

It seems that we learn something about art when we experience what the word *solitude* is meant to designate. This word has been much abused. Still, what does the expression *to be alone* signify? When is one alone? Asking this question should not simply lead us into melancholy reflections. Solitude as the world understands it is a hurt which requires no further comment here.

We do not intend to evoke the artist's solitude either — that which is said to be necessary to him for the practice of his art. When Rilke writes to the countess of Solms-Laubach (August 3, 1907), "For weeks, except for two short interruptions, I haven't pronounced a single word; my solitude has finally encircled me and I am inside my efforts just as the core is in the fruit," the solitude of which he speaks is not the essential solitude. It is concentration.

The Solitude of the Work

In the solitude of the work — the work of art, the literary work — we discover a more essential solitude. It excludes the complacent isolation of individualism; it has nothing to do with the quest for singularity. The fact that one sustains a stalwart attitude throughout the disciplined course of the day does not dissipate it. He who writes the work is set aside; he who has written it is dismissed. He who is dismissed, moreover, doesn't know it. This ignorance preserves him. It distracts him by authorizing him to persevere. The writer never knows whether the work is done. What he has finished in one book, he starts over or destroys in another. Valéry, celebrating this infinite quality which the work enjoys, still sees only its least problematic aspect. That the work is infinite means, for him, that the artist, though unable to finish it, can nevertheless make it the delimited site of an endless task whose incompleteness

develops the mastery of the mind, expresses this mastery, expresses it by developing it in the form of power. At a certain moment, circumstances—that is, history, in the person of the publisher or in the guise of financial exigencies, social duties—pronounce the missing end, and the artist, freed by a *dénouement* of pure constraint, pursues the unfinished matter elsewhere.

The infinite nature of the work, seen thus, is just the mind's infiniteness. The mind wants to fulfill itself in a single work, instead of realizing itself in an infinity of works and in history's ongoing movement. But Valéry was by no means a hero. He found it good to talk about everything, to write on everything: thus the scattered totality of the world distracted him from the unique and rigorous totality of the work, from which he amiably let himself be diverted. The *etc.* hid behind the diversity of thoughts and subjects.

However, the work—the work of art, the literary work—is neither finished nor unfinished: it is. What it says is exclusively this: that it is—and nothing more. Beyond that it is nothing. Whoever wants to make it express more finds nothing, finds that it expresses nothing. He whose life depends upon the work, either because he is a writer or because he is a reader, belongs to the solitude of that which expresses nothing except the word *being*: the word which language shelters by hiding it, or causes to appear when language itself disappears into the silent void of the work.

The solitude of the work has as its primary framework the absence of any defining criteria. This absence makes it impossible ever to declare the work finished or unfinished. The work is without any proof, just as it is without any use. It can't be verified. Truth can appropriate it, renown draws attention to it, but the existence it thus acquires doesn't concern it. This demonstrability renders it neither certain nor real—does not make it manifest.

The work is solitary: this does not mean that it remains uncommunicable, that it has no reader. But whoever reads it enters into the affirmation of the work's solitude, just as he who writes it belongs to the risk of this solitude.

The Work, the Book

In order to examine more closely what such statements beckon us toward, perhaps we should try to see where they originate. The writer writes a book, but the book is not yet the work. There is a work only

when, through it, and with the violence of a beginning which is proper to it, the word *being* is pronounced. This event occurs when the work becomes the intimacy between someone who writes it and someone who reads it. One might, then, wonder: if solitude is the writer's risk, does it not express the fact that he is turned, oriented toward the open violence of the work, of which he never grasps anything but the substitute—the approach and the illusion in the form of the book? The writer belongs to the work, but what belongs to him is only a book, a mute collection of sterile words, the most insignificant thing in the world. The writer who experiences this void believes only that the work is unfinished, and he thinks that a little more effort, along with some propitious moments, will permit him and him alone to finish it. So he goes back to work. But what he wants to finish by himself remains interminable; it involves him in an illusory task. And the work, finally, knows him not. It closes in around his absence as the impersonal, anonymous affirmation that it is—and nothing more. This is what is meant by the observation that the writer, since he only finishes his work at the moment he dies, never knows of his work. One ought perhaps to turn this remark around. For isn't the writer dead as soon as the work exists? He sometimes has such a presentiment himself: an impression of being ever so strangely out of work.¹

Noli Me Legere

The same situation can also be described this way: the writer never reads his work. It is, for him, illegible, a secret. He cannot linger in its presence. It is a secret because he is separated from it. However, his inability to read the work is not a purely negative phenomenon. It is, rather, the writer's only real relation to what we call the work. The

¹This situation is different from that of the man who labors and accomplishes his task only to have it escape him by being transformed in the world. What man makes undergoes transformation, but it undergoes this change in the world, and man recaptures it through the world. Or at least he can regain it if alienation is not immobilized—expropriated for the profit of certain others—but is pursued rather, right up to the world's own full realization.

On the contrary, what the writer aims at is the work, and what he writes is a book. The book, as such, can become an effective event in the world (an action, however, which is always reticent and insufficient), but it is not action that the writer aims at. It is the work. And what makes the book the substitute for the work suffices to make it a thing which, like the work, doesn't stem from the truth of the world, but is almost vain, inasmuch as it has neither the reality of the work nor the seriousness of genuine tasks undertaken in the world.

abrupt *Noli me legere* brings forth, where there is still only a book, the horizon of a different strength. This *Noli me legere* is a fleeting experience, although immediate. It is not the force of an interdict, but, through the play and the sense of words, the insistent, the rude and poignant affirmation that what is there, in the global presence of a definitive text, still withholds itself — the rude and biting void of refusal — or excludes, with the authority of indifference, him who, having written it, yet wants to grasp it afresh by reading it. The impossibility of reading is the discovery that now, in the space opened by creation, there is no more room for creation. And, for the writer, no other possibility than to keep on writing this work. No one who has written the work can linger close to it. For the work is the very decision which dismisses him, cuts him off, makes of him a survivor, without work. He becomes the inert idler upon whom art does not depend.

The writer cannot abide near the work. He can only write it; he can, once it is written, only discern its approach in the abrupt *Noli me legere* which moves him away, which sets him apart or which obliges him to go back to that "separation" which he first entered in order to become attuned to what he had to write. So that now he finds himself as if at the beginning of his task again and discovers again the proximity, the errant intimacy of the outside from which he could not make an abode.

Perhaps this ordeal points us toward what we are seeking. The writer's solitude, that condition which is the risk he runs, seems to come from his belonging, in the work, to what always precedes the work. Through him, the work comes into being; it constitutes the resolute solidity of a beginning. But he himself belongs to a time ruled by the indecisiveness inherent in beginning over again. The obsession which ties him to a privileged theme, which obliges him to say over again what he has already said — sometimes with the strength of an enriched talent, but sometimes with the prolixity of an extraordinarily impoverishing repetitiveness, with ever less force, more monotony — illustrates the necessity, which apparently determines his efforts, that he always come back to the same point, pass again over the same paths, persevere in starting over what for him never starts, and that he belong to the shadow of events, not their reality, to the image, not the object, to what allows words themselves to become images, appearances — not signs, values, the power of truth.

Tyrannical Prehension ✓

Sometimes, when a man is holding a pencil, his hand won't release it no matter how badly he wants to let it go. Instead, the hand tightens rather than open. The other hand intervenes more successfully, but then the hand which one might call sick makes a slow, tentative movement and tries to catch the departing object. The strange thing is the slowness of this movement. The hand moves in a tempo which is scarcely human: not that of viable action, not that of hope either, but rather the shadow of time, the hand being itself the shadow of a hand slipping ghostlike toward an object that has become its own shadow. This hand experiences, at certain moments, a very great need to seize: it must grasp the pencil, it has to. It receives an order, an imperious command. This phenomenon is known as "tyrannical prehension."

The writer seems to be the master of his pen; he can become capable of great mastery over words and over what he wants to make them express. But his mastery only succeeds in putting him, keeping him in contact with the fundamental passivity where the word, no longer anything but its appearance — the shadow of a word — never can be mastered or even grasped. It remains the ungraspable which is also unreleasable: the indecisive moment of fascination.

The writer's mastery is not in the hand that writes, the "sick" hand that never lets the pencil go — that can't let it go because what it holds it doesn't really hold; what it holds belongs to the realm of shadows, and it is itself a shade. Mastery always characterizes the other hand, the one that doesn't write and is capable of intervening at the right moment to seize the pencil and put it aside. Thus mastery consists in the power to stop writing, to interrupt what is being written, thereby restoring to the present instant its rights, its decisive trenchancy.

We must start questioning again. We have said that the writer belongs to the work, but that what belongs to him, what he finishes by himself, is only a book: "by himself" corresponds to the restriction "only." The writer is never face to face with the work, and when there is a work, he doesn't know it; or, more precisely, even this ignorance is unknown to him, is only granted him in the impossibility of reading, the ambiguous experience that puts him back to work.

The writer goes back to work. Why doesn't he cease writing? Why, if he breaks with the work, as Rimbaud did, does this break strike us as a

mysterious impossibility? Does he just desire a perfect product, and if he does not cease to work at it, is it simply because perfection is never perfect enough? Does he even write in the expectation of a work? Does he bear it always in mind as that which would put an end to his task, as the goal worthy of so much effort? Not at all. The work is never that in anticipation of which one can write (in prospect of which one would relate to the process of writing as to the exercise of some power).

The fact that the writer's task ends with his life hides another fact: that, through this task, his life slides into the distress of the infinite.

The Interminable, the Incessant ✓

The solitude which the work visits on the writer reveals itself in this: that writing is now the interminable, the incessant. The writer no longer belongs to the magisterial realm where to express oneself means to express the exactitude and the certainty of things and values according to the sense of their limits. What he is to write delivers the one who has to write to an affirmation over which he has no authority, which is itself without substance, which affirms nothing, and yet is not repose, not the dignity of silence, for it is what still speaks when everything has been said. This affirmation doesn't precede speech, because it prevents speech from beginning, just as it takes away from language the right and the power to interrupt itself. To write is to break the bond that unites the word with myself. It is to destroy the relation which, determining that I speak toward "you," gives me room to speak within the understanding which my word receives from you (for my word summons you, and is the summons that begins in me because it finishes in you). To write is to break this bond. To write is, moreover, to withdraw language from the world, to detach it from what makes it a power according to which, when I speak, it is the world that declares itself, the clear light of day that develops through tasks undertaken, through action and time.

Writing is the interminable, the incessant. The writer, it is said, gives up saying "I." Kafka remarks, with surprise, with enchantment, that he has entered into literature as soon as he can substitute "He" for "I." This is true, but the transformation is much more profound. The writer belongs to a language which no one speaks, which is addressed to no one, which has no center, and which reveals nothing. He may believe that he affirms himself in this language, but what he affirms is altogether deprived of self. To the extent that, being a writer, he does

justice to what requires writing, he can never again express himself, any more than he can appeal to you, or even introduce another's speech. Where he is, only being speaks — which means that language doesn't speak any more, but is. It devotes itself to the pure passivity of being.

If to write is to surrender to the interminable, the writer who consents to sustain writing's essence loses the power to say "I." And so he loses the power to make others say "I." Thus he can by no means give life to characters whose liberty would be guaranteed by his creative power. The notion of characters, as the traditional form of the novel, is only one of the compromises by which the writer, drawn out of himself by literature in search of its essence, tries to salvage his relations with the world and himself.

[To write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot cease speaking — and since it cannot, in order to become its echo I have, in a way, to silence it.] I bring to this incessant speech the decisiveness, the authority of my own silence. I make *perceptible*, by my silent mediation, the uninterrupted affirmation, the giant murmuring upon which language opens and thus becomes image, becomes imaginary, becomes a speaking depth, an indistinct plenitude which is empty. This silence has its source in the effacement toward which the writer is drawn. Or else, it is the resource of his mastery, the right of intervention which the hand that doesn't write retains — the part of the writer which can always say no and, when necessary, appeal to time, restore the future.

When we admire the tone of a work, when we respond to its tone as to its most authentic aspect, what are we referring to? Not to style, or to the interest and virtues of the language, but to this silence precisely, this vigorous force by which the writer, having been deprived of himself, having renounced himself, has in this effacement nevertheless maintained the authority of a certain power: the power decisively to be still, so that in this silence what speaks without beginning or end might take on form, coherence, and sense.

The tone is not the writer's voice, but the intimacy of the silence he imposes upon the word. This implies that the silence is still *his* — what remains of him in the discretion that sets him aside. The tone makes great writers, but perhaps the work is indifferent to what makes them great.

In the effacement toward which he is summoned, the "great writer" still holds back; what speaks is no longer he himself, but neither is it the sheer slipping away of no one's word. For he maintains the authoritative though silent affirmation of the effaced "I." He keeps the cutting edge, the violent swiftness of active time, of the instant.

Thus he preserves himself within the work; where there is no more restraint, he contains himself. But the work also retains, because of this, a content. It is not altogether its own interior.

The writer we call classic—at least in France—sacrifices within himself the idiom which is proper to him, but he does so in order to give voice to the universal. The calm of a regular form, the certainty of a language free from idiosyncrasy, where impersonal generality speaks, secures him a relation with truth—with truth which is beyond the person and purports to be beyond time. Then literature has the glorious solitude of reason, that rarefied life at the heart of the whole which would require resolution and courage if this reason were not in fact the stability of an ordered aristocratic society; that is, the noble satisfaction of a part of society which concentrates the whole within itself by isolating itself well above what sustains it.

When to write is to discover the interminable, the writer who enters this region does not leave himself behind in order to approach the universal. He does not move toward a surer world, a finer or better justified world where everything would be ordered according to the clarity of the impartial light of day. He does not discover the admirable language which speaks honorably for all. What speaks in him is the fact that, in one way or another, he is no longer himself; he isn't anyone any more. The third person substituting for the "I": such is the solitude that comes to the writer on account of the work. It does not denote objective disinterestedness, creative detachment. It does not glorify consciousness in someone other than myself or the evolution of a human vitality which, in the imaginary space of the work of art, would retain the freedom to say "I." The third person is myself become no one, my interlocutor turned alien; it is my no longer being able, where I am, to address myself and the inability of whoever addresses me to say "I"; it is his not being himself.

Recourse to the "Journal"

It is perhaps striking that from the moment the work becomes the search for art, from the moment it becomes literature, the writer increasingly feels the need to maintain a relation to himself. His feeling is one of extreme repugnance at losing his grasp upon himself in the interests of that neutral force, formless and bereft of any destiny, which is behind everything that gets written. This repugnance, or apprehension, is revealed by the concern, characteristic of so many authors, to compose what they call

their "journal." Such a preoccupation is far removed from the complacent attitudes usually described as Romantic. The journal is not essentially confessional; it is not one's own story. It is a memorial. What must the writer remember? Himself: who he is when he isn't writing, when he lives daily life, when he is alive and true, not dying and bereft of truth. But the tool he uses in order to recollect himself is, strangely, the very element of forgetfulness: writing. That is why, however, the truth of the journal lies not in the interesting, literary remarks to be found there, but in the insignificant details which attach it to daily reality. The journal represents the series of reference points which a writer establishes in order to keep track of himself when he begins to suspect the dangerous metamorphosis to which he is exposed. It is a route that remains viable; it is something like a watchman's walkway upon ramparts: parallel to, overlooking, and sometimes skirting around the other path—the one where to stray is the endless task. Here true things are still spoken of. Here, whoever speaks retains his name and speaks in this name, and the dates he notes down belong in a shared time where what happens really happens. The journal—this book which is apparently altogether solitary—is often written out of fear and anguish at the solitude which comes to the writer on account of the work.

The recourse to the journal indicates that he who writes doesn't want to break with contentment. He doesn't want to interrupt the propriety of days which really are days and which really follow one upon the other. The journal roots the movement of writing in time, in the humble succession of days whose dates preserve this routine. Perhaps what is written there is already nothing but insincerity; perhaps it is said without regard for truth. But it is said in the security of the event. It belongs to occupations, incidents, the affairs of the world—to our active present. This continuity is nil and insignificant, but at least it is irreversible. It is a pursuit that goes beyond itself toward tomorrow, and proceeds there definitively.

The journal indicates that already the writer is no longer capable of belonging to time through the ordinary certainty of action, through the shared concerns of common tasks, of an occupation, through the simplicity of intimate speech, the force of unreflecting habit. He is no longer truly historical; but he doesn't want to waste time either, and since he doesn't know anymore how to do anything but write, at least he writes in response to his everyday history and in accord with the preoccupations of daily life. It happens that writers who keep a journal are the most literary of all, but perhaps this is precisely because they avoid,

thus, the extreme of literature, if literature is ultimately the fascinating realm of time's absence.

The Fascination of Time's Absence

To write is to surrender to the fascination of time's absence. Now we are doubtless approaching the essence of solitude. Time's absence is not a purely negative mode. It is the time when nothing begins, when initiative is not possible, when, before the affirmation, there is already a return of the affirmation. Rather than a purely negative mode, it is, on the contrary, a time without negation, without decision, when here is nowhere as well, and each thing withdraws into its image while the "I" that we are recognizes itself by sinking into the neutrality of a featureless third person. The time of time's absence has no present, no presence. This "no present" does not, however, refer back to a past. Olden days had the dignity, the active force of now. Memory still bears witness to this active force. It frees me from what otherwise would recall me; it frees me by giving me the means of calling freely upon the past, of ordering it according to my present intention. Memory is freedom of the past. But what has no present will not accept the present of a memory either. Memory says of the event: it once was and now it will never be again. The irremediable character of what has no present, of what is not even there as having once been there, says: it never happened, never for a first time, and yet it starts over, again, again, infinitely. It is without end, without beginning. It is without a future.

The time of time's absence is not dialectical. In this time what appears is the fact that nothing appears. What appears is the being deep within being's absence, which is when there is nothing and which, as soon as there is something, is no longer. For it is as if there were no beings except through the loss of being, when being lacks. The reversal which, in time's absence, points us constantly back to the presence of absence—but to this presence as absence, to absence as its own affirmation (an affirmation in which nothing is affirmed, in which nothing never ceases to affirm itself with the exhausting insistence of the indefinite)—this movement is not dialectical. Contradictions do not exclude each other in it; nor are they reconciled. Only time itself, during which negation becomes our power, permits the "unity of contraries." In time's absence what is new renews nothing; what is present is not contemporary; what is present presents nothing, but represents itself and belongs henceforth and always to return. It isn't, but comes back

again. It comes already and forever past, so that my relation to it is not one of cognition, but of recognition, and this recognition ruins in me the power of knowing, the right to grasp. It makes what is ungraspable inescapable; it never lets me cease reaching what I cannot attain. And that which I cannot take, I must take up again, never to let go.

This time is not the ideal immobility which the name "eternal" glorifies. In the region we are trying to approach, here has collapsed in to nowhere, but nowhere is nonetheless here, and this empty, dead time is a real time in which death is present—in which death happens but doesn't stop happening, as if, by happening, it rendered sterile the time in which it could happen. The dead present is the impossibility of making any presence real—an impossibility which is present, which is there as the present's double, the shadow of the present which the present bears and hides in itself. When I am alone, I am not alone, but, in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone. Someone is there, where I am alone. The fact of being alone is my belonging to this dead time which is not my time, or yours, or the time we share in common, but Someone's time. Someone is what is still present when there is no one. Where I am alone, I am not there; no one is there, but the impersonal is: the outside, as that which prevents, precedes, and dissolves the possibility of any personal relation. Someone is the faceless third person, the They of which everybody and anybody is part, but who is part of it? Never anyone in particular, never you and I. Nobody is part of the They. "They" belongs to a region which cannot be brought to light, not because it hides some secret alien to any revelation or even because it is radically obscure, but because it transforms everything which has access to it, even light, into anonymous, impersonal being, the Nontrue, the Nonreal yet always there. The They is, in this respect, what appears up very close when someone dies.²

When I am alone, the light of day is only the loss of a dwelling place. It is intimacy with the outside which has no location and affords no rest. Coming here makes the one who comes belong to dispersal, to the fissure where the exterior is the intrusion that stifles, but is also nakedness, the chill of the enclosure that leaves one utterly exposed. Here the only space is its vertiginous separation. Here fascination reigns.

²When I am alone, it is not I who am there, and it is not from you that I stay away, or from others, or from the world. So begins the reflection which investigates "the essential solitude and solitude in the world." See, on this subject, and under this title, certain pages in the Appendixes.

The Image

Why fascination? Seeing presupposes distance, decisiveness which separates, the power to stay out of contact and in contact avoid confusion. Seeing means that this separation has nevertheless become an encounter. But what happens when what you see, although at a distance, seems to touch you with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is *contact* at a distance? What happens when what is seen imposes itself upon the gaze, as if the gaze were seized, put in touch with the appearance? What happens is not an active contact, not the initiative and action which there still is in real touching. Rather, the gaze gets taken in, absorbed by an immobile movement and a depthless deep. What is given us by this contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image.

What fascinates us robs us of our power to give sense. It abandons its "sensory" nature, abandons the world, draws back from the world, and draws us along. It no longer reveals itself to us, and yet it affirms itself in a presence foreign to the temporal present and to presence in space. Separation, which was the possibility of seeing, coagulates at the very center of the gaze into impossibility. The look thus finds, in what makes it possible, the power that neutralizes it, neither suspending nor arresting it, but on the contrary preventing it from ever finishing, cutting it off from any beginning, making of it a neutral, directionless gleam which will not go out, yet does not clarify — the gaze turned back upon itself and closed in a circle. Here we have an immediate expression of that reversal which is the essence of solitude. Fascination is solitude's gaze. It is the gaze of the incessant and interminable. In it blindness is vision still, vision which is no longer the possibility of seeing, but the impossibility of not seeing, the impossibility which becomes visible and perseveres — always and always — in a vision that never comes to an end: a dead gaze, a gaze become the ghost of an eternal vision.

Of whoever is fascinated it can be said that he doesn't perceive any real object, any real figure, for what he sees does not belong to the world of reality, but to the indeterminate milieu of fascination. This milieu is, so to speak, absolute. Distance is not excluded from it, but is immeasurable. Distance here is the limitless depth behind the image, a lifeless profundity, unmanipulable, absolutely present although not given, where objects sink away when they depart from their sense, when they collapse into their image. This milieu of fascination, where what one sees seizes sight and renders it interminable, where the gaze

coagulates into light, where light is the absolute gleam of an eye one doesn't see but which one doesn't cease to see since it is the mirror image of one's own look — this milieu is utterly attractive. Fascinating. It is light which is also the abyss, a light one sinks into, both terrifying and tantalizing.

If our childhood fascinates us, this happens because childhood is the moment of fascination, is itself fascinated. And this golden age seems bathed in a light which is splendid because unrevealed. But it is only that this light is foreign to revelation, has nothing to reveal, is pure reflection, a ray which is still only the gleam of an image. Perhaps the force of the maternal figure receives its intensity from the very force of fascination, and one might say then, that if the mother exerts this fascinating attraction it is because, appearing when the child lives altogether in fascination's gaze, she concentrates in herself all the powers of enchantment. It is because the child is fascinated that the mother is fascinating, and that is also why all the impressions of early childhood have a kind of fixity which comes from fascination.

Whoever is fascinated doesn't see, properly speaking, what he sees. Rather, it touches him in an immediate proximity; it seizes and ceaselessly draws him close, even though it leaves him absolutely at a distance. Fascination is fundamentally linked to neutral, impersonal presence, to the indeterminate They, the immense, faceless Someone. Fascination is the relation the gaze entertains — a relation which is itself neutral and impersonal — with sightless, shapeless depth, the absence one sees because it is blinding.

Writing

To write is to enter into the affirmation of the solitude in which fascination threatens. It is to surrender to the risk of time's absence, where eternal starting over reigns. It is to pass from the first to the third person, so that what happens to me happens to no one, is anonymous insofar as it concerns me, repeats itself in an infinite dispersal. To write is to let fascination rule language. It is to stay in touch, through language, in language, with the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again, where the image, instead of alluding to some particular feature, becomes an allusion to the featureless, and instead of a form drawn upon absence, becomes the formless presence of this absence, the opaque, empty opening onto that which is when there is no more world, when there is no world yet.

Why? Why should writing have to do with this essential solitude, whose essence is the dissimulation that appears in it?³

We will not try here to answer this question directly. We will only ask: just as the statue glorifies the marble, and insofar as all art means to draw into the light of day the elemental deep of the world, in order to affirm itself, negates and resists, doesn't the language of the poem, of literature, compare to ordinary language as the image compares to the thing? One likes to think that poetry is a language which, more than others, favors images. This is probably an allusion to a much more essential transformation — the poem is not a poem because it contains a certain number of figures, metaphors, comparisons; on the contrary, the poem's particular character is that nothing in it functions as an image. So we must express what we are seeking differently: in literature, doesn't language itself become altogether image? We do not mean a language containing images or one that casts reality in figures, but one which is its own image, an image of language (and not a figurative language), or yet again, an imaginary language, one which no one speaks: a language, that is, which issues from its own absence, the way the image emerges upon the absence of the thing; a language addressing itself to the shadow of events as well, not to their reality, and this because of the fact that the words which express them are, not signs, but images, images of words, and words where things turn into images.

What are we seeking to represent by saying this? Are we not on a path leading back to suppositions happily abandoned, analogous to the one which used to define art as imitation, a copy of the real? If, in the poem, language becomes its own image, doesn't this mean that poetic language is always second, secondary? According to the common analysis, the image comes after the object. It is the object's continuation. We see, then we imagine. After the object comes the image. "After" seems to indicate subordination. We really speak, then we speak in our imagination, or we imagine ourselves speaking. Wouldn't poetic language be the copy, the dim shadow, the transposition — in a space where the requirements of effectiveness are attenuated — of the sole speaking language? But perhaps the common analysis is mistaken. Perhaps, before going further, one ought to ask: but what is the image? (See, in the Appendixes, the pages entitled "The Two Versions of the Imaginary.")

Approaching Literature's Space

