It is itself an active, creative agent. The human capacity to utter falsehood, to lie, to negate what is the case, stands at the heart of speech and of the reciprocities between words and world. It may be that 'truth' is the more limited, the more special of the two conditions. We are a mammal who can bear false witness. How has this potentiality arisen, what adaptive needs does it serve?

The set of intentional and linguistic procedures which lies between the theoretic absolutes of 'truth' and 'falsity' is so multiple and finely shaded that no logic, no psychology, and no semantics have given even a provisional account of it. There have been many analytic and behavioural probes into nodal points, into such formally and culturally salient areas as induction, argument by hypothesis, philosophic doubt. There have been grammatical investigations of optatives and subjunctives. The development of modal and many-valued logics has extended the treatment of propositions beyond categories of exclusive truth or falsity. There is a considerable technical literature on conditionality.² The logical status of hypotheticals has been often

¹ J. L. Austin, 'Truth', reprinted in Pitcher, pp. 27-8.

² I have found the following of particular use: Stuart Hampshire, 'Subjunctive Conditionals' (*Analysis*, IX, 1948); M. R. Ayers, 'Counterfactuals and Subjunctive Conditionals' (*Mind*, LXXIV, 1965); K. Lehrer, 'Cans Without Ifs' (*Analysis*, XXIX, 1969); Bernard Mayo, 'A New Approach to Conditionals' (*Analysis*, XXX, 1970).

dreaming', his compulsive ability to construe 'that which is now' as being 'that which is not yet'. Human consciousness recognizes in the existent a constant margin of incompleteness, of arrested potentiality which challenges fulfilment. Man's awareness of 'becoming', his capacity to envisage a history of the future, distinguishes him from all other living species. This Utopian instinct is the mainspring of his politics. Great art contains the lineaments of unrealized actuality. It is, in Malraux's formula, an 'anti-destiny'. We hypothesize and project thought and imagination into the 'if-ness', into the free conditionalities of the unknown. Such projection is no logical muddle, no abuse of induction. It is far more than a probabilistic convention. It is the master nerve of human action. Counter-factuals and conditionals, argues Bloch, make up a grammar of constant renewal. They force us to proceed afresh in the morning, to leave failed history behind. Otherwise our posture would be static and we would choke on disappointed dreams. Bloch is a messianic Marxist; he finds the best rudiments of futurity in dialectical materialism and the Hegelian-Marxist vision of social progress. But his semantics of rational apocalypse have general philosophic and linguistic application. More than any other philosopher, Bloch has insisted that 'reasonings upon a supposition' are not, as Hume in his exercise of systematic doubt ruled, 'chimerical and without foundation'. They are, on the contrary, the means for our survival and the distinctive mechanism of personal and social evolution. Natural selection, as it were, favoured the subjunctive.

In a genuine philosophic grammar and science of language, Bloch's *Geist der Utopie* and *Prinzip Hoffnung* would relate to Austin's 'Ifs and Cans'. The ontological and the linguistic-analytical approaches would coexist in mutual respect and be seen as ultimately collaborative. But we are still a long way from this consolidation of insight.

My conviction is that we shall not get much further in understanding the evolution of language and the relations between speech and human performance so long as we see 'falsity' as primarily negative, so long as we consider counter-factuality, contradiction, and the many nuances of conditionality as specialized, often logically bastard modes. Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the

world as it is. Without that refusal, without the unceasing generation by the mind of 'counter-worlds'—a generation which cannot be divorced from the grammar of counter-factual and optative forms—we would turn forever on the treadmill of the present. Reality would be (to use Wittgenstein's phrase in an illicit sense), 'all that is the case' and nothing more. Ours is the ability, the need, to gainsay or 'un-say' the world, to image and speak it otherwise. In that capacity in its biological and social evolution, may lie some of the clues to the question of the origins of human speech and the multiplicity of tongues. It is not, perhaps, 'a theory of information' that will serve us best in trying to clarify the nature of language, but a 'theory of misinformation'.

We must be very careful here. The cardinal terms are not only elusive; they are so obviously tainted with a twofold indictment, moral and pragmatic, Augustinian and Cartesian. 'Mendacium est enuntiatio cum voluntate falsum enuntiandi' ('A lie is the wilful utterance of an articulate falsehood'), says Saint Augustine in his *De mendacio*. Note the stress on 'enunciation', on the point at which falsity is enacted through speech. It is very nearly impossible to make neutral use of 'mis-statement', 'deception', 'falsehood', 'mis-prison', or 'unclearly', the latter being the special object of Cartesian criticism. The unclear, the ambiguously or obscurely stated is an offence both to conscience and reason. Swift's account of the Houyhnhnms compacts an ethical with a pragmatic and a philosophical condemnation:

And I remember in frequent Discourses with my Master concerning the Nature of Manhood, in other parts of the World; having occasion to talk of *Lying*, and *false Representation*, it was with much Difficulty that he comprehended what I meant; although he had otherwise a most acute Judgment. For he argued thus; That the Use of Speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive Information of Facts; now if any one *said the Thing which was not*, these Ends were defeated; because I cannot properly be said to understand him; and I am so far from receiving Information, that he leaves me worse than in Ignorance; for I am led to believe a Thing *Black* when it is *White*, and *Short* when it is *Long*. And these were all the Notions he had concerning that Faculty of *Lying*, so perfectly well understood, and so universally practised among human Creatures.

tautology—to invention and, ‘alterity’ may also relate to the discovery of tools and to the formation of social modes which that discovery entails. But whatever their bio-sociological origin, the uses of language for ‘alterity’, for mis-construction, for illusion and play, are the greatest of man’s tools by far. With this stick he has reached out of the cage of instinct to touch the boundaries of the universe and of time.¹

At first the instrument probably had a banal survival value. It still carried with it the impulse of instinctual mantling. Fiction was disguise: from those seeking out the same water-hole, the same sparse quarry, or meagre sexual chance. To misinform, to utter less than the truth was to gain a vital edge of space or subsistence. Natural selection would favour the contriver. Folk tales and mythology retain a blurred memory of the evolutionary advantage of mask and misdirection. Loki, Odysseus are very late, literary concentrates of the widely diffused motif of the liar, of the dissembler

¹ While reading proofs of this chapter, I came across the following passage, also in galley, by Sir Karl Popper (‘Karl Popper, Replies to my Critics’ in *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, La Salle, Illinois, 1974, pp. 1112–13):

‘The development of human language plays a complex role within this process of adaptation. It seems to have developed from signalling among social animals; but I propose the thesis that what is most characteristic of the human language is the possibility of story telling. It may be that this ability too has some predecessor in the animal world. But I suggest that the moment when language became human was very closely related to the moment when a man invented a story, a myth in order to excuse a mistake he had made—perhaps in giving a danger signal when there was no occasion for it; and I suggest that the evolution of specifically human language, with its characteristic means of expressing negation—of saying that something signalled is not true—stems very largely from the discovery of systematic means to *negate* a false report, for example a false alarm, and from the closely related discovery of false stories—lies—used either as excuses or playfully.

If we look from this point of view at the relation of language to subjective experience, we can hardly deny that every genuine report contains an element of decision, at least of the decision to speak the truth. Experiences with lie detectors give a strong indication that, biologically, speaking what is subjectively believed to be the truth differs deeply from lying. I take this as an indication that lying is a comparatively late and fairly specifically human invention; indeed that it has made the human language what it is: an instrument which can be used for mis-reporting almost as well as for reporting.’

slippage between thought and words. Lies, says Vladimir Jankélévitch in his study of 'Le Mensonge', reflect 'the impotence of speech before the supreme wealth of thought'. A crude dualism is at work here, an unanalysed notion of 'thought' as previous to or distinct from verbal expression. The identical point—language seen as a garment cloaking the true forms of 'thought'—is put forward in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (4.002): 'Die Sprache verkleidet den Gedanken. Und zwar so, dass man nach der äusseren Form des Kleides, nicht auf die Form des bekleideten Gedankens schliessen kann; weil die äussere Form des Kleides nach ganz anderen Zwecken gebildet ist als danach, die Form des Körpers erkennen zu lassen.' The simile is not only epistemologically and linguistically misleading; it betrays a characteristic moral negative. Language commits larceny by concealing 'thought'; the ideal is one of total equivalence and empirical verifiability (cf. the Houyhnhnms). 'What is said is always too much or too little,' observes Nietzsche in the *Will to Power*, 'the demand that one should denude oneself with every word one says is a piece of *naïveté*.' Even here the pejorative image of disguise, of the false garb over the true skin is operative. Undoubtedly the linguistic resources of concealment *are* vital. It is difficult to imagine either the 'humanization' of the species or the preservation of social life without them. But these are, in the final analysis, defensive adaptations, body-paint, the capacity of the leaf-moth to take on the coloration of its background.

The dialectic of 'alterity', the genius of language for planned counter-factuality, are overwhelmingly positive and creative. They too are rooted in defence. But 'defence' here has a quite different meaning and gravity. At the central level the enemy is not the other drinker at the water hole, the torturer seeking your name, the negotiator across the table, or the social bore. Language is centrally fictive because the enemy is 'reality', because unlike the Houyhnhnm man is not prepared to abide with 'the Thing which is'.

Can we particularize T. S. Eliot's finding that mankind will only endure small doses of reality? Anthropology, myth, psychoanalysis preserve dim vestiges of the ancient shock man suffered at his discovery of the universality and routine of death. Uniquely, one conjectures, among animal species, we cultivate inside us, we con-

ceptualize and prefigure the enigmatic terror of our own personal extinction. It is only imperfectly, by dint of strenuous inattention, that we bear the knowledge of that finale. I have suggested that the grammars of the future tense, of conditionality, of imaginary open-endedness are essential to the sanity of consciousness and to the intuitions of forward motion which animate history. One can go further. It is unlikely that man, as we know him, would have survived without the fictive, counter-factual, anti-determinist means of language, without the semantic capacity, generated and stored in the 'superfluous' zones of the cortex, to conceive of, to articulate possibilities beyond the treadmill of organic decay and death. It is in this respect that human tongues, with their conspicuous consumption of subjunctive, future, and optative forms are a decisive evolutionary advantage. Through them we proceed in a substantive illusion of freedom. Man's sensibility endures and transcends the brevity, the haphazard ravages, the physiological programming of individual life because the semantically coded responses of the mind are constantly broader, freer, more inventive than the demands and stimulus of the material fact. 'There is only *one* world,' proclaims Nietzsche in the *Will to Power*, 'and that world is false, cruel, contradictory, misleading, senseless. . . . We need lies to vanquish this reality, this "truth", we need lies *in order to live.* . . . That lying is a necessity of life is itself a part of the terrifying and problematic character of existence.' Through un-truth, through counter-factuality, man 'violates' (*vergewaltigt*) an absurd, confining reality; and his ability to do so is at every point artistic, creative (*ein Künstler-Vermögen*). We secrete from within ourselves the grammar, the mythologies of hope, of fantasy, of self-deception without which we would have been arrested at some rung of primate behaviour or would, long since, have destroyed ourselves. It is our syntax, not the physiology of the body or the thermodynamics of the planetary system, which is full of tomorrows. Indeed, this may be the only area of 'free will', of assertion outside direct neurochemical causation or programming. We speak, we dream ourselves free of the organic trap. Ibsen's phrase pulls together the whole evolutionary argument: man lives, he progresses by virtue of 'the Life-Lie'.

The linguistic correlates are these: language is not only innovative

in the sense defined by transformational generative grammar, it is literally creative. Every act of speech has a potential of invention, a capacity to initiate, sketch, or construct 'anti-matter' (the terminology of particle physics and cosmology, with its inference of 'other worlds' is exactly suggestive of the entire notion of 'alterity'). In fact, this *poiesis* or dialectic of counter-statement is even more complex, because the 'reality' which we oppose or set aside is itself very largely a linguistic product. It is made up of the metonymies, metaphors, classifications which man originally spun around the inchoate jumble of perceptions and phenomena. But the cardinal issue is this: the 'messiness' of language, its fundamental difference from the ordered, closed systematization of mathematics or formal logic, the polysemy of individual words, are neither a defect nor a surface feature which can be cleared up by the analysis of deep structures. The fundamental 'looseness' of natural language is crucial to the creative functions of internalized and outward speech. A 'closed' syntax, a formally exhaustible semantics, would be a closed world. 'Metaphysics, religion, ethics, knowledge—all derive from man's will to art, to lies, from his flight before truth, from his negation of truth,' said Nietzsche. This evasion of the 'given fact', this gainsaying is inherent in the combinatorial structure of grammar, in the imprecision of words, in the persistently altering nature of usage and correctness. New worlds are born between the lines.

Of course there is an element of defeat in our reliance on language and the imaginary. There are truths of existence, particularities of material substance which escape us, which our words erode and for which the mental concept is only a surrogate. The linguistic pulse of perception and counter-creation, of apprehension and 'alterity' is itself ambivalent. No one has come nearer to identifying the reciprocal motion of loss and creation in all utterance, in all verbalized consciousness, than Mallarmé in a compressed sentence in his preface to René Ghil's *Traité du Verbe* (1886): 'Je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets.' But as Mallarmé himself notes, in a preceding sentence, it is this absence which allows the human spirit its vital space, which enables the mind to construe essence and generality—*la notion*

pure—beyond the narrows and shut horizons of our material condition.

In the creative function of language non-truth or less-than-truth is, we have seen, a primary device. The relevant framework is not one of morality but of survival. At every level, from brute camouflage to poetic vision, the linguistic capacity to conceal, misinform, leave ambiguous, hypothesize, invent is indispensable to the equilibrium of human consciousness and to the development of man in society. Only a small portion of human discourse is nakedly veracious or informative in any monovalent, unqualified sense. The scheme of unambiguous propositions, of utterances as direct pointers or homologous responders to a preceding utterance, which is set out in formal grammars and in the extension of information theory to language study, is an abstraction. It has only the most occasional, specialized counterpart in natural language. In actual speech all but a small class of definitional or 'unreflective-response' sentences are surrounded, mutely ramified, blurred by an immeasurably dense, individualized field of intention and withholding. Scarcely anything in human speech is what it sounds. Thus it is inaccurate and theoretically spurious to schematize language as 'information' or to identify language, be it unspoken or vocalized, with 'communication'. The latter term will serve only if it includes, if it places emphasis on, what is *not* said in the saying, what is said only partially, allusively or with intent to screen. Human speech conceals far more than it confides; it blurs much more than it defines; it distances more than it connects. The terrain between speaker and hearer—even when the current of discourse is internalized, when 'I' speak to 'myself', this duality being itself a fiction of 'alterity'—is unstable, full of mirage and pitfalls. 'The only true thoughts,' said Adorno in his *Minima Moralia*, 'are those which do not grasp their own meaning.'

Possibly we have got hold of the wrong end of the stick altogether when ascribing to the development of speech a primarily informational, a straightforwardly communicative motive. This may have been the generative impulse during a preliminary phase, during a very gradual elaboration and vocalization of the truth-conditioned signal systems of higher animals. One imagines a transitional 'proto-linguistic' stage of purely ostensive, stimulus-determined 'speech' of

the kind which recent investigators have taught a chimpanzee.¹ Then, it may be towards the end of the last Ice Age, occurred the explosive discovery that language is making and re-making, that statements can be free of fact and utility. In his *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (1953), Heidegger identifies this event with the true inception of human existence: 'Die Sprache kann nur aus dem Ueberwältigenden angefangen haben, im Aufbruch des Menschen in das Sein. In diesem Aufbruch war die Sprache als Wortwerden des Seins: Dichtung. Die Sprache ist die Urdichtung, in der ein Volk das Sein dichtet.' There is, to be sure, no evidence that this discovery, with which language as we know it truly begins, was explosive. But interrelated advances in cranial capacity, in the making of tools, and, so far as we can judge, in the lineaments of social organization do suggest a quantum jump. The symbolic affinities between words and fire, between the live twist of flame and the darting tongue, are immemorially archaic and firmly entrenched in the subconscious. Thus it may be that there is a language-factor in the Prometheus myth, an association between man's mastery over fire and his new conception of speech. Prometheus is the first to hold Nemesis at bay by silence, by refusing to disclose to his otherwise omnipotent tormentor the words which pulse and blaze in his own visionary intellect. In Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* Earth celebrates this paradoxical victory, the articulation through silence of the powers of word and image:

Through the cold mass
Of marble and colour his dreams pass;
Bright threads whence mothers weave the robes their children
wear;
Language is a perpetual Orphic song,
Which rules with Daedal harmony a throng

¹ Cf. Philip H. Lieberman, 'Primate Vocalizations and Human Linguistic Ability' (*Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, XLIV, 1968); J. B. Lancaster, 'Primate Communication Systems and the Emergence of Human Language', in P. C. Jay (ed.), *Primates* (New York, 1968); Allen R. and Beatrice T. Gardner, 'Teaching Sign Language to a Chimpanzee' (*Science*, CLXV, 1969). All the evidence, together with a powerful argument on the evolution of language out of the use of tools, is summarized in Gordon W. Hewes, 'An Explicit Formulation of the Relationship Between Tool-Usings, Tool-Making, and the Emergence of Language' (*Visible Language*, VII, 1973).

Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were.
(412-17)

If we postulate, as I think we must, that human speech matured principally through its hermetic and creative functions, that the evolution of the full genius of language is inseparable from the impulse to concealment and fiction, then we may at last have an approach to the Babel problem. All developed language has a private core. According to Velimir Khlebnikov, the Russian futurist who thought more deeply than any other great poet about the frontiers of language, 'Words are the living eyes of secrecy.' They encode, preserve, and transmit the knowledge, the shared memories, the metaphorical and pragmatic conjectures on life of a small group—a family, a clan, a tribe. Mature speech begins in shared secrecy, in centripetal storage or inventory, in the mutual cognizance of a very few. In the beginning the word was largely a pass-word, granting admission to a nucleus of like speakers. 'Linguistic exogamy' comes later, under compulsion of hostile or collaborative contact with other small groups. We speak first to ourselves, then to those nearest us in kinship and locale. We turn only gradually to the outsider, and we do so with every safeguard of obliqueness, of reservation, of conventional flatness or outright misguidance. At its intimate centre, in the zone of familial or totemic immediacy, our language is most economic of explanation, most dense with intentionality and compacted implication. Streaming outward it thins, losing energy and pressure as it reaches an alien speaker.

In the process of external contact a pidgin must have arisen, an interlingua minimally resistant to current, predictable needs of economic exchange, of territorial adjustment or joint enterprise. Under certain circumstances of combinatorial advantage and social fusion, this 'amalgam at the border' will have developed into a major tongue. But at many other times and places contact will have atrophied and the linguistic separation between communities, even neighbouring, will have deepened. Otherwise it becomes exceedingly difficult to account for the proliferation of mutually incomprehensible tongues over very short geographical distances. In brief: I am suggesting that the outwardly communicative, extrovert thrust of

language is secondary and that it may in substantial measure have been a late socio-historical acquirement. The primary drive is inward and domestic.

Each tongue hoards the resources of consciousness, the world-pictures of the clan. Using a simile still deeply entrenched in the language-awareness of Chinese, a language builds a wall around the 'middle kingdom' of the group's identity. It is secret towards the outsider and inventive of its own world. Each language selects, combines and 'contradicts' certain elements from the total potential of perceptual data. This selection, in turn, perpetuates the differences in world images explored by Whorf. Language is 'a perpetual Orphic song' precisely because the hermetic and the creative aspects in it are dominant. There have been so many thousands of human tongues, there still are, because there have been, particularly in the archaic stages of social history, so many distinct groups intent on keeping from one another the inherited, singular springs of their identity, and engaged in creating their own semantic worlds, their 'alternities'. Nietzsche came very close to unravelling the problem in a somewhat cryptic remark which occurs in his early, little-known paper 'Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne': 'A comparison between different languages shows that the point about words is never their truth or adequacy: for otherwise there would not be so many languages.' Or to put it simply: there is a direct, crucial correlation between the 'un-truthful' and fictive genius of human speech on the one hand and the great multiplicity of languages on the other.

Most probably there is a common molecular biology and neurophysiology to all human utterance. It seems very likely that all languages are subject to constraints and similarities determined by the design of the brain, by the vocal equipment of the species and, it might be, by certain highly generalized, wholly abstract efficacies of logic, of optimal form, and relation. But the ripened humanity of language, its indispensable conservative and creative force lie in the extraordinary diversity of actual tongues, in the bewildering profusion and eccentricity (though there is no centre) of their modes. The psychic need for particularity, for 'in-clusion' and invention is so intense that it has, during the whole of man's history until very lately, outweighed the spectacular, obvious material advantages of

mutual comprehension and linguistic unity. In that sense, the Babel myth is once again a case of symbolic inversion: mankind was not destroyed but on the contrary kept vital and creative by being scattered among tongues. But in this sense also there is in every act of translation—and specially where it succeeds—a touch of treason. Hoarded dreams, patents of life are being taken across the frontier.

It follows, once again, that the poem, taking the word in its fullest sense, is neither a contingent nor a marginal phenomenon of language. A poem concentrates, it deploys with least regard to routine or conventional transparency, those energies of covertness and of invention which are the crux of human speech. A poem is maximal speech. 'Au contraire d'une fonction de numéraire facile et représentatif, comme le traite d'abord la foule,' writes Mallarmé in the preface to René Ghil, 'le Dire, avant tout rêve et chant, retrouve chez le poète, par nécessité constitutive d'un art consacré aux fictions, sa virtualité.' There can be no more concise formula for the dynamics of language: 'a Saying'—*un Dire*—which is, above all, dream and song, remembrance and creation. It is with this conception that a philosophic linguistic must come to terms.

In considering the principal dualities which characterize natural language—the physical and mental, the time-bound and creator of time, the private and the public, truth and falsity—I have tried to suggest that a genuine linguistic will be neither exhaustive nor formally rigorous. It may be, on the analogy of a hologram, that the uses of recall, recognition, selection through contrastive scanning involved in even the simplest act of verbal articulation are a 'function' of the total state of the brain at any given moment. If this is so, the degree of relevant intricacy, the number of 'connections' and interactive 'fields' which would need to be mapped and statistically evaluated could be so large that we will never get very far beyond metaphoric, though perhaps predictive and even therapeutic approximations. In short: we do not have until now any general theory equipped to formalize let alone quantify a dynamic, open-ended system of an order of complexity even comparable to human speech (and I hope to indicate in the next chapter that the very notion of such a general theory is most likely illusory).

The 'depths' plotted by transformational generative grammars are

themselves largely a disguised simile or a convention of notation. The procedures of diagnosis involved are severely reductive. This is so of the types of evidence they bring forward: the sentences which 'deep-structure' grammarians

use as specimens in their expositions are usually such as are little likely to be misinterpreted. And where they do touch upon ambiguity there is commonly an eccentricity and artificiality in the examples which may be symptomatic. The real hazards of language are conspicuously *not* represented. Samples taken from political, moral, religious, methodological and linguistic discussion would give a very different impression. Studies of language which avoid dealing with those features of language which have been most frustrating to our efforts to inquire into our deepest needs may justly be described as superficial.¹

Such studies are superficial and reductive in another sense also 'Chomsky's epigones', says Roman Jakobson, 'often know only one language—English—and they draw all their examples from it. They say, for instance, that "beautiful girl" is a transformation of "girl who is beautiful", and yet in some languages there is no such thing as a subordinate clause or "who is".'² Jakobson's example is, as it happens, a distortion of the transformational procedure, but the underlying charge is substantial. A profound bias towards 'monolingualism' pervades transformational generative theories and their inference of universality. Whatever the sophistication of actual techniques (it can be over-estimated), the whole approach is at once 'rudimentary' and *a prioristic*. The disorders which it excludes, the 'non-acceptabilities' on which it legislates are among those springs of 'counter-communication' and 'alterity' which give language its primary role in our personal lives and in the evolution of the species.

This is my main point. Man has 'spoken himself free' of total organic constraint. Language is a constant creation of alternative worlds. There are no limits to the shaping powers of words, proclaims the poet. 'Look,' says Khlebnikov, that virtuoso of extreme statement in his 'Decrees to the Planet', 'the sun obeys my syntax'. Uncertainty of meaning is incipient poetry. In every fixed definition there is obsolescence or failed insight. The teeming plurality of languages enacts the

¹ I. A. Richards, *So Much Nearer* (New York, 1968), p. 95.

² Quoted in the *New Yorker*, 8 May 1971, pp. 79–80.

fundamentally creative, 'counter-factual' genius and psychic functions of language itself. It embodies a move away from unison and acceptance—the Gregorian homophonic—to the polyphonic, ultimately divergent fascination of manifold specificity. Each different tongue offers its own denial of determinism. 'The world', it says, 'can be other.' Ambiguity, polysemy, opaqueness, the violation of grammatical and logical sequences, reciprocal incomprehensions, the capacity to lie—these are not pathologies of language but the roots of its genius. Without them the individual and the species would have withered.

In translation the dialectic of unison and of plurality is dramatically at work. In one sense, each act of translation is an endeavour to abolish multiplicity and to bring different world-pictures back into perfect congruence. In another sense, it is an attempt to reinvent the shape of meaning, to find and justify an alternate statement. The craft of the translator is, as we shall see, deeply ambivalent: it is exercised in a radical tension between impulses to facsimile and impulses to appropriate recreation. In a very specific way, the translator 're-experiences' the evolution of language itself, the ambivalence of the relations between language and world, between 'languages' and 'worlds'. In every translation the creative, possibly fictive nature of these relations is tested. Thus translation is no specialized, secondary activity at the 'interface' between languages. It is the constant, necessary exemplification of the dialectical, at once welding and divisive nature of speech.

In turning now to interlingual transfers as such, to the actual business of the passage from one tongue to another, I am not moving away from the centre of language. I am only approaching this centre via a particularly graphic, documented direction. Even here, to be sure, the problems are too complex and various to allow any but a partial, intuitive treatment. Our age, our personal sensibilities, writes Octavio Paz, 'are immersed in the world of translation or, more precisely, in a world which is itself a translation of other worlds, of other systems'.¹ How does this world of translation work, what have men shouted or whispered to each other across the bewildering freedom of the rubble at Babel?

¹ Octavio Paz, Jacques Roubaud, Edoardo Sanguineti, Charles Tomlinson, *Renga* (Paris, 1971), p. 20.

Ronald Knox reduces the entire topic to two questions: which should come first, the literary version or the literal; and is the translator free to express the sense of the original in any style and idiom he chooses?¹ To limit the theory of translation to these two issues, which are in fact one, is to oversimplify. But Knox's point is apt. Over some two thousand years of argument and precept, the beliefs and disagreements voiced about the nature of translation have been almost the same. Identical theses, familiar moves and refutations in debate recur, nearly without exception, from Cicero and Quintilian to the present-day.

The perennial question whether translation is, in fact, possible is rooted in ancient religious and psychological doubts on whether there ought to be any passage from one tongue to another. So far as speech is divine and numinous, so far as it encloses revelation, active transmission either into the vulgate or across the barrier of languages is dubious or frankly evil. Inhibitions about decipherment, about the devaluation which must occur in all interpretative transcription—substantively each and every act of translation leads 'downward', to one further remove from the immediate moment of the *logos*—can be felt in Saint Paul. I Corinthians 14, that remarkable excursus on *pneuma* and the multiplicity of tongues, is ambivalent. If there is no interpreter present, let the alien speaker be silent. But not because he has nothing to say. His discourse is with himself and with God: 'sibi autem loquatur et Deo'. Moreover, where such speech is authentic, there must be no translation. He who has been in Christ and has heard unspeakable words—'arcana verba'—shall not utter them in a mortal idiom. Translation would be blasphemy (II Corinthians 12:4). An even more definite taboo can be found in Judaism. The Megillath Taanith (Roll of Fasting), which is assigned to the first century A.D., records the belief that three days of utter darkness fell on the world when the Law was translated into Greek.

In most cases, and certainly after the end of the fifteenth century, the postulate of untranslatability has a purely secular basis. It is founded on the conviction, formal and pragmatic, that there can be no true symmetry, no adequate mirroring, between two different semantic systems. But this view shares with the religious, mystical

¹ R. A. Knox, *On English Translation* (Oxford, 1957), p. 4.

task of semantic reconstruction. It is the unencumbered purity of philosophic thought "that has made philosophy a model of Babylonian confusion. Many of its abstract concepts defy illustration. Some defy definition. Others are definable but not conceivable: 'being' and 'nothingness', the *ὑπερούσιον* of Plotinus, the Kantian *Transcendenz*, the *deitas* (as opposed to *deus*) of medieval mystics, all are 'concepts' in name only. . . . The philosophical vocabulary has taken different turns even in the most closely related languages, with the result that many distinctions made in Greek or Latin or German are all but impossible to make in English."¹ In the case of poetry such barriers are, at once, a contingent disadvantage and a symptom of integrity. But so far as philosophy goes, problems of untranslatability strike at the heart of the whole philosophic enterprise. As early as the *Cratylus* and the *Parmenides*, we are made to feel the tension between aspirations to universality, to a critical fulcrum independent of temporal, geographic conditions, and the relativistic particularities of a given idiom. How is the particular to contain and express the universal? The Cartesian mathematical paradigm and Kant's internalization of the categories of perception—the *a priori* of 'mind' before 'language'—are attempts to break out of the circle of linguistic confinement. But neither can be demonstrated from outside. Like all verbal discourse, philosophy is tied to its own executive means. To use Hegel's enigmatic but suggestive phrase, there is an 'instinct of logic' in each particular language. But this gives no guarantee that statements on universals will translate. No less than that of poetry, the understanding of philosophy is a hermeneutic trial, a demand and provision of trust on unstable linguistic ground.²

¹ E. B. Ashton, 'Translating Philosophie' (*Delos*, VI, 1971), pp. 16–17.

² The problem of the translatability of philosophic texts has been of concern to I. A. Richards throughout his work, notably in *Mencius on The Mind*. There are invaluable discussions of particular problems in the *Journal and Letters of Stephen MacKenna*, ed. E. R. Dodds (London, 1936). Cf. also Johannes Lohmann, *Philosophie und Sprachwissenschaft* (Berlin, 1965), and Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegels Dialektik* (Tübingen, 1971). For a critical discussion of the entire hermeneutic approach, cf. Karl-Otto Apel, Claus von Bormann, *et al.*, *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1971). Though it does not deal directly with philosophy, Peter Szondi's essay 'Ueber philologische Erkenntnis' (*Die Neue Rundschau*, LXXIII, 1962) is an outstanding introduction to the problem of a 'science of understanding'.

Between the most hermetic poem or metaphysics and the most banal prose, the question of translatability is only one of degree. Language, says Croce, is intuitive; each speech-act is, in any rigorous, exhaustive sense, unprecedented; it is instantaneously creative in that it has acted on, expanded, altered the potential of thought and sensibility. Strictly considered, no statement is completely repeatable (time has passed). To translate is to compound unrepeatability at second and third hand.¹ *L'intraducibilità* is the life of speech.

The case *for* translation has its religious, mystical antecedents as well as that against. Even if the exact motivations of the disaster at Babel remain obscure, it would be sacrilege to give to this act of God an irreparable finality, to mistake the deep pulse of ebb and flow which marks the relations of God to men even in, perhaps most especially in, the moment of punishment. As the Fall may be understood to contain the coming of the Redeemer, so the scattering of tongues at Babel has in it, in a condition of urgent moral and practical potentiality, the return to linguistic unity, the movement towards and beyond Pentecost. Seen thus, translation is a teleological imperative, a stubborn searching out of all the apertures, translucencies, sluice-gates through which the divided streams of human speech pursue their destined return to a single sea. We have seen the strength, the theoretic and practical consequences of this approach in the long tradition of linguistic Kabbalism and illumination. It underlies the subtle exaltation in Walter Benjamin's view of the translator as one who elicits, who conjures up by virtue of unplanned echo a language nearer to the primal unity of speech than is either the original text or the tongue into which he is translating. This is 'the more final realm of language', the active adumbration of that lost, more integral discourse which, as it were, waits between and behind the lines of the text. Only translation has access to it. Until the undoing of Babel such access can only be partial. This is why, says Benjamin, 'the question of the translatability of certain works would remain open even if they were untranslatable for man'. Yet the attempt must be made and pressed forward. 'Every translation', urged Franz Rosenzweig when announcing his projected German version of the Old Testament, 'is a messianic act, which brings redemption nearer.'

¹ This thesis was developed by Croce in his *Estetica* (Bari, 1926).

contemporaneity of ancient and modern and the unified diversity—coherent as are the facets of a crystal—of the European community as they derive from two hundred years of translation.

In so extraordinary a period of actual performance, apologies for translation tend to have a triumphant or perfunctory air. It hardly seemed necessary to expand on Giordano Bruno's assertion, reported by Florio, that 'from translation all Science had its off-spring'. When it was published in 1603, Florio's recasting of Montaigne included a prefatory poem by Samuel Daniel. Daniel's encomium is typical of innumerable pieces in praise of translation. But it is worth quoting from because it knits together the entire humanist case:

It being the portion of a happie Pen,
Not to b'invassal'd to one Monarchie,
But dwell with all the better world of men
Whose spirits are all of one communitie.
Whom neither Ocean, Desarts, Rockes nor Sands,
Can keepe from th' intertraffique of the minde,
But that it vents her treasure in all lands,
And doth a most secure commercement finde.
Wrap Excellencie up never so much,
In Hieroglyphicques, Ciphers, Characters,
And let her speake never so strange a speach,
Her Genius yet finds apt decipherers. . . .

Each time that a language-community and literature seeks to enrich itself from outside and seeks to identify its own strength contrastively, the poet will celebrate the translator's part in the 'intertraffique of the minde'. As Goethe, so much of whose work went towards the import into German of classical, modern European and Oriental resources, wrote to Carlyle in July 1827: 'Say what one will of the inadequacy of translation, it remains one of the most important and valuable concerns in the whole of world affairs.' And speaking out of the isolation of the Russian condition, Pushkin defined the translator as the courier of the human spirit.

Nevertheless, if it is one thing to affirm the moral and cultural excellence of translation, it is quite another to refute the charge of

theoretic and practical impossibility. Here again the essential moves are few and long established.

Not *everything* can be translated. Theology and gnosis posit an upper limit. There are mysteries which can only be transcribed, which it would be sacrilegious and radically inaccurate to transpose or paraphrase. In such cases it is best to preserve the incomprehensible. 'Alioquin et multa alia quae ineffabilia sunt, et humanus animus capere non potest, hac licentia delebuntur,' says Saint Jerome when translating Ezekiel. Not everything can be translated *now*. Contexts can be lost, bodies of reference which in the past made it possible to interpret a piece of writing which now eludes us. We no longer have an adequate *Rückeffühlung*, as Nicolai Hartmann called the gift of retrospective empathy. In a sense which is more difficult to define, there are texts which we cannot *yet* translate but which may, through linguistic changes, through a refinement of interpretative means, through shifts in receptive sensibility, become translatable in the future. The source language and the language of the translator are in dual motion, relative to themselves and to each other. There is no unwobbling pivot in time from which understanding could be viewed as stable and definitive. As Dilthey was probably the first to emphasize, every act of understanding is itself involved in history, in a relativity of perspective. This is the reason for the commonplace observation that each age translates anew, that interpretation, except in the first momentary instance, is always re-interpretation, both of the original and of the intervening body of commentary. Walter Benjamin deflects the notion of a future translatability towards mysticism: one might speak of a life as 'unforgettable' even if all men had forgotten it and it subsisted only in 'the memory of God'; similarly there are works not yet translatable by man, but potentially so, in a realm of perfect understanding and at the lost juncture of languages. In fact, we are dealing with a perfectly ordinary phenomenon. The 'untranslatability' of Aristophanes in the latter half of the nineteenth century was far more than a matter of prudery. The plays seemed 'unreadable' at many levels of linguistic purpose and scenic event. Less than a hundred years later, the elements of taste, humour, social tone, and formal expectation which make up the reflecting surface, had moved into focus. Ask a contemporary English poet, or

indeed a German poet, to translate—to read with anything like the required degree of response—Klopstock's *Messias*, once a major European epic. The angle of incidence has grown too wide. The argument against translatability is, therefore, often no more than an argument based on local, temporary myopia.

Logically, moreover, the attack on translation is only a weak form of an attack on language itself. Tradition ascribes the following 'proof' to Gorgias of Leontini, teacher of rhetoric: speech is not the same thing as that which exists, the perceptibles; thus words communicate only themselves and are void of substance.¹ Beside such radical, probably ironic, nominalism there is another main line of negation. No two speakers mean exactly the same thing when they use the same terms; or if they do, there is no conceivable way of demonstrating perfect homology. No complete, verifiable act of communication is, therefore, possible. All discourse is fundamentally monadic or idiolectic. This was a shopworn paradox long before Schleiermacher investigated the meaning of meaning in his *Herme-neutik*.

Neither of these two 'proofs' has ever been formally refuted. But their status is trivial. The very logicians who put the argument forward have shown this to be the case. They could not phrase their point if speech did not have a relationship of content to the real world (however oblique the relationship may be). And if communication at some level of expressive transfer was not possible, why would they seek to puzzle or persuade us with their paradoxes? Like other bits of logical literalism, the nominalist and monadic refutations of the possibility of speech remain to one side of actual human practice. We do speak of the world and to one another. We do translate intra- and interlingually and have done so since the beginning of human history. The defence of translation has the immense advantage of abundant, vulgar fact. How could we be about our business if the thing was not inherently feasible, ask Saint Jerome and Luther with the impatience of craftsmen irritated by the buzz of theory. Translation is 'impossible' concedes Ortega y Gasset in his *Miseria y esplendor de la traducción*. But so is all absolute concordance be-

¹ Cf. K. Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Harvard University Press, 1957).

tween thought and speech. Somehow the 'impossible' is overcome at every moment in human affairs. Its logic subsists, in its own rigorous limbo, but it has no empirical consequences: 'non es una objeción contra el posible esplendor de la faena traductora.' Deny translation, says Gentile in his polemic against Croce, and you must be consistent and deny all speech. Translation is, and always will be, the mode of thought and understanding: 'Giacchè tradurre, in verità, è la condizione d'ogni pensare e d'ogni apprendere.'¹ Those who negate translation are themselves interpreters.

The argument from perfection which, essentially, is that of Du Bellay, Dr. Johnson, Nabokov, and so many others, is facile. No human product can be perfect. No duplication, even of materials which are conventionally labelled as identical, will turn out a total facsimile. Minute differences and asymmetries persist. To dismiss the validity of translation because it is not always possible and never perfect is absurd. What does need clarification, say the translators, is the *degree* of fidelity to be pursued in each case, the tolerance allowed as between different jobs of work.

A rough and ready division runs through the history and practice of translation. There is hardly a treatise on the subject which does not distinguish between the translation of common matter—private, commercial, clerical, ephemeral—and the recreative transfer from one literary, philosophic, or religious text to another. The distinction is assumed in Quintilian's *Institutiones oratoriae* and is formalized by Schleiermacher when he separates *Dolmetschen* from *Uebersetzen* or *Uebertragen* (Luther had used *Dolmetschen* to cover every aspect of the translator's craft). German has preserved and institutionalized this differentiation. The *Dolmetscher* is the 'interpreter', using the English word in its lower range of reference. He is the intermediary who translates commercial documents, the traveller's questions, the exchanges of diplomats and hoteliers. He is trained in *Dolmetscher-schulen* whose linguistic demands may be rigorous, but which are not concerned with 'high' translation. French uses three designations: *interprète*, *traducteur*, and *truchement*. The proposed discriminations are fairly clear, but the same terms cross over into different ranges.

¹ G. Gentile, 'Il diritto e il torto delle traduzioni' (*Rivista di Cultura*, I, 1920), p. 10.

3

A 'theory' of translation, a 'theory' of semantic transfer, must mean one of two things. It is either an intentionally sharpened, hermeneutically oriented way of designating a working model of *all* meaningful exchanges, of the totality of semantic communication (including Jakobson's intersemiotic translation or 'transmutation'). Or it is a subsection of such a model with specific reference to interlingual exchanges, to the emission and reception of significant messages between different languages. The preceding chapters have made my own preference clear. The 'totalizing' designation is the more instructive because it argues the fact that all procedures of expressive articulation and interpretative reception are translational, whether intra- or interlingually. The second usage—'translation involves two or more languages'—has the advantage of obviousness and common currency; but it is, I believe, damagingly restrictive. This, however, is not the point. Both or either concepts of 'theory', the totalizing or the traditionally specific, can be used with systematic adequacy only if they relate to a 'theory of language'. This relation can be of two types. It is either one of complete overlap and isometry, i.e. 'a theory of translation is in fact a theory of language'. Or it can be one of strict formal dependence, i.e. 'the theory of language is the whole of which the theory of translation is a part'. The totality of Geometries comprehends, is perfectly homologous with, the study of the properties and relations of all magnitudes in all conceivable spaces. This is the first sort of relation. A particular geometry, projective geometry for example, derives rigorously from, is a part of, the larger science. This is the second sort. But it is possible neither to have a 'theory of projective geometry' nor a 'theory of geometrical meaning' without a 'theory of Geometry or Geometries' to begin with.

This platitude needs underlining. Even Quine lacks caution in his resort to the enhancing rubric of what is a genuine 'theory'. The bare notion of a mature theory of how translation is possible and how it takes place, of a responsible model of the mental attributes and functions which are involved, *presumes* a systematic theory of language with which it overlaps completely or from which it derives

as a special case according to demonstrable rules of deduction and application. I can see no evasion from this truism. But the fact remains that we have no such theory of language (here again there has been no sufficiently stringent investigation of just what this phrase entails). The evidence available on key matters which such a theory would have to axiomatize and define is far from being in any stable, statistical comprehensive, or experimentally controllable state. In the main it consists of fragmentary data, rival hypotheses, intuitive conjectures, and bundles of images. On the crucial issues—crucial, that is, in regard to a systematic understanding of the nature of translation—linguistics is still in a roughly hypothetical stage. We have some measurements, some scintillating tricks of the trade and far-ranging guesses. But no Euclidean *Elements*.

Every understanding is actively interpretative. Even the most literal statement (what, actually, is a 'literal' statement?) has a hermetic dimension. It needs decoding. It means more or less or something other than it says. Only tautologies are coextensive with their own restatement. Pure tautologies are, one suspects, extremely rare in natural language. Occurring at successive moments in time, even repetition guarantees no logically neutral equivalence. Thus language generates—grammar permitting, one would want to say 'language is'—a surplus of meaning (meaning is the surplus-value of the labour performed by language). A fundamental asymmetry is operative in the process and means of linguistic signification. There may be a deep if elusive clue here to the question of origins about which, as we have seen, almost nothing sensible can be said. Asymmetry between means and yield may be a logical but also an evolutionary feature of language.

In an estimated 97 per cent of human adults language is controlled by the left hemisphere of the brain. The difference shows up in the anatomy of the upper surface of the temporal lobe (in 65 per cent of cases studied, the *planum temporale* on the left side of the brain was one-third longer than on the right).¹ This asymmetry, which seems to be genetically determined, is dramatized by the fact

¹ Cf. Norman Geschwind and Walter Levitsky, 'Human Brain: Left-Right Asymmetries in Temporal Speech Regions' (*Science*, CLXI, 1968), and Norman Geschwind, 'Language and the Brain' (*Scientific American*, CCXXVI, 1972).

that the great majority of human beings are right-handed. Evidence for this goes back to the earliest known stone tools. No such cerebral unbalance has been found in primates or any other animal species. E. H. Lenneberg has suggested, in his *Biological Foundations of Language*, that there may be intricate bio-genetic and topological connections between asymmetry and the origins of speech. Perhaps the point can be put more generally.

It has been conjectured that hominids descended from the trees in the late Miocene or early Pliocene Ages. This move into level territory would entail an extraordinary enrichment and complication of social encounters. The archaic system of calls is no longer adequate and language comes to replace it. (Again a curious asymmetry or 'slippage' turns up: the human ear is most sensitive to sounds whose pitch corresponds to a frequency of about 3,000 cycles per second, whereas the ordinary speaking voice of men, women and children is at least two octaves lower in the scale. This may mean that call-systems and language coexisted, at least for a long time, on neighbouring frequencies.) Some anthropologists argue that the emergence of 'true language' was more sudden, that it coincided with the abrupt forward leap in the elaboration and diversity of tool-making towards the end of the last Ice Age. Neither hypothesis can be verified. But it might be that neither sees the full import of asymmetry. Pavlov's often-reiterated belief is worth recalling: the processes of learning and of language in men are different from those in animals. The upgrading in complexity is such as to make for a quantum jump. We are able to say so fantastically much more than we would need to for purposes of physical survival. We mean endlessly more than we say. The sources of superfluity, with their anatomical analogue in the asymmetries of the cortex, generate new surpluses. Asymmetry, in the central sense of which the configurations of the brain are the enacting form, was the trigger. It set in motion the dissonance, the dialectic of human consciousness. Unlike animal species we are out of balance with and in the world. Speech is the consequence and maintainer of this disequilibrium. Interpretation (translation) keeps the pressures of inventive excess from overwhelming and randomizing the medium. It limits the play of private intention, of plurality in meaning, at least at a rough and ready level of functional consensus.

In an ambiguity which is at one level ontological and at another ironic, idiomatic level, political or social, we speak left and act right. Translation mediates; it constrains the constant drive to dispersion. But this too, of course, is conjecture.

Virtually everything we know of the organization of the functions of language in the human brain derives from pathology. It has been recorded under abnormal conditions, during brain surgery, through electrical stimulation of exposed parts of the brain, by observing the more or less controlled effects of drugs on cerebral functions. Almost the entirety of our picture of how language 'is located in' and produced by the brain is an extrapolation from the evidence of speech disorders followed by the study of dead tissue. This evidence, which dates back to Paul Broca's famous papers of the 1860s, is voluminous. We know a good deal about specific cerebral dominance, i.e. the unilateral control of certain speech functions by particular areas of the cortex. Damage to Broca's area (the third frontal gyrus on the left side) produces a characteristic aphasia. Articulation becomes slurred and elliptic; connectives and word endings drop away. Damage to the Wernicke area, also in the left hemisphere but outside and to the rear of Broca's area, causes a totally different aphasia. Speech can remain very quick and grammatical, but it lacks content. The patient substitutes meaningless words and phrases for those he would normally articulate. Incorrect sounds slip into otherwise correct words. The fascinating corollary to the aphasia described by Carl Wernicke, some ten years after Broca, is its suggestive proximity to the generation of neologisms and metaphor. In many known cases the results of verbal or phonemic paraphasia (un-governed substitution) are almost inspired. There is a sense in which a great poet or punster is a human being able to induce and select from a Wernicke aphasia. The 'Sinbad the sailor' sequence from Joyce's *Ulysses* gives a fair illustration. But with a crucial difference: though aural reception of non-verbal sounds and of music may remain perfectly normal, a lesion in the Wernicke area will cut down severely on understanding. When both areas are intact but disconnected, the result is conduction aphasia. Fluent but abnormal speech continues, together with a large measure of comprehension. The patient is, however, incapable of repeating spoken language.

The study of these aphasias and of many other aspects of the neurophysiology of the brain does allow the construction of a possible model for the organization of speech. A division of functions takes place between Broca's area and Wernicke's depending on whether language is heard or read. When a word is read, for example, the angular gyrus located towards the rear of the left hemisphere receives a stimulus from the primary visual areas of the cortex. Having, as it were, passed through the 'transformer', this stimulus in turn arouses the corresponding auditory form of the word in the Wernicke area. If the word is to be spoken, the 'current' moves in the reverse direction, from Wernicke to Broca.¹

Even to know so much or to have enough evidence to sustain such a model is a momentous achievement. Its therapeutic and cognitive implications are obvious. But it is by no means clear that a neurophysiological scheme and the deepening analysis and treatment of pathological states will lead to an understanding of the production of human speech. To know how a process is organized, to have a flow-chart of sequential operations, is not, necessarily, to know the nature of the energies involved. A phenomenon can be mapped, but the map can be of the surface. To say, as do the textbooks, that the third frontal gyrus 'transforms' an auditory input into a visual-verbal output or feedback, is to substitute one vocabulary of images for another. Unlike the 'animal spirits' of Cartesian physiology, the new electro-chemical vocabulary allows and rationalizes medical treatment. This is an immense step forward. But it is an empirical and not, necessarily, analytic step. We do not know *what* it is we are talking about, though our discourse may induce profitable, experimentally verifiable techniques of treatment.

What are the dynamics of conceptualization? In what ways are sensory stimuli translated into, matched with appropriate verbal

¹ Cf. O. L. Zangwill, *Cerebral Dominance and Its Relation to Psychological Function* (London, 1960); T. Alajouanine, *L'aphasie et le langage pathologique* (Paris, 1968); A. R. Luria, *Traumatic Aphasia: Its Syndromes, Psychology and Treatment* (The Hague, 1970). For the intriguing suggestion that the limited capacities for speech of the right hemisphere could represent language at an exceedingly primitive level, cf. the report on the work of M. S. Gazzaniga in *New Scientist*, LIII, 1972, p. 365. The findings were first reported in *Neuropsychologia*, IX, 1972.

units? To what extent are visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile perceptions themselves triggered and constrained by the (pre-set, self-correcting?) verbal matrix? How are words or units of information 'banked'? What is the electro-chemistry of scanning and of memory which ensures the right sequence of input, classification, recall, and emission? Does speech become organized, rule-governed at the interface between older and newer areas of the cortex? Is it, in some sense which we cannot even phrase adequately, an adaptive imitation of those much earlier, 'deeper' processes of encoding, replication, and punctuation which could parallel the genetic structure and transmission of organic forms? In what ways are the language-centres of the cortex subject to further evolution? (Can we even 'imagine' a more evolved mode of speech?)

An impressive amount of thought and experimental research is going into these problems at the present time. The mathematics of multi-dimensional interactive spaces and lattices, the projection of 'computer behaviour' on to possible models of cerebral functions, the theoretical and mechanical investigation of artificial intelligence, are producing a stream of sophisticated, often suggestive ideas. But it is, I believe, fair to say that nothing put forward until now in either theoretic design or mechanical mimicry comes even remotely in reach of the most rudimentary linguistic realities. The gap is not only one of utterly different orders of complexity. It seems rather as if the concept of a neurochemical 'explanation' of human speech and consciousness—the two are very nearly inseparable—were itself deceptive. The accumulation of physiological data and therapeutic practice could be leading towards a different, not necessarily relevant, sort of knowledge. There is nothing occult about this divergence. I have stressed throughout that the questions we ask of language and the answers we receive in (from) language are unalterably linguistic. We can neither formulate questions nor state replies outside the structures of language which are themselves the object of inquiry. It is not evident that the sciences, however advanced, will offer a reasonable procedure for arriving at an external view. We know no exit from the skin of our skin. This also, to be sure, is conjecture. What is certain is the fact that no model available at present or foreseeable in the fairly near future justifies any con-

fidant invocation of a 'theory of the generation of speech or of the transformation of cognitive material into semantic units'.

Zoologists report that the call-systems of gibbons have differentiated into what might be termed local 'dialects'. The signals emitted by whales and dolphins seem to show a certain degree of specificity and variation as between particular herds or schools. But there is no way of determining whether such phonetic variations, with their obvious utility for mutual recognition and territorial assertion, are in any way analogous to or a rudimentary stage of the differentiation in human speech forms. The diversity and mutual incomprehensibility of human tongues are, so far as we have any evidence, unique to man and inseparable from the existence of language as we know it. Nothing is known of their beginnings or fundamental aetiology.

I have sketched my own conviction. In significant measure, different languages are different, inherently creative counter-proposals to the constraints, to the limiting universals of biological and ecological conditions. They are the instruments of storage and of transmission of legacies of experience and imaginative construction particular to a given community. We do not yet know if the 'deep structures' postulated by transformational-generative grammars are in fact substantive universals. But if they are, the immense diversities of languages as men have spoken and speak them can be interpreted as a direct rebellion against the undifferentiated constraints of biological universality. In their formidable variety 'surface structures' would be an escape from rather than a contingent vocalization of 'deep structures'. Languages communicate inward to the native speaker with a density and pressure of shared intimation which are only partly, grudgingly yielded to the outsider. A major portion of language is enclosure and willed opaqueness. The intent is so ancient, its execution so remote from our public states of mind that we are not consciously aware of it. But it lives on in the layered fabric, in the tenacious quiddity of language, and becomes obvious when languages meet.

These points cannot be proved. I strongly feel that the hypothesis of 'alternity' and meta- or non-information is the one which describes most coherently the actual facts of linguistic diversity. It seems to me to take in more of semantic, historical, and psychological reality than other conjectures do. We will see how it forces itself

the importance of appearance?

2

upon one during the study of actual problems of translation, when one is concretely involved with the polysemic, hermetic nature of utterance. It is conceivable that we have misread the Babel myth. The tower did not mark the end of a blessed monism, of a universal-language situation. The bewildering prodigality of tongues had long existed, and had materially complicated the enterprise of men. In trying to build the tower, the nations stumbled on the great secret: that true understanding is possible only when there is silence. They built silently, and there lay the danger to God.

Whatever its causes, the multilingual condition invites or compels a certain percentage of mankind to speak more than one language. It also means that the exchanges of information, of verbalized messages on which history and the life of society depend, are to a very large part interlingual. They demand translation. The polyglot situation and the requirements which follow from it depend totally on the fact that the human mind has the capacity to learn and to house more than one tongue. There is nothing obvious, nothing organically necessitated about this capacity. It is a startling and complex attribute. We know nothing of its historical origins, though these are presumably coincident with the beginnings of the division of labour and of trade between communities. We do not know whether it has limits. There are reliable records of polyglots with some measure of fluency in anywhere up to twenty-five languages. Is there any boundary other than the time span of individual lives? The study of the learning and development of speech in infants and young children is a large field.¹ Though Chomskyan theories greatly undervalue the role of environmental as against innate factors—surely it is clear that *both* are involved and interactive—transformational grammars have given a powerful impetus to the investigation of how speech is acquired. There have also been inquiries into the linguistic growth of bilingual individuals.² But until now results have been either of the most general, intuitive sort, i.e. the ability to learn a second or

¹ For a lucid survey cf. M. M. Lewis, *Language, Thought and Personality in Infancy and Childhood* (London, 1963). Cf. also D. O. Hebb, W. E. Lambert, E. R. Tucker, 'Language, Thought and Experience' (*The Modern Language Journal*, LV, 1971).

² The most detailed study remains that of W. Leopold, *Speech Development of a Bilingual Child: a Linguist's Record* (Northwestern University Press, 1939-47).

third language with ease diminishes with age, or they have been fairly trivial statistics on the rates of acquisition of vowels, consonants, and phonemes during early years of life.¹ Neither the Chomskyan model of competence/performance, nor socio-linguistic surveys of multilingual children or communities tell us what is meant by 'learning a language' or by 'learning two or more languages', at the crucial level of the central nervous system.

Claims made towards a biochemical understanding of learning and of memory have recently been dramatic. From the point of view of the human brain the process of learning constitutes the most immediate environmental change. The research of Holger Hydén, of Steven Rose, and of other neurophysiologists and biochemists has shown that learning, which can be defined as repeated exposure to the stimulus of information, is accompanied by changed patterns of protein synthesis in the relevant areas of the cortex. There is evidence that a particular environmental change will activate a specific group or population of neurones. If the change is focused and sustained, as occurs during the reception and internalization of 'experience-information', corresponding alterations take place in the properties of these neurones. There are experimental grounds for believing that their configurations and patterns of assembly change. This 're-configuration' would provide the physical basis and organization of memory. When the stimulus weakens, becomes merely occasional, or is altogether absent, i.e. when the brain is no longer, or only rarely called upon to register and redeploy the given body of information, the neuronal changes dissipate and the neurones revert to their original, possibly undifferentiated or randomized grouping. Even as

¹ Cf. Roman Jakobson, 'Les lois phoniques du langage enfantin et leur place dans la phonologie générale', in N. S. Troubetzkoy, *Principes de phonologie* (Paris, 1949), and Helen Couteras and Sol Saporta, 'Phonological Development in the Speech of a Bilingual Child' in *Language Behavior*, compiled by J. Akin, A. Goldberg, G. Myers, J. Stewart (The Hague, 1970). Three special aspects of bilingual learning are examined respectively in W. E. Lambert, 'Measurement of the linguistic dominance of bilinguals' (*Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology* (L, 1955); M. S. Preston and W. E. Lambert, 'Interlingual Interference in a Bilingual Version of the Stroop Color-Word Task' (*Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, VIII, 1969); and J. C. Yuille, A. Paivio, W. E. Lambert, 'Noun and Adjective Imagery and Order in Paired-Associate Learning by French and English Subjects' (*Canadian Journal of Psychology*, XXIII, 1969).

information is energy, so forgetting is entropy. There is also beginning to be some evidence as to couplings between the electrical activities of the cortex under stimulus and the subsequent biochemical events which seem to regulate the reception, the storage, and the retrievability of knowledge in and by the human brain.

Over the next years there *may* be a spectacular progress of insight into the biochemistry of the central nervous system. Though it is conceptually and practically extremely difficult to isolate a single type of stimulus from the fact of stimulation as such (environment interconnects at every point), refinements in microbiology may lead to correlations between specific classes of information and specific changes in protein synthesis and neuronal assembly. At the biochemical level, the idea that we are 'shaped' by what we learn could take on a material corollary. On present evidence, however, it is impossible to go beyond rudimentary idealizations. The neurochemistry of language-acquisition, the understanding of the changes in RNA which may accompany the 'storage' of a language in the memory centres and synoptic terminals of the cortex, necessitate models of a complexity, of a multi-dimensionality beyond anything we can now conceive of. Information can be conceived of as environment. The learning process and the ordered 'stacking' of memory must themselves constitute a dynamic, multi-directional phenomenon. The brain is never a passive tympanum. The act of internalization, however subconscious or reflexive, presumably triggers an immensely ramified field of associative recognitions, relocations, and serial impulses. Reasoning by analogy most probably has its counterpart in neuronal mechanisms through which a new unit of input is tagged and 'inserted' in its proper location. One must think of the cortex as an active space in which stimulus and response, continuity and change, inheritance and environment are totally reciprocal, totally definitional of each other.

By 'environment', moreover, much more is intended than the neurochemistry of stimulus acting on innate bio-genetic structures. Learning and memory are conditioned, at every level, by social and historical agencies. Information is neither in substance nor conceptually value-free. Ideology, economic and class circumstance, the historical moment do much to define the content, the relative hier-

archies, the sheer visibility of knowledge as knowledge, of information or experience as worth recording. These categories are not permanent. Different societies, different epochs expose the central nervous system to different fields of stimulation. This is decisively the case in regard to language. A theory of the generation of language based on a conjectural postulate of innate competence and on the performance of an 'ideal speaker-listener relation' is no more than naked abstraction. The interface between the neurochemistry of language-learning and language-recall on the one hand, and the socio-historical framework in which an actual human being uses natural language on the other, is no remote, external boundary. The cortex and the 'world outside' in which language can be seen as a form of work, of social production, of economic and ideological exchange, cannot be meaningfully separated. Together they make up the generative environment of consciousness, the fabric of consciousness which is also environment.¹ But the number of parameters and variants is so great, and the modes of interaction are, by all evidence, so complex, that we cannot systematically represent or analyse them with the resources now available or, it may be, foreseeable.

Introspectively, one draws pictures. Thus one describes oneself as 'looking for' a word. Whenever it is baffled or momentarily vacuous, the search, the act of scanning, suggests circuitry. The relevant sensation or, more cogently, the vulgarized images we make up of what are subliminal processes, leave one with a compelling notion of nervous probes 'trying this or that connection', recoiling where the wire is blocked or broken and seeking alternative channels until the right contact is made. The sensation of a 'near-miss' can be tactile. The sought word or phrase is a 'micromillimeter away from' the scanner; it is poised obstinately at the edge of retrieval. One's focus becomes excited and insistent. It seems to press against a material

¹ It is on this point that Marxist critiques of Chomskyan linguistics as an 'empty mentalism' no less naïvely-deterministic than the theories of Skinner have been most telling. Cf. F. Rossi-Landi, *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* (Milan, 1968); J. Kristeva: *Σημειωτική. Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris, 1969), particularly pp. 280-5; Denis Slakta, 'Esquisse d'une théorie lexico-sémantique: pour une analyse d'un texte politique' in *Langages*, XXIII, 1971; Augusto Ponzio, 'Grammatica trasformazionale e ideologia politica' in *Idéologie*, XVI-XVII, 1972. For a summary statement and full bibliography, cf. F. Rossi-Landi, *Ideologies of Linguistic Relativity* (The Hague, 1973).

impediment. The 'muscles' of attention ache. Then comes the breach in the dam, the looked-for word or phrase flashing into consciousness. We know nothing of the relevant kinetics, but the implication of a correct location, of a 'slotting into place' is forceful, if only because of the muted but unmistakable impression of release, of a calming click which accompanies the instant of recall. When the right word is found, compression gives, and a deep-breathing currency—in the dual sense of 'flow' and 'integrated routine'—resumes. In contrast, under the spur of stimulants or histrionic occasion, or in the strange weightless tension of tiredness of mind, resistance seems to diminish in the verbal circuits and synapses multiply. Every bell chimes. Homonyms, paronomasia, acoustic and semantic cognates, synecdochic sets, analogies, associative strings proliferate, undulating at extreme speed, sometimes with incongruous but pointed logic, across the surfaces of consciousness. The acrostic or cross-word yields faster than our pencil can follow. We seem to know even more than we had forgotten, as if central sediments of memory or reserves normally unrecorded, because lightly imprinted or laid down without deliberate marking, had been galvanized. At yet another level of banal experience there are short-circuits and wires fuse. The identical morpheme, tonal combination, or atrophied phrase forces itself on the inner ear, insistent, like a bulb going on and off pointlessly. Some part of the memory current is trapped. Dreams, one suspects, may be attempts at associative context, pictorializations seeking to provide an *ad hoc* rationality, around crossed wires of blocked subconscious speech.

Penumbra as they are, and awkwardly dependent on the patronage of a contingent body of metaphor—that of electric circuits and storage batteries, or, at a mildly more dignified remove, of holograms and data-banks—all these sub-articulate sensations of tensed search, of decompression after the find, of lowered resistance under certain conditions, of wires crossed or fused, do point towards a spatial matrix, towards orderings in dimensionality. Language would seem to have or inhabit volume.

For the polyglot this impression is reinforced. He 'switches' from one language to another with a motion that can have a lateral and/or a vertical feel. As he moves from his native tongue to one acquired

Chapter Five

THE HERMENEUTIC MOTION

I

THE hermeneutic motion, the act of elicitation and appropriative transfer of meaning, is fourfold. There is initiative trust, an investment of belief, underwritten by previous experience but epistemologically exposed and psychologically hazardous, in the meaningfulness, in the 'seriousness' of the facing or, strictly speaking, adverse text. We venture a leap: we grant *ab initio* that there is 'something there' to be understood, that the transfer will not be void. All understanding, and the demonstrative statement of understanding which is translation, starts with an act of trust. This confiding will, ordinarily, be instantaneous and unexamined, but it has a complex base. It is an operative convention which derives from a sequence of phenomenological assumptions about the coherence of the world, about the presence of meaning in very different, perhaps formally antithetical semantic systems, about the validity of analogy and parallel. The radical generosity of the translator ('I grant beforehand that there must be something there'), his trust in the 'other', as yet untried, unmapped alternity of statement, concentrates to a philosophically dramatic degree the human bias towards seeing the world as symbolic, as constituted of relations in which 'this' can stand for 'that', and must in fact be able to do so if there are to be meanings and structures.

But the trust can never be final. It is betrayed, trivially, by nonsense, by the discovery that 'there is nothing there' to elicit and translate. Nonsense rhymes, *poésie concrète*, glossolalia are untranslatable because they are lexically non-communicative or deliberately insignificant. The commitment of trust will, however, be tested,

more or less severely, also in the common run and process of language acquisition and translation (the two being intimately connected). 'This means nothing' asserts the exasperated child in front of his Latin reader or the beginner at Berlitz. The sensation comes very close to being tactile, as of a blank, sloping surface which gives no purchase. Social incentive, the officious evidence of precedent—'others have managed to translate this bit before you'—keeps one at the task. But the donation of trust remains ontologically spontaneous and anticipates proof, often by a long, arduous gap (there are texts, says Walter Benjamin which will be translated only 'after us'). As he sets out, the translator must gamble on the coherence, on the symbolic plenitude of the world. Concomitantly he leaves himself vulnerable, though only in extremity and at the theoretical edge, to two dialectically related, mutually determined metaphysical risks. He may find that 'anything' or 'almost anything' can mean 'everything'. This is the vertigo of self-sustaining metaphoric or analogic enchainment experienced by medieval exegetists. Or he may find that there is 'nothing there' which can be divorced from its formal autonomy, that every meaning worth expressing is monadic and will not enter into any alternative mould. There is Kabbalistic speculation, to which I will return, about a day on which words will shake off 'the burden of having to mean' and will be only themselves, blank and replete as stone.

After trust comes aggression. The second move of the translator is incursive and extractive. The relevant analysis is that of Heidegger when he focuses our attention on understanding as an act, on the access, inherently appropriative and therefore violent, of *Erkenntnis* to *Dasein*. *Da-sein*, the 'thing there', 'the thing that is because it is there', only comes into authentic being when it is comprehended, i.e. translated.¹ The postulate that all cognition is aggressive, that every proposition is an inroad on the world, is, of course, Hegelian. It is Heidegger's contribution to have shown that understanding, recognition, interpretation are a compacted, unavoidable mode of attack. We can modulate Heidegger's insistence that understanding is not a matter of method but of primary being, that 'being consists in the

¹ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, 'Existence et herméneutique' in *Le Conflit des interprétations* (Paris, 1969).

images led into the terrestrial, to an earthly immediacy, to an early happening, yet despite this—in obedience to a supreme human compulsion—must be led further and further, must find a higher expression of earthly immediacy in the beyond, must lift the earthly happening over and beyond its this-sidedness to a still higher symbol; and even though the symbolic chain threatened to be severed at the boundary, to fall apart on the border of the celestial, evaporating on the resistance offered by the unattainable, forever discontinued, forever severed, the danger is warded off, warded off again and again. . . .

Few concessions are made to the natural breaks and lucidities of English (though a narrative past tense is substituted for Broch's immediate 'mystical' present). 'Arch-image', 'threatened to be severed at', 'evaporated on the resistance', and many other units abandon the norm of English word-usage or grammar. Taken 'straight', this bit of prose suggests Gertrude Stein seeking to transcribe and perhaps parody Kant. But it is hardly meant to stand alone. It forces us back to the original which it in turn illuminates; its own opaqueness induces the original to declare itself more fully. It poses echoing questions as does a critical exegesis. In this interlinear—between the lines of the German text, between the semantic lines of English and of German, between both languages and an unknown but clearly postulated tongue which can transcend the constraints of imprecise objective reference—we come close to the poets' dream of an absolute idiolect. Here is a *tertium datum* unique to its occasion and which refuses to serve either as example or canonic mould. There is from the bilingual weave of *The Death of Virgil* (1945) no necessary return to either English or to any German text except Broch's own. The final sentence of the book seeks to take us to 'the word beyond speech'.

Reference to meaning or language 'beyond speech' can be a heuristic device as at the end of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. It can be a conceit, often irritating, in epistemology or mysticism. But it can also serve as a metaphor, almost technical, through which to convey a genuine experience. The writer feels that there is a formal or substantive gap between his intentions, between the pressures of incipient shape or apprehension which he undoubtedly registers, and the means of expression available to him in the language. More generally,

of the translator as 'the poet of poetry', Borchardt conceived of translation as having a unique authority against time and the banal contingency of historical fact. By virtue of 'creative retransformation' (*Rückverwandlung*), the translator could propose, indeed enact an alternative development for his own language and culture. True archaicism, explains Borchardt in a letter to Josef Hofmiller of February 1911, is not antiquarian pastiche, but an active, even violent intrusion on the seemingly unalterable fabric of the past. The 'archaicist' enforces his will on the past, discarding from history or adding to it in the perspective of hindsight. The passage is astonishing:

der genuine Archaismus greift in die Geschichte nachträglich ein, zwingt sie für die ganze Dauer des Kunstwerks nach seinem Willen um, wirft vom Vergangenen weg was ihm nicht passt, und surrogiert ihr schöpferisch aus seinem Gegenwertsgefühl was es braucht; wie sein Ausgang nicht die Sehnsucht nach der Vergangenheit, sondern das resolute Bewusstsein ihres unangefochtenen Besitzes ist, so wird sein Ziel nicht ihre Illusion, sondern im Goethischen Sinne des Wortes die Travestie.

This was Borchardt's method in 'travestying' Dante, in making *Dante Deutsch* as his title blankly proclaims. Borchardt's medium is a fiction of arrested and redirected time, a personal *Frühneuhochdeutsch* with elements ranging from the fourteenth century to Luther. It contains bits of High, Low, and Middle High German, Alemannic, Alpine dialects, *termini technici* from the vocabulary of mines and quarries (*teufe, stollen, zeche, guhr, sintern*) and word-forms and grammatical devices coined by Borchardt.¹ He had no illusion as to its fictive character:

Die Sprache in die ich übertrug, kannte ich weder als solche noch konnte es sie als solche gegeben haben; das Original warf erst ihren Schatten gegen meine innere Wand: sie entstand, wie eine Dichtersprache entsteht, *ipso actu* des Werkes. Die italienische Wendungen, genau befolgt, ergaben ein Deutsch, das zwischen 1250 und 1340 im ganzen Oberdeutschland sehr leidlich verstanden worden wäre.²

¹ Cf. the authoritative study of Borchardt's language in Hans-Georg Dewitz, '*Dante Deutsch*': Studien zu Rudolf Borchardts Uebertragung der '*Divina Comedia*' (Göppingen, 1971), pp. 167-222.

² Rudolf Borchardt, *Gesammelte Werke* (Stuttgart, 1959), II, p. 522.

But to make of this linguistic fiction a possible 'might have been', an alternity with potential consequences for the present and future of the German spirit, was the object of the exercise. That which had never been might still become (*Ungeschehenes immer noch geschehen*).

Though it was noticed by Hesse, Curtius, Vossler, and Hofmannsthal, *Dante Deutsch* has remained largely ignored. Its texture is as difficult and in some ways as secretive as the vision of potential history which it embodies. It is, however, certainly so far as the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* are concerned, a work of peculiar genius. Borchardt 'relived' Dante with an almost pathological intensity; his reading of the poem as 'ein Hochgebirge Epos', a traverse of alpine chasms and escarpments, is at once singular and convincingly sustained. It is interesting to set Borchardt's version of Ulysses' narrative beside Littré's:

'Brüder, die mir durch hundert tausend wüste
 fährden bis her in untergang gefronet:
 dieser schon also winzigen, dieser rüste,
 Die unser sinnen annoch ist geschonet,
 wollet nicht weigern die auferschliessung
 —der sonne nach—der welt da nichts mehr wohnt!
 Betrachtet in euch selber eure spriessung!
 ihr kamt nich her zu leben gleich getier,
 ja zu befolgen mannheit und entschliessung.'
 In den gefährten wetzete ich solchen gier
 mit diesem kurzen spruch nach fahrt ins weite,
 dass ich sie dann nicht mögen wenden schier.
 Und lassend hinter uns des ostens breite,
 schufen uns ruder schwingen toll zu fliegen,
 allstunds zubüssend bei der linken seite.
 Alls das gestirn des andern poles siegen
 sah schon die nacht, und unsern abgesunken,
 als thät er tief in meeres grunde liegen.

There are admirable nuances: *untergang* for *occidente* (with the premonitory touch of disaster), *auferschliessung* with its delicate suggestion of the image of outward motion latent in *esperienza*, *mannheit* for *virtute*—an equivalence which restores the force of

substantial portion of Western literature, plastic art, and philosophic discourse.

The history of Western drama, as we know it, often reads like a prolonged echo of the doomed informalities (literally the failure to define separate forms) between gods and men in a small number of Greek households. The imbrolios suffered by the clan of Atreus were a set theme in epic and lyric poetry by the time Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides gave them theatrical form. After that, echo never ceases. Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon* are at the origin of Renaissance verse-tragedy in Italy, France, and England. The line of interanimation is a direct one to Alfieri. Modern drama is steeped in the story: Hofmannsthal, Claudel, O'Neill, Giraudoux, T. S. Eliot, Hauptmann, and Sartre produce some of the more successful variants. If we include musical and choreographic treatments, witness Martha Graham's inspired Clytemnestra, the modern catalogue would double or treble. Branches from the main stem are equally rich. The Iphigenia chapter is dramatized in a long sequence of plays from Euripides to Racine and Goethe. We know that Aeschylus had staged the catastrophe of the house of Laius before Sophocles' *Oedipus*, and that Euripides' *Phoenician Women* is only one among several Euripidean versions of the Theban cycle (which, of course, extends to the *Bacchae*). Seneca is followed by Corneille and Alfieri. Yeats rephrases *Oedipus at Colonus*. Cocteau's Jocasta daubing cold-cream on her face next to the cradle of her infant son is a continuation, serious yet parodistic, of an unbroken series. In Sophocles, Euripides, Racine, Alfieri, Hölderlin, Cocteau, Anouilh, and Brecht we find dramatizations of the Antigone story and of the fratricidal struggle between Eteocles and Polynices. As we noted earlier, the interanimations of the problem of Antigone in the thought and writings of Hölderlin, Hegel, and Kierkegaard produce one of the most vivid exchanges of feeling and philosophic debate in modern intellectual history. When Giraudoux entitled his play *Amphitryon* 38, he was underestimating the number of his predecessors. Drawing on variants of the tale in Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides wrote plays, now lost, on the ambiguous good fortune of the Theban general and his divine double. Plautus took up the subject and seems to have initiated the term 'tragi-

chosis which stretches back, as in Plato's *Ion*, to an initial mystery of divine vocation. The 'rewrite rules' vary widely from period to period, from genre to genre. Tennyson does not imitate or translate as did Pope. Picasso's variations on Velasquez have a somewhat different aesthetic from Manet's uses of Goya. But the central point is that all these metamorphic relations have as their underlying deep structure a process of translation. It is this process, and the continuum of reciprocal transformation and decipherment which it ensures, that determine the code of inheritance in our civilization.

One may celebrate this fact as does Leishman when he speaks 'of the continuity of Western European culture and civilization, of the endless possibilities of individual difference within that great identity, and of the perfect freedom that is possible within that service'.¹ Or one can find this 'translational' condition maddeningly oppressive, as did the poets of Dada, as did D. H. Lawrence in his essay on 'The Good Man': 'This is our true bondage. This is the agony of our human existence, that we can only feel things in conventional feeling-patterns. Because when these feeling-patterns become inadequate, when they will no longer body forth the workings of the yeasty soul, then we are in torture.' But whether we experience it as a source of strength or of suffocation, the fact itself remains. No statement starts completely anew, no meaning comes from a void:

Even the greatest artist—and he more than others—needs an idiom to work in. Only tradition, such as he finds it, can provide him with the raw material of imagery which he needs to represent an event or a 'fragment of nature'. He can re-fashion this imagery, adapt it to its task, assimilate it to his needs and change it beyond recognition, but he can no more represent what is in front of his eyes without a pre-existing stock of acquired images than he can paint it without the pre-existing colours which he must have on his palette.²

Western art is, more often than not, about preceding art; literature about literature. The word 'about' points to the crucial ontological dependence, to the fact that a previous work or body of work is, in some degree, the *raison d'être* of the work in hand. We have seen that

¹ J. B. Leishman, *Translating Horace*, p. 105.

² E. H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and other Essays on the Theory of Art* (London, 1963), p. 126.

this degree can vary from immediate reduplication to tangential allusion and change almost beyond recognition. But the dependence is there, and its structure is that of translation.

3

We are so much the product of set feeling-patterns, Western culture has so thoroughly stylized our perceptions, that we experience our 'traditionality' as natural. In particular, we tend to leave unquestioned the historical causes, the roots of determinism which underlie the 'recursive' structure of our sensibility and expressive codes. The problem of origins is one of extreme difficulty if only because the accumulated pressures from the past, embedded in our semantics, in our conventions of logic, bend our questions into circular shapes. The themes of which so much of our philosophy, art, literature are a sequence of variations, the gestures through which we articulate fundamental meanings and values are, if we consider them closely, quite restricted. The initial 'set' has generated an incommensurable series of local variants and figures (our 'topologies'), but in itself it seems to have contained only a limited number of units. How is one to think of these? The concept of 'archetypes' is seductive. Robert Graves's assurance 'To Juan at the Winter Solstice' that 'There is one story and one story only / That will prove worth your telling' sets echo going. Great art, poetry that pierces, are *déjà-vu*, lighting for recognition places immemorial, innately familiar to our racial, historical recollection. We have been there before; there is a genetic code of transmitted consciousness. Until now, however, no biological mechanism is known which could make the persistence and reduplication of archetypes, especially at the level of specific images, episodes, scenes, at all plausible. There is a more naïve objection as well. Given our common neurophysiological build, archetypal images, sign systems ought to be demonstrably universal. Those stylizations and continuities of coding which we can verify are, however, cultural specific. Our Western feeling-patterns, as they have come down to us through thematic development, are 'ours', taking this possessive to delimit the Graeco-Latin and Hebraic circumference.

This suggests an alternative source of constancy. It may be that the Mediterranean achievement proved inescapable. Sixty years after *Lear*, Milton in his prefatory note to *Samson Agonistes*, spoke of Greek tragic drama as the timeless model 'unequaled yet by any'. To the Renaissance, to Winckelmann, the whole issue seemed straightforward. Granted the fact that fundamental intellectual insights and psychological attitudes are of a limited order, the Greeks had found for both means of plastic and verbal expression which were supreme and which had exhausted the likely possibilities. What came after was variation, adjustment to local context, and critique (the critique of the canonic being *the* modern and ontologically inferior mode). Yielding to intuitive conviction, and in patent rebuke to his own construct of history, Marx proclaimed that Greek art and literature would never be surpassed. They had sprung from a concordance, by definition unrepeatably, between 'the childhood of the race' and the highest levels of technical craft. For Nietzsche the record of the species after the ruin of the antique *polis* was one of progressive diminution. All renaissances were only partial, strained spurts of nostalgia for a lost mastery over intellectual and aesthetic expression. Even as the history of religion in the West has been one of variations on and accretions to the Judaic-Hellenistic canon, so our metaphysics, visual arts, humanities, scientific criteria, have reproduced, more or less designedly, the Platonic, Aristotelian, Homeric, or Sophoclean paradigm. The novelty of content and of empirical consequence in the natural sciences and technology have obscured the determinist constancy of tradition. But in philosophic discourse and the arts, where novelty of content is at best a problematic notion, the impulse to repetition, to organization via backward reference, is sovereign. Testimony from an unexpected quarter makes the point exhaustively. Civilization, as we know and pursue it, writes Thoreau in *Walden* (III. 6) is transcription:

Those who have not learned to read the ancient classics in the language in which they were written must have a very imperfect knowledge of the history of the human race; for it is remarkable that no transcript of them has ever been made into any modern tongue, unless our civilization itself may be regarded as such a transcript. Homer has never yet been printed in English, nor Aeschylus, nor Virgil even, works as refined, as solidly done,

Goya, Velasquez, Manet, are external products of a constant revision, a 'seeing again' in the light of technical and cultural shifts. Had we only Picasso's sculptures, graphics, and paintings, we could reconstruct a fair portion of the development of the arts from the Minoan to Cézanne. In twentieth-century literature, the elements of *reprise* have been obsessive, and they have organized precisely those texts which at first seemed most revolutionary. 'The Waste Land', *Ulysses*, Pound's *Cantos* are deliberate assemblages, in-gatherings of a cultural past felt to be in danger of dissolution. The long sequence of imitations, translations, masked quotations, and explicit historical painting in Robert Lowell's *History* has carried the same technique into the 1970s. The apparent iconoclasts have turned out to be more or less anguished custodians racing through the museum of civilization, seeking order and sanctuary for its treasures, before closing time. In modernism *collage* has been the representative device. The new, even at its most scandalous, has been set against an informing background and framework of tradition. Stravinsky, Picasso, Braque, Eliot, Joyce, Pound—the 'makers of the new'—have been neo-classics, often as observant of canonic precedent as their seventeenth-century forbears.

A second symptom points to our heightened awareness of traditionality, of the symbolic and expressive constraints encoded in our culture. The modern attention to myth and ritual has transformed anthropology. We are being taught to look on the 'stasis', on the myth-bound structure of primitive societies with an entirely new understanding and intuition of analogy. Had he not been conscious of the constraints, of the conservatism inherent in our own language habits and behavioural format, Lévi-Strauss could never have explored the determinism, the normative reciprocities of speech and myth, of myth and social practice in Amerindian civilizations. Long persuaded of the privileged dynamism of Western ways, of the presumably unique factor of iconoclasm and futurism operative in Western science and technology, we are now experiencing a subtle counter-current, a new understanding of our confinement within ancient bounds of mental habit. We too are creatures of fable and recursive dreams.

Does this reflexive use of the cultural past, this recognition of

how much is 'translational' in our field of reference, point to a real crisis? Do those whose antennae are most alert, who, in the words of the Russian poetess Tsvetaeva, have 'perfect pitch for the future' really anticipate the end of the linguistic-cultural continuum? And if so, what evidence is there to support their terror, their flight to the *musée imaginaire*? I have sought to discuss the issue elsewhere.¹ The flowering of a sub- and semi-literacy in mass education, in the mass media, very obviously challenges the concept of cultural canons. The discipline of referential recognition, of citation, of a shared symbolic and syntactic code which marked traditional literacy are, increasingly, the prerogative or burden of an élite. This was always more or less the case; but the élite is no longer in an economic or political position to enforce its ideals on the community at large (even if it had the psychological impulse to do so). There is no doubt that patterns of articulate speech, reading habits, fundamental legacies of grammaticality, are under pressure. We read little that is ancient or demanding; we know less by heart. But although the inroads of populism and technocracy on cultural coherence have been drastic, the scale, the depth of penetration of the phenomenon are very difficult to assess. The outward gains of barbarism which threaten to trivialize our schools, which demean the level of discourse in our politics, which cheapen the human word, are so strident as to make deeper currents almost impalpable. It may be that cultural traditions are more firmly anchored in our syntax than we realize, and that we shall continue to translate from the past of our individual and social being whether we would or not.

The threat of dispersal, of a crisis in the organic coherence between language and its cultural content, could stem from another and paradoxical direction. Here the argument bears crucially on English.

'At countless points on the earth's surface, English will be the most available language—English of some sort.'² I. A. Richards's prediction, made in 1943, has proved accurate. Like no other tongue before it, English has expanded into a world-language. It has far out-

¹ Cf. Chapter IV of *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture* (London, 1971), and 'Do Books Matter?' in *Do Books Matter?*, edited by B. Baumfield (London, 1973).

² I. A. Richards, *Basic English and its Uses* (London, 1943), p. 120.

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