Appendix: Translations of Pages 13–16 and 17–21

Forgive me for speaking in my own tongue. It's the only one I ever spoke with Paul de Man. It's also the one in which he often taught, wrote and thought. What is more, I haven't the heart today to translate these few words, adding to them the suffering and distance, for you and for me, of a foreign accent. We are speaking today less in order to say something than to assure ourselves, with voice and with music, that we are together in the same thought. We know with what difficulty one finds right and decent words at such a moment when no recourse should be had to common usage since all conventions will seem either intolerable or vain.

If we have, as one says in French, "la mort dans l'âme," death in the soul, it is because from now on we are destined to speak *of* Paul de Man, instead of speaking *to* and *with* him, destined to speak of the teacher and of the friend whom he remains for so many of us, whereas the most vivid desire and the one which, within us, has been most cruelly battered, the most forbidden desire from now on would be to speak, still, to Paul, to hear him and to respond to him. Not just within ourselves (we will continue, I will continue to do that endlessly) but to speak to him and to hear him, himself, speaking to us. That's the impossible and we can no longer even take the measure of this wound.

Speaking is impossible, but so too would be silence or absence or a refusal to share one's sadness. Let me simply ask you to forgive me if today finds me with the strength for only a few very simple words. At a later time, I will try to find better words, and more serene ones, for the friendship that ties me to Paul de Man (it was and remains unique), what I, like so many others, owe to his generosity, to his lucidity, to the ever so gentle force of his thought: since that morning in 1966 when I met him at a breakfast table in Baltimore, during a colloquium, where we spoke, among other things, of Rousseau and the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, a text which was then seldom read in the university but which we had both been working on, each in his own way, without know-

ing it. From then on, nothing has ever come between us, not even a hint of disagreement. It was like the golden rule of an alliance, no doubt that of a trusting and unlimited friendship, but also the seal of a secret affirmation that, still today, I wouldn't know how to circumscribe, to limit, to name (and that is as it should be). As you know, Paul was irony itself and, among all the vivid thoughts he leaves with us and leaves alive in us, there is as well an enigmatic reflection on irony and even, in the words of Schlegel which he had occasion to cite, on "irony of irony." At the heart of my attachment to him, there has also always been a certain beyond-of-irony which cast on his own a softening, generous light, reflecting a smiling compassion on everything he illuminated with his tireless vigilance. His lucidity was sometimes overpowering, making no concession to weakness, but it never gave in to that negative assurance with which the ironic consciousness is sometimes too easily satisfied.

At some later time, then, I will try to find better words for what his friendship brought to all of those who had the good fortune to be his friend, his colleague, his student; but also for his work and especially for the future of his work, undoubtedly one of the most influential of our time.[1] His work, in other words, his teaching and his books, those already published and those soon to appear—because, to the very last and with an admirable strength, enthusiasm and gaiety, he worked on ever new lectures and writing projects, enlarging and enriching still further the perspectives he had already opened up for us. As we know already but as we shall also come to realize more and more, he transformed the field of literary theory, revitalizing all the channels that irrigate it both inside and outside the university, in the United States and in Europe. Besides a new style of interpretation, of reading, of teaching, he brought to bear the necessity of the polylogue and of a plurilinguistic refinement which was his genius—not only that of national languages (Flemish, French, German, English) but also of those idioms which are literature and philosophy, renewing as he did so the reading of Pascal as well as Rilke, of Descartes and Hölderlin, of Hegel and Keats, Rousseau and Shelley, Nietzsche and Kant, Locke and Diderot, Stendahl and Kierkegaard, Coleridge, Kleist, Wordsworth and Baudelaire, Proust, Mallarmé and Blanchot, Austin and Heidegger, Benjamin, Bakhtin and so many others, contemporary or not. Never content merely to present new readings, he led one to think the very possibility of reading—and also sometimes the paradox of its impossibility. His commitment remains henceforth that of his friends and his students who owe it to him and to themselves to pursue what was begun by him and with him.

Beyond the manifest evidence of the published texts—his own as well as those that make reference to his—I, like many others, can attest to what is today the radiance of his thought and his words: in the United States, first of

1. Jacques Derrida will soon publish an essay in homage to Paul de Man (Univeristy of Minnesota Press) and a longer work on the oeuvre of Paul de Man (Columbia University Press), the result of conferences held at the University of California at Irvine in April 1984 (editorial note).

all, where so many universities are linked and enlivened by the large community of his disciples, the large family of his former students or colleagues who have remained his friends; but also in Europe at all the universities where I had, as I did here at Yale, the good fortune and the honor to work with him, often at his invitation. I think first of Zurich, where we came together so many times, with Patricia, with Hillis; and naturally I think of Paris where he lived, published and shared editorial or academic responsibilities (for example, for Johns Hopkins or Cornell—and again these were for us the occasion of so many encounters). I also know the impression his passage left on the universities of Constance, Berlin and Stockholm. I will say nothing of Yale because you know this better than anyone and because today my memory is too given over to mourning for all that I have shared with him here during the last ten years, from the most simple day-to-dayness to the most intense moments in the work that allied us with each other and with others, the friends, students and colleagues who grieve for him so close to me here.

I wanted only to *bear witness* as would befit the sort of admiring observer I have also been at his side in the American and European academic world. This is neither the time nor the place to give into indiscreet revelations or too personal memories. I will refrain from speaking of such memories therefore—I have too many of them, as do many of you, and they are so overwhelming that we prefer to be alone with them. But allow me to infringe this law of privacy long enough to evoke two memories, just two among so many others.

The last letter I received from Paul: I still don't know how to read the serenity or the cheerfulness which it displayed. I never knew to what extent he adopted this tone, in a gesture of noble and sovereign discretion, so as to console and spare his friends in their anxiety or their despair; or, on the contrary, to what extent he had succeeded in transfiguring what is still for us the worst. No doubt it was both. Among other things, he wrote what I am going to permit myself to read here because, rightly or wrongly, I received it as a message, confided to me, for his friends in distress. You'll hear a voice and a tone that are familiar to us: "All of this, as I was telling you [on the phone], seems prodigiously interesting to me and I'm enjoying myself a lot. I knew it all along but it is being borne out: death gains a great deal, as they say, when one gets to know it close up—that 'peu profond ruisseau calomnié la mort' [shallow stream caluminated as death]." And after having cited this last line from Mallarmé's "Tombeau for Verlaine," he added: "Anyhow, I prefer that to the brutality of the word 'tumeur' "—which, in fact, is more terrible, more insinuating and menacing in French than in any other language [tumeur/tu meurs: you are dying].

I recall the second memory because it says something about music—and only music today seems to me bearable, consonant, able to give some measure of what unites us in the same thought. I had known for a long time, even though he spoke of it very rarely, that music occupied an important place in Paul's life and thought. On that particular night—it was 1979 and once again

the occasion was a colloquium—we were driving through the streets of Chicago after a jazz concert. My older son, who had accompanied me, was talking with Paul about music, more precisely about musical instruments. This they were doing as the experts they both were, as technicians who know how to call things by their name. It was then I realized that Paul had never told me he was an experienced musician and that music had also been a practice with him. The word that let me know this was the word "âme" [soul] when, hearing Pierre, my son, and Paul speak with familiarity of the violin's or the bass's soul, I learned that the "soul" is the name one gives in French to the small and fragile piece of wood—always very exposed, very vulnerable—that is placed within the body of these instruments to support the bridge and assure the resonant communication of the two sounding boards. I didn't know why at that moment I was so strangely moved and unsettled in some dim recess by the conversation I was listening to: no doubt it was due to the word "soul" which always speaks to us at the same time of life and of death and makes us dream of immortality, like the argument of the lyre in the *Phaedo*.

And I will always regret, among so many other things, that I never again spoke of any of this with Paul. How was I to know that one day I would speak of that moment, that music and that soul without him, before you who must forgive me for doing it just now so poorly, so painfully when already everything is painful, so painful?

JACQUES DERRIDA

Translated by Kevin Newmark with the approval of the author.

The first encounter, around 1955, at the Collège de philosophie, led, almost exclusively, by Jean Wahl who was to some extent (or even definitely) our *maître*. The lecture was on "poetry and destiny." I had come because of the subject, but also because it was almost a habit for me in those years, at six o'clock, to be in the rather dusty room of the Institut de géographie, place Saint-Germain-des-Prés, to listen to Massignon or Pierre Jean Jouve, Lévi-Strauss or Georges Bataille.—I had come because of the subject, but I left with a budding friendship which was soon to become admiration and affection.

And for this, this head with the slanted forehead, leaning over an unexpected big smile above which would filter the very blue glance had sufficed; as a word almost whispered which, of important moments, was lowered still more or was interrupted by a little laugh.

This laughter was malicious, somewhat childlike, in any case very youthful: it seemed to suggest that we stop thinking about the idea which had just been proferred, about this preposterous project that a young critic-philosopher (this double choice was still rather rare) had taken on that day, of thinking about poetry. But this was not however a laugh of derision, one in which one feels fright and which anticipates the dogmatism which will follow the instant of doubt. I felt in this abrupt denial of the seriousness of the hour, both the joy of understanding profoundly, and the irony born of the lucid perception of limitations, be they those of philosophy as an enterprise or more immediately the difficulties of a personal thought still fragile, in spite of its magnificent intuitions. And in this playfulness, the nostalgia of those years of play sparkled as well, and the memory, one might surmise, of a sorrow,—already permeated with this detachment, already this serenity of a mind completely dedicated to its work, whatever form his existence had taken, which some of us have seen deepen and mature, become pure irony and wisdom during the rest of his destiny.

Paul de Man. A presence was felt there, with all the mystery which this name evokes; it was on the horizon of a problem which meant a great deal to me, which had sollicited me that day, a region suddenly brighter (not the brightness of an explanation, however, nor even that of a method, but rather that of a fire which is perceived at a distance, on a beach, when one senses that someone down there is repairing his net, and sewing heaven and earth back together). It was a source of happiness for me, two or three years later, when I came to the United States for the first time, to Harvard, for one of those long summers when one wears white as in India in the overwhelming humidity, to find Paul, on the silent grass, in Cambridge. He was then living in Boston, on Beacon Street, in a small apartment under the roof, his daughter was about to be born. I can see him again at our first meeting, approaching across the yard, his head tilted, smiling from afar, the surprising color of his glance already spread around him, under the trees: it was noon, the hour when the shadows

disappear. We became accustomed to lunch in the small French restaurants of Harvard Square, or of Berkeley Street in Boston. But it was no longer in order to speak of poetry and destiny, at least in a systematic way, Paul loved poetry too much to refer to it too directly and, by so doing, engage himself in it—he preferred, as in his writing, to evoke poets rather than poetry itself, and critics rather than poets. This manner of marking, cruelly, gently, the underlying limitations of a method or the insufficiencies of a reading, was not distancing himself from the essential, it was practicing, again with this brief and somehow distant laughter which he also turned against himself, an unexpected kind of negative theology.

And above all he spoke to me of Ireland, which he loved, because, he told me once, there one could not distinguish a man from an animal or from a plant (doubtlessly because the language is not separated from the earth, because of its myths and of its admirable popular music), and he evoked Gott Island where I regret having been unable to join him that year or others. The island is off the coast of Maine, with only two or three small houses there in the sunlight. And in the life of Paul de Man, begun again late in America, it was the center which had been missing for so long, the justification, and sometimes the haven: always in any case the proof of the existence, if not of God, at least of this unifying force which, underneath all the sadnesses, the nostalgias, rises again, irresistible for some, in order to lighten their anguish, as water does for the diver.

Paul loved, in fact, passionately loved the natural world as it is, prairies and forests, waves surging among the rocks, this world of the immediate and of the eternal which he never ceased to note, with joy at the most acute point of his anxiety—it was and would remain inaccessible to language and moreover, even to poetry. He who worked on the verbal particle in so intellectualized a manner, one so mediated by culture—let us say, in a word: so "secondary," but it is true that he only touched those fragments of the word already charged with the most intense poetic and metaphysical energy, as if they were the irruption of a spiritual fire as basic and blind as that which impels the stars—, he sought the great deserted beach which extends to the things of nature between usand the light out there in silent evidence. He advanced towards this horizon, in all his moments of solitude, it is from there, when the life of the cities claimed him once more, that he returned with this courage which we admired in him, henceforth capable of that attention, as if cleansed of all care, that he knw how to grant to the most transient student as to the most difficult thoughts. And he of course loved only, and with reason, the works of poetry in which this light appears, or is mediated—lacking sometimes, but painfully acknowledged by the poet. Wordsworth, Hölderlin, Yeats. And Mallarmé, as well. As we know, Paul was drawn to the word which is found in hymns, the last of our religious tradition, or simply in fragments, the signs of our misery, towards that which transcends the word; and which, hurling itself thus, perhaps says something other, in the economy of language, than that which it believes it says. But the

gravest error that we could make about Paul de Man would be to think that he loved for themselves, out of a simple taste for truth, those failures of signification, those ruptures which mutedly ring in the meaning that great poets have tried to give the world. His eyes followed, at the variegated surface of poetic enunciations, the play of intuitions, of misunderstandings, a mighty swell never broken in which are endlessly exchanged—for whom, we do not know, in the drift of the centuries—reality, so to speak, and dream. In these moments of extreme attention, it was heard at the heart of this Zen monk's laughter that he had always had by premonition that there is no God, even in the very depths of language. But if he so watched the foam appear and disappear around the flotsam which comes from upstream, and slides towards the estuary, it is because that which shines in figures and images when we read them thus in the infinity of their significance in the material of the text, is always the light, the indifferent and holy light. It is because watching the drift enlarges the sky, even if the sky remains empty.

A long series of encounters spaced too far apart, drift—there again—projects, obstacles, occasions suddenly offered and sometimes seized: the flowing of the passing years displacing the places in which we found ourselves, Cambridge for a long time, Ithaca, Zurich, Provence, Connecticut, California. A car which stops, very late, in front of the Clark Institute in Williamstown—it is the museum, the place chosen for the meeting, because of the Piero della Francesca—and Paul and Patricia and the children get out, these are vacation days which will go on in this manner, where? Out of time, it now seems to me, out of the world. Another car, incredibly loaded with baggage which, surprised to arrive in this place by an unpaved road, immobilizes itself in front of the Valsaintes house: and the children have grown, ten minutes have not gone by before we are going down in the ravine, in the heat, Patricia always in front because of her light tripping step. It is in Paul's office, in Woodbridge, that a certain little girl, one Sunday, suddenly risked taking her first steps. Fifteen years later, on a beach in New Hampshire, Paul built a big fire of driftwood, putting in it potatoes and meat, it was already night, I defended myself with flaming firebrands against the assault of a similar sword which a little six year old boy shook with the gauche agility of childhood.

And the last time was at Irvine, where I was living for a few weeks in a little house on the dunes which are at the end of the campus, and Paul, who had come to California for a colloquium, came to see again this place where he himself had lived the year before, where he had been happy, I could see. After which there were two or three meetings which were, without our knowing it, the end—here, at the seashore, there at the home of people we did not know, it is evening, there is a dinner outside, we linger to speak in the garden, under the lamps. I had listened to Paul, in the colloquium, evoke Jauss, present his critical thought, but as if at a distance, as if he were in another world than those discussions or that room: he seemed so withdrawn in the analysis of a few words of a poem of Baudelaire that he did not follow them to the limit of their

meaning, dreaming this meaning, one might have said, so well that I thought that he spoke there of himself, that he spoke to himself. "I am two distinct beings," he said to me, more or less, upon leaving the lecture. When the visit was over, we drove, John Naughton and myself, our friend, to the little Orange County airport. It was an afternoon, it was very beautiful and very hot, as usual. And at the last minute, or almost, Paul took his suitcase, we did not get out of the car, it was in silence, it was invisibly—as so often—that life turned past in that moment one of those great sets with which it can lull for years our affection, our dream.

YVES BONNEFOY

Translated by Peggy McCracken